

# **Different Modes of Transnational History**



## 2. Putting the nation in its place?: world history and C. A. Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World*

**Tony Ballantyne**

History writing and the nation state have a symbiotic relationship. From the eighteenth century, the development of professional historical writing has been entwined with the elaboration and consolidation of national identity. Professional historians have typically worked in archives created, funded and policed by the state and have been employed by institutions that are either financed or regulated by the state. The stories that historians have most often told are national ones; the nation state remains a key, probably *the* key, unit for historical analysis and narrative. This is true not only in the 'West', where history has been a primary intellectual tool for nation-makers over the last two centuries, but also in most 'non-Western' contexts. An intimate relationship between history and the nation – which Sudipta Kaviraj identifies as a 'narrative contract' – has characterised the development of history as a discipline in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific, where history has been central in both anti-colonial nationalism and in postcolonial debates over the intersections between ethnicity, religion, and the nation.<sup>1</sup> In those parts of Asia that were not colonised, history has also become a potent servant of the nation as long-established genres of historical writing were re-crafted under modernity to produce national narratives.<sup>2</sup>

As teachers, professional historians also frame their classroom narratives and arguments around the nation. National surveys – 'Australian History', 'Indian History' or 'The History of the United States' – remain the staple of undergraduate curricula. Even though history departments might offer their undergraduates various thematic courses – medical history, environmental history, or women's history – that seemingly break away from national histories, many of these courses are delimited by a focus on a particular national experience or present narratives in which nation states are the key actors. Moreover, while post-graduate students pursue finely-grained archival research, often relating

<sup>1</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj 1992, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Shahid Amin and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII* (Delhi), pp. 1-39.

<sup>2</sup> Prasenjit Duara 1995, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press); Brian Moloughney 2001, 'Nation, Narrative and China's New History', in Roy Starrs (ed.), *Asian Nationalism in an Age of Globalization* (Richmond: Japan Library), pp. 205-22; Stefan Tanaka 1993, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

to a very particular place and time, they are frequently encouraged to think about where their material fits within the national 'story' and agonise over how representative their research is of the national 'pattern'. Upon completion of their doctorates, these students enter job markets that remain predominantly organised around national histories, as most history departments continue to search for experts in particular national fields. When job searches are shaped more thematically, for example around gender history or the history of science, the fine print of the job advertisement typically stresses the desirability of a particular national focus.

Thus, the centrality of the nation to historical practice is reaffirmed at every significant stage in the training and professionalisation of historians. Not surprisingly, this constant reiteration encourages historians to see the nation as the normative, even natural, site for historical analysis and to formulate their own professional identity in reference to the nation state. This is strikingly clear when historians get together at workshops or conferences, where they typically define themselves by their national expertise ('Hi, I'm Pat and I'm a historian of Ireland').

However there are, of course, important forms of historical analysis that use analytical frameworks other than the nation state, many of which are explored or demonstrated in this volume. This essay examines one long-established form of writing history that has produced a range of narratives that transcend the nation state: world history. In exploring world history's distinctive approach to the past – one that examines the encounters, exchanges, networks and institutions that bring communities into contact, co-dependence and conflict – this essay is divided into three parts. The first part offers a short and general overview of the development of world history as a research field. It begins by briefly discussing a popular variety of world history in the early twentieth century, when efforts to create historical narratives that went beyond the nation were enthusiastically received by a large international readership, but were rejected by professional historians. I then trace the emergence of new and professionalised versions of world history after World War II and map a range of important frameworks for historical analysis that were developed from the 1950s. This section of the essay then concludes by discussing the ways in which more recent world history research has offered new challenges to Eurocentric histories and fashioned a vision of a multi-centred world. In the second part of the essay, my focus shifts to examine one important and lauded work of world history: C. A. Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004). Here I examine how Bayly's vision of modern history works within the framework of recent world history research and highlight his volume's key innovations that push world history as a field in new and important directions. The final and briefest part of the essay offers a critique of two significant aspects of Bayly's volume (his use of the body as a site of analysis and the 'geography of modernity' that shapes

key points of his argument), before assessing the relationship between world history and postcolonial histories of the kind examined in Angela Woollacott's chapter.

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At the dawn of the twentieth century, a point when national history traditions were well established within Europe and were calcifying in many European colonies as well as in much of Asia, a diverse group of historians were searching for new models of historical writing that reflected the strong sense of global interconnectedness that was a key product of the nineteenth century. H. G. Wells, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee produced world histories within an intellectual and political context charged by the global reach of European imperial power and a widespread conviction that the 'West' was both modernity's natural location and the key vector for its transmission. Within this milieu and given the locations where these authors wrote from, it is hardly surprising that these texts played a central role in consolidating Europe and North America at the heart of understandings of global history. Wells and company articulated powerful narratives that moulded the complex, fragmentary and heterogeneous nature of the human past into striking accounts of the creation, consolidation and extension of the power of the 'West' and the crisis 'Western Civilisation' faced in the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> While this narrative appealed to a broad readership, 'world history' had little intellectual authority in universities and among university-based historians.<sup>4</sup> As a result of world history's marginal position in academic culture in the first half of the twentieth century, Michael Geyer and Charles Bright have noted that world history was typically seen as an 'illegitimate, unprofessional and therefore foolish enterprise' associated with dilettantes and figures at the margins of academic life.<sup>5</sup>

After World War II, world history slowly and unevenly began to gain in credibility. In the wake of global war and the conflicts surrounding decolonisation and the onset of the Cold War, the project of world history took on new relevance. UNESCO formulated a plan to produce a six-volume set of

<sup>3</sup> Oswald Spengler 1922, *The Decline of the West* (London: Allen and Unwin); Arnold J. Toynbee 1934–1954, *A Study of History*, 10 volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press); H. G. Wells 1920, *Outline of History* (London: Cassell). Spengler certainly recognised the significance of non-Western civilisations, but for him only 'Western Civilisation' had fulfilled its potential and the crisis that he diagnosed in the early twentieth century reflected the instability born out of the decline of 'Western Civilisation'.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Allardyce 1990, 'Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course', *Journal of World History*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Geyer and Charles Bright 1995, 'World History in a Global Age', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 4, p. 1034.

textbooks to serve as standard texts for international education. This collection, UNESCO hoped, would record the richness of the civilisations that had shaped the world and rematerialise the common bonds that united humanity.<sup>6</sup> Under the editorship of the Yale historian Ralph E. Turner, the UNESCO project was dedicated to turning history into an instrument for peace and cross-cultural understanding. The UNESCO history was not to be simply a history of 'Western Civilisation' masquerading as global history, but rather a truly collaborative effort drawing upon scholars from all corners of the world and committed to the equitable treatment of the world's various cultural traditions. As Gilbert Allardyce has argued, as an exercise in history writing by committee, the UNESCO project was riddled with conflict.<sup>7</sup> Arriving at a consensus over interpretations of previous international conflicts was difficult and there was widespread dispute over the weight to be attached to certain historical events and actors. This was made abundantly clear when the University of Chicago's Louis Gottschalk suggested that his volume on the 1300–1775 period should be entitled *The European Age*. This title was rejected by the UNESCO Commission that oversaw the project and the Commission president, Pablo E. DeBerredo Carneiro of Brazil, reminded Gottschalk that 'world history' was not simply 'European' history writ large but rather that all global regions, not just Europe, were central to understanding any given period of the global past. Gottschalk's work, like the other volumes in the series, was the product of extensive collaboration and consultation with over 350 scholars, religious authorities, and national representatives reading either part or whole of his text. As Gottschalk searched for compromises, his analysis was weakened and his work became increasingly descriptive.<sup>8</sup> In turn, the revisions he settled on alienated other scholars and when his work finally appeared in 1969 it received hostile reviews.<sup>9</sup> By the late 1960s, the limitations of the UNESCO project became clear: no historian could produce a narrative that would please all scholars, let alone all religious, ethnic and national communities. In struggling to produce a vision of the past that sought to attach equal weight to all societies and to use history as a tool for peace, the UNESCO world history in fact revealed the centrality of conflict in human history and made it clear that historical writing is as likely to produce enmity as amity.

While many reviewers dismissed the UNESCO volumes as lacking coherence and attaching too much weight to the 'Third World', the vision of world history developed by W. H. McNeill was warmly received by 'general readers' and

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Wooley 1963, *History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development: Vol. I: The Beginnings of Civilization* (London: George Allen and Unwin), pp. xvii-xxiii.

<sup>7</sup> Allardyce 1990, 'Toward World History', pp. 23-76.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 28-39.

<sup>9</sup> See Franklin L. Ford 1972, review in *American Historical Review*, vol. 77, no. 5, pp. 1406-7.

began to gain some academic respectability for world history. McNeill produced a punchy rendering of the global past that was organised around two key arguments. Firstly, McNeill suggested that it was encounters with strangers that provided the main impetus for change in human history. In focusing on cross-cultural encounters as conduits for the transmission of ideas and technology, McNeill formulated a vision of history that in many ways was an updated rendering of older cultural diffusionist arguments. Secondly, he suggested that the key story in world history was the emergence of Europe and its rise to dominance in the early modern period. In 1963, McNeill published his paradigmatic *The Rise of the West*, a work that had sold over 75 000 copies by 1990, which continues to be popular with the public and is still widely used in tertiary classrooms. The subtitle of McNeill's work (*A History of the Human Community*) reduced human history to a narrative of the 'rise of the west', a model that he now recognises as 'an expression of the postwar imperial mood' and a 'form of intellectual imperialism'.<sup>10</sup> McNeill was working in the wake of Toynbee (he later produced a biography of the pioneering world historian), but in comparison to Toynbee's work, he produced a secular rendering of world history with a stronger and clearer argument. In many ways, McNeill's vision of the 'rise of the west' actually marked a retreat from the detailed and often nuanced analysis of Toynbee. Where Toynbee saw nineteen civilisations acting as meaningful units in world history, McNeill's work was built around just four civilisations: Europe and the Mediterranean, China, India and the Middle East. Other societies, such as the pre-Columbian Americas, the islands of the Pacific and most of Africa were of little importance in this framing of global history. Even in the 1990s, when McNeill recognised that his *Rise of the West* gave 'undue attention to Latin Christendom' and was blind to the 'efflorescence of China', he continued to assert that 'sub-Saharan Africa . . . remained peripheral to the rest of the world, down to and including our own age'.<sup>11</sup>

McNeill's narrative quickly provided an influential and remarkably durable framework for understandings of the global past in undergraduate lecture halls, graduate seminar rooms, and faculty lounges. From the 1970s, sociologists and area studies specialists cemented the centrality of the 'West' in world history, for although world system and dependency theories offered staunch critiques of capitalism they confidently located Europe and North America as the 'core' of the modern world.<sup>12</sup> But we must guard against seeing world history between

<sup>10</sup> McNeill 1990 and 1998, reflects critically upon the 'rise of the West' model in his essays 'The *Rise of the West* after Twenty-five Years', *Journal of World History*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-22 and 'World History and the Rise and Fall of the West', *Journal of World History*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 215-36.

<sup>11</sup> McNeill 1990, 'The *Rise of the West* after Twenty-five Years', pp. 5, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Wallerstein's work can be read as Eurocentric critique of capitalism. Mignolo notes that the essential difference between world systems theory and dependency theory was that 'Dependency theory was

1950 and 1990 as an intrinsically Eurocentric approach because of the prominence that McNeill enjoyed; other analytical traditions emerged alongside and in competition with the 'rise of the west' model. While a careful reconstruction of the transnational production of world history as a research field is beyond the scope of this essay, here we might note three significant clusters of research that have taken shape since World War II and have helped to establish the foundations of world history as a serious and respected field of study: histories of 'Eurasia', 'Atlantic History', and work on the 'Indian Ocean World'. These larger regional or oceanic units have been the prominent structures in shaping research within the field of world history; while much teaching within the field is conducted on a truly global canvas, research is more typically organised around a particular set of networks and exchanges within a regional, imperial or oceanic unit of analysis.

From the 1950s, historians working on a range of issues began to explore the unity of Eurasian history, moving beyond narrow national, civilisational, and continental frameworks. This work on Eurasia roamed over a wide range of sites and periods. Whether the research focused on the development of long-distance trade, the expanding reach of Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, the interaction between nomadic and sedentary peoples, or the rise and fall of empires, historians of Eurasia highlighted the porousness of the boundaries that supposedly marked 'India', 'China', 'Central Asia' and 'Europe' and the interdependence of these regions prior to the growth of European maritime empires during the early modern period. Marshall S. Hodgson's work was particularly significant in formulating the history of 'Eurasia' as a meaningful and important unit of analysis. Hodgson, a leading Chicago-based historian of Islam, was critical of the common tendency to see 'the modern West' as the 'only significant end point of progress' and saw world history as a powerful instrument to be deployed against Eurocentrism.<sup>13</sup> Hodgson warned against any privileging of Europe and the tendency of history as a discipline to naturalise European perceptions and intellectual traditions. He instead insisted that for the period between 1000 BCE to 1800 CE, 'Afro-Eurasia' was a more appropriate and particularly powerful

a political statement for the social transformation of and from Third World countries, while world-system analysis was a political statement for academic transformation from First World countries.' Walter D. Mignolo 2002, 'The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 1, p. 63. Key entry points into world systems and dependency theory are: Immanuel Wallerstein 1974–1989, *The Modern World System*, 3 volumes (New York, NY: Academic Press); Andre Gunder Frank 1971, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

<sup>13</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson 1993, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, Edmund Burke III (ed.) (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), p. 290. Also see his 1974–1977, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 volumes (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).

frame of analysis. While it was possible to identify distinctive civilisational traditions within 'Afro-Eurasia' – Europe, the Middle East, India and East Asia – Hodgson suggested that the 'cleavages' between these had been overestimated and that it made more sense to conceive of them as 'a single great complex of historical developments' underpinned by complex inter-regional connections and the gradual growth of a common store of human knowledge.<sup>14</sup> These connections and unities have been subsequently explored by many historians, including those based in the former Soviet Union and China. While significant bodies of scholarship have focused on the silk roads and the role of religion in the integration of Eurasia, it is widely accepted that the cohesiveness of Eurasian history reached its apogee under the Mongol Empire. According to this scholarship, the Mongol Empire was characterised by a remarkable cosmopolitanism and multi-ethnic make-up; in the imperial capital, Chinese and Scandinavian traders rubbed shoulders with Uighur scribes, Parisian goldsmiths and Afghani administrators.<sup>15</sup> As a massive land-based Empire that reached from eastern Europe to China, the Mongol state enabled the economic, demographic and even biological integration of Eurasia and established political and cultural patterns that profoundly shaped the subsequent development of East, South and Central Asia. The substantial body of work that has highlighted the pivotal role of the Mongols in shaping the history of Eurasia underpinned Janet Abu-Lughod's influential work on the 'world system' between 1250 and 1350 as well as S. A. M. Adshead's provocative assessments of European-Chinese relationships and the place of Central Asia in world history.<sup>16</sup>

Where this work on Eurasia has focused on the movement of missionaries and pilgrims, caravan routes, and the elaboration of imperial structures that integrated the disparate societies of Europe and Asia before 1500, 'Atlantic History' is structured around the ocean. Its key structures are the shipping routes, markets, and communication networks that connected Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean into a highly interactive system from the late fifteenth century through to the early nineteenth. 'Atlantic History' is now perhaps the best established variation of 'world history' and enjoys particular standing in the United States, but as a field it slowly took shape out of research on both sides of the Atlantic. A key spur was the work of the *Annales* school, especially Braudel's research on the Mediterranean, together with Pierre Chaunu's

<sup>14</sup> Hodgson 1993, *Rethinking World History*, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas T. Allsen 1997, 'Ever Closer Encounters: The Appropriation of Culture and the Apportionment of Peoples in the Mongol Empire', *Journal of Early Modern History*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 2-23.

<sup>16</sup> S. A. M. Adshead 1993, *Central Asia in World History* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press); Adshead 1988, *China in World History* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press); and Adshead 1997, *Material Culture in Europe and China, 1400–1800* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press).

pioneering work on both the place of Seville and Latin America in the Atlantic. This French research produced models that demonstrated the richness of work organised around large regional units, even oceans, and foregrounded the relationship between history and geography.<sup>17</sup> In North America, Bernard Bailyn, perhaps the key American figure in the emergence of 'Atlantic History', was precocious in his engagement with the *Annales* school.<sup>18</sup> Bailyn's research on migration and political culture within 'colonial America' placed the American colonies within a larger north Atlantic frame. Bailyn's enlarged vision of the early history of United States was also moulded by work on early modern British history. Of particular importance here was the work of historians such as David Beers Quinn and Nicholas Canny which examined British rule in Ireland and mapped how models of rule and colonisation developed in Ireland were subsequently transplanted to North America.<sup>19</sup> Of course, historians of the African diaspora and the Caribbean have also played a pivotal role in shaping this field, which is not surprising as slavery is frequently identified as the key institution that undergirded the 'Atlantic world'. But the history of the 'black Atlantic' is not simply a history of slavery: C. L. R. James' *The Black Jacobins* stands at the head of an important sequence of work on resistance and revolutions within the Atlantic and has provided a touchstone for many scholars who have tried to push Atlantic history into a stronger engagement with cultural history and critical theory.<sup>20</sup> While Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, disappeared from McNeill's vision of world history, it is a central presence in Atlantic history

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Chaunu 1955–1960, *Séville et l'Atlantique (1504–1650)*, 12 volumes (Paris: SEVPEN); and Chaunu 1953, 'Économie atlantique, économie mondiale', *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 91–104.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Bailyn 1951, 'Braudel's Geohistory. A Reconsideration', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 11, pp. 277–82; and Bailyn 1977, 'Review Essay', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 37, pp. 1028–34.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas P. Canny 1999, 'Writing Atlantic History; Or, Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America', *Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 3, pp. 1093–114; Canny 1978, 'The Permissive Frontier: Social Control in English Settlements in Ireland and Virginia 1550–1650', in K. R. Andrews, Nicholas P. Canny, and Paul Edward Hedley Hair (eds), *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America, 1480–1650* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), pp. 17–44; and Canny 1973, 'The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 575–98; David Beers Quinn 1958, *Ireland and Sixteenth Century European Expansion* (Tralee: *The Kerryman*); Quinn 1991, *Ireland & America: Their Early Associations, 1500–1640* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press).

<sup>20</sup> C. L. R. James 1938, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg); Paul Gilroy 1993, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

and Atlantic historians have revealed the centrality of Africa and Africans in the making of both the Americas and Europe since the fifteenth century.

Scholarship on the Indian Ocean is long-standing and although some American and European-based scholars have been prominent in this sub-field, many of its leading practitioners have been based in South Asia and Australia. The historiography of the Indian Ocean explores the complex interactions of empires, merchants, and communities from East Africa to Southeast Asia and China. This scholarship has stressed the historical importance of the long-established trading systems that developed across the Indian Ocean long before the intrusion of Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century. In tracing this 'traditional' world of trade, scholars have reconstructed some of the histories of merchant communities that thrived in the region's port cities and the complex flows of prized commodities along its shipping lanes.<sup>21</sup> One of the real challenges posed by Indian Ocean as a unit of analysis is the sheer diversity of significant agents in its modern history: from the sixteenth century on, scholars are confronted by Portuguese, Dutch, French, English, and Danish agents as well as merchants from East Africa, the Islamic World, Gujarat, the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, Bengal, Southeast and East Asia. Perhaps the most influential model of this work is K. N. Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, which communicated a strong sense of the interconnections created by travel, commerce, and intellectual engagement from 700 CE to 1750 CE. After reconstructing the intricate threads that linked communities around the rim of the Indian Ocean in the wake of the rapid expansion of the Islamic world, Chaudhuri's volume traced the comparatively late entry of Europeans into this cosmopolitan world and the gradual emergence of European power in the middle of the eighteenth century. This identification of the mid-eighteenth century as a point of rupture reflects one abiding concern of the scholarship on the Indian Ocean, the very slow initial growth of European power before 1700 but the fundamental shifts in the structure and culture that accompanied the growth of European territorial empires in the late eighteenth century. From the late 1940s, Holden Furber produced a crucial sketch of the nature of European enterprise in the region and his work on imperial competition complemented C. L. R. Boxer's landmark studies of both Dutch and Portuguese enterprise in the region.<sup>22</sup> More recent work by Sugata Bose and Mark Ravinder Frost has begun to reshape the field, stressing the persistence of crucial trans-oceanic connections into the early

<sup>21</sup> Colin G. F. Simkin 1968, *The Traditional Trade of Asia* (London: Oxford University Press).

<sup>22</sup> Holden Furber 1948, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Furber 1976, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press); C. R. Boxer 1965, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (New York, NY: Knopf); and Furber 1969, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (London: Hutchinson).

twentieth century and the important role of various non-European elites in creating expansive political and cultural networks across the ocean within a context of colonial modernity and the rise of the nation state.<sup>23</sup> Equally importantly, Tansen Sen and Sanjay Subrahmanyam as well as Joseph Fletcher have produced arguments that have reconstituted some of the key connection between the Indian Ocean world and the broader history of Eurasia.<sup>24</sup>

Even the most cursory reading of any of these bodies of scholarship quickly reveals the limitations of 'national' histories, particularly when they are projected back into the period before the emergence of nation states. The best work in world history pays close attention to 'bundles of relationships' that shape any given object of study and is sensitive to the complex interplays between different layers of the analysis: the local, the regional, the inter-regional, the national, the continental, and the global. The nation state is not cast aside entirely, at least for the modern period, but rather it is put firmly in its place, as *one*, albeit an often significant, structure that governs human action and cross-cultural engagements.

Moreover, in interrogating 'Europe' and its place in the world, recent work in the field has also exposed some of the older models of analysis that are organised around European exceptionalism or the 'rise of the west'. Since early 1980s, world historians have explicitly challenged the primacy attached to Europe or the 'West' as the prime historical agent of cross-cultural integration, a project whose political and intellectual significance must not be overlooked.<sup>25</sup> Janet

<sup>23</sup> Sugata Bose 2002, 'Space and Time on the Indian Ocean Rim: Theory and History', in Leila Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (eds), *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, 1890–1920* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press); Mark Frost 2002, "'Wider Opportunities': Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870–1920", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 937–67; and Frost 2004, 'Asia's Maritime Networks and the Colonial Public Sphere, 1840–1920', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 63–94.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph F. Fletcher 1985, 'Integrative History: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period, 1500–1800', *Journal of Turkish Studies*, vol. 9, pp. 37–58; Sanjay Subrahmanyam 1992, 'Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 340–63; and Subrahmanyam 1997, 'Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 735–62; Tansen Sen 2003, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press).

<sup>25</sup> As Micol Seigel has suggested, the 'radical social context' of world history is obscured by the conservatism of the World History Association (established in 1982) and the *Journal of World History*. Micol Seigel 2004, 'World History's Narrative Problem', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 84, no. 3, p. 432.

Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony*, for example, called into question the belief that Europeans were central in driving cross-cultural exchanges, by drawing attention to the complex circuits of long-distance trade that integrated Eurasia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> The particular weight Abu-Lughod attached to the dynamism and significance of central Asia – an important blow to the notion that world history is the story of the development and significance of 'civilisations' – has been extended by other scholars who have identified the 'Mongol explosion' in this period as marking the emergence of the first truly 'world empire'.<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, however, it has been work on China and its connections with inner Asia, Southeast Asia, the rest of East Asia, and Europe which has radically transformed our understandings of the basic pattern of world history. China had emerged as the key centre of 'civilisation' within Eurasia and its economic hub for most of its history before 1700 CE: the key markers of Europe's modernity – urbanisation, intensified production, complex bureaucratic state structures, and print culture – were well established in China by 1000 CE. At the same time, work on the economic history of South Asia has both revised the long-dominant image of a corrupt and weakening Mughal Empire, an understanding inherited from British colonial discourse, and has emphasised that the Indian Ocean was the centre of a series of interlocking commercial networks that reached out as far as East Africa and Indonesia. It was only as a result of the militarisation of trade during the eighteenth century and the growing colonial aspirations of European East India Companies after the British East India Company became a territorial power in 1765, that Europeans gradually came to dominate the long-established markets and commercial hubs around the Indian Ocean.

In effect, this work on Asian economic history and Asia's trade with Europe has both called into question the exceptional status so frequently accorded to Europe and recast our understandings of the chronology of world history.<sup>28</sup> One of the

<sup>26</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod 1989, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A. D. 1250–1350* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).

<sup>27</sup> Adshead 1988, *China in World History*; Adshead 1993, *Central Asia in World History*; David Christian 1998, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia* (Oxford: Blackwell).

<sup>28</sup> Much of this work is synthesised in the *Cambridge History of China*. For a collection of work that explores the connections between the development of the Chinese economy and global trade see Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez (eds) 1997, *Metals and Monies in an Emerging Global Economy* (Aldershot: Variorum). Also see the provocative arguments forwarded in Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez 1995, 'Born with a "Silver Spoon": The Origin of World Trade in 1571', *Journal of World History*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 201–21; on South Asia and the Indian Ocean see Satish Chandra 1987, *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage); K. N. Chaudhuri 1985, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to*

key debates that continues to exercise world historians is the relationship between Europe's rise to global dominance, empire building and the emergence of global capitalism. While some historians, such as David Landes, continue to attribute Europe's rise to power to supposedly intrinsically European cultural qualities ('work, thrift, honesty, patience, tenacity'), recent research has tended to underscore the centrality of imperialism in the new world in both allowing Europe to escape from its ecological constraints and constituting the very nature of European culture itself.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, where McNeill might have given shape to history by discerning the rising dominance of the 'West', what has emerged out of recent world historical research is an image of a multi-centred world during the period between 1250–1800, where China was perhaps the single most powerful region. In the century from 1800, it seems that Europe did exercise increasing power at a global level as a result of the military-fiscal revolution which consolidated its military advantage over non-European nations, its harnessing of its natural resources – especially coal – to its industrial revolution, and a sustained period of imperial expansion beginning from the 1760s.<sup>30</sup> But the thrust of much recent work has shown that although European ascendancy profoundly transformed the world, particularly through its imperial projects, it was short-lived. The United States, Russia and Japan emerged as both industrial forces and imperial powers around the turn of the twentieth century, while Tokyo, Shanghai, Singapore, and Bombay emerged as new commercial, cultural, technological and migratory centres. World history research on migration, economics, empires and ideologies suggests that history cannot be imagined as an inexorable march to Western dominance and global homogeneity, but rather as a more complex and ambiguous set of interwoven and overlapping processes driven from by diverse array of groups from a variety of different locations.<sup>31</sup>

1750 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Kenneth McPherson 1993, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

<sup>29</sup> David Landes 1998, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton), p. 523.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz 2000, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik 1999, *The World That Trade Created: Culture, Society, and the World Economy, 1400–the Present* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe); and the essays in the forum on the 'great divergence' in *Itinerario*, vol. 24, nos 3/4, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> e.g. Arjun Appadurai 1996, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press); Michael Geyer and Charles Bright 1995, 'World History in a Global Age', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 4, pp. 1034-60; Akira Iriye 1989, 'The Internationalization of History', *American Historical Review*, vol. 94, no. 1, pp. 1-10; Adam McKeown 2001, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).

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This vision of world history provides the basic framework for C. A. Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Comparisons and Connections*. This volume, which was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm and acclaim on its publication early in 2004, is shaped by Bayly's expertise as both a leading South Asianist and an influential historian of the British Empire and extends the provocative vision of world history he had sketched in earlier publications.<sup>32</sup> At the heart of Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* is the emergence of 'global uniformities in the state, religion, political ideologies, and economic life' between 1780 and 1914.<sup>33</sup> According to Bayly, these uniformities manifested themselves in numerous ways, from the emergence of the census as a key technology of governance for almost every state by 1914 to the international popularity of the Western-style suit as a marker of sobriety, seriousness and status, or from the rise of municipal government at a global level to the profound transformations enacted by the rigorous time-keeping central in the 'industrious revolution'.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, however, Bayly traces the ways in which various forms of connection worked to 'heighten the sense of *difference*, and even antagonism, between people in different societies', highlighting how 'those differences were increasingly expressed in similar ways'.<sup>35</sup> The most obvious example of this paradox was what Bayly terms the age of 'hyperactive nationalism' after 1890 which witnessed the consolidation of European nation states, the emergence of settler nationalism within the British Empire, the rise of the significant anti-colonial movements in Egypt, India, French North Africa and Indochina as well as the emergence of the 'Young Turk' movement within the Ottoman Empire and the Chinese revolution of 1911.<sup>36</sup> Each of these nationalist movements stressed the distinctiveness of their own community, yet the symbolic repertoire and historical vision of these imagined communities were in many ways remarkably similar.<sup>37</sup> This reminds us that despite the fact that each nation is defined by its supposedly unique character, nationalisms share powerful characteristics and that they are also produced transnationally. For Bayly,

<sup>32</sup> C. A. Bayly 1998, 'The First Age of Global Imperialism, c. 1760–1830', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 28–47; Bayly 2002, "'Archaic" and "Modern" Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, ca. 1750–1850', in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (New York, NY: Norton), pp. 45–72.

<sup>33</sup> C. A. Bayly 2004, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell), p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 13–4, 474, 478.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 199–244, 462–4.

however, nation states were not the sole anchor of identity even in an age of 'hyper-active nationalism'; rather he insists one of the markers of modernity was the range of identities, often overlapping and frequently competing, that were produced out of a range of collectivities: class, ethnicity, race and religion.

At the heart of *The Birth of the Modern World* are two theses. The first of these asserts that a central precondition for the emergence of modernity was the growth of internal complexity within most societies between 1780 and 1914. Bayly argues that during this period we can trace a significant shift in most large scale societies as professionals of various types began to displace older knowledge traditions and geographies of expertise. Networks of kinship and marriage-alliance were jostled aside by professional associations and interest groups. During the nineteenth century distinct legal professions, for example, emerged in many colonised lands, in Japan and in the Chinese Treaty Ports. At the same time, Western medicine was increasingly globalised and doctors trained in Western methods enjoyed increased social influence even as increasingly systematised forms of non-Western medicine retained significant cultural authority in the Islamic World, South and East Asia. In the economic domain, Bayly argues, it is in this period that we see 'specialist bodies of managers, accountants and insurers' becoming a key feature of the global economy as they spread out to major urban centres across the globe from London, Amsterdam, and Paris.<sup>38</sup> In terms of economic production, global industrialisation reshaped long established labour patterns as a 'kind of international class structure was emerging', where workers in Europe, the Americas, India or Japan were subjected to similar pressures and began to articulate increasingly shared aspirations.<sup>39</sup>

Bayly's second thesis is that during the long nineteenth century there was a shift towards 'outward uniformity' at a global level. In other words, the profound differences that marked off originally disparate cultural formations were softened and even undercut due to the integrative work of imperial political systems, global technological change, and the globalisation of religion and race as 'universal' languages. Between 1780 and 1914, for example, Hinduism, which had confounded many early European observers with its innumerable gods, devotional paths, and little traditions, was increasing systematised and outwardly, at least, began to look like other 'religions' (like Islam and Christianity). This transformation, Bayly suggests, was by no means unique, as during the long nineteenth century many 'traditions which had once been bundles of rights, shamanistic practices, rituals and antique verities' were reshaped into coherent 'religions' with 'their own spheres of interest and supposedly uniform characteristics'. For Bayly, the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

in 1893 is a potent symbol of the outcome of these systematising processes. This event would have been incomprehensible a century before, as in the late eighteenth century the notion of 'religion' remained largely unknown outside the West and Europeans had a limited understanding of Hinduism, a thin grasp of Islamic traditions in Southeast Asia, and virtually no knowledge of Buddhism. Over the following century the power of print, the reforming efforts of elites in the Pacific, Asia and Africa, and the entanglement of various devotional paths with imperial power meant that 'the claims of the great standardizing, religions were much more widely known and acted on' by 1914.<sup>40</sup>

Bayly develops these arguments on a truly global scale over a wide range of different domains – the economic, the political, the social, the cultural and so on – and they are underpinned by a growing body of work within world history that has questioned the Eurocentrism of social theory as well as Europe's privileged position in both historical and theoretical accounts of modernity. The long-established tendency to treat European patterns as either 'natural' or 'universal' (in the way that say Marx, Talcott Parsons, or David Landes have done) and thereby reducing China or India, or the Islamic world to being cases of failed or stagnated development has been undercut by recent work on economics and state building within Eurasia. Most importantly, Kenneth Pomeranz and R. Bin Wong have demolished many of the arguments that have been used to highlight European exceptionalism (whether we are talking about patterns of agricultural production, fertility patterns and family structures, the development of transportation networks, or the workings of the market or 'culture'). Wong traces a broad set of similarities within 'Eurasian' economic history as well as a key set of divergences in the history of European and Chinese state-making, especially in terms of the capacities they developed and both the internal and external threats they faced. His work suggests the particular rather than universal nature of European models and has been central in reorienting ongoing debates over the history of the state, the path of capitalist development and the nature of Chinese history itself.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, Pomeranz suggests that Europe enjoyed little or no advantage over East Asia before 1800. The 'great divergence' that emerged between Europe and Asia during the nineteenth century was ultimately the product of 'windfalls' from the New World (precious metals, but also slave labour, food plants and various commodities) and the tapping of Europe's, but especially Britain's, coal deposits to maximise production and save the land.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 364-5.

<sup>41</sup> R. Bin Wong 1997, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

<sup>42</sup> Pomeranz 2000, *The Great Divergence*, pp. 57-62 and 264-97.

The work of Wong and Pomeranz are key elements of the overall scaffolding of Bayly's work, shaping, in particular, his rendering of the world around 1800. In their wake, Bayly recognises both the connections between China and Europe and some of the key similarities between their economic and social development. Bayly suggests that modernity was the product of a 'complex parallelogram of forces' that were driven from a variety of different centres, not just the 'West'.<sup>43</sup> This vision of a multi-centred world certainly echoes Pomeranz's argument and the drive of the last generation of world historians to break away from the rather mechanistic approach of world systems theory. In fact, in this regard the core arguments articulated in *The Birth of the Modern World* could be read as a response to R. Bin Wong's warning that 'History often seems to reach non-western peoples as they come into contact with Europeans .... modern histories are conventionally constructed along the axis of native responses to Western challenges.'<sup>44</sup>

But it is important to recognise that in several important ways Bayly's vision of world history is significantly different from not only the work of Wong and Pomeranz but recent research within the field more generally. In contrast to the Sinocentrism of Pomeranz and Wong, Bayly's vision of modernity places particular emphasis on both the Islamic world and South Asia. This is not surprising given the trajectory of Bayly's research: his early work reconstructed the transformation of the economic fortunes and social lives of north Indian towns and merchant dynasties in the 1770–1870 period and it still stands as a crucial contribution to a heated debate over the transformation of South Asia during the late Mughal period.<sup>45</sup> In addition, his under-appreciated *Imperial Meridian* (1989) located the rapid expansion of the British Empire between 1780 and 1830 in the 'hollowing out' of the great Muslim Empires – the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals – as the result of peasant resistance to taxation regimes, the rise of religious revivalism, the growing power of regional rulers, religious conflict and factional disputes at the imperial courts. *Imperial Meridian* was not simply a rehabilitation of the Robinson-Gallagher thesis (which suggested that the British Empire grew rapidly during the nineteenth century as a result of a succession of local crises in the periphery), but rather the provocative marriage of new perspectives on the rise of the military-fiscal state in eighteenth-century Britain with a nuanced understanding of the culture and politics of the Islamic world.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Bayly 2004, *The Birth of the Modern World*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Wong 1997, *China Transformed*, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Most importantly: C. A. Bayly 1983, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>46</sup> C. A. Bayly 1989, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman).

It is also not surprising given Bayly's prominence in debates over both the Mughal and British Empires that the *Birth of the Modern World* places empire building at the heart of modernity. This sets Bayly apart from the Sinocentric vision of much recent world history. Imperialism is not a problematic that is central in the work of Wong and Pomeranz, in part because European empires struggled to maintain anything more than a fingertip grasp on China and in part because both Wong and Pomeranz frame their studies as comparative economic histories of Europe and China. Where empire building does intrude, in Pomeranz's 'new world windfalls' for example, it is framed in essentially economic terms rather than as a larger set of unequal power relations.<sup>47</sup> For Bayly, however, there is no doubt that empire building is profoundly entangled with, and deeply suffuses, modernity. Not only was the new age of global imperialism that emerged in the late eighteenth century one of the engines that transformed various 'old regimes' across the globe, but during the nineteenth century empires played a central role in reshaping material culture, in moulding the modern state, in the crafting of new visions of nations and ethnicities, in dictating the food people consumed and the languages they spoke.

What is also striking and salutary about Bayly's vision of empire is that he does not shy away from confronting the violence of imperial orders. Where Niall Ferguson and David Cannadine have downplayed the significance of race in the world of empire and underplayed imperialism's violence and human cost, Bayly is clear on the connection between race, empire, and violence.<sup>48</sup> Chapter 12 of the *Birth of the Modern* is entitled 'The Destruction of Native Peoples and Ecological Depradation' and it traces the ravages visited upon indigenous peoples by Eurasian diseases, the 'white deluge' of migration, and the deployment of 'sheer violence' of colonialism, as well as the profound changes wrought by broader shifts in technology, communication networks, and global markets.<sup>49</sup> Given the brute power of European empire building, Bayly suggests that the nineteenth century did witness the rise of north-western Europe to global dominance. This dominance might have been contested, provisional and fleeting

<sup>47</sup> A significant body of scholarship has begun to emerge over the past few years: James L. Hevia 1995, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press); and Hevia 2003, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press); Lydia H. Liu 2004, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

<sup>48</sup> David Cannadine 2001, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Oxford University Press); Niall Ferguson 2003, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane). Also see *From Orientalism to Ornamentalism: Empire and Difference in History*, special issue of *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Bayly 2004, *The Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 432-50, quote is at p. 440.

in many areas, but in Bayly's view it did mark a key moment when the multi-centred world invoked by Pomeranz was reconfigured. In suggesting that 'efficiency in killing other human beings' was an important element of Europe's, and especially Britain's rise, Bayly is a long way from Cannadine's bloodless and deracinated vision of empire or Ferguson's identification of the British Empire as an exemplary model of global governance.<sup>50</sup>

Here we can identify one further concern that places Bayly's work at odds with much recent work within world history. Throughout *The Birth of the Modern World* he locates his narrative of connection, convergence and conflict in the social and cultural domains as well as in the world of economics that remains the chief concern in world history research. In particular, Bayly puts a good deal of emphasis on what he terms 'bodily practice': dress, bodily decoration and grooming, food and drink, sport and leisure. While it is true that Bayly's discussion of the history of the body supplements rather than transforms his approach, there is no doubt that it marks an important challenge to traditional approaches to world history. Key works within world history over the past twenty years have been grounded in economic history or have adopted an explicitly materialist approach to the past (most obviously: Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony*; Philip Curtin's, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*; K. N. Chaudhuri's *Asia before Europe*; Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* and *The Columbian Exchange*; Andre Gunder Frank's *ReOrient*; Pomeranz's *Great Divergence*; Wong's *China Transformed*; and David Christian's *Maps of Time*). The title of Pomeranz's collection of essays co-authored with Steven Topik, *The World That Trade Made*, is particularly indicative of the outlook of world history: that modernity is essentially the product of a particular set of economic innovations and structures.<sup>51</sup> These concerns remain the stock in trade of the *Journal of World History*, which has been a crucial site for these ongoing debates over global trade and the history of capitalism. In a recent essay, Antoinette Burton and I have argued that the *Journal of World History* and world history more generally seems to have functioned as a redoubt against the cultural turn.<sup>52</sup> One of features that sets world history apart from either postcolonial studies, or the new transnational research within the humanities, is that it has not systematically engaged with questions of race or more particularly gender and sexuality.

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>51</sup> Pomeranz and Topik 1999, *The World That Trade Created*.

<sup>52</sup> Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton 2005, 'Postscript: Bodies, Genders, Empires: Reimagining World Histories', in Ballantyne and Burton (eds), *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), pp. 409-10.

In this regard, Bayly's stress on 'bodily regimes' is a welcome innovation that begins to break down the economic tendencies of world history. However, the way in which Bayly deals with these 'bodily regimes' feeds my major reservation about this volume – the constancy of its gaze on the macro, on the global overlay, on the big processes. While this analytical gaze certainly helps us appreciate the 'big picture' of the shaping of modernity, it produces a relatively thin treatment of subjectivities and meaning making. These questions are frequently occluded in the writing of world histories, especially big synthetic histories like this one. But knowing the richly detailed work Bayly has produced on the encounter between British and South Asian knowledge traditions and the emphasis he places on bodily regimes in the introduction to *The Birth of the Modern World*, I had hoped that the 'big' stories that are at the heart of the volume – empire building, international trade, the rise of the nation state and so on – would be given texture and nuance through some detailed discussion of particular movements, locations, and individuals.

There is no doubt that *The Birth of the Modern World* strives to be comprehensive, to present a rich analysis of the making of our world. As a result, however, individual actors (especially women), marginal social groups, and dissenting voices are either ignored or folded into the grand narrative at the heart of the volume. Unfortunately, his treatment of 'bodily regimes', which might have provided one key space for exploring 'small' stories or voices, does not offer a distinctive level of analysis. Where Kathleen Canning has argued that the 'body as method' offers a challenging and distinctive site for historical analysis, for Bayly the history of the body is simply another domain, no different in kind from economics or politics, where he can trace the emergence of modernity.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Bayly's analytical position and focus remains essentially fixed and unmoving throughout the volume – the *Birth of the Modern World* offers an assured and masterful analysis of the making of global modernity, but at times it lacks the texture and richness that a more rigorous examination of the history of the body might have given the text.

One other aspect of *The Birth of the Modern World* that is troubling is what we might term its 'geography of modernity'. Bayly's account of modernity diverges markedly from the visions of colonial modernity that have been produced out of some of the best new work on empire. Even though Bayly stresses that modernity was shaped from a variety of centres and was fashioned out of encounters between a wide range of peoples, *The Birth of the Modern* nevertheless tends to encode modernity as the product of an unproblematised Europe. Modern financial services, science, medicine, and even the nation state emanate from

<sup>53</sup> Kathleen Canning 1999, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History', *Gender & History*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 499-513.

Europe, from where they disseminate outwards, often conveyed by agents of empire. In stressing the coterminous history of the 'great acceleration' of modernity and the rise to global dominance of European empires in the after 1820, Bayly's vision of the geography of modernity is very traditional. In effect, Bayly frequently frames European modernity and global modernity in a segregated and neatly sequential relationship. Here *The Birth of the Modern World* resolutely ignores one of the key insights of postcolonial criticism: that slavery and empire building were central in the very creation of 'Europe' prior to modernity and that these entanglements in many ways provided the very basis for Europe's modernity. This, of course, has been a particular thrust of the 'imperial turn' in British historiography, where the research produced by James Walvin, Kathleen Wilson, Catherine Hall, Mrinalini Sinha, Antoinette Burton, and Angela Woollacott has undercut the rigid distinction between the history of the imperial metropole and Britain's various colonies. In this regard, Bayly also elides some of the important recent work on colonial modernities that stresses both the particularity of, and in-process nature of, specific formations of modernity in various colonial sites.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, much of the recent work on 'colonial modernity' is inflected by postcolonialism. In the past Bayly has been quite critical of postcolonialism, not least in part because he sees it as marking the 'Americanisation' of British and British imperial history. However, he does recognise that the weight of postcolonial criticism and the cultural turn has necessitated the creation of new forms of historical writing. He has recently suggested that:

the postmodern and post-colonial [*sic*] writers who have dominated the last decade or more have tended to be sceptical of 'grand narratives' such as these, arguing instead for the study of the 'fragment', the individual resister or subaltern. But ironically, the postcolonial sensibility has had the countervailing effect of requiring the construction of a new type of world history to replace the old histories of 'Western civilisation' in that greatest of academic marketplaces, the United States.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, we should see Bayly's volume as a response to this need for new narratives. Even though Bayly's vision of modernity is not as decentred as recent postcolonial writing suggests, *The Birth of the Modern World* produces a powerful analysis of the global nineteenth century that will challenge undergraduates and maybe please scholars sympathetic to postcolonialism. After all, this is a world history that places empire at the heart of modernity and violence at the heart of empire building, two points that seem particularly apposite at this moment in global politics. More broadly, in *The Birth of the Modern World* Bayly

<sup>54</sup> e.g., Antoinette Burton (ed.) 1999, *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities* (London: Routledge).

<sup>55</sup> C. A. Bayly 2004, 'Writing World History', *History Today*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 36-40.

attaches significant weight to South Asia and the Islamic world, draws upon the recent historiography on China, and certainly escapes from any tendency to see the European experience as normative. R. Bin Wong has recently argued that 'we should exceed the limitations of historical explanations derived from European experiences' by exploring '[t]he plurality of historical pasts' and expanding 'the capacities of social theory through a more systematic grounding in multiple historical experiences'.<sup>56</sup> Bayly's volume is a very significant contribution to that vital project.

<sup>56</sup> Wong 1997, *China Transformed*, p. 293.



# 3. Paths not yet taken, voices not yet heard: rethinking Atlantic history

**Michael A. McDonnell**

Of late, scholarly journals in the discipline of history have been filled with arguments stressing the need to break with traditional historiographic boundaries. In particular, we are told that in this global age, we must move 'beyond the nation' in our research and in our teaching. In the early modern history of Europe and the Americas, these arguments for thinking 'transnationally' have of late coalesced around a call to focus on the Atlantic World as a new conceptual framework.

Yet, for all these exhortations and good intentions, and a proliferation of conferences and edited collections with titles evoking 'transnational' or more specifically 'Atlantic World' history, few scholars have yet been able to produce work that truly reflects or represents just such an approach. In part, this is because the conceptual insights of Atlantic History have not been matched by the development of appropriate methodological tools. But nationally-based historiographic traditions also make comparative or transnational approaches difficult and are only compounded by institutional barriers at the departmental, University and national levels that often curtail rather than encourage non-national approaches to research and teaching.

This chapter will examine the rise of Atlantic History in recent historiography and its apparent limits. I will argue that the fruits of Atlantic History can only be enjoyed to their full extent if we recognise these problems, begin to think beyond the often Anglo-American Atlantic World, and use the conceptual insights of Atlantic History to create narratives that extend beyond imperial and national boundaries, and across traditional chronologies that support the national narratives that sustain those boundaries.

The essay will conclude by looking at some of the ways in which we might do this by looking beyond the traditionally defined borders of race, nation, and empire, and examining the Atlantic World from different, and eastward facing perspectives, from the bottom-up, and across older imperial and newly created national borders. The challenges of doing so are substantial, but the potential rewards include the possibility of a radically revised Atlantic World history that dynamically fuses the best of recent historical scholarship to an emergent and exciting conceptual advance in transnational history.

A quick scan of new publications in the back pages of the *American Historical Review*, the conference calls on H-Net and the contents pages of just about any leading journal that deals with early modern European or American history will

reveal the extent of the dynamic explosion of interest in Atlantic history over the past few years. Conferences, journals, seminars, book prizes, textbooks, courses, graduate programmes, and now, dedicated academic positions in Atlantic history have blossomed. Fired by the possibilities of a new kind of open, empirical agenda (and those jobs), and by encouragement from notable scholars such as John Elliott who wrote recently that Atlantic history was ‘one of the most important new historiographical development of recent years’, scholars young and old have redefined their own work in a collective effort to reconceptualise the early modern world of Europeans, Africans, and Americans. As David Armitage wrote in 2002 in his introduction to *The British Atlantic World*, it seems ‘we are all Atlanticists now’.<sup>1</sup>

The pace of the increasing institutionalisation of Atlantic history has been matched only by the possibilities it has raised and the questions asked of it, particularly about what it encompasses. Atlantic history has, most obviously, something to do with the ocean itself. But is that the North Atlantic, or South, or both? Is it about the sailors and ships that plied that ocean, or about the

<sup>1</sup> David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (eds) 2002, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 11. For attempts to survey and define the field and trace its lineage, see Bernard Bailyn 1996, ‘The Idea of Atlantic History’, *Itinerario*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 19-44; and more recently, Bailyn 2005, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); John Thornton 1992, ‘Introduction’, in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Daniel W. Howe 1993, *American History in an Atlantic Context: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 3 June 1993* (Oxford: Clarendon); Nicholas Canny 1999, ‘Writing Atlantic History; Or, Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America’, *Journal of American History*, pp. 1093-114. For some challenges to these ideas and other approaches, see A. T. Bushnell (ed.) 1995, *Establishing Exceptionalism: Historiography and the Colonial Americas* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum); David Brion Davis 2000, ‘Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 2, pp. 452-66, and comments by Peter Kolchin, Rebecca J. Scott, and Stanley L. Engerman, pp. 467-84; John H. Elliott 1987, ‘Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World’, in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 3-13; J. H. Elliott 1994, *Britain and Spain in America: Colonists and Colonized* (Reading: University of Reading); J. H. Elliott 1998, *Do the Americas Have a Common History?: An Address* (Providence, RI: Published for the Associates of the John Carter Brown Library). See also the forum at *History Compass*, 1 (2003) NA 026, 001-010, [www.history-compass.com](http://www.history-compass.com), especially Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra 2003, ‘Some Caveats about the “Atlantic” Paradigm’, in *History Compass*, 1. For older attempts to envision the Atlantic, see H. E. Bolton 1933, ‘The Epic of Greater America’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 448-74; R. R. Palmer 1959–1964, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 volumes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); and John Elliott 1970, ‘The Atlantic World’, in Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 79-104.

myriad people who depended upon them to cross it – in chains or with chests, with fear or with hope – or is it about the people those ships connected? Is it about the places that the ocean connected – Lisbon, Madeira and Rio de Janeiro – or the goods that travelled between those places – the beaver pelts trapped by Ottawa Indians that ended up on the heads of wealthy Parisians, or the silver mined by drafted indigenous mit'a workers in Peru that fuelled European expansion in the early modern period?

And, where exactly does the Atlantic begin and end? Is it at the mouth of the St Lawrence River, or at the Nipigon River on the north shore of Lake Superior? Does it include the Niger River in sub-Saharan Africa along which raiders enslaved Yoruba peoples, or the colonial town of Quito, high in the Ecuadorian Andes, reached only via ports off the Pacific Ocean? Does it begin with the voyages of Columbus, or Portuguese raiding and trading along the West African coast? And did this Atlantic World come to an end with the independence movements that rocked the western hemisphere in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, or with the abolition of slavery in Cuba and Brazil as late as 1888? Finally, is the Atlantic more about the old world or the new, or is it perhaps merely more a construction of European thinkers, or modern historians, than about the peoples who inhabited it?

Atlantic history is, of course, about all of this and potentially so much more. In summing up recent trends and setting an agenda for new work, Armitage cautiously and correctly chose to embrace an open-ended approach to Atlantic history, noting that it is best used as a field that 'links national histories, facilitates comparisons between them, and opens up new areas of study', ultimately pushing historians 'towards methodological pluralism and expanded horizons'. Depending on how it is defined, Armitage concludes, the field is fluid, "in motion, and potentially boundless," like the Atlantic itself. This is, Armitage concludes, 'the most one can ask of any emergent field of study'.<sup>2</sup>

The great promise of Atlantic history, then, is that it will lead us to think about all kinds of new connections, but above all, that it will be transnational in scope. Even for the pre-national early modern era, colonial historians, and particularly,

<sup>2</sup>David Armitage 2002, 'Three Concepts of Atlantic History', in Armitage and Braddick, (eds), *British Atlantic World*, pp. 26-7. For other, similarly open-ended definitions of Atlantic history, see Alan L. Karras 1992, 'The Atlantic World as a Unit of Study', in Karras and J. R. McNeill (eds), *Atlantic American Societies: From Columbus Through Abolition, 1492–1888* (London: Routledge), pp. 1-18; Marcus Rediker and Michael F. Jiménez 2001, 'What is Atlantic History?' *CPAS Newsletter: The University of Tokyo Center for Pacific and Asian Studies* (October), also available at [www.marcusrediker.com/Articles/what\\_is\\_atlantic\\_history.htm](http://www.marcusrediker.com/Articles/what_is_atlantic_history.htm); Thomas Benjamin, Timothy Hall, David Rutherford 2001, 'Introduction', to their edited collection, *The Atlantic World in the Age of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), pp. 1-10.

though not exclusively, colonial American scholars, have been decidedly wedded to a teleological agenda that is designed to explain the emergence of the nation above all else. In a globalising world, Atlantic history has the potential to liberate us from more narrow, and mostly nationalist views of the past, and from an historical agenda that has at its heart the education of a patriotic citizenry dedicated to the principles and values of a single state. In this context, Atlantic history pushes us to examine the more fundamental glue that connected and held people together in pre-national communities, as well as the problems and conflicts that made people aware of their differences, and pulled them apart. In short, Atlantic History is about raising exciting new issues and questions about the interconnections between Africans, Americans, and Europeans – citizens of, quite literally, a new world – quite independent of the nations in which they may or may not have ended up.

As exciting as these new possibilities are, already there seem to be limits emerging, at least in practice. For one thing, despite all the exhortations and good intentions, and a proliferation of conferences and edited collections with titles evoking ‘transnational’ or more specifically ‘Atlantic World’ history, the actual steps taken by scholars thus far have seemed tentative, cautious, and circumscribed. In short, few scholars have yet been able to produce good empirical work that reflects or represents a truly Atlantic approach to the early modern period.

What scholars have so far produced tend to be what Armitage has called cis-Atlantic history – the study of particular places or locations in relation to the wider Atlantic World. Indeed, there has been a wonderful explosion of literature on topics ranging from the Atlantic-influenced political and legal culture of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to the cultural lives of African slaves in the early colonial Portuguese world, to the dynamic interactions between Natives, Dutch and English in the early New York region, and finally to the massive upheaval of the Haitian Revolution.<sup>3</sup> But so far, with several important

<sup>3</sup> See Jeremy Adelman 2002, *Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); James H. Sweet 2003, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press); Faren R. Siminoff 2004, *Crossing the Sound: The Rise of Atlantic American Communities in Seventeenth-Century Eastern Long Island* (New York, NY: New York University Press); Laurent Dubois 2004, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press). See also April Lee Hatfield 2004, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: PENN/University of Pennsylvania Press); Herman L. Bennett 2003, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Blacks in the Diaspora) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press); and the edited collections, Bradley G. Bond (ed.) 2005,

exceptions discussed below, there has been relatively little work so far that is truly transatlantic (comparative) or circum-Atlantic (that is, ‘the history of the Atlantic as a particular zone of exchange and interchange, circulation and transmission’).<sup>4</sup>

As Armitage notes, it may just be a matter of time before an accumulation of cis-Atlantic histories lend themselves to more expansive trans- and circum-Atlantic histories. In the meantime, though, there is a danger that such initial efforts might actually be limiting in the long run. For while historiographers thus far have embraced an open-ended definition of Atlantic history and run ahead of the pack to announce the possibilities that lie ahead, most historians have had to proceed from what they know. And what many ‘Atlantic’ historians know best is the Anglo-Atlantic World. Thus so far, with some important exceptions, the bulk of the work in Atlantic history has really been about the Anglo-Atlantic World.<sup>5</sup> Armitage and Braddick’s path-breaking work, several recently published readers and many of the new and forthcoming

*French Colonial Louisiana And The Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press); Robert Applebaum and John Wood Sweet (eds) 2005, *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press).

<sup>4</sup> Armitage 2002, ‘Three Concepts’, pp. 16-25.

<sup>5</sup> Examples are many, but see especially the fine work done by people such as Alison Games 1999, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press); Ian K. Steele 1986, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press); Alison G. Olson 1992, *Making the Empire Work: London and American Interest Groups, 1690–1790* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy 2000, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press); Carla Gardina Pestana 2004, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); David Hancock 1995, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Patrick Griffin 2001, *The People with No Name: Ireland’s Ulster Scots, America’s Scots Irish, and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689–1764* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); Joyce E. Chaplin 2001, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); and recently published edited collections such as Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (eds) 2004, *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press); Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas (eds) 2005, *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press), both of which are in a new Johns Hopkins University Press series entitled *Anglo-America in the Trans-Atlantic World*.

books with 'Atlantic World' in their title are, on closer inspection, about the Anglo-American Atlantic World.<sup>6</sup>

Now, the desire to place European colonies in an Atlantic setting is admirable, as is the push to integrate those colonies into histories of the metropole, but surely in the colonial context, this is what we should have been doing all along. Perhaps this historiographical turn is only natural given that the history of colonial British America is probably the field that has the most catching up to do when it comes to breaking down modern conceptual and political borders. As John Elliott has noted, Atlantic History in the Anglo-American world has been, when seen especially in a broader Atlantic context, and in particular, by Latin American historians, remarkably bifurcated. Whereas the history of Spanish America during the colonial period has conventionally been regarded as a 'natural concomitant of the history of metropolitan Spain, and vice versa', the same cannot be said of general histories of England, nor for that matter, of the British colonies in America, where historians of the latter have been strongly preoccupied with teleological and exceptionalist assumptions about the kind of society into which they were to evolve.<sup>7</sup>

So, there is good reason to celebrate the recent outpouring of monographs and books on both sides of the Atlantic that have transformed Anglo-American history and that have already culminated in the publication of new textbooks such as T. H. Breen and Timothy Hall's, *Colonial America in an Atlantic World* (New York, Nyand London: Pearson Longman, 2004), and Alan Taylor's remarkably rich and Atlantic-minded *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (London: Penguin, 2001). These books collectively enrich the history of colonial America while they illuminate transatlantic networks of exchange, migration, ideas and labour. They also tell us a good deal about Britain as well, and the impact empire had on the development of the British 'nation', 'national identity', and even newer ideas of empire too.<sup>8</sup> In short, Atlantic history has

<sup>6</sup>Or, as Cañizares-Esguerra has put it, they are usually about the 'North Atlantic' (see his 2003 essay, 'Some Caveats about the "Atlantic" Paradigm', in *History Compass*, 1. Even works that at first glance promise a more pan-Atlantic approach are often more focused on the Anglo-Atlantic World on closer inspection. See, for example, Mary Sarah Bilder 2004, *The Transatlantic Constitution: Colonial Legal Culture and the Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); and Peter A. Coclanis 2005, *The Atlantic Economy During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: New Perspectives on Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel* (The Carolina Lowcountry and the Atlantic World Series) (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press).

<sup>7</sup>John Elliott 2002, 'Afterword', in Armitage and Braddick (eds), *British Atlantic World*, pp. 238.

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, Eliga H. Gould 2000, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press); Andrew Fitzmaurice 2003, *Humanism and America: An Intellectual History of English Colonisation, 1500–1625*

thus far helped in telling a much more multifaceted, three-dimensional and integrated tale of the British imperial and the colonial American experience.

But at their worst, these 'new' Atlantic history books tend to replicate and enhance older teleological assumptions about the growth of the United States and the rise of Britain, albeit now with an enriched and broader Atlantic World context. Even the latest, and in many ways very admirable, attempt at placing the colonial American experience in a wider Atlantic perspective – Alan Taylor's, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* fails to break from an ultimate adherence to explaining the origins of the United States. Presumably, this has much to do with publishers' desires to fill a textbook market for University courses that still revolve around the rise of the United States, albeit a more multicultural United States. It is here that intellectual developments have run far ahead of departmental, institutional, and market forces, needs, and biases.

Quite apart from the inherent limitations in this more traditional approach, if we do not break free from these particular national, or even imperial paradigms, Atlantic history is in danger of becoming a neo-imperial form of history; one dominated by the rise of the British Empire, and the birth of the United States. Bernard Bailyn, for example, has been at the forefront of efforts to invigorate the field of Atlantic history. But in Bailyn's own *Atlantic World*, Britain is clearly at the centre, and the British Empire and the Anglo-American world radiates outward – throughout the 'entire inter-hemispheric system'. Suddenly British traders are crowding the ports of the Caribbean and British goods are flooding into French ports. And 'England's population moved about the Atlantic World as the people of no other European nation.' Bailyn wants to place Britain and America into a larger Atlantic context, but seems only interested in reading that context through British eyes – the impact of Britain on the Atlantic, rather than the Atlantic impact on Britain. Atlantic history, for Bailyn, is about linking 'European history with the history of the western hemisphere'.<sup>9</sup>

A celebration of Atlantic history in this context suddenly sounds at best suspiciously like older notions of the 'Western civilisation' programme out of which, at least in part, Atlantic history grew. Bailyn himself traces those origins

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); David Armitage 2000, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Linda Colley 1992, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press); Michael J. Braddick 2000, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c. 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); and the illuminating essays in the special forum on 'The New British History in Atlantic Perspective', *American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 2, 1999, pp. 426-500.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Bailyn 2002, Preface, in Armitage and Braddick (eds), *British Atlantic World*, pp. xv, xvi-xvii.

to Walter Lippmann's influential essay in *The New Republic* in February 1917, when he argued for the preservation of the

profound web of interest which joins together the western world. Britain, France, Italy, even Spain, Belgium, Holland, the Scandinavian nations, and Pan-America are in the main one community in their deepest needs and their deepest purposes .... What we must fight for is the common interest of the western world, for the integrity of the Atlantic Powers.

And most proponents of Atlantic history recognise its ideological roots in the defensive posturing of the Cold War.<sup>10</sup>

But at worst, this kind of approach also threatens to become something more than a rewarming of the Western civilisation programme. Most recently, Bailyn tipped his hand as to what he meant by Atlantic History when, at the end of an essay detailing the radiating influence of American constitutionalism through the Atlantic World in the early nineteenth century, he wrote of contemporary challenges to that 'classic formulation for the world at large of effectiveness and constraint in the humane uses of power' by people with 'other values, other aspirations, other beliefs in the proper uses of power' and by people who 'emphatically challenge Jefferson's belief that it is America's destiny to extend to other regions of the earth what he called "the sacred fire of freedom and self-government"'. What these 'other' values, aspirations and beliefs are, Bailyn leaves up to one's imagination. But in this new era of post-September 11th fears, Atlantic history may yet become a casualty of a Western-oriented new political agenda.<sup>11</sup>

With these caveats aside, and in the spirit of the idea that Atlantic history should be liberating, not limiting, let me suggest several possible directions in which

<sup>10</sup> *The New Republic*, February 17, 1917, pp. 60, quoted in Bailyn 1996, 'The Idea of Atlantic History'. More recently, Bailyn has downplayed the Cold War origins of Atlanticism. Atlantic history was, 'essentially' in his view, a result of the 'force of "inner" developments within scholarship itself: the propulsion of expanding knowledge and the perception of hitherto unremarked filiations' (2002, Preface, pp. xvii).

<sup>11</sup> See Bernard Bailyn 2003, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York, NY: Knopf), pp. 149. For similar warnings of this kind, see the essays by Cañizares-Esguerra 2003, 'Some Caveats about the "Atlantic" Paradigm', and Jack P. Greene 2003, 'Comparing Early Modern American Worlds: Some Reflections on the Promise of a Hemispheric Perspective', in *History Compass*, 1, NA 026, 001-010, at [www.historycompass.com](http://www.historycompass.com), in which Greene worries about Atlantic history becoming the latest example of 'Yankee imperialism', while Cañizares-Esguerra notes that such suspicions grow when it is noted that 'Atlantic' history has not extended past the colonial period, when Latin America becomes less about Spain and more about histories, politics, and poverty that challenge 'aseptic and celebratory definitions of the West as the cradle of "democracy", "reason", "prosperity", and "freedom"'.

we should think carefully about how best to use this conceptual tool: by thinking across borders, and especially imperial borders, by facing east as much as we face west, and by taking a bottom-up approach at least as much as a top-down approach. By using Atlantic history along with the best of other new methodological and conceptual advances, we have a real opportunity now of radically reframing Atlantic history and pushing it far beyond what R. R. Palmer and his intellectual heirs had in mind.<sup>12</sup>

One of these is to really move beyond borders. It is of course extremely useful to think about the multicultural origins of the United States, or to reconnect the colonial experience with the European nations that spawned those colonies. And, Atlantic history has helped illuminate a great deal *within* the older imperial systems as a whole. But Atlantic historians need to look further than their imperial borders, too. We need more discussion of comparisons and connections *across* imperial systems. Relatively few scholars have begun to compare and contrast the labour systems of Spanish and English America, to take one example, or even to compare the cultivation of gentility in Portuguese Brazil and French St Domingue. As John Elliott has observed, Anglo-American historians are not the only ones who have focused on a single system; French, Dutch, Portuguese, or Spanish Atlantic history, is still usually 'divided into neat national packages' as Elliot has put it.<sup>13</sup>

This requires everyone, of course, to undertake the rather difficult task of breaking free from the different systems they study, however large they are already. But once we have a more integrated view, and once we give equal weight to the voices of French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and even West Indian

<sup>12</sup> Here I draw inspiration from the thoughts of Jiménez and Rediker, 'What is Atlantic History', at [http://www.marcusrediker.com/Articles/what\\_is\\_atlantic\\_history.htm](http://www.marcusrediker.com/Articles/what_is_atlantic_history.htm)

<sup>13</sup> J. H. Elliott 2002, 'Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation', in Armitage and Braddick (eds), *British Atlantic World*, p. 235. Indeed, surveying at least the most recent English-language publications, the study of imperial systems in isolation of each other is not limited to Anglo-American historians. See, for example, the otherwise path-breaking work by Tamar Herzog 2003, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press); Roleno Adorno and Kenneth Andrien 1991, *Transatlantic Encounters: Europeans and Andeans in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press); Ida Altman 2000, *Transatlantic Ties in the Spanish Empire: Brihuega, Spain & Puebla, Mexico, 1560–1620* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); James Pritchard 2004, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); and Kenneth J. Banks 2002, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press); and most recently, Laurent Dubois 2004, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press).

historians weighing into the discussion about the Atlantic, we can potentially radically reconfigure our narratives, rather than just incorporate scholarship on the so-called 'borderlands' in a sometimes tokenistic way. We can let, for example, the truly multicultural experience of New Spain drive the agenda of our interpretive framework as easily as American constitutionalism seems to drive the current agenda. Too many Anglo-Americans, myself included, too often try to 'fit' Spanish experiences into Anglo models, rather than the other way around, or comparing them equally.<sup>14</sup>

Integral to this effort to move beyond borders will be the need to take up the call of Michael Jiménez and Marcus Rediker and others to completely 'reframe the political and intellectual style of early Atlanticism' and refashion Atlantic History – away from Robert R. Palmer's male upper- and middle-class actors in national politics, and more towards a common and/or comparative social history – towards a new class history, for example. Indeed, as Jiménez and Rediker note, 'we possess considerably more knowledge of previously ignored workers and peasants, women, and peoples of many nations, races, and ethnicities – in intensively studied regions, villages, and neighbourhoods throughout the Atlantic World'. This exciting research has put us in a unique position – not only to produce more enriching scholarship on the comparisons and connections, the similarities and differences, between ordinary people throughout the Atlantic World, but also to write a fundamentally new kind of history. The constellation of the emergence of the new Atlantic history with so many other 'new' histories – on gender, race, and ethnicity in colonial, imperial and postcolonial studies – means that we have a better chance than ever of breaking free from Palmer and others and writing even a new kind of political history, but one which involves a significant 'reworking of the liberal and modernization paradigms which lay at the heart of the earlier Atlantic project'.<sup>15</sup>

There are several very exciting developments in this direction. Rediker and Peter Linebaugh's own work, *The Many Headed Hydra* is of course one of these, but so too is Camilla Townsend's fascinating comparison of early republic Baltimore, Maryland and Guayaquil, Ecuador, in *Tales of Two Cities: Race and Economic Culture in Early Republican North and South America*. And, of course, this is what many Africanists and historians of slavery are and have always been doing. From Philip Curtin to David Eltis and Paul Gilroy, Africanists have been

<sup>14</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra 2003, 'Some Caveats about the "Atlantic" Paradigm', 1. And see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra 2001, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), for one example of the potential fruits of doing so.

<sup>15</sup> Jiménez and Rediker, 'What is Atlantic History', at [http://www.marcusrediker.com/Articles/what\\_is\\_atlantic\\_history.htm](http://www.marcusrediker.com/Articles/what_is_atlantic_history.htm)

the best Atlanticists, and pan-Atlanticists at that, and the outpouring of so many outstanding works on African slavery and the slave trade, especially over recent decades, has opened up what Elliott has called 'exciting perspectives that suggest the dawn of a new era of Pan-Atlantic history'. Given this, it is perhaps no surprise that path-breaking work by scholars of the Black Atlantic have helped inspire significantly the proponents of Atlantic history.<sup>16</sup>

Some fields, of course, lend themselves to a more pan-Atlantic approach.<sup>17</sup> But surprisingly, other subjects that might have been at the forefront of such a movement have apparently been left behind. I'm teaching a new course this semester on natives and newcomers in the Atlantic World focused squarely on the experiences of indigenous peoples in the Americas between 1400 and 1800.

<sup>16</sup> Elliott 2002, 'Atlantic History', pp. 235. The literature on the Black Atlantic and slavery is, of course, extensive, but see especially, John Thornton 1992, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); P. E. Russell 1995, *Portugal, Spain, and the African Atlantic, 1343–1490* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum); Philip D. Curtin 1990, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Philip D. Curtin 1969, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press); Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman (eds) 2003, *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora* (London and New York, NY: Continuum); Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson 1999, 'Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade', *American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 2, pp. 333-55; Robin Law and Kristin Mann 1999, 'West Africa in the Atlantic Community: The Case of the Slave Coast', *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 307-34; David Eltis 2000, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); David Eltis 1993, 'Europeans and the Rise and Fall of African Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation', *American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 5, pp. 1399-423; Stanley L. Engerman and Joseph E. Inikori (eds) 1992, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press); Michael L. Conniff and Thomas J. Davis (eds) 1994, *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press); Richard Price 1996, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd edition (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press); and Frank Tannenbaum's (1946) classic comparative work, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, NY: Knopf).

<sup>17</sup> Exciting new developments in British imperial history on gender in the colonial world also point to possibilities: see, for example, Anne McClintock 1995, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, NY: Routledge); and Jennifer L. Morgan 2004, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press). Other works that have taken a pan-Atlantic approach are those that look at early encounters, such as Patricia Seed 1995, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); and Anthony Pagden 1995, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c1500–c1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

I was astonished to find how little there has been published that pushes beyond the artificial national and imperial boundaries Europeans erected and which were often meaningless to indigenous peoples. There are in fact a bewildering array of survey texts on Native Americans in Canada, the United States, and sometimes of Canada and the United States, and many now regularly incorporate Florida and the south-west to accommodate the Spanish dimension to Native American experiences. But there are almost no books that make sustained comparisons and connections *between* the experiences of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas in the face of what was, by and large, a common experience to all. Atlanticists thus also need to pay attention to the insights of those in other fields, like the new Indian history, and ‘face east’ as much as they normally face west.<sup>18</sup>

The important thing to note here, I think, is that we should strive to think as much about the peripheries as the centres in Atlantic history. We especially need to keep our eyes on the impact that the small politics of local communities had on the larger politics of imperial rule and nation building. The lines of force so often run in multiple directions, but few scholars in taking an Atlantic approach have put the so-called peripheries at the centre of the larger imperial story. But if we really want to think global, we need to watch the local. We need to tell stories from the bottom-up, facing east (as well as north and south), and from gendered perspectives as often, if not more, than we tell stories from the top-down, facing westwards from Europe, and from a single, usually, male-oriented perspective. Only when we do this can we fully appreciate the

<sup>18</sup> See Daniel Richter 2001, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). John Kicza 2003 recently undertook such an effort in *Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization, 1500–1800* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall). A much less successful attempt can be found in Jayme A. Sokolow's (2002) *The Great Encounter: Native Peoples and European Settlers in the Americas, 1492–1800* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe). The potential fruits of such comparisons and connections are evident in Alison Games' revealing aside that in contrast to historians of North American Indians, historians of Latin American have often considered indigenous peoples, and especially labourers, as migrants. Characterising the experiences of North American Indians as migrants helps us make sense of the tremendous movement of Indian communities in the face of the European invasion. See Alison Games 2002, ‘Migration’, in Armitage and Braddick (eds), *British Atlantic World*, pp. 44, where she draws on the work of scholars of the Andes, especially Nicolás Sánchez-Albornoz 1978, *Indios y Tributos en el Alto Peru* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos) and Karen Viera Powers 1995, *Andean Journeys: Migration, Ethnogenesis, and the State in Colonial Quito* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press). At least some of the essays in Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (eds) 2002, *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (New York, NY: Routledge) do attempt to balance a westward-eastward perspective.

real and highly contingent nature of the ‘negotiated empires’ – and their cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions – at the heart of Atlantic World.<sup>19</sup>

Well, how do we do this? Not everyone can hope to emulate the brilliance of Joseph Roach in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), the virtuosity of Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), or the erudition and wide-reading of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker in *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000) – three works that have helped us believe that such truly transnational and circum-Atlantic histories are possible. And even if we had the creative imagination to offer such interpretations, there are some more mundane and practical problems standing in the way of producing solid empirical work on such topics. Comparative history requires a mastery of at least two or more discrete historiographies, archival systems, and often, and ideally, different languages. But circum-Atlantic history (like any good transnational history) demands even more – often and again, ideally, transcending national and imperial borders and boundaries and the traditional periodisation of the historical narratives that sustain those borders. How then, does one begin archival work on subjects that defy easy categorisation, that are elusive in the records, that ignore the border controls that now separate historical resources?

Some good edited collections have begun to push us forward in this respect. Most offer discrete essays that allow us to make some useful comparisons, such as Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), Michael A. Morrison and Melinda S. Zook, *Revolutionary Currents: Nation Building in the Transatlantic World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), Franklin W. Knight and Peggy Liss (eds), *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), Wim Klooster and Alfred Padula, *The Atlantic World : Essays on Slavery, Migration and Imagination* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005), Elaine G. Breslaw (ed.), *Witches of the Atlantic World: An Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), Paul E. Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers (eds), *Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World* (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1994), and David P. Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*

<sup>19</sup> Some important steps towards the achievement of this goal have been taken by the contributors to Daniels and Kennedy (eds) 2002, *Negotiated Empires*.

(Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, a forthcoming volume edited by Bailyn and drawn from his Harvard-based International Seminar on the Atlantic World entitled *Cultural Encounters in Atlantic History, 1500–1825: Passages in Europe’s Engagement with the West* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), promises the same (though note the revealing and eastward facing subtitle).

So far, it seems, biographical or prosopographical approaches have worked with some success. Two recent path-breaking works, for example, explore the fascinating worlds of several Africans in the Atlantic World. Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), and Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) both demonstrate not only the extent to which Africans were enmeshed in this new Atlantic World, but also how vital they were in creating it. Such biographies help break down borders. In crossing colonial or national boundaries, researchers at least find themselves on less certain footing when making comparisons between diverse peoples or institutions across time and/or places. But while modern researchers may draw back from the uncertainties beyond their historiographic borders, their subjects rarely did.<sup>21</sup>

Non-elite studies of these kinds of people have the biggest potential to transform the field. Communities like the Métis of the Great Lakes, for example, do not really fit into existing narratives and approaches. They were French, and Indian, after all, in an expanding Anglo-American world. But they lived lives that extended much further than the confines of nation-based narratives to which historians have long been bound. Their lives transcended the traditional periodisation to which nation-bound scholars adhere to give coherence to their own narratives. They crossed imperial borders with impunity and they slipped through and across the ethnic, racial, and linguistic categories we have so often imposed on the past. In short, they lived transnational Atlantic lives that defy easy categorisation. In effect, their stories have been fragmented and lost by historians who have been teleologically wedded to tracing the development of new nations.<sup>22</sup> It may take a little more fleet-footed archival work to piece

<sup>20</sup> Even student readers are helpful in making the initial connections we need to spur new ideas. See, for example, Timothy J. Shannon 2004, *Atlantic Lives: A History of the Atlantic World* (New York, NY: Pearson Longman).

<sup>21</sup> See also the suggestive and illuminating biographies collected in David G. Sweet and Gary B. Nash (eds) 1981, *Struggle & Survival in Colonial America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), which despite its title, covers all of the Americas.

<sup>22</sup> Richard White’s (1991) masterful study *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), recognises these artificial borders, but

together such lives – from their origins in southern France and the northern Great Lakes, to their scattered communities across Wisconsin, Michigan, and southern and northern Ontario – but the potential rewards are enticing.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, as exciting as all of this sounds, we also need to be aware that this might be difficult, and the task of synthesising such work virtually impossible. It seems hard enough to please a national audience without attempting to synthesise the histories of four continents bordering the Atlantic ocean over three centuries, and our unfamiliarity with so many aspects of the histories contained within the Atlantic World in the early modern period.<sup>24</sup> And, as Atlantic history is a ‘history without borders’ – a story told from no one vantage point and about no single representative place; no nation states, no single narratives, but instead multiple and often conflicting narratives presented from different perspectives – it can be particularly confusing.

Moreover, in the end we might, as Jack Greene has noted, be not only taken aback at the difficulties of comparative history, but also by a sense of the often vast differences between the different imperial worlds. And not only between the Catholic Iberian-American polities and the Protestant Anglo-American polities established much later, but also within those sprawling entities – particularly between Spanish Peru and Mexico where huge concentrations of imperial indigenous populations combined with mineral resources to produce societies there like nowhere else.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, such an overview, over such a long period, may not be entirely satisfactory – it’s a bit more like jet-setting rather than backpacking. We’ll see the broader outlines from the air, but rarely get sweaty exploring the forests up close; we’ll see patterns of mobility and analyse large groups of people who make up the Atlantic World, but not mingle enough with the locals to perhaps feel like we know what is really going on. And, like jet-setters, we might be in danger of over-emphasising the commonalities and continuities. As we explore the Atlantic World on the same planes, via similar airports, stay in the same luxury chain hotels, and drink coke and bottled water, we’ll see superficial

White’s study, like many others, begins to come to an end with the American Revolution, and we lose sight of his subjects in both the new republic and early Canada.

<sup>23</sup> Others, have successfully focused on the biography of a product, like sugar or tobacco to explore the pan-Atlantic dimensions of the early modern economy. See, for example, Stuart B. Schwartz 2004, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450–1680* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press).

<sup>24</sup> For a warning of the dangers and difficulties of undertaking such work, especially comparative histories, see especially Greene 2003, ‘Comparing Early Modern American Worlds’, pp. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Greene 2003, ‘Comparing Early Modern American Worlds’, pp. 5-6.

differences in the countries we visit, but remark generally and pithily on the shrinking size of the global village.

But a truly Atlantic approach ultimately allows us to ask – and begin to answer – some significant questions, and to interrupt so many dominant Eurocentric and Anglo-centric historical narratives and trajectories. For example, an Atlantic approach makes it quite clear that the expansion of any kind of European concept of ‘liberty’ was quite literally and figuratively carried to the New World on the backs of unfree labour. An Atlantic perspective allows us to move beyond endless debates within colonial historiographies about the relative prosperity and opportunity of different colonists and put the system as a whole under the microscope. As David Brion Davis has noted, when put in that broader perspective, there can be no doubt that the history of the entire New World has been dominated by the theme of slavery and freedom. In the 320 years from 1500 to 1820, he writes, two African slaves for every European immigrant arrived in the New World: ‘It was African slaves and their descendants who furnished the basic labour power that created the dynamic New World economies and the first international mass markets for such consumer goods as sugar, rice, tobacco, dyestuffs, and cotton.’<sup>26</sup> This seems an obvious fact but one which, if acknowledged properly, helps undermine a Eurocentric ‘rise of the West’ narrative particularly since the history of North America in particular, but also Europe and the West in general, has long since been predicted upon the idea of progress, of the march of liberal democratic ideas and ideals.

And, we may also be able finally to move beyond the deceit, usually implicit in many studies, but explicitly stated as recently as 1992 by J. R. McNeill that Europeans ‘created and controlled’ the Atlantic World.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, from the perspective of London, Paris, Madrid, or even of colonists in Philadelphia, Mexico, or Rio de Janeiro, this might have seemed true, but when viewed from the perspective of the motley crew of privateers who shaped so much of the history of the Caribbean in particular, and the Atlantic in general, such a statement rings hollow. And, when viewed from the perspective of the newly emergent Araucanian nation in southern Chile, or the Six Nations of eastern

<sup>26</sup> Davis 2000, ‘Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives’, pp. 455. Moreover, the revolutions and movements for independence that ended the first phase in the history of the Atlantic world have always been acquainted with the drive for liberal democratic governments. But does the history of the Atlantic World in this period bear those assumptions and ideas out? Or was, as Edmund Morgan famously postulated for the American Revolution, slavery absolutely – though paradoxically – essential for the development of republican ideas in the New World. See Edmund S. Morgan 1976, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, NY: Norton).

<sup>27</sup> See J. R. McNeill 1992, ‘The End of the Old Atlantic World: America, Africa, Europe, 1770–1888’, in Karras and McNeill (eds), *Atlantic American Societies*, pp. 265.

North America, both of whom successfully limited European advances for centuries while in turn profiting from the newcomers, it becomes quite clear that the Atlantic World was a 'negotiated' world. From the start, most Europeans got a foothold along the coasts of western Africa and the Americas via a series of negotiations, invitations, and sought after alliances amongst African and Americans, and all new Atlantic identities were forged from an amalgamation of sustained and intense European, African, and American contact, conflict, and cooperation.<sup>28</sup> If the Atlantic World is to be about anything meaningful, we must start, rather than end, with these premises.

<sup>28</sup> For illuminating and suggestive thoughts on this front see especially Donald J. Weber 2002, 'Bourbons and Bárbaros: Center and Periphery in the Reshaping of Spanish Indian Policy', in Daniels and Kennedy (eds), *Negotiated Empires*, pp. 79-104, and Thomas Benjamin 2001, 'Alliances and Conquests', in Benjamin, Hall, and Rutherford (eds), *Atlantic World in the Age of Empire*, pp. 81-7. On identities, see the collected essays in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds) 1987, *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press). All of this, then, would help us understand the magnitude of the lines of force that ran the other way through the Atlantic, transforming our understanding of Old World societies too.



## 4. Postcolonial histories and Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects*

### Angela Woollacott

As with any area of scholarship, there is much slippage in the terminology of transnational histories. Scholars inflect the terms 'global history', 'world history' and 'postcolonial history' differently. Yet even if these terms inevitably lack precision and completely consensual meaning, there are differences to be described in their general usage – at least, to my mind, between the terms 'world history' and 'postcolonial history', particularly the kind of world history most associated with the *Journal of World History* and the World History Association. My task here is to posit some of the characteristics and contributions of postcolonial histories as a transnational approach, and to this end to focus on Catherine Hall's monograph *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* published by Polity Press and the University of Chicago Press in 2002.

Let me begin with some thoughts about what characterises postcolonial histories.

I would suggest that postcolonial approaches to transnational history are distinguished by:

- political engagement with the operation of imperialism and colonialism;
- a concern with power structures and hierarchies;
- an interest in the historical construction of race (one such hierarchy) and often, an interest in the interconstitution of race, gender, class and sexuality;
- an impetus to interrogate knowledge structures, to ask how categories, taxonomies and language have structured imperial relations and hierarchies;
- a recognition that political, economic, social and cultural structures were constructed at once in colonies and their metropolises; that things did not happen originally or independently in London, Paris or Lisbon, rather they happened in multiple parts of an empire in interconnected and interconstitutive ways – including between colonies; and
- a concern with the contingencies and specificities of historical change within particular imperial and/or colonial frames.

Further, let me suggest specifically that, among these characteristics, the distinctions between postcolonial histories and the kind of world history one is most likely to find in the pages of the *Journal of World History* consist in:

- postcolonialism's interest in the historical construction of race and its interconstitution with other categories such as gender and sexuality;
- the impetus to interrogate knowledge structures and their regimes;

- the emphasis on cultural interconstitution as well as economic interdependence; and
- the concern with the specificities of historical change, importantly as opposed to any universalist approach.

It is readily apparent that no one work in postcolonial history totally fulfills any such list of characteristics – whether it’s my list or a list that another scholar might compile. Yet there is value, I think, in considering how a significant, substantial and influential work such as Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* corresponds to such a set of characteristics. Arguably, *Civilising Subjects* bears evidence of all six of the characteristics of postcolonialism I have listed, but it demonstrates some much more than others. The ways in which it exemplifies some fully, and others only minimally, become telling about both the book and the field of postcolonialism.

The great strengths, in postcolonial terms, of Hall’s magnum opus include her concern with the specificities and contingencies of historical change; her compelling insistence on the interconstitutive connections between colony and metropole; her interest in the historical construction of race and its connections to gender and class; and perhaps above all, her political engagement with the operation of imperialism and colonialism and their legacies. The fact that, despite its heft and the time it took to produce, this is far from a universalist history is signaled immediately by Hall’s disarming introduction, the first sentence: ‘The origins of this book lie in my own history’<sup>1</sup> – and this contrast with a universalist approach is despite her discussion of the influence of humanist universalism on her intellectual development. By making clear the ways in which her own life shaped the project, and the questions she asks, Hall shows both her belief in the subjective nature of history writing, and the political commitments that underscore the book. The history of her family, and her own life, as well as nineteenth-century British politics and culture have been shaped by the interconstitution of the British midlands and Jamaica, in specific ways which she fully delineates.

In his review of the book, published six months before his death, Edward Said makes plain its contemporary political importance. Referring to the Baptist missionaries at the heart of Hall’s study, Said closes his review with the sobering observation: ‘George Bush’s main constituency, as he sets out first to punish and then to remake the world with American power, are seventy million evangelical and fundamentalist American Christians, many of whom are Southern

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Hall 2002, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 1.

Baptists'.<sup>2</sup> Said argues that since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a disturbing swing in academic and intellectual views of empire, away from the days and views of the anti-Vietnam war movement and support for the anti-colonial nationalists of Asia and Africa. He charts a groundswell of intellectual reaction in the 1980s and 1990s up to the time of his writing, condemning writers from V. S. Naipaul to Niall Ferguson for a revisionist approach that has found redeeming features in the histories of the European empires and, for some at least, has come to consider current American imperialism as an enlightened global force. Passionately advocating a postcolonial approach that interrogates the 'intertwined histories' of the two sides of the imperial divide, Said called for continuing recognition of the enormous and ongoing legacies of imperialism – the as-yet continuing consequences of slavery and the other depredations of imperial regimes both economic and moral. '[T]he legacy of empire', Said says, 'sits like a menacing and metastasising cancer just beneath the skin of our contemporary lives'.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, Said finds much value in Hall's *Civilising Subjects*, lauding her personal investment in her topic, and her finely detailed account of the changing nature of British imperialism as seen through the actions and words of her protagonists, particularly the shift from the paternalist idealism of the Baptist missionaries in the post-emancipation era of the 1830s and 1840s, to the articulated racism of the 1850s and 1860s. Said admired above all Hall's preparedness, while demonstrating the contingent and evolving nature of imperialism, to show that the empire was fundamentally about the subordination of the colonised to the interests of their English rulers.

One of the historians whom Said contrasts with Hall is David Cannadine. I do not wish to discuss *Ornamentalism* at great length because it has been widely reviewed and discussed in recent years, but for the very same reason I do not want to pass it over. Cannadine sees postcolonialism and the critique of Orientalism as wrongheaded in their emphasis on the imperial construction of racial difference and otherness.<sup>4</sup> Despite his avowed support for the project of putting 'the history of Britain back into the history of empire, and the history of the empire back into the history of Britain',<sup>5</sup> he advances the former more than the latter process. He sees the empire as having been cast in the mould of British class hierarchy – and thus as a social extension of the British metropole,

<sup>2</sup> Edward Said 2003, 'Always on Top', *London Review of Books*, vol. 25, no. 6, 20 March, p. 14 of web version.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> David Cannadine 2001, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. xix.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. xx.

built more on affinities than on difference. Further, he argues that the empire was 'based more on class than on colour'<sup>6</sup> and was run on collaboration between local elites and British imperial rulers. While he is correct to remind us of such collaboration, several commentators have suggested that the book carries a whiff of nostalgia for empire, implying that its success is a signal of the political shift to which Said pointed. Indeed, it would seem that the book's success reflects the resistance to postcolonialism that is widespread in contemporary British and British Empire historiography. It must also be said that the book's success is in good part a product of its considerable merits: its gracious prose, compelling descriptions of the elaborate structures and ceremonies that upheld imperial rule, and its geographical breadth.

In a context of resistance to postcolonial work on race, and of a lack of interest in the perspectives of the colonised, Hall's book stands out for its political commitment to drawing attention to the continuing negative consequences of imperialism and colonialism, and thus, I think, exemplifies the politics inherent to postcolonialism. Antoinette Burton has laid out the political and intellectual stakes in British historiography's resistance to postcolonialism, specifically to the argument that Britain itself was shaped by the Empire:

Clearly the persistent conviction that home and empire were separate spheres cannot be dismissed as just any other fiction. Because history-writing is one terrain upon which political battles are fought out, the quest currently being undertaken by historians and literary critics to recast the nation as an imperialized space – a political territory which could not, and still cannot, escape the imprint of empire – is an important political project. It strikes at the heart of Britain's long ideological attachment to the narratives of the Island Story, of splendid isolation, and of European exceptionalism.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, in her review of Hall's book in a forum in *Victorian Studies*, Burton has pointed to its importance in undermining the hegemonic fiction of Britain's separation from empire; she calls it 'a model of British history in a genuinely transnational frame'.<sup>8</sup>

Equally unsurprisingly, not least because Hall chose to reprint Burton's essay that lays out the political stakes of British historians' investment in the nation in her *Cultures of Empire* reader, Hall agrees in her response to Burton that

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> Antoinette Burton 2000, 'Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating "British" History', in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire: A Reader: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, NY: Routledge), p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> Antoinette Burton 2003, 'Book Review Forum', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 700.

challenging the national frame was a central goal of the book. 'One of my imperatives in *Civilising Subjects*', Hall notes, 'was to demonstrate the ways in which the well-established narrative of British history, the national history, the one taught in schools and universities, needs to be rethought through the frame of empire'.<sup>9</sup> Hall goes on to agree with Burton that 'the debate in Britain over the impact of empire is extremely contentious and the stakes are high'. Interestingly, she continues 'Indeed, I have come to think of these debates as Britain's version of "the history wars" – the controversies over interpretations of colonial history that have mobilized historians in hostile camps in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and elsewhere'.<sup>10</sup> It is hardly worth adding that the work of those who consider themselves global or world historians is far less likely to provoke such political debate in Britain or elsewhere, for the reason that most of it does not engage with contemporary political issues – certainly not issues of race relations and the moral and political questions of the legacies of colonialism.

Despite her central concern with demonstrating the interconnections between Jamaica and Birmingham, Hall does not address broader imperial connections or connections between Jamaica and other colonies beyond Edward John Eyre's career in Australia and New Zealand. Edward Said notes this with the comment that Hall 'mystifyingly doesn't draw' on the work of the Subaltern Studies group<sup>11</sup> – and by implication suggests that Hall's work would have been enriched both by the theoretical insights of Subaltern Studies and a comparative consideration of the interconstitution of India and the metropole in the same period.

It might be suggested that, because of the near absence of a broader imperial view in Hall's book, it does not fully reflect what some scholars of postcolonialism have come to consider an important revision of the image of empire as centre and periphery, the old image of a spoked wheel. Tony Ballantyne has suggested the far better metaphor of a spider web, a metaphor that forces us to keep in mind the constant traffic between and interconstitution of multiple imperial sites, especially between colonies.<sup>12</sup> (I should add that Hall refers to Ballantyne's web metaphor in the *Victorian Studies* forum on her book.)<sup>13</sup> Of course, a reasonable response is that Hall's interest lies in the relationship between Britain

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Hall 2003, 'Book Review Forum', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 723.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 724.

<sup>11</sup> Said 2003, 'Always on Top', p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Ballantyne 2002, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave), pp. 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Hall 2003, 'Book Review Forum', p. 722.

and Jamaica, and therefore she had no empirical reason, beyond Eyre's career, to look at other colonial sites.

While this absence of a broader imperial context might be considered a shortcoming of the book, it also signals, I think, one of the characteristics of postcolonial history – which is that while postcolonialism necessarily means a transnational or transimperial view of history, it does not mean a global or universal view. Traditional world history practitioners claim a global framework, and a less traditional world historian like C. A. Bayly in his *The Birth of the Modern World* also takes the planet as his canvas. Importantly, postcolonial history is not big history or macro history, despite the global significance of its concern with imperialism and colonialism. Postcolonial histories use specific transnational or imperial or transcolonial frameworks, to demonstrate interconstitutive histories with particular substance and detail.

For the purposes of this anthology, it is worth briefly considering other examples of such a specifically postcolonial approach – that is, an approach framed both chronologically and geographically, and based solidly on archival sources – to transnational history. One study that has revealed important constitutive dynamics of gender and race stretching between the imperial metropole and the white-settler dominion of Australia is Fiona Paisley's book on privileged Australian feminists' activism on the status of Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal women, in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>14</sup> Paisley's study presents a detailed analysis of what literary critic Simon Gikandi has termed 'the mutual imbrication of both the colonizer and the colonized in the making of modern social and cultural formations'.<sup>15</sup> Using postcolonial perspectives in her analysis of race relations within Australia as colonialism, Paisley underscores the importance of white Australian feminists' international activism. She examines their strategic use of London as an imperial staging ground for feminist critiques of Australian policy on Aborigines, and their deployment of internationalism and the specific humanitarian principles laid out by the League of Nations to focus on Australian governments' failure to deal adequately with the plight of Aboriginal people.

Paisley argues that white Australian feminists' concern with their own citizenship status and their maternalism merged with humanitarian and internationalist impulses in the interwar decades in a historically significant episode of activism on behalf of Aboriginal people. As she shows, interwar feminists' critiques of prevailing assimilationist policies, especially the policy of separating Aboriginal children from their mothers in order to raise them in white society, prefigured

<sup>14</sup> Fiona Paisley 2000, *Loving Protection? Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919–1939* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press).

<sup>15</sup> Simon Gikandi 1996, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* ((New York, NY: Columbia University Press), p. 20.

the recent controversy in Australia over the legacies of forced child removal, and the debates over how to make amends to Aboriginal people – debates that provoked Australia's current Prime Minister John Howard to decry what he labelled derisively 'black armband history'. Like Hall, Paisley is very conscious of the current political significance of her historical work. She points out that the feminists who mounted this critique of racial policy in the 1920s and 1930s were a small but vociferous group, who used the platforms of mainstream Australian feminist organisations with sizeable memberships to speak at local, national and international levels. They became witnesses for Aboriginal reform at three major inquiries: a Royal Commission on the Constitution, a federal government conference on Aboriginal welfare, and a Royal Commission on the status of Aborigines in Western Australia. Their other important victory was the success they had drawing Australian and metropolitan media attention to the deplorable status of Aboriginal people.

Paisley most directly invokes postcolonial theory in her conclusion, where she points out the limitations to these white feminists' racial analysis, and the ways in which they were the products of their own times, contemporary racial assumptions, and their positioning within Australian structures of colonialism. There she acknowledges that rather than enabling Aboriginal people to speak for themselves, white feminists assumed the right to speak for them and thus effectively contributed to their silencing. Paisley's book exemplifies what I see as several of the key aspects of postcolonial history. It has a transnational focus central to its story: white Australian feminists needed London, the international stage and their own status as modern 'citizens of the world' to conduct their political work. At the same time, Paisley's focus is very much on developments within Australia's shores, the impact of the feminists' activism, and multiple aspects of the political and cultural context. Her study is chronologically focused, based solidly in archival records and contemporary print materials, and fully cognizant of the current political significance of its findings. Constructions of race and gender, shaped by Australian colonialism, are integral to her subject matter.

While Paisley's work illuminates white-settler colonialism through an analysis of political activism and travel between Australia and the metropole, other postcolonial histories examine transnational dynamics that are rather less tangible. Dipesh Chakrabarty's study of the social practice of *adda* in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Calcutta focuses on that particular colonial and post-independence city, but his analysis foregrounds the transnational dynamics of modernisation and urbanisation, and the transnational quest to find both home and subjectivity within the turbulence of modernity. Chakrabarty defines *adda* as a cultural practice of idle and wide-ranging conversation among groups that met regularly, often tied to specific urban sites and settings, and usually consisting exclusively of men. He shows *adda's* roots in earlier Bengali village

life and traditions, yet demonstrates in clear and specific ways its emergence as a cultural practice of modernity. The earliest recorded instances of what became this idiosyncratically Bengali practice (despite its similarity to social practices in other places, such as Cairo) are set in the 1820s, suggesting the rise of the practice, along with that of the Bengali capital itself, under British colonialism. Different versions of the practice occurred through the nineteenth century, some – better known as *majlish* – being associated with wealth and the patronage of a particular elite man. *Addas*, by contrast, at first carried innuendos of marginal groups who indulged in drugs, but increasingly came to signify democratic gatherings where each member paid for his own refreshments and class distinctions were supposedly irrelevant to the exchange of ideas.

The social practice of *addas* grew along with the expansion of the middle class and education, becoming associated with high school and university groups of young men. They reached their full flowering, Chakrabarty suggests, in the early twentieth century, the period of late colonialism when nationalist politics meshed with a high period of Bengali literary production and publishing. These conversational groups were products of urban modernity in that they were held not only in private homes, but in public spaces such as teashops, coffee houses and public parks. The open access to such spaces combined with the philosophy of egalitarianism within *addas* to nurture democratisation, along with radical and nationalist politics and the growth of literary culture. Despite their Bengali particularity, *addas* forged an intellectual culture linked to cosmopolitanism, and thus helped to create a modern sense of global citizenship – a linking of global culture to local practice.

Chakrabarty acknowledges, and to some extent analyses, the exclusion of women from *addas*. A few women were admitted to some groups by the middle decades of the twentieth century, but their late admission and their sparsity only highlight the fact of this being a homosocial practice that privileged men in their relations to one another as well as in their access to urban spaces and the worlds of literature and politics. In this sexual exclusion *addas* were representative of much else in global modernity, even as they were at times the site of debate in Bengal about gender divisions and definitions. Chakrabarty's history and analysis of this ethnically and locally specific practice thus demonstrates the interconnections among urbanisation, capitalism, education, print culture, masculine homosocial culture, and global consciousness under the aegis of colonial modernity. His narrative of a particular social practice based especially in one city is thus a transnational history, illustrating the focus of a postcolonial approach on combined economic and cultural analysis, on the operations of

discourse and cultural practice, and, again, on hierarchies of gender and class.<sup>16</sup> Both Paisley and Chakrabarty give evidence of being aware of wider imperial contexts and significance of their work, yet the projects are both bounded in specific geographic and temporal ways, as well as being tied to archival and contemporary print sources. Postcolonial histories then can be seen as *not* global, even as they address issues of global import – not least, of course, the larger project of provincialising Europe, to use Chakrabarty’s phrase.

Hall’s interests lie far more in historical contingency and in the developments and legacies of nineteenth-century politics and culture than they do in theory, postcolonial or otherwise. It is not the case that she is theoretically unaware, yet the theory is worn lightly and its elaboration or revision is not a particular goal of the book. This allows reviewers to make comments such as Anthony Pagden’s quip that ‘Despite some initial obeisance to the household deities of Post-Colonial and Subaltern Studies, *Civilising Subjects* is a work of traditional social history’.<sup>17</sup> The density of detail in Hall’s book, as well as the cast of characters that emerges, and the mix of religious, political and economic history, are reasons why more than one reviewer has likened *Civilising Subjects* to E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, including no less a commentator than Roy Porter. Porter gave Hall’s book the following very high praise: *Civilising Subjects* ‘does for colonial history what E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* did for social history’.<sup>18</sup> I cannot help but wonder, however, whether some scholars of colonialism and imperialism had not thought that the field of colonial studies had already been launched well before the publication of *Civilising Subjects*, and that Porter’s comment is thus somewhat surprising.

Here again the boundedness of Hall’s project reflects distinct features of postcolonialism as compared with other approaches to transnational history. Like *The Making of the English Working Class*, *Civilising Subjects* is closely tied to its archival sources and their parameters, for all of its significance. Hall’s project’s solid archival foundations, what Pagden identifies as the characteristics of traditional social history, form a basis for a detailed and nuanced analysis of the changing interconnections between religious thought, the legal and material conditions of black Jamaicans, racial thinking, and gendered and raced notions of British citizenship. The book reflects the attachment of most postcolonial historians to the archives, and the central place of narrative in their work. Like

<sup>16</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty 2000, ‘Adda: A History of Sociality’ in his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 180-213.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Pagden 2003, ‘Flog and Hang and Burn’, *TLS*, 14 February, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in a review of Hall’s book by Lorenzo Veracini 2002, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Issue 10, November. It seems very poignant yet fortunate for Hall that her book received high praise from both Roy Porter and Edward Said before their untimely deaths.

other postcolonial scholars, Hall's questions are at once cultural, political and economic – a contrast to the dominant economic approach of many who identify themselves as world historians, as is, probably needless to say, her fine-grained analysis of historically evolving ideologies of masculinity.

To return to the overarching question of postcolonialism as a specific approach to transnational histories: obviously, scholars influenced by postcolonialism are far from being the only transnational historians who bring a critical or materialist political approach to their work. Adherents to schools of thought such as World Systems Theory include those motivated by the desire to reveal the historical roots of current global inequalities, the dependence of so-called Third World countries on the overdeveloped states, and the evolving historical role of capitalism in the creation of poverty, dependency and environmental 'disasters'. Historians who find value in postcolonialism are distinguished not so much by politics of the left, but rather by their added concern to link political questions to historical specificities, and to contingency rather than large-scale narratives or social-scientific paradigms. Further, they typically are concerned with the relationship between culture and politics, as well as the ideological work performed by constructed categories of race, gender and sexuality.

It is important to note that there are historians who might be thought of as writing postcolonial transnational history but who eschew such a theoretical label. Barbara Bush's study of connections between Britain, West Africa and South Africa in the interwar decades, specifically of British imperial attitudes and the development of anti-colonial nationalisms, bears hallmarks of postcolonial history. It is a bounded study concerned with historical specificities and change, that considers the power relations of imperialism as constituted through policy, cultural productions and material relations, and that examines colonial links between race and gender. Yet in her preface to the book Bush voices her worries about the 'weaknesses of post-colonialism, particularly the high jargon and mystifying dense prose of much post-colonial writing'.<sup>19</sup> Bush's distancing of herself from postcolonialism is a reminder of how careful we must be in applying both labels and judgements. The legacies of Marxism, of course, continue to inflect various areas of history-writing, including histories of colonialism. While the fields of Subaltern Studies and postcolonialism bear such legacies, so too does much work in sub-Saharan African history. Yet historians in that field do not often espouse postcolonial theory, and are more likely to invoke cultural anthropology and Gramscian-derived theory on cultural hegemony. These areas of work are both connected and crosscut by lines of differentiation, necessitating careful distinctions. If some world historians share some of the materialist politics

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Bush 1999, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919–1945* (London: Routledge), p. xiii.

of postcolonialism, so too do other historians share much of its agenda while being wary of its theoretical roots, or preferring to align themselves with other schools.

Conversely, some world historians espouse the term 'transnational history' and see little if any difference between the fields. Moreover, there is evidence that the field of World History, represented by the *Journal of World History*, is becoming increasingly reflexive, and more inclined to question its own biases and exclusions. In the editorial manifesto published in the inaugural issue of the journal in 1990, Jerry H. Bentley outlined the field as one that 'transcends national frontiers' and studies the history of topics such as 'population movements, economic fluctuations, climatic changes, transfers of technology, the spread of infectious and contagious diseases, imperial expansion, long-distance trade, and the spread of religious faiths, ideas, and ideals'.<sup>20</sup> Despite the evidence of greater self-reflexivity and questioning within world history, it would seem that the field has for much of its organised life been driven by the demographic, economic, technological, and biological interests in Bentley's original list. Cultural history, issues of gender and race, and even some of the more traditional concerns of class-driven social history, are still not equally represented in the field. Their prevalence in postcolonial history, by contrast, continues to be a distinguishing feature between these two variants of global or transnational history.

In my own latest project on the ways in which historiographical understanding of the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been shaped by feminist scholarship, I constantly found myself returning to evidence of the mobility of imperial culture.<sup>21</sup> Colonial rulers, colonised subjects, and specific vehicles of popular imperial culture circulated not only *from* the metropole, but *to* the metropole and between multiple imperial sites. Thus whether I was working on my chapter on the narratives of interracial sexual assault that were attached to crises of imperial rule in the latter nineteenth century and early twentieth century, or that on the connections between constructions of boyhood, masculinity and imperial wars, or that on the gendered politics of anti-colonial nationalisms, I kept seeing the ways in which events and narratives from one colonial site affected those in another. For my current work, then, a focus on the transnational is ineluctable. But whether we focus on the transnational as that which moved from colony to colony (or nation to nation), or that which belies constructed national boundaries by operating *within* their imagined parameters but not simply because of them, we must be clear about what

<sup>20</sup> Jerry H. Bentley 1990, 'A New Forum for Global History', *Journal of World History*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. iv.

<sup>21</sup> Angela Woollacott 2006, *Gender and Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

questions we are asking, why we are asking them, and what are our own investments in them.

And it is here that Ania Loomba's definition of postcolonialism is so relevant. Loomba points out, as have other critics, that colonialism is a continuing process that has survived declarations of political independence and nationhood. We need to be very clear that in many parts of the world 'the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased' and therefore 'it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism'.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Loomba suggests, it is useful to see postcolonialism as 'the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism', or 'a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome'.<sup>23</sup> Catherine Hall's book stands out for its subjective honesty, and its clarity of personal investment and political purpose, qualities that I see as directly linked to its postcolonial transnational framework. At base, as *Civilising Subjects* exemplifies, postcolonial historical scholarship continues to be marked by the imperative to investigate the workings of colonialism in the past, and to expose their legacies for the present.

<sup>22</sup> Ania Loomba 1998, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 12, 19.