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0521007968 - A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840 - Edited by Kathleen Wilson

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: histories, empires, modernities**Kathleen Wilson*

The single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates . . . Trade, without enlarging the British Territories, has given us a kind of additional Empire.

*The Spectator* (1712, I: 295–6)

Settlement [in the Darien] would be agreeable to the Laws of Nations, the Principles of Christianity, and the Constant Maxims of the British Nation, whose Possessions are founded in Reason and Justice, not Chimerical Grants, Butchery of Millions of Innocent Peoples, and other unjustifiable Means.

James Knight to the Duke of Newcastle, November 20, 1739<sup>1</sup>

History [is one of] the blessings of a more exalted civilization and education, which give us in every respect so great a superiority over these nations, and assign to us so high a rank in the scale of rational beings.

Johann Reinhold Forster, *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World* (1778), 608

Can there be a “new imperial history”? In the past two decades scholars from a range of disciplinary and geographical locations have raised serious questions about the capacity of conventional historical narratives to account for non-elite and non-western pasts. Rather, History, shaped by the political and epistemological models of Enlightenment and modernist Europe, continues to universalize Eurocentric historical experience to the rest of the world, assessing the “emergence” and “development” of nationalism, capitalism, and modernity through the stagist paradigms central to historical knowledge. As a result, whether focused on particularities or general trends, individuals or *mentalités*, History as a discipline and craft invariably measures or assumes a cultural distance between “us” and

<sup>1</sup> BL, Add MS 22, 677, f. 27, Letters Relating to Jamaica.

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“them” while also taking on “an ontological power in providing assumptions about how the real social and natural worlds are constituted.”<sup>2</sup> The very notion of an “imperial history,” whether new or old, may be but an artifact of European dominance and metropolitan perspective, that assumes as fact the paradigms and locations forged by and within western imperial modernity. To quote the famous argument of Dipesh Chakrabarty, “insofar as the academic discourse of history is concerned, ‘Europe’ remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call ‘Indian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Kenyan,’ and so on.”<sup>3</sup> To found a “new imperial history” on such an edifice, if not impossible, would only be a means of “adding to” established narratives, rather than replacing or even reconfiguring them.

None the less, energized by the political and imaginative wakes of post-colonial and cross-disciplinary scholarship, many of the same writers have pursued historical analyses that are geared to doing precisely what they themselves acknowledge simultaneously to be impossible: namely, to recognize alternative modes and sources for understanding the past, to probe at the limits of historical knowledge, and to make the “subaltern” – from indigenes to women, and all others rendered silent or invisible by the historical archive – “speak.” In British studies, most of this exciting new work has been influenced by a rather remarkable re-discovery of the importance of empire in the British past, and a simultaneous interest in the methodologies of social and cultural history and criticism to address questions about identity and difference in imperial settings. In eighteenth-century studies (the concern of the present volume), after decades of comparative neglect, the imperial dimensions of British domestic culture, politics, and social relations are starting to come into focus, significantly revising our conceptualization of Englishness and Britishness and the categories through which “colonizers” and “colonized” are understood.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the importance of empire was a cardinal assumption to generations of historians, and the rise

<sup>2</sup> That is, from anthropology, literature, art history, geography, and feminist and postcolonial studies as well as history, and Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Ocean societies. See the works by Antonio Benítez-Rojo, J. M. Blaut, Partha Chatterjee, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., Nicholas Dirks, Greg Denning, Johannes Fabian, Reinhart Koselleck, Uday Singh Mehta, V. Y. Mudimbe, Gananath Obeyesekere, Gyan Prakash, Naoki Sakai, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Robert Young in “Further Reading” at the end of this volume. Quotation from Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 5. Feminist theorists, of course, have long made the same point about the exclusion of women from the historical archive.

<sup>3</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 27. Chakrabarty’s fine book has proved invaluable in sharpening and extending the argument presented here.

<sup>4</sup> See the works by Srinivas Aravamudan, David Armitage and Michael Braddick, eds., Laura Brown, Linda Colley, Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., David Eltis, Elijah Gould, Matthew Edney, Michael Fisher, Durba Ghosh, Richard Grove, Jonathan Lamb, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker,

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and fall of its importance in British historical studies can be related to specific political moments. J. R. Seeley, writing on the verge of High Victorian imperial take-off, recognized how intimately connected were the history of nation and the history of empire; as he famously remarked in 1883, surveying the scale of English expansion in the long eighteenth century, “the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia.”<sup>5</sup> Many scholars today would add that the history of America and Asia was in part also in England, in a material and imaginative testimony to the entangled nature of early modern – and late modern – pasts. The eighteenth-century British empire presents us with interconnected and interdependent sites of historical importance, territorial and imaginative, that can disrupt oppositions between metropole and colony and allow us to rethink the genealogies and historiographies of national belonging and exclusion.

Within this framework, the present volume attempts to investigate the potentialities and limits of a “new imperial history.” However, such a slogan seems to invite a stereotyping that the analyses presented here eschew. Certainly, the resounding clarion call of “the new,” in history as in other aspects of social and intellectual practice, seems to invite us to shake off the shackles of the hidebound in favor of the innovative, the exploratory, and the controversial as it simultaneously relegates traditional approaches to the proverbial dustbin. Yet this book begins by proclaiming that it is *not* out to substitute a new orthodoxy for an established one; neither is it calling for the evacuation of established political, social, or intellectual histories. For the kind of “new imperial history” at work here has at its heart the importance of *difference* – in historical settings and forms of consciousness as well as in historiographic and critical practice – that supports and extends the pluralities of historical interpretation. “New ways of theorizing difference are central to the task of writing new imperial histories,” Catherine Hall has argued,<sup>6</sup> and questions of difference, its ascription and maintenance among colonizers as well as colonized, were also central to colonial projects and imperial visions. Between 1660 and 1840, the chronological parameters of this volume, the taxonomic projects of ethnography, natural history, and global knowledge, as well as the ideals of “civilization’s” diffusion, began both to fuel and to reflect British economic, political, and territorial expansion. In this rapidly changing world, notions of national belonging were

Paul Lovejoy, ed., Clare Midgley, Felicity Nussbaum, Joseph Roach, Nicholas Rogers, Sudipta Sen, Charlotte Sussman, Kate Teltscher, Beth Fowkes Tobin, James Walvin, Roxanne Wheeler, and Kathleen Wilson in “Further Reading” at the end of this volume.

<sup>5</sup> J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Hall, “Introduction,” in Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 16.

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formulated and altered to suit new international and imperial circumstances and the question of national identity itself became particularly unsettling. The assumption of imperial power and colonial territories not only generated conflicts, ambiguities, and desires, in other words, but also produced a more “precarious sense of self.”<sup>7</sup> Within the complex encounters and societies generated by the British empire’s increasingly global reach, “difference” was a political strategy rather than a verifiable descriptive category, a highly mobile signifier for power relations, often “ascribed in the context of domination” as Himani Bannerji has remarked,<sup>8</sup> while also thereby becoming a source of identification and social practice.

Exploring questions of difference within and between societies where radically dissimilar social and political conditions and forms of consciousness were at play remains a formidable and perhaps even quixotic undertaking; the essays collected here make no pretense of proffering easy solutions. What they do offer are examples of the difference that “difference” can make in the crafting of historical and critical narratives of empire and its impact. Centering questions of difference requires alertness to the past’s inaccessibility, an openness to alternative modes of historical being, and a capacity for humility and uncertainty in our engagements with historical archives and issues. It also forces upon the historian and critic a recognition of the radical insufficiency of dichotomous notions of difference inherited, in part, from the eighteenth century itself, when the interplay of alterity and similitude propelled by British expansion made possible notions of essentializing “national” characters and the claims to historical distance. These categories of difference and filiation were paramount in imperial policy; indeed, the maintenance of European national identities and ties were as crucial as settlement to the legitimatization of claims to legal and political “dominium,” or territorial possession and rights to govern.<sup>9</sup> Historical claims of difference also present to scholars the problem of translation – that is, the “practice producing difference [and similarity] out of incommensurability”<sup>10</sup> – that speaks to the fragility and materiality of social identities

<sup>7</sup> Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600–1800* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Himani Bannerji, “Politics and the Writing of History,” in Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 287–90.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Mancke, “Negotiating an Empire: Britain and its Overseas Peripheries, c. 1550–1780,” in Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (London: Routledge, 2002), 237–8, 260n. Mancke distinguishes “dominium” from “imperium,” or the extent of a ruler’s sole jurisdiction: 236.

<sup>10</sup> Meaghan Morris, “Forward,” in Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xiii, quoted in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 263n.

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in historical settings. The analysis of difference accordingly requires that the irreducible relationships between the imaginative and the material be acknowledged and analyzed from a range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. The chapters in this volume hint at the pleasures, potential, and dangers enabled by thinking a new imperial history that is grounded on difference: that investigates new kinds of “evidence” and subjects; moves across as well as within disciplines and locations; interrogates the shifting historical grounds of cultural and national production; and is not always written by imperial historians, or even by historians.

## MODERNITIES

To address questions of difference is to address questions of identity. Yet the concept of identity in history-writing has become a topic of debate. Scholars have criticized its overzealous use, arguing that “identity” is too subjective a category to be analytically useful, that it is anachronistic, a product of late twentieth-century politicization of the term (as in “identity politics”), or that, as a psychological construct, it has no purchase within early modern societies as a mode of self- and collective location. Yet arguably these critiques depend upon a subjective reading of identity as a voluntary act, a way of constituting the subject through individual agency that is willed rather than imposed.<sup>11</sup> Such a reading seriously misrepresents the ontology of identity as a coercive process. Indeed, in societies where slavery was a fact of life and crucial to the economic viability of the imperial system dominated by Britain and its cultural networks, identity was structured in part by the epistemic violence attached to the notion of human property. As David Eltis has rather drily remarked, “On board a slave ship with the slaves always black and the crew largely white, skin colour tended to define ethnicity.”<sup>12</sup> The unique, predatory, and ubiquitous presence of slavery in British societies in this period is crucial to recognize, making “slave” and

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘identity,’” *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000), 1–47; Colin Kidd, *British identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); for a more optimistic account, see Dror Wahrman, “The Problem of English Identity in the American Revolution,” *American Historical Review* (hereafter *AHR*), 106 (2001), 1236–62; and Wahrman, “On Queen Bees and Being Queens: A Late-Eighteenth-Century ‘cultural revolution?’” in Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, eds., *The Age of Cultural Revolutions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 251–79.

<sup>12</sup> For cogent statements about the importance of chattel and indigenous forms of slavery to British imperial power, see Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 1998); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 226; Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and the Law in Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

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“free” crucial markers of identity, and the social performances of nationality, freedom, gender, and rank – by men and women, slave and free – acts of resounding political importance. Categories of identity in the long eighteenth century were, in other words, shaped by the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the period, and thus differed from those which came before or after. Within forts, factories, and plantation colonies, as well as in Britain itself, social location and value were ascribed to people on the basis of factors that included not only legal status (e.g., “slave” and “free,” head of household or dependent), but also national origin, gender, skin color, religion, family connection, reputation, and geography. At the same time, however, these social relations, or identities, were multiple and contingent, bound to a historical social order and both concretized and challenged through the practices of everyday life. Identity was a historical process, rather than an outcome, a negotiation between individual conceptions of self and collectivity and their social valence.<sup>13</sup>

Given that much of the philosophy and conjectural history of Enlightenment thinkers focused on the ethics and technologies of self and collectivity – of the ways, for example, that an individual’s “sensibility” marked the most advanced point on the continuum of human progress, that “identity” itself was constituted, or that attributes such as “national manners,” “race,” or gender were natural or acquired – the historical dimensions of the philosophical problem of identity have to be recognized in our own histories of the period.<sup>14</sup> Although the contributors stand at various points in the debate on identity as a historical analytic, the volume nevertheless advances the argument for the importance of engaging with problems of identity in eighteenth-century historical settings, the changing role of the body as a marker in the process of ascribed human value, and the importance of performance as a means of disrupting as well as confirming such ascription. Tracking the relations between empire and identity may require a revision of the model of metropole-to-colony diffusion traditionally used by historians, for such attention makes clear that the most decisive breaks with established practices and attitudes occurred in the novel and

<sup>13</sup> For an elaboration of this definition of identity see Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1–28.

<sup>14</sup> For Enlightenment debates, see Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (2 vols., Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Armitage, “The New World and British Historical Thought,” in Karen Kupperman, ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 60–75. Adam Smith’s *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 2nd edn. (London, 1761) is crucial to this conceptualization of identity and its historical moorings.

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culturally hybrid environments of empire, correspondingly reshaping the understanding of difference at the supposed center.

“Modernity” was a crucial relation of many eighteenth-century British people’s notion of identity, and this book seeks to underline the importance of their understanding of modernity to our own. Britons’ own self-conceptualization as “modern” hinged on the emergent historical consciousness, expressed in the opening quotation by J. R. Forster, that was produced by contact and exchange with and narratives about a widening world and Britain’s place in it: History, in other words, was a “sign of the modern.”<sup>15</sup> The practices of empire and nation-state building and their various constituencies also made possible the invention and representation of categories of collective identity that would continue to shape group and individual consciousness for a century or more to come. These foundational relations of modernity deserve sustained attention. Indeed, the patterns of British imperial power in the period from 1763 to 1840 have recently been recognized as providing the framework for imperial dominance in the late Victorian period.<sup>16</sup> Yet Britain’s eighteenth-century empire has too often been neglected by scholars of other centuries as a “transitional” phase sandwiched between the verities of “early modern” and the cataclysms of “modern” transformations. Moreover, the consolidation and extension of parliamentary and colonial authority in the Hanoverian decades, uneven and sporadically ineffective as it may have been, also adumbrated localized versions of an emergent governmentality that sought to intervene directly in the internal lives and social, sexual, and gender practices of its subjects.<sup>17</sup> The histories of the interpenetration of British imperial strategies of rule and technologies of gender, racial, and national differentiation within the nation and empire demonstrate that new narratives of modernity need to be written – ones which take sufficient account of the impact of developments “out there” on the priorities, visions, and imaginations of those “in

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Dirks, “History as a Sign of the Modern,” *Public Culture*, 2 (1990), 25–32. See also Patrick Joyce, “The End of Social History?” *Social History*, 20 (1995), 73–91; Wilson, *Island Race*, 7–15, 84–89; Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (London: Routledge, 2002), 27–56.

<sup>16</sup> C. A. Bayly, “The British and Indigenous Peoples, 1760–1860: Power, Perception, Identity,” in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 22; and Bayly, “The First Age of Global Imperialism, 1760–1830,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (hereafter *JICH*), 26 (1998), 28–48.

<sup>17</sup> See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Continuum, 1991), 87–104. This emerging colonial governmentality, ignored until recently, is evinced in the lineage regulations of colonial assemblies in America and the West Indies and the power of the East India Company in the East.



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here,” and which recognize that crucial features of “modernity” may have been forged in and through colonial frontiers long before the nineteenth century.

For our purposes, modernity signifies the unfolding set of relationships – cognitive, social, and intellectual as well as economic and political – which, however valued or construed, produced among their contemporaneous witnesses the conviction of historical *difference*.<sup>18</sup> As James Knight’s hubris in the opening quotations indicates, and many of the following chapters confirm, Georgian Britons fretted over or boasted about the distinctiveness, superiority, and modernity of Britishness, and British imperial endeavors played a large role in sustaining or challenging that perception and self-image. At the same time, modes of British and English cultural production and consumption were constituted in part by bodies, practices, and exchanges of people across the globe, trends which writers like those at *The Spectator* delighted in pointing out. These influences of empire were not uniformly felt, and were uneven in their impact, but they were still powerful: the layout and specimens within botanical gardens, horticultural practices on landed estates, architectural styles, clothing, fabric, and food fads, tea, coffee, sugar, and chocolate and the rituals and institutions they generated, scientific societies, the national museum, religious missions: all were predicated upon colonial goods, imperial trading connections, and knowledge and artifacts culled from exploration, colonization, and colonial emissaries abroad.<sup>19</sup> Political jeremiads on the corrupting impact of luxuries on the polity and the “stadial” or stages theory of Enlightenment thinkers were equally propelled by the commodities, information, and practices brought home by explorers, voyagers, colonial settlers, and natural historians. The dramatic expansion of print culture itself over the century was owed in no small measure to the public’s appetite for travel and colonization accounts, which rivaled sermons in their popularity in circulating libraries and were cannibalized and excerpted in periodicals and newspapers. And graphic and performance media, such as paintings, prints, drama, statuary, and pottery

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Island Race*, ch. 1; Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London’s Geographies 1680–1780* (New York: Guildford Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the “Improvement” of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (New York: Viking, 1985); Susanne Seymour, Stephen Daniels, and Charles Watkins, “Estate and Empire: Sir George Cornewall’s Management of Moccas, Herefordshire and La Taste, Grenada, 1771–1819,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24 (1998), 313–51; James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660–1800* (New York University Press, and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); Kathleen Wilson, “The Good, the Bad and the Impotent: Imperialism and the Politics of Identity in Georgian England,” in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995), 229–52.



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documented, idealized, or memorialized Britain's colonial achievements, military victories, and national aspirations.<sup>20</sup>

Even the project of state-building in the Hanoverian decades – a process that few historians would any longer dispute, although its long-term success is still debated – was a cultural as well as political project that was closely linked with Britain's emergence as an imperial power.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, the changes in the meanings of the word “culture” in the eighteenth century are illuminating. For most of the period, “culture” meant to cultivate or improve, but by the 1770s it had also taken on the meaning “to civilize.”<sup>22</sup> Enlightenment epistemology, exploration, and imperial expansion had wrought this change in meaning, as in other “keywords” of the period, ranging from “race,” which went from denoting a breed or stock to one of the broad differences among humankind, to “nation,” which added to its older juridical and biblical concepts of a “people” the idea of political-territorial particularity.<sup>23</sup> “Modern” constructions of sex and gender, too, were forged through the practices and ideologies of colonization and slavery and bequeathed to the metropolis.<sup>24</sup> As Eric Hinderaker has noted, “Empire is a cultural artifact as well as a geopolitical entity; it belongs to a geography of the mind as well as a geography of power.”<sup>25</sup> As such, both empire and culture were increasingly seen to have redemptive and progressive possibilities.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *Island Race*, 8–11; Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth Century English Narrative* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Michael Heffernan, “A Dream as Frail as Those of Ancient Time: The In-credible Geographies of Timbuctoo,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19 (2001), 203–25; Margaret Hunt, “Racism, Imperialism and the Traveler's Gaze in Eighteenth Century England,” *Journal of British Studies* (hereafter *JBS*), 32 (1993), 333–57; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England 1715–1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), chs. 1 and 3; Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Peter Hulme and William Sherman, *The Tempest and its Travels* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); for a critique, see J. A. C. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793–1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). For the mutual complicity of state and colonial expansion in this period, see Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th edn (London, 1773).

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Island Race*, 6–15; Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth Century Thought,” *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 29 (1996), 247–60.

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Wilson, “Empire, Gender and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century,” in Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Cf. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Eric Hinderaker, “The ‘Four Indian Kings’ and the Imaginative Construction of the British Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter *WMQ*), 3rd ser., 53 (1996), 486.

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Through state policy as well as social relations and cultural practice, the shifting geopolitics and chronopolitics of empire created some of the critical *conditions of possibility* for an eighteenth-century modernity. These conditions of possibility were consolidated and extended over the period studied here, from the 1660s to the abolition of slavery in 1833 and its aftermath, and so may trouble the traditional distinctions between the “first” and “second” empires that are common in current histories.<sup>26</sup> They included defensive and aggressive wars; a fiscal-military state that encouraged investment, accumulation, and innovation as well as coercive forms of trade; the growth and dissemination of cultural and imaginative media through which British people came to recognize their own historical and religious difference and distinctiveness; and the far-reaching networks that allowed these ideas, people, and commodities to travel and be transformed. Certainly transoceanic flows of peoples, goods, and ideas were millennia old.<sup>27</sup> But what changes in this period are both the scale and nature of the movements, the technologies of production and exchange that reinvented older notions of insiders, outsiders, and the mobility between them, and the conflation of geographic distance with temporality in ways that secured “the peripheral relation of the colony in metropolitan thinking.” It was precisely through such processes that the nation-state strove to claim a new relationship to its subjects, and its subjects struggled to claim a stake in the nation. “Forging the nation” was thus inextricably bound to transnational and colonial developments.<sup>28</sup> The chapters that follow suggest that attention to the ideologies and representations of difference, including History itself, can significantly illumine the practices and perceptions of these developments, and help us better grasp the implications of an eighteenth-century imperial modernity, the legacies and categories of which have refused to fade.

<sup>26</sup> The “first” empire was enabled by English political domination of Ireland and Union with Scotland, and centered on British overseas settlements in North America and the West Indies and the establishment of British supremacy in the slave trade. The “second” empire (1763–1840) was defined by a turn towards the East (especially in the wake of the revolt of the American colonies), a more regulatory and rationalized imperial apparatus, and the extension of British power over a proliferating range of peoples and territories, such as India, New South Wales (1788), and Gambia and the Cape of Good Hope (1795). The phrase “conditions of possibility” is taken from Fernando Coronil, “Introduction,” in Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), xiii–xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, AD 1250–1350* (Oxford University Press, 1989); Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996); Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Parama Roy, “At Home in the World? The Gendered Cartographies of Globality,” *Feminist Studies*, 27, 3 (2001), 709–10; Edward Said, “Always on Top,” *London Review of Books*, 20 March 2003; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Wilson, *The Sense of the People*.