Historical Geography
Volume 43 – 2015

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Historical Geography is an annual journal that publishes scholarly articles, book reviews, conference reports, and commentaries. The journal encourages an interdisciplinary and international dialogue among scholars, professionals, and students interested in geographic perspectives on the past. Concerned with maintaining historical geography’s ongoing intellectual contribution to social scientific and humanities-based disciplines, Historical Geography is especially committed to presenting the work of emerging scholars.

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in EBSCO and Elsevier electronic databases, including HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS and AMERICA HISTORY AND LIFE.

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Cover illustration based on: *Colony of British Honduras*, Harrison & Sons, 1885
As is obvious from the table of contents for Historical Geography vol 43, we have assembled a robust set of contributions over the past year. Julie Podmore and Michael Brown curated an exceptional set of papers on the Historical Geographies of Sexualities, with an important afterword by Eric Olund, and we are extremely proud to publish this special issue. We are also happy to announce two special features from the 2015 International Conference of Historical Geographers held in London last summer: a conference report and a set of roundtable papers in honor of Graeme Wynn. Finally, we offer a full complement of research articles and book reviews that span topics and time periods, highlighting the breadth and depth of historical-geographical work.

This was our first full year of editorial work from new journal co-editor Arn Keeling and new book review editor John Bauer, and I’m delighted to report that the journal couldn’t be in better hands. In tandem with bringing these capable colleagues on board, we have made a few changes in our production process. Most notably, book reviews and conference reports will now be published throughout the year and will be open-access from first date of publication, without embargo. Research articles and special issue articles will still be subject to a one-year embargo before converting to open access, but we will now post these publications online on a rolling basis (in our new “in press” section) for subscribers, rather than holding them to the end of the year.

Our online home is still at ejournals.unm.edu/index.php/historicalgeography, where authors are welcome and encouraged to upload article submissions through the online portal. As always, we encourage submissions that use diverse digital media forms for both analysis and presentation. Don’t forget that you can manage your subscriptions through this same online site, although paid members of the AAG’s Historical Geography Specialty Group are renewed and updated automatically. Anyone who is interested in editing a future special issue on a particular theme should contact Maria Lane (mdlane@unm.edu) and Arn Keeling (akeeling@mun.ca) to discuss topical and scheduling considerations.

Finally, I would like to thank Tina Faris and Jordan Stone, MS students at the University of New Mexico, for their tireless work this year on journal production. Both Arn and I are grateful for your professionalism and your support.

Maria Lane
University of New Mexico
Likewise, where historical geography once seemed almost synonymous with geography tout court, today it is a fairly small subfield of diminished intellectual influence.

– Noel Castree

On a hot Sunday afternoon in July 2015, more than 730 historical geographers gathered at the Royal Geographical Society, London. This marked the start of the fabulous 16th International Conference of Historical Geographers (ICHG). Hailing from over forty countries, the delegates were resolutely international, and the audible voices and discussions reflected this. All of them, though, had reason to view the future with trepidation, because although they were gathered to mark the conference’s 40th anniversary, they had all heard versions of Castree’s taunt.

In the opening plenary session on the international dimensions of historical geography, Alan Baker discussed the history of the ICHG and a related institution, the Journal of Historical Geography, both founded in 1975. The first British-Canadian Symposium on Historical Geography was held at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, in fall 1975 and dealt with settler colonialism in Canada. The idea for the Canadian meeting was, according to Baker, first suggested at the Annual Conference of the Institute of British Geographers at Birmingham in 1973. The fraternity and hospitality of those early meetings is an important tradition and evident influence on the composition of the ICHG today. The contributions of key figures in the ICHG’s evolution, like Alan Baker and Graeme Wynn, were appropriately recognized and honored through the conference programme.

Baker’s retrospective was not entirely surprising: in any discussion amongst Anglo-American historical geographers, it is never long before they recall the halcyon days of the 1970s. For much of the authors’ education as historical geographers in the late 1990s and early 2000s, we learned about this period and that things would never get that good again. But from what we saw at the 16th ICHG, the best days for historical geography appear to be in the present and the future.

Forty years ago, historical geography at the ICHG focused almost exclusively on settler
colonialism in the British Empire and to lesser extent France. It was limited in its ambition but careful and consolidated. Now, it is evident that although much expanded, the concerns of the field are also more divergent. British historical geography and North American historical geography seem to have followed different paths over the past decade or so. In Britain, there has been a recent rapprochement with cultural geography, and important work has been pursued on the historical geography of collections, instruments and cultural practices. By contrast, significant contributions by historical geographers in the U.S. and Canada have remained closer to debates in environmental history and in the application of spatial technologies to economic and social history. But these are no longer the only debates in town—if, indeed, they ever were. Conversations at the ICHG also involved trends in Brazilian historical geography, and the differences between geographical history and historical geography in Chinese discourse, as well as tropes more familiar to Anglophone ears.

Forty years ago, almost all historical geographers at the ICHG were men. In her response to Baker’s address, Laura Cameron noted that just two women were present at the inaugural Kingston gathering. In doing so, she welcomed any ‘outsiders’ and ‘gate-crashers’ to the ICHG and wondered what conversations might ensue. Mona Domosh, in her plenary comments, mentioned that back in 2004, she had noted the death of American historical geography in Philadelphia: “Now, it’s back!” she said. Indeed, a major strength of American human geography over the past decade has been feminist historical geography. Three of its leading practitioners, Mona Domosh, Karen Morin and Tamar Rothenberg, organized three sessions on the topic at this ICHG. These sessions were sponsored by our journal, Historical Geography, and followed by a reception at a nearby pub.

While there were too many sessions to describe here, a number of themes stood out. There were fascinating sessions on “Technology, Nature and War,” “Geographical Traditions,” “Historical Geographies of Making,” “Geography and Enlightenment,” and “Histories of Geographies and Geographers.” Lunchtime discussions on teaching historical geography were also seamlessly integrated into the program.

Another prominent motif was historical geographies of weather and climate. Sessions covered such topics as cultural memories of extreme weather events, climate vulnerability in Latin America, and the use of documentary data to reconstruct past climates. No doubt, growing concerns about anthropogenic climate change have raised the prominence of such work. Just a few days before the conference began, England experienced its hottest day for a decade. Such searing heat made the papers here seem all the more topical.

The conference organizers chose three visiting plenary speakers to reflect the sibling disciplines of imperial history (Catherine Hall), history of science (Simon Schaffer), and environmental history (William Cronon). Catherine Hall gave a powerful plenary lecture on the legacies of slave ownership for British society and economy today. Simon Schaffer presented a dazzling account of the links between the history of astronomy and the history of empire in an argument about the science of coincidence. In a resolutely historical geographical account, he demonstrated that colonial cultures were founded upon *metissage*. All of the three main plenary speakers made reference to the debt of learning they owed to historical geographers. William Cronon, in particular, was grateful to geography’s ‘capacious tent.’ Perhaps they knew their audience, but there is no doubting the energizing impact these events had on the community.

Unlike Hall or Schaffer, Cronon used his lecture as an opportunity to reflect on the digital revolution and how its tumultuous changes are affecting historical scholarship and reading more generally. Among all the sub-fields of geography, historical geography is probably the most book-oriented. Compared to our colleagues in other parts of geography, historical geographers tend to write books and read more of them. Yet what, Cronon asked, is the fate of the book and this sort
of scholarly “product” in our digital age? What will become of long-form reading — of fiction, nonfiction, and historical geography — as people’s reading occurs more via tablets and smart phones than physical books?

Notwithstanding these concerns, Cronon ended on a positive note: “Leaning in to stories and maps is how we can navigate the digital world.” With its commitment to storytelling, maps, and rich description, historical geography is perhaps better positioned to cope with these changes than other fields. Despite the many ways that the digital revolution has reshaped our lives, the desire of people for incisive historical stories well told has not abated. And of course, the digital world lends itself to employing and displaying the sorts of maps, images, and other spatial visualizations geographers have so long used.

Moreover, digital connectedness means some of our readers might already know much about ICHG 2015 already, not because they attended, but because they followed the conference via social media such as podcasts, Facebook, and Twitter — including a welcome, if disconcerting, gatecrasher, @GeographyFly.

Indeed this journal, in a small way, is also a part of the digital revolution Cronon described. Two years ago, *Historical Geography* migrated to a digital platform, partly as a cost-saving move. In becoming an online publication, though, opportunities are afforded that were difficult to imagine when the journal appeared only in print. In its new digital form, *Historical Geography* is less restricted by word count and is able to publish more and richer color images than it could before, and the journal editors and editorial board are exploring new creative ways to make the most of this digital medium.

After the conference, there was an exciting program of fieldtrips considering *inter alia* the geographies of Kent, Oxford, Soho and East London, a range of repositories and museums, and a final, extended trip to the Cotswolds and Welsh Marches. There was warm hospitality throughout, with delegates enjoying the receptions, lunches and a conference dinner. The conference organization was excellent, with the various international and local committees interacting perfectly. The local team of Nicola Thomas, Charlie Withers and Felix Driver must be thanked for delivering professionally and with great humor. Catherine Souch and her team at the RGS also deserve acclaim for facilitating a conference of this length and size so smoothly.

One of the striking features of the audiences and debates at this ICHG was their lack of parochialism. The global reach of historical geographers was particularly manifest. Certain sites and institutions still produce among the best historical geography, but it is refreshing to hear so many emergent voices from across the world. At the final session, Warsaw, Poland was chosen by delegates over St. Petersburg, Russia, as the location for the ICHG 2018. In short, the global vitality, expanded membership and intellectual integrity of historical geography in the contemporary, for us, were heartening. And its concerns in their breadth and their diversity remain synonymous with geography. Tout court.

NOTES


5 Some of these papers will be published next year as a special issue of *Historical Geography*.

6 William Cronon, “Who Reads Geography or History Anymore? The Challenge of Audience in a Digital Age,” (Lecture in Geography, British Academy, July 7, 2015). Available at http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2015/Who_reads_Geography_or_History_Anymore.cfm. Cronon’s talk was also notable as it was the inaugural British Academy (BA) Lecture in Geography, and was cross-listed as a BA event in the ICHG programme. In this way, historical geography was given prominence amongst the fellowship of the BA, as well as the wider geographical public. Certainly, Cronon drew a significant audience to the Ondaatje Lecture Theatre at the Royal Geographical Society from beyond solely the attendees of the ICHG.
Introduction to the Special Issue
Historical Geographies of Sexualities?

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ABSTRACT: In this introduction to the special issue, we evaluate the potential of a strengthened relationship between historical geography and geographies of sexualities. We begin by providing a brief review of the ways in which sexuality has been integrated into spatialized histories. Next, we turn to the historical geography literature to provide an overview of existing work and to investigate the absence of sexualities in historical geography research. Then, we turn our attention to the missing “pasts” in geographies of sexualities. Here, we discuss the limited integration of time and the ways in which time is used in the articulation of geographies of sexualities. Finally, to introduce this collection, we describe the process of collecting these works and discuss how it might contribute to the project of regenerating historical geographies of sexualities.

Keywords: geographies of sexualities, historical geographies, histories of sexualities

Introduction

Using most academic search engines, a search for the term “historical geographies of sexualities” will yield few relevant results. There will be references to the plethora of publications on geographies of sexualities, some on “the body” in geography, and perhaps the odd historical geography work that has geographies of sexualities references embedded in its endnotes. Moreover, to even find the one expressly relevant title, Matt Houlbrook’s “Toward a Historical Geography of Sexuality,” it is necessary to use the singular form for the terms “geography” and “sexuality.” Given the difficulties in locating historical geographies of sexualities, it might be tempting to conclude that there has not been any such work within Anglo-American geography. Such a conclusion would indeed be a significant oversight. There are historical geographers who research sexualities as well as geographers of sexuality who occasionally turn to the past to inform their more presentist works. In addition, since the 1990s, historians have dramatically expanded research on sexualities, some of which has specifically asked spatial questions. During this decade, some work by feminist historical geographers also began to examine sexuality as it intersected with gender in shaping spaces in the past. However, these various strains of inquiry have rarely come together and have not been expressly thought of as a thematic area of study within either historical geography or geographies of sexualities.

The collection presented in this special issue of Historical Geography is an attempt to draw together the multiple and fragmented strains of what might be defined as historical geographies of sexualities, and to reflect on the possibilities of making thematic connections between historical...
Podmore and Brown

geographers working on sexuality and geographers of sexualities who research past spaces. It is the outcome of a special session of the same title organized for the 2013 AAG conference in Los Angeles, where we realized that several sexuality-and-space scholars (especially those with an urban focus) were increasingly asking historical questions. While this collection is quite a departure from what was actually presented in the session, it represents what we could generate as we open up this discussion. In order to frame the collection, we provide an overview of three literatures that are central to the project. We begin by providing a brief overview of spatialized histories from a variety of sources that speak to this literature. We then discuss the “present absences” of sexualities within historical geography. Next, we turn to the more presentist geographies of sexualities to consider the uses of sexual pasts for this literature. Finally, we describe the process of building this collection and discuss its unique contributions. An additional framing and critical review of historical geographies of sexualities is provided in Eric Olund’s afterword, which examines when and how historical geographies have ever been about sexualities.

Spatial “histories” of sexuality

In the 1990s, interest in the mutually constituting relationships between spaces and sexualities in history seems to have emerged due to three intersecting processes. First, the translation of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* into English in the late 1970s and 1980s gave writers a language through which to discuss the past regulation of sexualities and their spaces. Exemplary in this sense is Judith Walkowitz’s investigation of the spatialized narratives surrounding prostitution in her *City of Dreadful Delight*. Secondly, building on feminist history, a new generation of historians began researching the experience of sexual “difference” by considering how gay populations navigated the sexual normativities of modernity, especially the social order of urban spaces. The serious consideration of how gay men carved out public places for themselves found in George Chauncey’s *Gay New York* is a mainstay of this work. Thirdly, and more broadly, Foucault’s reflections on the spatial, in conjunction with the translation and discussion of the works of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre, generated a “spatial turn” in the social sciences and a much greater emphasis on the spatial within geography and historical geography.

The spatial turn even led some historians to begin to ask if there could be an “historical geography of sexualities” and if so, to begin to consider what it might look like. Perhaps the earliest of these came from Frank Mort and Lynda Nead’s reflections in the introduction to a special historical collection of *New Formations* titled “Sexual Geographies.” Here, they proposed that Foucault’s attention to spaces of regulation be placed in tension with de Certeau’s spaces of resistance, a framework that highlighted the interplay between space as discourse and space as experience. Along similar lines, in an article in that collection, historical geographer Ogborn argued that an historical geography of sexuality could focus on, 1) “relating sites of sexual encounter and identity to geographies of leisure, sociability, work and state regulation” and 2) “the analysis of the production and regulation of sexualities through established relations of power.” While such an agenda seems to slightly overemphasize the regulatory and clearly focus on “public sexualities,” it is this interplay between space, experience, and regulation that would come to dominate the agenda of what might be the first iteration of “historical geographies of sexualities.” Notably, Houlbrook’s own review “Towards an Historical Geography of Sexuality” highlights the importance of holding in tension regulation and experience, an approach which came alive in his analysis of the interplay between policing, resistances, experience, and spaces in *Queer London*. Over the last decade, however, with the exception of Richard Phillips and his work on imperial sexualities, few historians or historical geographers have given much thought to the question of what an historical geography of sexualities might look like.
However, for many historians studying gay, lesbian, and trans sexualities, the more perhaps detached academic desire to understand sexuality through spaces of regulation needed to also be held in tension with the search for something more embodied: a desire to understand how those who inhabited “deviant” locations in the past experienced such spaces and created social worlds for themselves. Moreover, how these experiences could be “uncovered” became an important methodological concern. Work on “revealing” what had been “hidden from history” led to a plethora of local, regional and national histories of lesbian and gay experiences.9 Local case studies such as Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis’s *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* lesbian oral history project on Buffalo, New York, for example, demonstrated the importance of spaces of resistance for working-class lesbians in the 1950s and 1960s.10 Collections such as Stephen Whittle’s *Margins of the City* or Higgs’s *Queer Sites* were organized so as to enable readers to compare the gay histories of a variety of different cities located primarily in the urban West.11 And, in many Western contexts by the 1980s and 1990s, the past and its spaces had become useful, important, and even urgent for sexuality politics, especially for lesbian and gay politics. Generational changes, and the potential erasure of gay memories of the “liberation” era brought by HIV-AIDS, meant that collecting and archiving lesbian and gay experiences of the local (mostly urban) histories seemed all the more urgent by the end of the 1980s. An historical geographic project of telling the story of a particular city and, at this time, its gay and lesbian history, straddled the academy and the “community.”

As a result, there is now a large and growing collection of monographs detailing the local history of sexual minorities and dissidents in cities across North America and elsewhere. Written largely by historians, local activists, and those who lived the experience, these works have recorded and preserved an often-closeted history that is difficult to find in the archive and easily lost to time, especially after the AIDS epidemic.12 Besides such heroic preservation, these texts are impressive for their varied nuanced spatial sensitivities. They certainly describe the spatial formation of gay neighborhoods that was so typical of the 1970s and 1980s, tying them to gentrification and racial displacements, new social movements, and what we would now call neoliberal urban policies.13 Over the past thirty years, the range of cities has expanded, challenging the *doxa* that one need only focus on New York, London, and San Francisco.14 Yet they also describe more complex spatialities. Global political-economic forces situate the rise of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer visibilities in the post-war city including the shift from Fordist to Postfordist regimes of accumulation.15 Cold War geopolitics and anti-communist anxieties, along with broad migrations at the international and intranational scales, also help explain queer urban morphology.16 The complexity of relations between public and private spheres in the city is a frequent theme, and one that shows the multiple permutations of that couplet and the dangers of simply reducing such spheres to static locations. Several authors have chronicled the relations between public space and private sexual encounters, captured in Chauncey’s maxim “privacy could only be had in public,” for example.17 And the myriad gender dynamics and differentials of such geographies are well described. Micro-geographies of bars and taverns are richly detailed, showing how these locations were vital to self actualization, community formation, as well as political organization and resistance.18 Hidden, closet spaces are revealed. The importance of private spaces such as the home and family were vital for community formation and individual survival, as in the case of lesbian dinner parties in 1950s Buffalo, or the struggle of lesbian and gay parenting in a conservative post-war culture.19 Shifting urban morphologies are also traced, suggesting the importance of appreciating the moving gay ghetto (and its attendant inclusions and exclusions).20 And geographies of the body are abundant: from the governance of gender through dress and comportment, to the politics of dance, to sexual and mental health, to racisms.21 So impressive are these histories that they raise the question of whether the best geography is written by non-geographers!
Sexuality as present absence in historical geography

To be sure, there have been a scattering of historical geographies of sexualities. This is hardly surprising given the breadth of each term in that appellation. But because of this breadth, there is a rather disparate quality to the literature, where pieces address different theoretical and topical strands more directly than they engage with one another as a cogent intellectual group. Prostitution has certainly been a point of focus, where governance and policing clash with complex geographies of public and private, gender, and moral regulation.\(^\text{22}\) The relations between sexualities and imperialism and colonialism have received particular attention, and their relation to the mutual constitution of race and sexuality is a specific point of focus.\(^\text{23}\) Heterosexuality has been studied in a variety of settings and related to a variety of forces such as the governance of inebriates or the mingling of the population in the cinema.\(^\text{24}\) More recently, some work has addressed the spaces of the urban biopolitics of sexualities.\(^\text{25}\) In their research on the interplay between gender and sexuality, some feminist geographers have produced important urban historical geographies of sexuality.\(^\text{26}\) There are also a few important outliers among these historical geographical works, such as Heidi Nast’s research on the concubinage and spatial power relations in the Nigerian Kano Palace.\(^\text{27}\)

The disparate character of this literature is reflected in its lack of representation within the subdiscipline. A scan of historical geography journals, reference materials, and reviews suggest that sexuality largely remains a present absence in the subdiscipline, either as a complete silence or one that haunts research on urban, population, medical, and feminist historical geographies but is rarely articulated. For example, aside from book reviews of the work of historians, the main journals of the subdiscipline have published very few research articles on the topic. The recent publication of the reference book *Key Concepts in Historical Geography*, although written by “critical” geographers, does not include sexuality among its chapters on “Historical Hierarchies” alongside class, race, and gender, nor does its index include a reference to the topic beyond the quite limited “sexual violence in the media.”\(^\text{28}\) Sexuality is more or less absent in the reviews of historical geography published since 2000. While major Foucauldian themes such as biopolitics, moral regulation, and governance are common, references to sexuality as subject matter are almost completely absent. One notable instance of this absence is Robert Mayhew’s “Foucault’s Avatars.”\(^\text{29}\) Reviewing the impact of three Foucauldian axes on the sub-discipline (governmentality/discipline, space/knowledge, and discourse/identity), Mayhew begins the discourse/identity section by reflecting on the impacts of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* on the subdiscipline: “Foucault in all his oeuvre, but perhaps most notably in the *History of Sexuality* project, taught us all to look to the discursive construction of identity, something which transforms how we view the conjunction of biography, identity and memory.”\(^\text{30}\) He then proceeds to focus on the impact of biography on historical geography, completely disregarding the content of the *History of Sexuality*.

While it can be argued that there is little to review or that Mayhew’s objectives were located elsewhere, this slippage seems to underscore some subtle reasons for sexuality’s absence within historical geography. As Phil Howell has argued, historical geographers have primarily read both Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality* for what they have to say about power relations, time and space.\(^\text{31}\) He specifically points out that Foucault’s analysis of power in the *History of Sexuality* has always been much more compelling for historical geographers than its actual subject matter.\(^\text{32}\) Howell writes: “Historical geographers, in particular, have localized, detailed, developed, and extended Foucault’s insights into the emergence and spread of a new, disciplinary power in the modern era . . . Having said this, the thematic of sexuality within the discussion of discipline has not been particularly well developed.”\(^\text{33}\)
For Howell, both Foucault and his interpreters are to blame for the neglect of sexuality (and gender) in earlier works like *Discipline and Punish*. He suggests: “It does not take too much imagination however to register the extent to which ‘discipline-blockades’ like the military camp, the school, the monastery, the hospital and the prison were pervaded with the disciplining of sexuality.” But what of the neglect of sexuality as a subject matter after reading and working with his three-volume *History of Sexuality*? While this work perhaps has limitations, its main argument was that sexuality, as a discursive regime, like the many power relations that preoccupy historical geographers – including nationalism, colonialism, and industrial capitalism – is a product of the nineteenth century and its invention of “modernity.” This limited engagement with the content of one of Foucault’s major works combined with a focus on the regulation of sexualities brought by a Foucauldian perspective means that historical geographies of sexuality have been limited in ways that spatialized histories and more presentist geographies of sexuality have not. Here, sexualities are morally regulated, medicalized, commodified and governed, but they are rarely experienced, made, or emplaced.

The “missing pasts” of geographies of sexualities

From within social, cultural, urban, and, more recently, critical geography, has emerged a very vibrant field of inquiry in geography: geographies of sexualities, and its critical off-shoot, queer geographies. Although it began primarily by analyzing how lesbians and gays created urban spaces, it quickly shifted to the mutually constituting relationship between heterosexuality and space, a perspective inspired by the spatial turn. But as the field continued to develop into the 2000s, queer theory has also influenced epistemologies. Queer geography began to analyze the hetero- and homo-normativities involved in shaping spatial power relations, critically engage with the intersections between sexual normativities and other power relations such as racialization and colonialism, and disrupt the orthodoxies of geographical epistemologies and methodologies. The material foundations of geographies of sexualities continue to inform and ground queer geographies whilst queer geographies have led to the critical evaluation of geographies of sexualities and other critical aspects of the discipline.

The sexuality and space work of the 1990s certainly provided inspiration for the spatialized histories of sexuality. However, geographers of sexualities and queer geographers have rarely engaged with the past. While there are examples of historical geographers who straddle both sub-disciplines, few geographers of sexualities research past spaces, and when they do so, the past largely plays an unexamined role. Geographers of sexualities have generally engaged with the past as “presentists”; in other words they have used the past primarily to make sense of present spatial relations. Primary examples of this presentism include the analysis of the historical development of particular urban forms such as red-light districts and gay villages, or the tracing of the movements of sexually marginalized populations in urban space. For example, displacement and movement over time has often been integral to Phil Hubbard’s studies of the relationships between sex work, urban space, and heteronormativity. Julie Podmore’s chronological analysis of the shifting locations of lesbian nightlife in Montreal over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century uses the past to undermine the contemporary invisibility of lesbians in the urban landscape and to understand the impacts of the gay village on the production of lesbian spaces. Catherine Jean Nash’s research into the contested and complex processes involved in the production of Toronto’s gay village in the 1970s and 1980s perhaps approximates the more chorological approach of historical geography, but ultimately the goal of this work is to disrupt present understandings of gay village formation as an uncontested and linear process. Chris Schroeder uses the historical development of LGBT spaces in Toledo, Ohio, to speak to the current metronormativity of geographies of sexualities. Moreover, the turn to the past in these works is
inspired primarily by the spatialized histories discussed above rather than by historical geography. In this sense, these works have taken up the task of providing a geographical perspective to the deeply contextualized ethnographies and histories of LGBT community formation in the past. Such a project has also been extended by researchers interested in working at the interface between community history and geographical theory to disrupt historical methodologies such as mapping and archiving. Michael Brown and Larry Knopp’s community mapping of Seattle’s lesbian and gay past and Jen Jack Gieseking’s reflections on the space of the New York Lesbian Herstory Archives are exemplary of these types of inquiries.

These last two works signal what is perhaps the greatest challenge for the building of historical geographies of sexualities at the current moment as critiques emerging from queer geography continue to inform and reshape the practice of geographies of sexualities. Beyond the intersectionality that is seen as central to queer critiques, queer epistemologies in geography extend earlier analytic concerns of postmodern and feminist scholarship regarding the transparency of space. More recently, however, such critical analysis also involves the reconsideration of the temporal brought by queer futurity. Specifically, the queer challenge to the temporal, although largely made at the scale of the queer subject, proposes the reconsideration of universal temporality by highlighting how queer subjects are “untimely” in relation to lifecycle benchmarks defined in relation to bourgeois norms of reproduction. But as Estelle Freedman has argued regarding the queering of time in history, this can be extended to the interpretation of discourses of sexuality and dissident movements in ways that disrupt common understandings of time ranging from temporalities such as “the progressive era,” “sexual revolution,” or “pre-Stonewall” to broader understandings such as “modernity” or “industrialization,” which themselves are informed by linear notions of progress that implicate reproduction. As there has long been, dare we say, a “productive tension” between geographies of sexualities and queer critique, the reconsideration of such temporalities might also stimulate a re-ignited historical geography of sexualities.

Collecting historical geographies of sexualities

The challenges of creating this special issue of *Historical Geography* lie at the interstices of the cleavages of knowledge production outlined above. Since few historical geographers have specifically adopted sexuality as an arena of inquiry, there has been a lack of researchers with the archival skills, theoretical grounding, and curiosity about sexualities in the past to take up this line of inquiry. This seems poised to shift as new generations of historical geographers either adopt lines of inquiry specifically focused on sexuality or are persuaded to consider sexuality as they examine the intersections of relations of power in the past. The adoption of queer theory, moreover, asks us to reframe some historical geographies and to reconsider whether they might be historical geographies that implicate sexualities. On the other hand, few presentists working within geographies of sexualities feel comfortable working in the past and presenting their work in an historical geography forum. It is not only that they may feel untrained in archival skills and in the style of writing that informs historical geography as *metier*, but many of the authors that we asked to contribute to this collection were at a loss when considering what they might say to an historical geography audience. In other words, they were unclear how to frame their contribution to this discussion. They have something to say about sexual geographies in the past, but not necessarily to historical geographies of sexualities.

Our goal in creating this collection was to showcase works in this field from both sides. The result is a collection that includes four original research papers and one critical review framed as an afterword. The first two papers are situated much further in the past than is common in the study of geographies of sexualities. In “When Silence Reigns,” Marianne Blidon examines the role played by sexuality and affect in soldiers’ memoirs of the Napoleonic Wars in order
Introduction to the Special Issue

to understand how bodies were constituted in their spaces. She argues that truth-telling in such testimonies and, ultimately, the silences that such veridiction reproduced, are integral to understanding the biopolitical power relations surrounding the production of moral boundaries during war. In “A Mistaken Policy of Secretiveness,” Francesca Moore examines how public health campaigns, mobilized to combat the spread of venereal disease in Lancaster UK in the 1930s, served to modernize sexuality by promoting individual responsibility for “frankness” and “responsible” behavior. The campaigns had a specific geography, accompanied by a new more disciplinary sexual morality that was to be regulated within the family and accompanied by a public education campaign that focused on transmitting modern sexual health knowledge to parents in the home.

The subsequent papers engage with a more traditional subject matter for geographies of sexualities and are situated in a more recent past. In “Queering Discourses of Urban Decline,” Julie Podmore examines how urban redevelopment, reformist governance, and police regulation of queer sexualities in Montreal in the 1960s transformed discourses about the Lower Main, the city’s historic red-light and entertainment district. Like Moore’s work on Lancaster in the 1930s, the paper focuses on the “modernization” of sexual norms, but in this case these new norms are held in tension with discourses of modernity and civic betterment that were made explicit as the city prepared to host Expo 67. In “Recovering the Gay Village,” Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray provide a comparison of the historical geographies of gay villages in Sydney and Toronto, situating both sites in time and space. They examine the respective pasts of these two districts not only to demonstrate their specificity in space but also to speak to the contemporary literature on the de-gaying of gay villages and queering of other neighborhoods within the city. They demonstrate that the historical geographies of each of these unique locales can be used to understand the reorganization of sexual and gendered landscapes in both Sydney and Toronto in the present moment. Finally, Eric Olund’s “When has Sexuality been about Sexuality?” asks what appears to be a relatively straightforward question. However, in reconsidering sexuality as an empirical and archival object, he finds a central tension for historical geographers of sexualities: tracing a number of different themes in the literature, he argues that sexuality is located in a place where there is a constant struggle between the individual and the social. He proposes that historical geographies of sexualities require working from this location, a place where sexuality resides in material, discursive, and relational forms.

The resulting collection is an interesting one in that the subject matter and approaches are diverse, representing the potential of historical geographies of sexualities and potential new directions in a field that is not yet established. One of the important strengths is that this collection does take a broad interpretation of sexuality and, in particular, heterosexuality (institutionally, affectively, and normatively) very seriously. In simple terms, heterosexuality is more than an institution through which more specific versions of gender and sexuality are framed and experienced. Both Moore and Blidon contribute to the study of heterosexuality by demonstrating how it was defined at different times through heteronormativities. Podmore examines how heteronormativities created margins not only around a heterosexual/homosexual binary, but also gendered normativities around trans-identified populations and commercialized heterosexuality. Olund provides a comprehensive review of sexuality that creates a dialogue amongst a wide range of sexualities in relation to heteronormativities.

A second major contribution is that this collection showcases quite different epistemological approaches developing in historical geographies of sexualities. Both Moore and Blidon are working with Foucault’s biopolitics framework in ways that highlight the role of the state in ordering the sexuality of the population. Extending from her earlier work on historical geographies of reproduction, Moore is working within a medical geographies framework to understand venereal
disease campaigns. Blidon examines how the social ordering of populations during war creates particular gendered and classed hierarchies that determine what is sayable regarding sexuality and affect in memories of war. The contributions of Nash and Gorman-Murray and Podmore are based much more in a materialist analysis that stresses the importance of discourse and policy in the production of LGBT spaces. Finally, the ways in which the uses of the past are conceived are quite divergent but also offer unique contributions. While the first two works are clearly examples of reading the past for the past’s sake, the other two are more presentist in their objectives. Nash and Gorman Murray use the historical geographies of two gay neighborhoods to understand their differences in the present era of “de-gaying.” Podmore uses historical geography to call attention primarily to the neglect of sexuality in understanding urban restructuring as well as the neglect of pre-Stonewall geographies of sexuality in the subdiscipline.

Although we have been able to draw together a set of divergent works in this field, there is clearly a lot missing here in terms of representing both the current endeavors of historical geographers of sexualities and their potentials. Although we would rather avoid well-rehearsed arguments about the lack of research on historical geographies of sexualities that focus on colonial power relations and take colonialism and/or “race” seriously, we cannot. While there have been such projects, specifically on sex work and Olund’s work on American cities, we have not been able to include any here. There is also an important absence of work on less visible LGBT sexualities. For example, historical geographies of lesbians and queer women would have been instructive, but this field is only beginning to experience a renaissance. And while the collection includes a number of less iconic cities and regions, its metronormativities could not easily be undone given existing research projects. Finally, critical work on archiving and methods is important and would also have made an important contribution, especially work that reconsiders queer time, memory and the complex politics of “archiving” sexualities. Indeed, this collection is but a stepping stone, building on other earlier attempts to continue the project of historical geographies of sexualities.

NOTES


For example, Susan Stryker and Jim Van Bushkirk, Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996); The History Project, Improper Bostonians: Lesbian and Gay History from the Puritans to Playland (Boston: Beacon Press: 1998).


For Cold War geopolitics and anti-communist anxieties, see The History Project, Improper Bostonians, 142-148; Esther Newton, Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America’s First Gay and Lesbian Town (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 101. For information on migrations, see: Gary L. Atkins, Gay Seattle: Tales of Exile and Belonging (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 57. Faderman and Timmons, Gay L.A., 110; Stein, City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves, 1819.


21 For the governance of gender through dress and comportment see Robert Beachy, Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity (New York: Knopf, 2014), 44; Faderman and Timmons, Gay L.A., 77; Enke, Finding the Movement, 49; Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, 155. For the politics of dance, as well as sexual and mental health, see Atkins, Gay Seattle, 179. For racism, see Siobhan B. Somerville, Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in America (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).


26 A feminist historical geographer who has done research on the interplay between gender and sexuality in the spaces of the past is Kate Boyer, specifically her earliest works on Vancouver and Montreal. See Kate Boyer, “‘Neither Forget nor Remember your Sex’: Sexual Politics in the Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office,” Journal of Historical Geography 29, no. 2 (2003): 212-229; Kate Boyer, “‘What’s a Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?’ A Geography of Sexual Violence in Early 20th-Century Vancouver,” Urban Geography 17, no. 4 (1996): 286-293. See also Mona Domosh, “‘The Women of New York’: A Fashionable Geography,” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 19, no. 5 (2004): 573-592.


32 Howell, “Foucault, Sexuality and Geography,” 300.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.


39 Phil Hubbard, Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 1999).


47 Brown and Knopp, “Queering the Map.”

48 See Olund, “‘Disreputable Life,’”; Olund, “Traffic in Souls.” See also Howell, Geographies of Regulation; Legg, Prostitution and the Ends of Empire.

When Silence Reigns: Sexuality, Affect, and Space in Soldiers’ Memoirs of the Napoleonic Wars

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I draw on a collection of war memoirs written by soldiers who survived the Napoleonic campaigns. I examine what was sayable or unsayable concerning affect and sexuality in order to better understand the role that these memoirs played in self-narrative within the highly particular context of war. If the present self-narrative is also a sexual and emotional account, these memoirs demonstrate such interpretations of the self that must be seen as a recent phenomenon. After describing the military context and discussing how their testimonies are constructed, I will analyze the traces they have left of their affect and the manner in which space and sexuality are incorporated into their accounts of the war.

Keywords: sexuality, soldiers, memoir

In 2004, the dissemination of the shocking photographs of the torture of male Iraqi Abu Ghraib prisoners by American soldiers ignited an international debate regarding sexual violence during war. By spectacularizing the victimization of male prisoners, this particular narrative implicated sexuality in important ways: it was an instrument of national humiliation among men, a tool for the geopolitical classification of national populations, and ultimately a means by which to reaffirm the moral contours of heterosexuality.¹ In such contexts, sexuality calls into question the boundaries between spaces and groups according to national discourses regarding “morality” and “civilization.” War simultaneously serves to scramble, reconfigure, or reinforce its boundaries. War is a unique time, a time of upheaval and trauma during which humanity itself is tested. During such a challenge, love, desire, and sexuality all occupy an ambivalent location that lies somewhere between suspension and urgency, ordinariness and exceptionalism, prohibition and the transgression of norms. Such sexual violence during war, however, is not an inevitable form of collateral damage; rather, it can be one of its constituent components. It is not simply a moment when the institutional frameworks created to ensure the safety and physical integrity of individuals fall apart: it can also be a mode of war. If sexuality is part of war, it is because, over and above the individual body, it is the social body (the people, the nation) that is produced and reproduced by a political economy of the body.² As a disciplinary mechanism, sexual violence during war is complex. It can take multiple forms: rape, sexual mutilation, sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, forced pregnancies, and so on. It has multiple subjects: this violence is generally inflicted on women, but also, to a lesser degree, on men, regardless of their age and whether or not they are civilians or soldiers.³ At the same time, since the mid-seventeenth century, war has been defined as an art that has its rules and principles, notably excluding acts of violence against civilian populations, especially women.⁴

Taking up Griffin and Evans’s recent call to take the historical geographies of embodiment seriously, this paper considers the role played by sexuality and affect in constituting bodies in the spaces of the Napoleonic wars.⁵ If embodiment during war is relatively well documented
for twentieth-century conflicts by drawing upon available archives, correspondence, diaries, film, and literature, that is not the case for the Napoleonic wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the nineteenth century constitutes a pivotal period between the “regulated” wars of the modern era and those that would follow. At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the conflicts that were entangling Europe were marked by “brutalization” or barbarism, a shift that took place long before the renowned brutality of the First World War. In addition, according to Michel Foucault, the nineteenth century also constitutes a pivotal period in the history of sexuality. Geographers have demonstrated the fundamental role played by space in shaping the dynamics of gender and sexuality, reflecting upon the ways in which sex and sexuality are represented, perceived and understood in spatial terms. However, research on heterosexuality in geography has been limited as compared with the literature on homosexuality and queer geographies. A detour into the sexualized locations of the Napoleonic wars allows us to re-examine these questions specifically by highlighting the ways that categories of sexuality and moral boundaries were produced in relation to gender, race and nationality in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It also permits a re-examination of how the foundations of sexual democracy have been constituted through specific world views and political geographies. In this paper, I will demonstrate that fundamental elements of this debate—as well as elements that are absent such as taking into account violence against women within their own national space—were already in place during the Napoleonic era, prefiguring the orientalism described by Edward Said. I will also focus on the question of the production of discourses on love and emotions during the particular period of the Napoleonic Wars. Since, for most feminists, love has been considered an invention of patriarchy and marriage—the bedrock of patriarchal domination—few had analyzed the role that love plays in the experience of everyday life until the recent “affective turn” in social sciences. Human geographers have also recently begun to take affective life seriously. The notion of affect refers to an embodied experience and the experience of life as it is lived. Anderson defined affect as “... a transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications).” It also focuses on the “how” of emotion in order to better understand the body’s capacity to affect and be affected but also to situate knowledge production by interconnecting emotional subjectivity within the experience of conducting research. We can thus begin to pay attention to some of those life experiences that are difficult to put into words.

In this paper, I will demonstrate that the capacity to express oneself—in as much as it is a necessary condition—is insufficient for the production of a discourse on sexuality especially if the sexual practices that are evoked are non-consensual and the question of consent itself is not considered because the subject status of the victim is denied. The testimonies operate in a space of meaning and signification forged through culturally imagined categories from which their actors cannot be abstracted. Sexuality involves sexual acts linked to desires, the permissive and restrictive laws that frame them, but also an awareness of what these acts involve, the way in which the experience is lived, the value that these acts are accorded. Using a particular type of testimony, the memoir, I will focus on the latter dimensions. By the time of the Restoration, memoirs had become a fashionable genre that survivors of the Napoleonic campaigns used to provide testimony of their experiences. But what experiences serve as testimonies of the performance of war? That which is verbalized, formulated, or written tends to saturate and blind us to that which is not said. Silence envelops different meanings. On the one hand, that which is evident, banal, ordinary, beyond the field of understanding and, at the same time, is beyond discourse. On the other hand, that which is unspeakable and shameful with regard to the care of self. There is, however, no binary separation between the said and the unsaid. It is necessary to focus on analyzing the different modalities of the unsaid, starting with the unequal distribution
of speech or writing, the ability to say or write, categorizing what is sayable and what is not, the forms of required discretion, etc. Concretely, there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of strategies that underlie and traverse discourse. These silences have a strong resonance during war. Particular attention must be paid to the economy of feelings that constitute the discursive regime of these memoirs in the context of the implementation of conscription involved in the construction of a virile ethos and the reinforcement of the naturalization of sexual difference.

In what follows, I use a collection of texts (reports, memoirs, diaries, letters, and testimonies) of the Napoleonic campaigns that are grouped together under the generic name of “memoirs” in the sense that they are written accounts of events in which the authors were participants or to which they bore witness. Specifically, I will examine what they said and did not say about emotions and sexuality in order to better understand the production of national and moral boundaries during war. First, I will discuss the context of the Napoleonic wars and develop a profile of the soldiers in order to show that the troops themselves rarely gave direct testimony of their experiences. In essence, therefore, I will outline who had the potential to give an account of the war. Indeed, as I will show, the majority of the memoirists were not conscripts but rather men who occupied the higher ranks in the army who produced truths that were shaped by their class position and their particular vision of the world. In the next section I focus on how they told the “truth,” in other words their practices of veridiction. Finally, I will demonstrate that love and sexuality were, for these men, part of the unthinkable and unsayable, and therefore served as a geopolitical tool for the classification of the enemy.

**Personal accounts in a war environment**

From 1792 to 1815, France was involved in military operations both within and beyond its frontiers. These wars, be they civil, against an external enemy during the revolutionary period (1792-1800), or imperialist as during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), deeply marked the construction of European national imaginations during the nineteenth century, before they were superseded in the collective memory by the magnitude of the two World Wars and forgotten due to a growing French disaffection for Napoleon. However, this pivotal period was marked by a large number of innovations that changed the way in which war was waged. The most important of these was the use of conscription or obligatory national service that resulted in a strict demarcation between men and women.

**Total exclusion or marginality? The subaltern place of women in the army**

In the society represented by the Ancien Régime, the practice of warfare and the bearing of arms were linked to two qualities, nobility and masculinity, although they were not mutually exclusive. French society was divided into the Three Estates: the clergy, the aristocracy, and the commons, each of which was justified by its functional role (religion, defense, and production). Before 1795, there was no institutional link between the army and citizenship. While some women managed to fight, it was generally because they were disguised as men. These women included Renée Bordereau, a woman of common birth who became a Knight of the Catholic and Royal Army and battled with a fiery spirit and determination against the “Blues” (i.e. the Republican army). Her enlistment was only possible because she appropriated the place of a man (“I acquired men’s clothing”), which allowed her to equal and even exceed the performance of men on the battlefield (“I killed five of my enemy and finished the day by breaking my saber on the head of the last soldier. . . . All in all, I killed 20 enemy soldiers.”) The rarity of such an enlistment explains why such women left a lasting impression and became famous. For example, Madame de Xaintrailles, who participated in seven campaigns and was part of the expedition to Egypt and to whom a
pension was refused “. . . because she is a woman,” demanded justice from Napoleon on the basis that “it was hardly as a woman that she had waged war, but rather as a warrior.” Assumed to be of a fragile and delicate constitution, women were considered to be naturally unsuitable for combat, an endeavor requiring strength and courage, qualities that the unequal and hierarchical thinking of the period denied them. Far from being a period of emancipation, the Revolution in the 1790s led to a strengthening of male power: “The questioning of God the Father, the execution of the King, the father of the Nation, had no effect on domestic relations as, all men, including the revolutionary ‘sans-culottes’, affirmed their role in the household and the natural inequality of the sexes. Excluded from citizenship, women returned to their maternal and domestic roles.” The bearing of arms remained a male privilege and the place that women were assigned to was the home.

While warfare was considered a male domain, the army was nevertheless not a wholly masculine environment isolated from the population. Up until the end of the seventeenth century, troops were housed by local inhabitants and accompanied by civilians, most of whom were women. They included women who worked as cooks and bottle washers, as prostitutes — despite the large number of royal prohibitions — and women who were the wives and mistresses of soldiers. On April 30, 1793, the Convention adopted a decree stating that “all women not of use to the armed forces” should leave the camps and barracks within eight days. This decree was in response to the huge number of women that followed the battalions, ate a proportion of the rations, interfered with the marching of the troops and the execution of military operations, and, ultimately, contributed to the propagation of syphilis. They were also accused of distracting and “softening” the soldiers. The only exceptions were the sutlers (who sold provisions to the soldiers), and the laundrywomen whose role in nourishing and caring for the bodies of the troops justified their presence both in the barracks and camps. This sexual division of labor was not the result of functionalism: the gender-based assignment of tasks stemmed from a naturalist interpretation of sex roles. Once again, it was the naturalized physical differences that underscored the subordinate position and condition of women in armies. For example, according to Henri Ducor, women’s “natural” difference from men allowed them to escape the illnesses that decimated the men and pushed them to serve the soldiers to the point of self-sacrifice:

Of the 14,000 that we were, there were 8,000 who had scurvy and dysentery, and the other half, just scurvy. These two illnesses, along with their auxiliary, typhus, resulted in our pontoons being a terrible scene of destruction. Only the wives of soldiers and cooks and bottle-washers held up well. One of the most remarkable particularities is that we had several hundreds of these women with us and not one of them fell sick. The reason for their continued health could be all the activities that they engaged in while trying to make themselves useful, as women are particularly hospitable: as soon as there was a need to relieve suffering, they forgot about themselves amidst the danger; the danger itself did not preoccupy them except as it related to others and became a healthy diversion. “If we were to fall sick, they said, what would become of our poor men?” Our task and our role is to groom them, to look after them, to nurse them.

The question of affect and sexuality could not, therefore, be experienced or understood from an egalitarian or relational perspective because, by nature, women represented a radical and subordinate otherness. Feminist geographers like Liz Bondi, Nancy Duncan, and Julia Cream have shown that an understanding of the dynamics of heterosexuality is fundamental to interpreting women’s place in society regarding the performance of particular gender roles.
the sexual division of labor and its spatial implications reinforced the heterosexual matrix. This hierarchical vision and its spatial divisions were reinforced by the practice of conscription.

Conscription: men’s business (young, rural, and single)

Conscription, or obligatory military service, is the requisitioning by the State of a proportion of its population to serve in its armed forces. Developed during the French Revolution with the mass conscription of Year II (September 21 to September 22, 1794), this practice replaced the professional armies of the Ancien Régime and the mercenaries used until the end of the eighteenth century. On September 5, 1798, the Jourdan-Delbrel law instituted “the compulsory conscription” of all French men aged 20 to 25, based on the principle that “all French men are soldiers and obliged to defend their homeland.” In practice, this conscription lottery included all men who were theoretically single and fit for service. Exemptions were based on the following physiological limits and medical problems: too short (height was set at a minimum of 1.598 meters up to Year XI; it was then reduced in 1804 and 1811 to meet the needs of the various fronts); completely lacking in sight or speech; infirmities linked to the total loss of a member (nose, arm, leg, foot, hand or right eye) or malformations (voluminous goiters, humps, atrophy of a limb, clearly visible lameness); illnesses and lesions (epilepsy, skin diseases, ulcers and tumors); and finally, the lack of incisors or having atrociously bad breath. While a successful medical check-up was considered as a sign of good health and a confirmation of virility, being exempted implied being unfit to carry out most jobs. For these reasons, conscription was considered to be a fundamental rite of passage that gave a young man a role in the village community and the right to marry. Family matters were among the other reasons for being declared unfit for service, with marriage being a primary motive for exemption on the condition that it took place prior to the young man being called up to join the army. While this measure led to a certain number of marriage certificates being forged, it also resulted in a significant increase in the number of marriages. Relying on the possibility of divorcing at the end of the war, young men rushed into marriages with widows, as well as aging spinsters and women whose physical or mental health had, until then, excluded them from marriage. This practice had a considerable effect on the understanding of marriage as a legal and social institution as well as on relations between sexes.

The recruited men were young as the minimum legal age for conscription was set at nineteen years old. However, this could be lowered to sixteen in the case of voluntary recruitment. All French men born in the same year formed a “class” and, having reached their twentieth year, they had to register together (in other words, “be conscripted”) at the army’s recruitment tables. The duration of military service in peacetime was set at five years. Alain Pigeard estimated that around 2,432,000 men were recruited in Napoleon Bonaparte’s armies. While limited at the beginning of the Napoleonic campaigns, the numbers increased with the growing requirements caused by losses as well as the need for a simultaneous presence on several fronts. On January 11, 1813, 350,000 men were made available to the Ministry of War. Between 1805 and 1815, losses were estimated at 580,000 men. During the coalition wars the needs were such that use was made of the older “classes” in order to spare the “class” of 1815 which was deemed too young and immature.

Parisians partially escaped conscription; therefore, they were under-represented among the conscripts. In all, only 16,647 Parisians were mobilized over a 14-year period, a number that can be considered low given the capital’s demographic weight and the demand for conscripts. Recruitment did not involve only the French; men from invaded European and Mediterranean countries were also conscripted. Of the 2,300,000 conscripts carrying out military service between 1804 and 1814, the proportion from the new regions represented 16.6 percent under the Consulate, subsequently increasing to 20.5 percent in 1808 and then to 25.6 percent by the end of the Empire.
Given that women were rejected because they were considered by definition to be incapable of fighting, once conscription was in place it reinforced a strict separation of men and women, contributing to the construction of a homosocial environment and reinforcing unequal gender relations. The armies were formed from young, single men from rural environments. Simultaneously, the assignment of women to the domestic sphere conversely contributed to the production of their vulnerability. With the exception of the cooks, camp followers selling provisions, and passing civilians, day-to-day life in the barracks, requisitioned accommodation, camps, and bivouacs was an intensely virile and masculine environment leaving little place for intimacy. Among those returning from the campaigns, a number have given their accounts, thus providing testimonies of their experiences.

**Bearing witness: a selective veridiction**

Within the context of war, the anonymous soldiers found themselves living out experiences that were far from their everyday life worlds, in terms of customs and environment, in both neighboring and far-away countries (Italy, Ireland, Prussia, Poland, Austria, Egypt, Russia and so on). Far from home, they followed destinies and suffered traumas for which they were rarely prepared. Writing thus became a means of leaving a mark, justifying oneself, making sense of events that were often senseless, as well as an act for the benefit of familial, local, or national posterity. While each memoir imposed its own spatio-temporal limits (*Journal de l’expédition d’Egypte* (1798-1801), *Journal d’un commissaire des guerres pendant le Premier Empire* (1806-1814), *Souvenirs de guerre* (1790-1831), *Campagne de Russie 1812, etc.*) and, consequently, its own singularity, memoir writing subscribed to the conventions of a codified stylistic exercise, both in terms of its chronological construction and the actual contents of the account.

**Those bearing witness**

The fifteen volumes that I have studied were published by La Vouivre in 1998. This collection comprises reports, memoirs, diaries, letters, and memories of the Napoleonic campaigns grouped together under the generic name of “memoirs” in the sense that they are written accounts of events in which the author was a participant or to which they bore witness. These memoirs were written by men who had a different profile from the previously described conscripts. In fact, all of them chose a military career out of political conviction or for the opportunity. None were conscripts and, consequently, they were older. With the exception of Jean-Baptiste Kléber, born in 1753, and Jozef Grabowski, born in 1791, most of these men were born in the 1770s. They were, therefore, 30 or even 40 years old at the time of the events and occupied positions of power in the army. With the exception of Pierre-Paul Denniéé, an aide-de-camp, and Salomon-Louis Laurillard-Fallot, a doctor, all of them occupied positions in the military hierarchy (Captain of Cuirassiers, Captain of Grenadiers, Officer attached to the Imperial Chief of Staff, Second-Lieutenant of the Light Infantry, Colonel, General, etc.) or its administration (Commissioner of Wars). Some made careers in the army, such as Jean-Pierre Doguereau, a Chief of Staff of modest means who began as an aide-de-camp before making a name for himself during the Egyptian campaign, or Jean Sarrazin, an Engineering Officer promoted to Adjutant-General. These men gave few details concerning their past life and did not necessarily describe their professional, matrimonial, or domestic situation. In civilian life, one of them had been an architect, while another had studied law and worked as a lawyer. Inevitably, some had wives and children before joining the army. All had a level of education that allowed them to write with relative ease. While most were French, some were foreigners. This was the case of Jozef Grabowski (a Polish officer attached to the Imperial Chief of Staff), William Theobald Wolfe Tone (whose father had been an English lawyer who fought for the independence of an Ireland united under the French flag), or Salomon-Louis Laurillard-Fallot who was Dutch.
While most conscripts were young men from rural environments, there were very few who were able to give accounts and leave traces of their experiences. The formalization of war memories was carried out by men who held positions of power in the army or had the resources necessary to write these testimonies. Consequently, the experiences of the men of the troops, revealed in administrative, legal, or artistic sources, were rarely produced by those directly involved as they were denied the possibility of having their voices heard. However, Duncan has proposed a method of reading against the grain to recover the voices of those who did not produce the archive, yet are present in it. In this sense, the men of the troops are a present-absence in these memoirs. While they are absent as subjects and rarely named, they are nevertheless present in two forms: first, as figures that embody bad behavior and deviance generally attributable to their subordinate class position that contrasts in value with the nobility of the memoirist; and, secondly, as a backdrop, components of the scenery that add realness to the story.

**Telling the truth: accounts as veridiction**

Contrary to the premise of the exercise, writing down one’s memories is not an eminently intimate, personal, and singular act. Often written some time after the event, just after the war or several years later, these accounts comply with the conventions for this type of writing as well as with social and cultural norms of the time. As such, they are a precious source for historical geography research. In fact, reading the collection highlights strong similarities in their structure (linear and chronological construction of the narration, writing in the first-person singular) and contents (the themes examined, the hierarchy of events, and the value given to them over and above the partisan commitments of their authors). Underlying this particular genre, as expressed by Michel Foucault, there is the pretension of “veridiction,” an act of truth telling. Regardless of the gaps, the omissions, the memory failures, or the liberties taken with the facts, the premise of writing a memoir is the affirmation of the truth. “To hide nothing,” “to reveal all,” “to only tell the truth” are just some of the assertions that mark these memoirs. These are accounts of events in which the author was an actor, a witness or, at the very least, a contemporary. In this sense, the telling of these stories presupposes a transparency with oneself and with others concerned. Each memoirist claims to be honest, of good faith, and impartial. This good faith expresses itself as being self-evident: “It hardly bears mentioning that these memoirs contain nothing but facts and the truth.”

Guarding against any potential partiality or untruth is vital for the legitimacy of the memoirist. As one author of the period wrote regarding these memoirs: “It is the truth, an exact knowledge of what occurred, and the greatest impartiality that guides my pen.” The words are authoritative as they affirm this truth that depends on witnessing the events. Regarding rumors, Arlette Farge has noted: “Truth is none other than what has been seen and said. Truth is true because we have seen it and said that it was.” In order to be able to speak the truth, seeing or hearing is required because it provides legitimacy. Jean-Louis Jobit thus insisted that “placed in the theatre of events that I shall describe, as an actor myself, I shall become the faithful narrator. I shall describe these events as I saw them. I shall not exaggerate anything... My sword has always been devoted to honorable ends and in the same way I shall devote my pen to the truth.”

Being an eyewitness provides credibility and legitimacy. This argument is often made within the accounts: “[I] undertake to offer the public a brief exposé of the facts, concerning which, as an eye witness and an officer serving in Ireland, I can guarantee their authenticity”; “I was an eye witness of what a Russian army does and can do”; or, “I was an eye witness of this action and can confirm it took place.” However, not all are fooled by the rhetorical dimensions of this presumption to an all-encompassing form of knowledge. As François-René Cailloux
ironically notes in this regard: “I have never understood how a General Officer or a Commander could understand what was happening to their left or to their right, let alone across the entire battle field, when there were already so many things going on that immediately concerned them and kept them completely busy. Despite this, some of these people claim to have seen all, heard all and done all.”

The vision that eyewitnesses might have of a battle and, a fortiori, the war itself, is partial, spatially limited, reduced to a field of vision, to a snapshot. Above all, the account is based on words. For Paul Ricoeur, “the testimony is not the perception itself, but rather a report, a story, a narration of the event. Consequently, it transforms what has been seen into what has been said.”

_Telling the truth, but what to tell . . . ?_

The contents of these memoirs pick up the themes expected from such an exercise in style including descriptions of battles, face-to-face confrontations with the enemy, day-to-day living (especially the tough life in the camps and barracks), relations with comrades-in-arms and hierarchical relations, the progression of an ordinary day, etc. The importance given to all these elements, as well as the wealth and precision of the details and their weight in the text, is not proportional to the importance that we might give them today. As a result, it is common when describing a battle that the author describes the death of soldiers from his own troop by stating that the “losses were considerable” or “it was a carnage” while going into far greater detail concerning a bullet that had damaged a uniform or the loss of a horse. Far from being trivial anecdotes, such renderings make sense because they permit the author to reveal the courage of the soldier who escaped death as well as his attachment to his possessions, their value and rarity (uniform, horse, etc.). Memoirists focus their attention on what affects them and what they find remarkable, unusual, or extraordinary. The triviality of day-to-day life—or that which seems obvious—does not form the basis of an account worthy of being written and, consequently, of being read. The only exceptions to this are certain details (such as the description of an object, a setting, an interior, or an itinerary) which Roland Barthes, in his chapter _From History to Reality_, considers useless. Even if there are not many of them, “useless details” seem inevitable: all accounts, at least modern Western accounts, have some. For Barthes,

This is what we might call the referential illusion. The truth of this illusion is this: eliminated from the realist speech-act as a signified of denotation, the “real” returns to it as a signified of connotation; for just then these details are reputed to denote the real directly, all that they do—without saying so—is signify it; Flaubert’s barometer, Michelet’s little door finally say nothing but this: _we are the real_; it is the category of “the real” (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the reality effect is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.

These details are assumed to directly reveal reality but they do nothing more than signify it. These superfluous details that serve as the filling refer to “reality.” All this would seem to indicate that the “real” can be sufficient in and of itself, that it is sufficiently powerful to refute any idea of function, that its enunciation has no need to be integrated into a structure, and that the having-been-there of things is a sufficient principle of speech. Between memorable events and descriptive details of the reality effect, memoirists make choices that are never clearly explained. Moreover,
such memoirs have been shaped by the assumptions of the period, determining what is sayable and what is not. And, among the themes where, with very few exceptions, there is a complete silence, there are feelings of love and sexuality.

The describable and indescribable: sexuality and amorous feelings in war’s spaces

Histories and historical geographies of war rarely deal with the affective. As the British military historian John Keegan has remarked “it is a pity that official historians deliberately ignore all that is emotional [and that] this aspect of a soldier’s life, to say nothing of the sense of identification that could arouse among us, is essential when depicting historical reality.” French historian Arlette Farge argues that the affective should be seen an important tool by historians: “Emotion is not a handicap for research if one accepts to use it as a tool of recognition and understanding. Rather than being seen as a soppy sentiment that dulls all that it touches, emotion is, in fact, the astonishment of intelligence that needs to be worked on and ordered.” While I share these sentiments, it is clear that researchers working on the emotions of soldiers during the Napoleonic campaigns face many challenges, specifically the lack of testimonies from ordinary soldiers and the silences surrounding emotions and sexuality in existing accounts.

Silences and absences: the construction of an unstated virile ethos

With a few rare exceptions that I shall return to, the memoirists whose works I have analyzed make no mention of their amorous or sexual feelings. If the body has a place and occasionally a central place in their accounts, it is a body having suffered from the accumulation of hardships that they faced: exhausting marches, spartan bivouacs, the harshness of everyday life exacerbated by climatic conditions (heat, cold, or damp), deprivations and hunger resulting from haphazard supplies, the shock and experience of battle, the proximity of dead bodies and death’s banality, the illnesses and injuries that further weaken the soldiers, etc. It is never an amorous or desiring body. If there is any desire whatsoever, it is, above all, a desire to be safe, sheltered, and satiated.

Here, an anecdote brought back by a Genevan, a musician in the Great Army, is illustrative. During the siege of Magdebourg in 1806, the besieging army went marauding to find food to meet their daily needs. One day, one of the marauders returned without food, but was accompanied by a young and attractive German girl. A violent argument broke out between the soldiers, resulting in the men fighting one another. The reason for the quarrel was related to food choices—stealing potatoes was a more judicious choice and therefore more valued—and the cost resulting from having to keep her, yet another mouth to feed in conditions of shortage. The young girl was raped by the squad and forced to become their cook and bottle washer. The narrator states that he was the only one who did not participate in these “gymnastics,” having preferred “a cup of hot milk.” Whether or not he is telling the truth or simply trying to protect his reputation is unclear, but what this anecdote reveals is the highly probable way in which priorities defined themselves and the place held by the libido in the order of these priorities. A first reading thus makes clear that there is an almost complete absence of amorous or sexual plot lines when taken in their literal sense: war is a sexual and emotional desert where the survival instinct takes precedence over all other concerns. Thinking about sexuality also meant thinking sexual abstinence, frustration, dissatisfaction, and a lack of desire.

However, a second reading can put this sexual absence (which is hard to believe given the young age of some soldiers who left their homes for many years, such as Alexandre Bellot de Kergorre who was away for seventeen years and four months) into the context of the intended readers of these accounts. As defined by Umberto Eco, “a text is a product whose interpretative result must form part of its own generative mechanism.” Female memoirists
from the revolutionary period wrote, above all, to educate their children and grandchildren. This, in most cases, was not the case of their male peers whose accounts were not essentially intended for their descendants, but rather for other men (their comrades whose judgment they valued) and, more generally, for posterity. They are men addressing other men with whom they have shared or will share a common experience or, at least, common references. While soldiers were able to use tender words when addressing their wives, this was only possible within the strictly private framework of a letter. The positive aspects of the soldier’s more public virile ethos is built through the affirmation of values such as bravery, courage, discipline, contempt for danger, sense of duty, and honor. But, it is also constructed negatively through the exclusion of feminine characteristics which are necessarily perceived as being signs of weakness. There cannot be, therefore, any question of love or a loving disposition which would be perceived as a sign of weakness nor any satisfaction of trivial sexual impulses that would dull or sully such a noble account entirely. This affirmation of a virile ethos is more than a quality specific to an individual; it is a “being within an incorporated world” which is linked to certain moral imperatives and criteria concerning appearance and behavior. For Pierre Bourdieu, the perfect man in terms of virility implies a way of being, a sense of virtue, that is imposed on the world through the mode of “it goes without saying,” without any discussion whatsoever. Virility is “the product of a social labor of domination and inculcation at the end of which a social identity instituted by one of the ‘invisible demarcation lines’ laid down by the social world and known and recognized by all inscribes itself in a biological nature and becomes habitus, embodied social law.”

War memoirs, therefore, participate in the distribution of a standardized mental image of what it means to be a man through both enrollment and rejection. In these memoirs, anecdotes concerning this aspect abound. For example, William-Theobald Wolf Tone recalled that a “few old soldiers demonstrated the most extraordinary courage, smoking while having a limb amputated and then crying out ‘Long live the Emperor!’ at the end of the operation.” In his memoir, Jean Bréaut des Marlots proudly affirmed with complete self-assurance that “neither misfortune, privation, suffering, injuries, life nor death could influence his military nature.” For George Mosse, the affirmation of virility in Europe dates back to this period:

The association of militarism and masculinity had always been present—after all, the birth of modern masculinity had culminated in the Napoleonic Wars.... At the same time, in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, men seemed to become more self-conscious about their manhoods.... That the divide between the sexes became wider as well, each confined to the imperative of constructing an ideal male stereotype.

Virility and love are, therefore, two contradictory concepts, with the latter not having any role to play in the expression of the former. The memoirist’s homecoming is often marked by a marriage or the reunion with a wife in a manner similar to that of Ulysses’ return to Ithaca. Similarly, William-Theobald Wolf Tone completed his account by writing: “Having an honorable rank in the American army and being the proud holder of American citizenship, united with the object of my first and constant love, being the single daughter of my father’s friend ... I feel like the sailor who, following a stormy crossing, finally returns to his home to be drawn into the family’s embrace.” The ways that women were able to live through these absences is an overlooked aspect that was subsequently used as fodder for literature, as in the Balzac-like heroes of Colonel Chabert.

The meaning given to love and sexuality is not independent from the social relations of sex and their resulting prioritization. Far from the chivalric ideal, the love of a woman is completely
excluded from the construction of the virile ethos of Napoleonic soldiers whose value can only be appreciated and measured between men. Conversely, while the efficiency of the troops is based on this homosociability, expressing feelings regarding another man is unthinkable other than in terms of camaraderie or team spirit. Similarly, it is impossible to name sexual practices between peers, whether consensual or not. Certain forms of sexuality, such as the use of prostitutes, rape or homosexuality are unsayable and unthinkable with the exception of their use as indictments against the enemy who does not count anyway. It is the silence of the victims and the impossibility of their testimony, compounded by the silence of the torturers and the denial that their peers practice sexuality, especially sexual violence, that renders sexuality not only silent but ensures that it remains unthought.60

Expressing sexuality to create order in the world

Although very marginal in war memoirs, sexuality is represented in two forms: rapes carried out by the enemy (or, more rarely, troops devoid of honor whom the narrator denounces and distances) and sexual relations (commercial and consensual) with foreign women, who are presented as being depraved and immoral—a means by which to justify the conquest of their country. During the Napoleonic Wars, sexuality, therefore, was used as a tool to create order in the world and designate the enemy as “the Other.” One way to create such order was to defend the sexual honor of French women. During this period, only honorable women could be rape victims, insofar as for a rape to constitute a crime, a woman had to have something to lose. Feminine honor was associated with the moral and physical control of oneself, meaning sexual abstinence or moderation for married women. Considered vulnerable by nature, women were not supposed to display themselves, which implied that during war they should stay at home rather than traveling into unknown territories. One of the memoirists noted the following: “I tenaciously opposed her coming to Vienna as I knew the dangers she would risk along the way as she would have no protector.”61 This situation was generally interiorized by women who had a vague idea of what fate might await them when an army passed through town. Alexandre Bellot de Kergorre recalls the suicide of mothers with their children to escape the cruelty of the invading Russians: “[There were some] women and children in the most desperate straits. All were necessarily going to die at the end of the day. . . . We know that many of the women, to avoid falling into the hands of the Russians, threw themselves into the river with their children.”62 Jean-Pierre Doguereau mentions nuns “who died of fear as the army approached.”63

Another way to order the world was through the conquest of territories, a practice that implicates sexuality. When they could, entire populations fled before the advance of Napoleonic armies, leaving abandoned villages behind them.

We entered into farmland and burned the wheat and flax crops as well as two villages along our route . . . , we crossed meadows well-planted with trees that I enjoyed travelling through; it had been a long time since I had followed such a pleasant route; the meadow was covered with flowers; there was a stream to our right. . . . We left the countryside in flame; before departing, we set fire to the crops surrounding the camp. At 9 o’clock we arrived in a village fairly well-built from stone; there was not a single villager, we set fire to what we could. . . . We spread out around the countryside to destroy the crops; we left fires everywhere.64

Such conquest involves taking possession of a territory, represented by the destruction of material goods and properties (destroying crops, setting fires), their appropriation (pillaging, pilfering), and enslavement (massacres, rapes) of its peoples. As Farges has argued, conquest also involves gendered representations of the sexuality of the enemy:
It is as if the women of the conquered enemy belonged de facto and almost by right to the conqueror. Insofar as a woman is concerned, this form of belonging is implicitly perceived as being sexual. The anthropological dissymmetry between male and female provides the “natural” evidence of this stereotype: the sexual act is a possession of the feminine by the masculine and not the other way round. The conqueror says “this is mine” when he places his flag over the conquered city and rapes the women. In this sense, the two actions are homologous.65

By raping, the soldiers assume the right to both possess the bodies of the enemy’s women and confuse the parentage of future births. One of the memoirists admits that “the populations where we are going [Egypt] do not treat women in the same way that we do, but in all countries, the person who rapes is a monster.”66 While the practice is condemned, its definition will largely depend on which side of the conflict commits these acts.

If there is no question of rape among the ranks of the memoirists, it is because the enemy’s women are without virtue. As Salomon-Louis Laurillard-Fallot wrote, “it is clear that the (Belgian) women are very pretty, curvaceous and extremely amorous and it is not difficult to encounter them.” A little further on, he recalled that “the small town where I was to live could not be recommended by the morality of the women. Those who were not married particularly stood out due to the lightness of their behaviour. They played innocent games that were often not so innocent at all.”67 The disqualification of women from the moral register excused the men who had sexual relations with them and even, via a rhetorical reversal, turned these men into victims. One of these memoirists noted that “this absence of all scruples in the trafficking of women was a great pitfall for a young man exiled on the island (Great Britain); another pitfall was the orgiastic life led by foreigners.”68

Nevertheless, certain anecdotes leave little doubt as to the constraints weighing on foreign women during occupation by the French army. Thus, Jean-Pierre Doguereau recalls, without expressing the slightest remorse, the kidnapping of several Egyptian women who were handed over to the troops for several days: “A harem, penetrated by our comrades and from which they took negroes, helped pass the time for a few days, but we soon got bored.”69 Similarly, Kléber admitted that “they found the location well-adapted to their antics with the Egyptian women and it soon became a setting for vice and debauchery.”70 This association between exoticism and eros is a very effective way in which to divide spaces and populations.71 The extent of the moral disqualification of foreign women is reflected in the barbarity of the French soldiers.

Charles-Antoine Morand’s account of the Egyptian occupation is the only one to describe men being raped. It is important to note that the accuracy of this indirect account has not been established. Nevertheless, it is interesting because it is only intelligible through the hierarchical worldview that underlies the French colonial interpretation of the Egyptians during this period. It is clearly because the Egyptians were considered barbarians that this very detailed anecdote—unlike others that reference such acts in a more euphemistic and elliptical manner—makes perfect sense to its author and contributes to a colonial demonstration of the “monstrosity” of the Egyptian people.

Certain imprudent soldiers who had drifted away from our convoy were taken prisoner and splendidly fucked by the children of Ishmael. . . . Woe betides the unfortunates having fallen into their hands. They were stripped and, before being put to death, had to submit and suffer the abominable passions of their captors. Occasionally, opening the anus with a knife, they sought ghastly pleasure from the prisoner’s bloody wound. Or, inserting a rifle cartridge, they set fire to it and then abandoned their victim to his fate.72
In this instance, sexual violence is used to question the boundaries between spaces and groups according to their relative degree of morality and civilization. Morand’s reading of himself and his troops translates into a hierarchical vision of political spaces that both asserts the superiority of a dominant space and essentializes modes of classification. Thus, using a moral and political register, the memoirist translates a defense of “values” that simultaneously divides and unifies. Such rhetoric opposes two homogenized and essentialized spaces: the Napoleonic Empire—a modern, educated and civilized space—and its fringes—a set of uncontrolled, barbaric, and violent spaces. This false interpretation thus makes it possible to legitimize imperialist intentions and murderous wars of conquest.

Far from being a matter of intimacy, sexuality is part of geopolitics and a politics that relies on the production of a sexual world order. Power creates, organizes, and naturalizes a world order that also exposes itself as a sexual order. The sexual goes beyond sex; it signifies and produces an asymmetrical relationship that empowers or unites certain individuals, groups, and hierarchized spaces. Therefore, sexuality is an additional indicator of power. It creates, transforms, and reproduces social and spatial hierarchies. Dominant spaces are associated with a greater capacity for self-discipline, the internalization of taboos, and their corporeal inscription in the most intimate attitudes and behavior patterns. In the capacity to control instinctual sexuality, the civilized process finds the mark of superiority. Spatially translated, this classificatory logic informs the justification and reinforcement of territorial hierarchies.

Conclusion

If veridiction represents the very foundation of writing a war memoir, studying the contents of such testimonials in terms of affect and sexuality reveals the divergence between this statement and what is revealed by reading their silences for the unsayable. Veridiction does not mean the truth. In fact, lexicological studies show that the term rape is rarely used in war memoirs. Expressions used dissolve the nature and impact of this very clearly identified and condemned act. This process of dissolution absolves the soldiers of responsibility, clearly assigning the blame to the victims. It helps to reveal the socio-cultural and geopolitical factors involved in the qualification of sexual violence, a qualification strongly linked to a hierarchical and essentialized conception of women, but also to men on the other side of the conflict. Far from giving a singular personal account of a terribly unstable and complex emotional and physical experience, these war memoirs reflect the hierarchical thinking of their time period regarding sexuality, gender, and “race.” Indeed, accounts that evade such established forms of representation are rare. As such, they simplify the experience of war by drawing on established claims to truth, such as the logic of “common sense,” that serve to reify a more stable reading of the world that predated them. Far from revealing a singular individual trajectory, therefore, they put into words the social norms of their time. In short, these memoirs mask as much as they reveal.

For the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, “sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms.” However, this is not the case for everyone. One only needs to consider the unequal distribution of the possibilities represented by this malleability and its expression, and thus, the coexistence in time and space of a plurality of situations and discursive regimes. Moreover, that which is verbalized, formulated, or written tends to create saturation, blinding us to that which is not said. Silence simultaneously covers that which is evident and banal and, thus, beyond discourse; at the same time, it determines what is taboo or unsayable. Nevertheless, there is no reason to create a binary separation between what is said and what is not said; the focus should be on the various modalities of the unspoken, beginning with the uneven distribution of the spoken or the written, the capacity to say or write, the classification of what is sayable and what is not, the determination of which particular forms
of discretion are required, etc. There is never just one but several silences and they form an integral part of the strategies that underlie and cross through discourses on sexuality. Seen in this light, the testimonies presented here constitute a source that is as precious as it is difficult to analyze because it permits the questioning of the contours of intimacy and singularity of emotions—which, in this case, is linked to both ordinary and extraordinary experiences. Ultimately, these memoirs permit the demonstration of how the construction of the Other determines the way that a person could be treated, how the effects of classification permit (or not) the naming of a phenomenon, and, by the same token, its recognition (or, on the contrary, its denial), whether it be love or sexual violence against exoticized foreign women or love or sexual violence between men.77

Through these memoirs of war, the question of scale and of the boundaries of (im)moral landscapes have been re-examined as well as the extent to which these stories permit the naming, the classification, the saying or, on the contrary, the silencing of love and sexuality. An examination of the morality of heterosexual performances during war in this case appears to offer a useful point of departure regarding the exploration of how heterosexuality is naturalized in (and through) space. According to Phil Hubbard, an increasing body of geographical research has investigated the judgments people make on an everyday basis about what type of peoples, behaviors, and embodied practices are acceptable in which settings. He argues that “far from being a unified and monolithic system, heterosexualities (like homosexualities) are obviously manifest in a variety of different displays of emotion and intimacy which are inscribed in a variety of different landscapes.”78 Although queer geographers often invoke “straight” space as a dominant space that queers must negotiate, Hubbard calls attention to the ways in which heterosexual spaces are variously sexualized and desexualized. To this we might add that the institutionalization of moral values varies significantly across national boundaries in terms of the moral sanctioning of what forms of heterosexual performance are culturally desirable. As Natalie Oswin has proposed, queering our analysis thus helps us to position sexuality within multifaceted constellations of power and to ask new questions that illuminate a broader range of critical possibilities.79

Acknowledgements

I wish to warmly thank Julie Podmore for the translation of the final version and for her friendly support and trust. I also wish to thank the anonymous referees for their critical comments and suggested amendments on an earlier draft of this paper.

NOTES


2 For Michel Foucault, “the disciplinary mechanisms concerning the body and the regulating mechanisms concerning the population are interlinked…. Sexuality lies precisely at the intersection of the body and the population. As such, it is based on discipline but is also the result of checks and balances.” From Michel Foucault, “Il faut défendre la société: cours au Collège de France, 1975-1976,” (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 223-224.


4 The “Rights of War” was developed in the nineteenth century by Grotius (Hugo Grotius, The Rights of War and Peace, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005)). Diderot and d’Alembert’s eighteenth-century Encyclopédie also mentions that “the military laws of Europe do not authorize the deliberate taking of the life of prisoners of war, nor of those who ask for
pardon, nor those who surrender, especially not the elderly, women, children, and in
general, of anyone who is not of an age nor of a profession to carry arms, and those who
have no part in the war whether they are in the country or on the side of the enemy. Most
importantly, the rights of war cannot be used to authorize affronts to women’s honor; such
conduct contributes nothing to our defense, our security nor the maintenance of our rights;
it can only serve to satisfy the brutality of an undisciplined soldier.” From Denis Diderot
and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des
Métiers*, vol. 7, (Paris: Chez Briasson, 1751), 997-998.

5 Carl J. Griffin and Adrian B. Evans, “On Historical Geographies of Embodied Practice and

6 If, as Ann Stoler noted in the early 2000s, we are “disinclined to think of the affective to
the detriment of policy, we leave feelings to literature, excluding the possibility of making
reference to it and abandoning the frivolity of emotion for the benefit of the solidity of the
less the case today with the development of numerous studies on gender, sexuality, and
emotions. See, for example, Riki Van Boeschoten, “The Trauma of War Rape: A Comparative
View on the Bosnian Conflict and the Greek Civil War,” *History and Anthropology* 14, no. 1
(2003): 41-44; or Sara McDowell, “Commemorating Dead ‘Men’: Gendering the Past and

7 This notion of “brutalization” was developed by George Mosse (George L. Mosse, *La
Brutalisation des sociétés européennes. De la Grande Guerre au totalitarisme* (Paris: Hachette,
2000). For Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, “war brutalizes men in both
senses of the term: it touches their flesh and in their soul; it also makes them brutal.” From
Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *Retrouver la guerre, 1914-1918* (Paris: Gallimard,
2000) 34. To this more social understanding of brutalization we may also add the more
individual case studies analyzed by Joanna Bourke (Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of
Killing. Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999)).

8 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, Tome 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard,
1977).

9 David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London:
Routledge, 1995); and Kath Browne, Jason Lim, and Gavin Brown, eds., *Geographies of

10 See Bell and Valentine, *Mapping Desire*, 12. As Natalie Oswin has noted, the lack of
geographical work on heterosexualities is indeed a significant lacuna that should be
urgently addressed (Natalie Oswin, “Critical Geographies and the Uses of Sexuality:
Phil Hubbard, this lacuna is dangerous, for without a focus on the fractured articulation of
heterosexual love, romance and desire, geographers risk presenting an overly sanitized and
ordered conception of its socio-spatial relations which excludes many of the central desires
and disgusts that infuse all people’s lives (not just those of homosexually-identified men
and women) (Hubbard, “Desire/Disgust”).

11 See Catherine Nash, “Cultural Geography: Postcolonial Cultural Geographies,” *Progress
in Human Geography* 26, no. 2 (2002): 219–230; and Hakan Sekinelgin, “Global Civil Society
as Shepherd: Global Sexualities and the Limits of Solidarity from a Distance,” *Critical
Social Policy*, (2012). French sociologist Eric Fassin defines sexual democracy as “the
ultimate frontier of democratization, while sexual difference appears to its opponents as
the last refuge of transcendence – a natural reservation immune to history and politics,
protected from the turmoil of democratic critique. The importance of sexual politics today
throughout the world (from gay marriage to violence against women, from the Islamic
Blidon

veil to prostitution, etc.) is to be interpreted in this context: these are battles about the limits, or on the contrary about the continued extension, of the democratic logic.” From Éric Fassin, “A Double-Edged Sword: Sexual Democracy, Gender Norms, and Racialized Rhetoric,” in The Question of Gender. Joan W. Scott’s Critical Feminism, eds. Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 143–160. For Fassin, the so-called sexual clash of civilizations takes on a different meaning in today’s Europe: it is about immigrants rather than terrorists and about contention rather than expansion. As a consequence, Europe draws the boundaries between “us” and “them” through sexual politics. Sexual democracy thus defines the borders of Europe while embodying national identities in France, in the Netherlands, and elsewhere (see Éric Fassin, “National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe,” Public Culture, 22, no. 3 (2010): 507-529). Leticia Sabsay explores to what extent the sexual citizen has been configured in Euro-American terms within political liberalism, and how colonial and orientalist ideas about sexual citizenship and democracy follow on from this restricted notion of the subject of rights (see Leticia Sabsay, “The Emergence of the Other Sexual Citizen: Orientalism and the Modernisation of Sexuality,” Citizenship Studies 16, no. 5-6 (2012): 605-623).

12 The definition of orientalism given by Edward Said is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is just adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and its languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. […] orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1979), 1-3.

13 “Perhaps too geographers have deemed love to be a type of biological need which requires no explanation. Or, perhaps geographers are too cynical about love to conduct much research about it. Certainly it is time to question why geographers have paid little attention to actually explaining what romantic, passionate, or intimate love is. Perhaps geographers need to be more in touch with their emotions.” From Carey-Ann Morrison, Lynda Johnston, and Robyn Longhurst, “Critical Geographies of Love as Spatial, Relational and Political,” Progress in Human Geography 37, no. 4 (2012): 505-521. See also Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst, eds., Space, Place, and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010). As Lauren Berlant notes: “Desires for intimacy that bypass the couple or the life narratives it generates have no alternative plots, let alone few laws and stable spaces of culture in which to clarify and cultivate them […] to rethink intimacy is to appraise who we have been and how we live and how we might imagine our lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living.” Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” Critical Inquiry 24, no. 2 (1998): 285-286.

14 There are numerous related definitions of affect. For example, Steve Pile, “Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography,” Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 35, no. 1 (2010): 5-20.


17 For example, Hakan Sekinelgin argues that in the debates on international sexuality rights, global civil society actors assume leadership to represent the voices of those who are seen
as marginalized or voiceless due to diverse injustices. This process, however, itself creates a layer of power relations within civil society which in turn leads to an under-representation of the voices and demands of people who do not appear in the global register of sexuality politics (see Hakan Sekinelgin, “Global Civil Society as Shepherd: Global Sexualities and the Limits of Solidarity from a Distance,” Critical Social Policy 32, no. 4 (2012): 536-555; see also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the subaltern speak?” in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 271-313).

18 This is even more remarkable given that it was not her noble constitution that allowed her to overcome the weakness of her sex. As Sylvie Steinberg has shown, it is the individual’s status and the social exceptionalism linked to birth that authorizes the separation between them. See Steinberg Sylvie, La Confusion des sexes. Le travestissement de la Renaissance à la Révolution (Paris: Fayard, 2001).
27 See the text on gallica website: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56399t/f491.image.


33 Pigeard, *La Conscription*.


40 Ibid., 100.


When Silence Reigns


50 To analyze these memoirs, I conducted a systematic survey of their thematic content (including references to hunger, cold, relationships with women, fellowship, rape, sexuality, relationships to animals, relationships to indigenous people) as well as their content and lexicography.
53 “It is for you, my dear children, that I write this history of the suffering and the glory of the Vendée.” (Madame de Sapinaud, Memoirs of Madame de Sapinaud (Loudéac: Y. Salmon, 1989), 17) or “it is because of you, my dear children, that I have had the courage to complete these memoirs.” (Madame la Marquise de la Rochejaquelein, Mémoires de Madame la marquise de la Rochejaquelein, Volume 1, Edition 12 (Paris: E. Dentu, 1868), 1).
54 Among the letters found in the archives by Pierre Le Buhan are those from Joseph Landouart (October 28, 1806 in Venlo) addressed to his wife: “My dear wife Marie-Jeanne Ollivier, this is the seventh letter I have sent you, having only received four from you. My dear wife, I hope my parents are helping you as they promised and I would like to know if my son is well. I embrace you with all my heart, your loving husband Joseph Landouart.” Or that from Yves Tremel (5 May, 1806 in Strasbourg): “My dearest wife, I hasten to let you know that I shall be arriving in just a few days. I wish from the bottom of my heart that this letter finds you well and that we can share our joy and satisfaction. My dear wife, I embrace you with all my heart and pray you are not sad for I shall be constant to you for my entire life. Your friend and husband for life. Please kiss my dear children for me.” (Pierre Le Buhan, “Soldats bretons de Napoléon 1796-1815,” (Saint-Brieuc: P. Le Buhan, 2012).
59 Wolf Tone, Récit de mes souvenirs, 75.
60 On the question of silence, John Wrathall argues that the provenance and organizational structure of manuscript collections can be used as historical sources. Doing so illuminates their content, especially when one is trying to evaluate the significance of silences within such collections. He has assumed that all silences, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out, are not the same, that they hide different meanings, and that something of what they hide can be deduced from the context in which they exist and the purpose for which they were produced. In few fields is evaluating silences as important as in the history of sexuality, where, in modern American culture in particular, the forces of shame and punishment have dominated discourse and determined what could or could not be expressed. Wrathall, “Provenance as Text.” See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” Representations 37 (1992): 1-26.


75 Bell and Valentine, *Mapping Desire*.


77 As geographer Jane M. Jacobs has written: “The sheer uneven materiality of the lives of people affected by imperialism must inform the moral and ethical function of critical postcolonial studies, and, by extension, postcolonial cultural geographies.” (Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 29).


79 Oswin, “Critical geographies,” 100.
“A Mistaken Policy of Secretiveness”:
Venereal Disease and Changing Heterosexual Morality in Lancashire, UK, 1920-1935

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ABSTRACT: In the interwar years in the mill town of Rochdale, in Lancashire, UK, the percentage of the population accessing treatment for venereal disease more than tripled, rising from 0.08% in 1920 to 0.29% in 1932. Concern began to grow during this period, and public health campaigns about sex education were deployed in an effort to tackle the problem. Archival research indicates that these events were intended to instill a new “modern” approach to sex in the town and to inculcate a “new sex morality” of frankness and responsible behavior. This paper uses the problem of venereal disease as a lens to examine the shifting historical geographies of heterosexuality. The changing sexual culture in the town is the focus of the paper, with an analytical spotlight directed at the discursive production of venereal disease as a new bio-political, public, and inter-generational concern. The paper also examines the way in which, as part of the “new sex morality,” the family functioned as an important channel of sexual and social discipline. The advent of a belief in parental responsibility for accurate and adequate sex education led to changing parenting philosophies. The paper finds that bio-political concerns about the health of the town, and by extension the nation, were a significant impetus for making sexuality and sexual health a public matter.

Keywords: venereal disease, sex education, public health, Lancashire, bio-politics

Introduction

Sexuality as a subfield of geographical inquiry has burgeoned over the last twenty years. The work of Michel Foucault is the theoretical terrain on which many studies of sexuality have been carried out. His work denaturalizing and historicizing sexuality has reformulated the concept into a historically (and geographically) contingent practice closely linked to power relations. For geographers, the study of sexuality thus investigates not only the spaces and places through which it is constituted, practiced and lived, but also the geopolitical work of culture and discourse. Geographers have only relatively recently turned their attention to the deconstruction of heterosexuality and the spatial production of heterosexual identities and desires. Consequently, several scholars have highlighted the need for new geographical knowledge on heterosexuality, since it is central to the construction and reproduction of the alterity and difference which are played out through bodies, spaces, and places. My paper responds to this by exploring the changing heterosexual morality in Lancashire during the period 1920-1935. By “heterosexual morality” I refer to aspects of heterosexual conduct, culture, and practice. It is important to note at this point that some of the increase in venereal disease in Rochdale over the period in question...
must have been transmitted through means other than heterosexual activity. However, in the
town in the early twentieth century, addressing this was beyond the allowed confines of a public
epistemological and ontological imagination. Seeing sexually transmitted infection solely through
the lens of heterosexuality no doubt impeded efforts to halt the spread of disease in Rochdale.
Unfortunately, exploring this dimension of the cultural and sexual politics in the town is beyond
the purview of this paper.

This study uses the public health problem of venereal disease to trace the way in which
heterosexuality was produced, contested, and reworked in interwar Rochdale, Lancashire, UK.
At this time in the town, venereal disease was conceptualized narrowly as only two sexually
transmitted diseases, syphilis and gonorrhea, eliding other infections such as herpes and warts.
This indicates that whilst a new and so-called “modern” approach to sex was deployed in the
town to combat silence and ignorance, the epidemiological reach of this was somewhat flawed.
This myopia may have been due to specific concern about syphilis, perhaps a residue from what
Brandt has described as a Victorian “hysteria” about the disease, originating in the perceived ease
of transmission. This panic had impressive longevity; as late as World War I, the United States
Navy removed all doorknobs from battleships, claiming these had been a source of syphilitic
infection for its sailors.6

Setting aside the partiality of the public health imagination in the town at the time, it
has been convincingly established that the social construction and management of venereal
disease is significant in shaping and articulating perceptions of sexuality.7 This is largely because
the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections led to the increasing visibility
of certain sexual behaviors, such as promiscuity, which were then problematized.8 It therefore
follows that the study of venereal disease can be one method of charting the historically and
demographically contingent nature of sexuality. Venereal disease itself, perhaps unsurprisingly, has
attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly the medical, social and legal responses.9
In 2007, Del Casino argued that there was “strikingly little” geographical work being done at the
intersections of health and sexuality studies, notwithstanding an important corpus of work on
HIV/AIDS.10 Since then geographers have contributed to an ongoing expansion of research that
makes connections between health, space and sexualities, and this piece offers an historical case
study as an addition to the field.11 Using sexual disease(s) to examine the normative boundaries of
heterosexuality can uncover the ways in which (hetero)sexualities and sexual health are framed
by prevailing attitudes about the when, where and how of acceptable and non-acceptable sexual
behaviors and identities.12

Growing rates of venereal disease in Rochdale in the period 1920-1932 soon attracted
the attention of the town’s Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Andrew Topping.13 He attributed the
growing problem to “a mistaken policy of secretive-ness” on sexual matters and sexual health.14
This policy is an example of the way in which sexuality, as Howell has precisely observed, is
normatively private.15 My paper examines the workings of a new local health policy designed to
bring positive reckonings of sex and sexual health into the public domain as a way of tackling
venereal disease. The linchpin of this new public discourse on sex was a project of sexual pedagogy
whereby “everyone should learn about his own body” and it is this instruction and training that
the paper takes as part of its focus.16 Hubbard has noted that few geographers have sought to
explore how sexual morality is constructed through specific state programs and, as such, sex
education remains an important but under-examined site of moral pedagogy.17 Thus, the paper’s
investigation of this new local culture of sexual instruction is important because it offers valuable
insights into the cultural construction of normal (hetero) sexual health.18 In Rochdale, the new
morality enshrined a new personal and parental responsibility for sex education and sexual
health.
The purpose of the paper is, therefore, to excavate the change in (hetero)sexual morality that the venereal disease problem provoked in interwar Rochdale. The paper also explicates ways in which this can be mapped on to the conceptual realms of private and public. Fundamentally, the paper addresses the ways in which (hetero)sexual morality has been made and remade across space.19 This “placing” of sexuality is important, since examining the geographic contexts of social and sexual relations allows us to see the role of space in producing sexual moralities. The paper has three key findings. Firstly, I suggest that this new culture and the political obligations it enshrined for citizens, especially parents, was reflective of wider concerns for the health of the nation. Secondly, it argues that the changing sexual culture in the town was brought about by a new strategic alliance between agents of the public and private: health officials and parents. Finally, the paper argues that whilst officials claimed that the policy was new and more open, it was actually stubbornly conservative in its approach to sex, not only focusing exclusively on heterosexual, marital relations but also on occasion taking an anti-sex stance. The archive material upon which this paper is based consists of local Medical Officer of Health reports, health education literature from the Rochdale Health Committee, and newspaper reports from one archive repository.20

Society, disease, and sexuality

Rochdale in the interwar period was part of a network of mill towns in the northwest of England. The town specialized in cotton, wool, and machine tool manufacture. In 1920, the population of the town was 93,639 and by 1935 this had grown to 94,100. During this period, concern began to escalate about public health and, in particular, about the town’s increasing incidence of venereal disease.21 The health crisis in Rochdale mirrored concern across Britain and America from physicians, public health officials, and social reformers about syphilis and gonorrhea in the early twentieth century.22 In 1913 the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases was set up to investigate the prevalence of venereal disease in the British civilian population. Its findings, reported in 1916, resulted in the creation of a network of venereal disease clinics across Britain. New diagnostic and treatment facilities were offered, including the Wasserman antibody test for syphilis and the provision of arsephenamine, also known as Salvarsan, for the effective treatment of syphilis. Diagnostic testing and treatment, in line with the Royal Commission’s recommendations, were free and confidential. These clinics, as Evans has argued, represented a significant extension of state health services.23 In line with these national-level changes, a clinic for the diagnosis and outpatient treatment of venereal disease in male and female patients was opened at Rochdale’s Royal Infirmary, Redcross Street, in December 1917. Until September 1922, the work was carried out by two part-time medical officers and two clinics were provided each Friday, one for male patients and one for female patients. In 1922 the clinic services were reorganized, following Ministry of Health recommendations. Opening hours were increased, with the provision of two clinics a week for male patients and two clinics a week for female patients conducted by two full-time members of medical staff from the Public Health Department. Two beds were also retained in Rochdale infirmary for inpatient treatment of venereal disease. In 1933, the clinic was transferred to Baillie Street in the vicinity of the public health offices. The new premises were purpose built and fitted with the state-of-the-art equipment. The Medical Officer of Health noted in his 1933 Report that these facilities were reasonably comparable with the larger clinics in the country.

Yet in 1932, over a decade after Rochdale’s clinic opened, Rochdale’s Medical Officer of Health, Dr Andrew Topping, warned that venereal diseases were having a far-reaching effect in the area. He claimed they were “responsible for more ill-health and for a higher mortality than any other single disease.”24 At this time, the other main public health concerns in the town, and
across the United Kingdom, were maternal and child welfare, the provision of ante-natal care, and the management of tuberculosis.\textsuperscript{25} The observational data presented in the following graphs indicates the actual scale of the problem. The data, reported by Rochdale’s venereal disease clinic, considers the relationship between the population of Rochdale and attendances at the clinic.

Figure 1 reveals the scale of the increasing demand for venereal disease health services in Rochdale such as clinic appointments. This graph also indicates that population increase is unlikely to be the cause for the rising number of clinic attendances during the period in question. The increase in clinic attendances is clearly gendered, with a far lower number of attendances by women than men and a notable increase in attendances during the period for male patients. The data could indicate a greater number of men having sex with a smaller number of infected women, which might be expected to have triggered concern about commercial sex work, yet there is no evidence of such concern in the archival material. The lower attendances by women may also be related to the difference in presentation of sexually transmitted infections between men and women.

Whilst there is little difference between the presentation of male and female patients with syphilis, a clear difference in presentation occurs with gonorrhea, with almost half of infected women asymptomatic. This issue of female asymptomatic presentation is important for a number of reasons. It genders gonorrhea and could problematize women’s sexuality in that it suggests men’s VD status is more visible, or knowable (although this is not necessarily the case). However,
the gendered difference attracted little comment from the Medical Officer of Health; instead his attention focused on social characterizations such as the “fool or knave who won’t attend the clinic,” which is explored in further detail in the second half of the paper.

Figure 2 plots venereal disease clinic patients as a proportion of the population of Rochdale, instead of an absolute number. Plotting the data as a percentage of the population is a way of showing the impact of the disease on the town. The data suggests that, at its worst, the venereal disease problem in Rochdale impacted between 0.3 to just over 0.4 percent of the town’s population.

Davidson has suggested that the articulation of venereal disease as a public health issue provided a powerful legitimation for the social construction and regulation of dangerous or pathological sexualities and practices. In other words, the biological or physical problem of disease was also used as a mechanism to evaluate behavior, facilitating a measure of moral as well as physical health. Sexual diseases have often been framed as the result of pathological sexual behaviors, as opposed to other diseases such as cancer that are not generally seen as a reflection of individual conduct. Davidson has coined the phrase “moral epidemiology” to refer to this type of analysis. A moral epidemiology of venereal disease was certainly in evidence in Rochdale’s approach to sexual health. The clearest indication of this approach was in health promotion literature from the town’s annual “Health Week” event. These municipally-organized health promotion events had been running in the town since the 1920s and consisted of public lectures,
films, exhibitions and distribution of health education pamphlets across the town. Alongside
general health and hygiene information, the pamphlets contained material about specific concerns
such as cancer and venereal disease. They also operated in line with the recommendations of the
1916 Royal Commission on Venereal Disease by providing some educational information on the
problem.

However, in 1932, for the first time, Health Week focused heavily on venereal disease. The event pamphlet professed that the problem was almost totally behavioral—or moral—in stating that “this scourge could be wiped out in one generation if every man and woman lived a pure life and avoided all promiscuity in the sex relation.” The pamphlet, however, does not provide a definition of promiscuity. Instead, there was heavy emphasis on the concept of personal inadequacy. The pamphlet argued that the eradication of venereal disease was bound up with “problems of personal character, behaviour and a sense of individual responsibility towards family, fellowmen and self.” It follows from this logic that in-depth discussion of a medical approach to the problem was largely eschewed. Medical interventions, or “prophylactic treatment,” were described as “methods adopted in the hope of fighting venereal disease while still persisting in self-indulgence.” It is clear, then, that the use of condoms as a barrier method was not endorsed in this public health education program. Nor was this discourse of sex education linked in any way to discussions of broader matters of sexual education such as family planning and contraception. Instead, the pamphlet made two bold declarations about the need for a particular type of conduct: restraint. It urged that “a high moral code is the only sure prevention” and “there is one prophylaxis, and one prophylaxis only, and that is Purity.” As such, the new sex morality that was to be inculcated in the town largely involved arguments for abstinence and horror stories about the symptoms and effects of disease.

The claim that “Purity” could solve the problem of venereal disease allows us to consider both the epidemiological and moral connotations of the “promiscuity” the Health Week pamphlet mentioned without explanation. The concept of “Purity” is evidence for the existence of a conservative set of social and sexual mores privileging marital sexual relations over any other type. Brandt has suggested that educational efforts in the early twentieth century, in their focus on the loathsome and disfiguring aspects of venereal disease and emphasis on the inherent dangers of sexual activity, were actually resolutely anti-sex. Indeed, the local newspaper, Rochdale Observer, took this tone in relation to the town’s venereal disease problem. It announced in 1932 that it had located the cause, proclaiming it to be “irregular conduct” and noting that “a great deal of the misery existing today was an outcome of the casual living and loose behaviour that had followed the war.” What is notable here is that alongside the anti-sex sentiment, a fascinating relationship between war and rates of venereal disease is posited. Often, the argument that venereal disease increases during war is made, while social mores are immediately and thoroughly disrupted, as Beardsley has shown. Yet, in Rochdale, officials suggested that a spike in venereal disease in the town occurred after the war. In noting the “casual living” and “loose behaviour” that were thought to occur in the post-war period, authorities in Rochdale were perhaps linking sexual conduct to the broader social changes wrought by war.

The problem of venereal disease in the town was also imagined using powerful tropes of danger, innocence and guilt. Local official Alderman Dawson made an introductory address to the public as part of a 1934 venereal disease prevention campaign in the town. Dawson evidently knew the power of a single rhetorical narrative with a clear division between good and evil. He described the disease as a submarine, “ploughing its course under the surface of the sea of human life in secret, torpedoing not only those who were guilty but the innocent as well.” Here, venereal disease has been, in Sontag’s words, encumbered by the trappings of metaphor.
imagination limited to vaginal intercourse and the transmission of two diseases, thus neglecting other infections, sexual practices and pathways of transmission. The description of those afflicted as occupying the opposing moral poles of “innocent” or “guilty” constructs the disease as a mirror of personal character and hints at the worrying possibility of both moral and biological contagion. Dawson does not explain how he assigned guilt and innocence between the sexual partners, but the contemporary understandings of sexuality can provide an indication. Women, especially wives, were most often portrayed as innocent and sexually passive in relation to male sexuality and, as such, were likely to be the innocents to which Dawson refers. However, as Bland notes, the sexual double standard of the time meant that women, paradoxically, could also be considered impure and sexually corrupting. Children infected with venereal disease during birth were also viewed as innocent parties. Rochdale’s Medical Officer of Health describes in his 1924 Report that “many of these [infected] children that survive birth are to be found in our children’s hospitals. The trained eye knows them as the innocents, bearing the iniquities of their fathers.” This suggests that men are seen as the parties to sex having real sexual agency and responsibility and consequently, the mother, although party to the sexual act, was beyond reproach. Dawson believed that the “guilty” — the sexual dissidents — were actually a problematic minority. He claimed there were “ten times as many innocent people suffering through the disease as guilty.” Dawson’s assertion here shows us that venereal disease was not just a way to assign moral failure to individuals, moreover, it was also a way for health and governing officials to adjudicate guilt or innocence in a complex moral-epidemiological calculus. Dawson noted that the “great majority sinned in ignorance” and needed instruction in order to be able to “detect this enemy which was lying in ambush.” This construction served to suggest that there was a glimmer of hope for the town’s health. In styling the disease as partially having its origins in a small group of people acting in ignorance, Dawson painted a picture of the possibility of change. He also paved the way for education as a suitable cure.

Davidson has found that in twentieth-century Scotland the burden of guilt for the continuing incidence of venereal disease was indeed placed heavily upon a sub-culture of sexual offenders. The “defaulter,” a person who failed to complete a course of treatment and thus remained infectious, was a notable problem. Similarly, in Rochdale, little sympathy was reserved for those who were part of this faction; they were referred to damningly in a public education lecture as “inhuman figures who returned to their filth.” Alderman Dawson reiterated the strength of local disapproval for the defaulter in his 1934 public address on venereal disease. He claimed that he had “no words strong enough to express his contempt of those who knowingly handed on the disease to someone else.” Clearly, these figures were seen as simultaneously inhuman and ignorant. The Medical Officer of Health noted that “individuals who ceased to attend before cure is established demonstrate that they do not realise the seriousness of their condition.” In 1932, to address this, a system of following up defaulters was established at the Rochdale venereal disease clinic. This was not yet a procedure as advanced as contact tracing, but a system of simple reminders in the form of a written request to return to the clinic to complete treatment. Here once again, we see gendered notions of sexual responsibility since that year, the clinic sent out reminder letters to eighty-two male patients. These resulted in “the return of the delinquent in thirty-two cases.” This statement from Rochdale’s Medical Officer of Health’s Annual Report indicates that those patients to whom the clinic had to send reminders were considered to be depraved. These questions of behavior and moral code can be used to make an important point here akin to Brown’s notion of political obligation. The moral choice facing Rochdale’s citizenry was not simply “stay celibate,” it was “don’t spread disease.” The fact that officials considered it immoral to spread disease knowingly is subtly different to “anti-sex” sentiments or notions of the immorality of having sex.
However, any success in reminding those who had not completed their treatment to return to the clinic was overshadowed in Rochdale by “the only person we can’t cure.” In other words, the sum of all public health fears: “the Fool or the Knave who won’t attend the clinic.” These characterizations suggest that infected persons who failed to seek treatment were considered to be stupid and, at worst, irresponsible since they continued to pose a threat to society at large. Importantly, this figure of the “fool” or “knave” is not assigned a gender in any official descriptions of the problem in Rochdale. Although, given the clinic’s procedure of contacting male patients to return to complete treatment, one can suggest that the “fool” is probably paradigmatically male. This stands in contrast to the identification in other studies of gendered dangerous sexualities. For instance, the figure of the amateur prostitute—a generalized stereotypical image of female sexuality—has featured heavily elsewhere in the venereal disease historiography. Given that most moral panics about venereal disease have some focus on women and female prostitutes, the absence of concern in this register in Rochdale is noteworthy. Perhaps this absence is further evidence for the limited conceptualization of sexual practices and sexuality by officials in Rochdale. The discursive focus on marital sexual relations seen in the Health Week disease prevention literature, even during what amounted to a time of greater disclosure about sex, suggests the attempt to inculcate a modern and more open outlook was only partially successful. Perhaps in 1932 the cultural climate in Rochdale was stubbornly conservative, not yet forgiving enough to publicly discuss sexual relations that were not between husband and wife, and women who earned money from sex. That said, the causes of the venereal disease problem in the town were considered in a multi-faceted way with individual choice, circumstances, context, and to a lesser extent, gender acknowledged in official accounts.

The “mistaken policy of secretiveness” and the epistemology of ignorance

In 1930, Rochdale’s Medical Officer of Health, Dr Topping, noted in his Annual Report that the problem of venereal disease in Rochdale was caused by a “mistaken policy of secretiveness in the town” in relation to sexual matters and sexual health. Hall has argued that the characteristic British squeamishness toward manifestations of sexuality in the late nineteenth century assumed that venereal diseases were too disgusting a subject for discussion, and there existed a consequent reluctance to recognize them as a problem. Topping indicates that similar recoil from such matters occurred in Rochdale. He noted in 1930 that “owing to its unsavoury nature, the venereal disease problem is apt to be kept in the background and treated as the Cinderella of the Public Health Family.” Here, in personifying the disease as Cinderella, Topping indicates the way in which the problem had been overlooked compared with other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis. The Rochdale Observer also hinted at this in 1932, noting that “in the past it was considered vulgar to discuss the human body.” This amounts to what Tuana has termed an “epistemology of ignorance.” Such ignorance is not a simple lack, but a state that is constructed and maintained. Clearly, the unpalatable nature of venereal infection created a need for the matter to be hidden: the spillage of the sexual into everyday public life seemed transgressive.

For geographers, this spatial segregation is fascinating and the ways in which sexual ignorance and silence can be produced in and by space demand further attention. One of the most important and interesting divisions of political geography—the distinction between the public and private—is of considerable importance in this process. Deeply rooted in North American and British culture and enshrined in law, the division structurally differentiates personal life from work, politics, and the public sphere. Whilst there is literature in both history and geography that complicates this simple division, the conceptual separation does carry out important conceptual and cultural work. Duncan notes that a private sphere of domestic embodied activities such as sexuality and the family is demarcated and isolated from an allegedly disembodied political
sphere that is predominantly located in public space. Mort has suggested that this gives sexuality an “extra political” status. It is likely, as Mort contends, that the correlation of the sexual with the personal was a key factor in the local non-interventionist and secretive stance toward sexual health. However, the private nature of sexuality and sexual matters is actually something of an illusion, as Duncan has argued, and the paper now turns to the way in which, in Rochdale, the public sphere underwent a process of sexualization.

The “modern outlook”: a new public discourse on sex

1932 saw change in the politics of sex and sexual health in Rochdale. Topping’s report that year as Medical Officer of Health was a trenchant critique of the current policy on venereal disease and what he called “sex matters.” Topping felt that the town’s venereal disease problem had not been publicly addressed by his own public health agency. Rather imaginatively, he observed that the local approach was “comparable to the device of the fleeing ostrich (which obviously does this inan bird very little good) and is not worthy of an enlightened population.” In fact, such a policy of denial seems to be typical of British towns; Hall has suggested that the British approach to venereal diseases can be characterized as a reluctance to engage with the issue. Yet, the way in which sexuality was handled officially in Britain was changing. Mort and Weeks have argued, separately, that sexuality became more of a public matter because of broader cultural and economic changes. These include the decline of family size, a rise in real wages and the growth of new consumer markets. However, Worboys cites new concerns for families, children and the quality and quantity of the British race from the turn of the twentieth century as the most significant factor. In a Foucauldian ontology, these concerns would be labelled “bio-political” in reference to a politics of life itself which sees the body as an economic and also moral resource. Evidence from Rochdale suggests that these questions of population strength and health were significant factors in the changing approach to sexuality. Topping’s dislike of the current approach was couched in terms of the implications for the population’s health. In his 1930 report, he argued that since venereal diseases had a higher mortality than any other single disease in the town, “the hush-hush policy [on sex questions] is not only puerile but criminal.” In 1932, the Rochdale Observer reported that the Health Week event of 1932, of which tackling VD was a central tenet, was in essence, an “appeal to the public conscience” to “help themselves to become A1 members of an A1 nation.” The entire event was thus seized in an attempt to achieve improvements in population health. Such concerns for the health and strength of the nation have been shown elsewhere to have legitimized the opening up of the private sphere in and the re-territorialization of certain individual practices such as motherhood in both private and public realms. The early twentieth-century discourse of motherhood as a civic duty and women as mothers of the nation justified the opening up of the private sphere to the corrective inspection of the infant welfare movement and state medicine. The new public approach to sex and sexual health in Rochdale, should therefore be seen as another signal instance of bio-political worries about population health provoking the re-territorialization of private matters into the public sphere.

Topping was determined to eradicate past mistakes and develop a new approach to Rochdale’s problem of venereal disease. He believed that the time to cure venereal disease was “before an individual has so far forgotten himself or herself as to run the risk of acquiring it.” Or, in other words, he thought the time to act was before a person had surrendered to their desires. In 1932, he masterminded a “modern outlook”: a new public discourse about sex and sexual health based on “frank education in and discussion of all matters relating to it [sex and venereal disease.]” In the same year, the Rochdale Observer newspaper reported on this transformation, claiming that “all phases of the health problem, personal as well as public, will be treated with a frankness and simplicity to which the popular mind has not been accustomed in the past.”
essence, what was *new* about this era in Rochdale’s sexual health was the willingness to publicly acknowledge the problem of venereal disease in the town and provide more information about sexual health in educational materials. Rochdale was not unique in its new era of sexual disclosure. The turn of the twentieth century had seen the beginnings of a gradual speaking out on matters of sex and venereal disease. Topping’s focus on education as one of the key tenets of his new strategy chimed clearly with national-level recommendations for educational programs. Bland has argued that a combination of medical treatment and moral guidance characterized the British approach to venereal disease in the interwar years. In Rochdale, educational work about health in the form of public exhibitions and educational literature had been carried out for some time, but in 1932 there was an unprecedented focus on venereal disease in the town’s annual Health Week. Plates 1 and 2 show the health education pamphlets used in Rochdale in 1924 and 1932 health education literature.

In 1932, approximately 14,000 households received the Health Week pamphlet. The pamphlet broke the mold of the town’s previous Health Week publications in two ways. Firstly, the booklet took a reflexive tone, openly acknowledging the “mistaken policy of secretiveness” in relation to venereal disease and making reference to a change in the approach to public health—sexual health in particular—in the town. The pamphlet then put the issue of venereal disease firmly in the public domain by providing more explicit and detailed information on venereal disease than any Health Week literature before it. The 1924 publication included a “venereal disease” section but provided only the most general information about syphilis and gonorrhea, with little focus on complications. By contrast, in 1932 the Health Week pamphlet medicalized sexual behavior and transformed it into morbidity. It imparted new information about the complications of venereal disease such as cognitive impairment and blindness and drew attention to the very high mortality rates the diseases caused in the town. The dissemination for the first time of detailed medical information about venereal disease indicated a change in the municipal approach to sexual health. Yet, the pamphlet also had an obviously moral agenda. It argued that there were ten times as many innocent as guilty sufferers. Sauerteig and Davidson have suggested that this moral overtone was crucial since the purpose of sex education and health information in the first half of the twentieth century had been to emphasize the moral aspects of sex. We can go further than this however to identify other rationales underpinning this literature. Bland has suggested that new knowledge was intended to create individuals active in the acquisition and maintenance of their own health. Moreover, in Rochdale, the calls to create an “A1 nation” suggest a focus not only on the improvement of the individual but also working on the health of the nation. In Foucault’s terminology, educating the individual at the level of the “anatomo-politics” of the human body allows individual sexual conduct to interconnect with the “bio-politics” of the population. The presence of these scalar connections in Rochdale is not surprising since venereal diseases have long been political issues where the politics of the human body are made congruent with the politics of population control. We can, though, suggest that Rochdale’s new public discourse about sex was clearly a “vital” discourse in its attempt to manage life and longevity in both individual and population.

Reflecting on Health Week 1932, the *Rochdale Observer* noted the scale of the change that had occurred locally. Referring specifically to what could be termed the new geography of heterosexual morality, the paper noted that “sex problems are freely discussed in private and from platforms without the most sensitive turning a hair.” The paper concluded that “the old coy and restrictive relationship between the sexes—in public at any rate—has given way to the modern freedom, regarded by many as infinitely more healthy.” Here the paper describes a new spatial configuration of heterosexual morality: the sexualization of the public sphere. This process can be seen as a signal example of what Brown has termed the *marbling* of public and private whereby the supposedly separate characteristics of the two spheres are combined.
Plate 1. 1924 Rochdale Health Week Pamphlet. Source: Touchstones Rochdale Archives and Local Studies.
Plate 2. 1932 Rochdale Health Week Pamphlet. Source: Touchstones Rochdale Archives and Local Studies.
The moral economy of good parenting

Over the course of the twentieth century, European societies by and large acknowledged the need for the young to gain knowledge about sexual matters and to be educated about what was perceived to be morally acceptable behavior. In 1932, the Rochdale Observer reported that a “new conception of duty towards children in regard to sex education” had been detected in the town. Medical Officer of Health Dr. Topping explained the rationale for this in his 1932 report. He argued that the “mistaken policy of secretiveness” had made children particularly vulnerable. He noted that “we put up warning signs at the dangerous points in our roads, but we let our sons and daughters venture on the road of life, on which are displayed no warnings, without even a word of advice.” There is little specification of what age group is meant by “children” in these discourses. However, in November 1934 when a three day campaign to combat venereal disease was held in Rochdale, Mr. E. Ford, a lecturer from the Hygiene Council, told audiences that “the time to tell a child was when it asked the question.” This indicates that sex education for the town’s children was not considered to be subject to any formal age restriction and, perhaps surprisingly, concern about the sexualization of children appears to be absent.

Honesty seemed to be the cornerstone of parental duty in sexual pedagogy. This so-called “rising generation” was important for the town’s future and Topping feared that the children and young adults of Rochdale were not receiving positive messages about sex. He observed that “while children are brought up and sent out into the world with no knowledge other than that acquired from their prurient-minded fellows, it is obvious that they will look upon all sex matters as essentially synonymous with shame.” Topping wanted to change the epistemological context in which the young experienced sexual matters. Between 1932 and 1935 in the town concrete efforts were made to change this approach in a campaign called “Telling the Young,” a part of the annual Health Week program. The campaign was an attempt to instil responsibility into parents, calling on them to attend public information lectures and exhibitions and then furnish their children with accurate and positive information about sexual behavior and sexual health. Parents were placed at the forefront of action to reduce the venereal disease in Rochdale; according to the 1932 Health Week pamphlet they “bear the brunt of this fight” against venereal disease.

In 1932, parents in the town were given a new resource to help them fulfill their duties. A moral welfare agency, the Rochdale Mission, provided a library in which there were “medical books suitable for both sexes.” This was considered to be “a valuable agency” by the local press because “in reading, people got a different aspect of questions and guided their actions accordingly.” Education was thought to have a transformative effect in that it could change understanding of health and, in turn, behavior. The rhetoric of getting parents to educate their children was thus an ironic one, in that it required parents a priori to educate themselves. Clearly, reading and personal study were key ways in which an individual became an active agent in the acquisition and maintenance of his or her own health. Education as a way of targeting sexually transmitted disease is a near-ubiquitous trope in public health politics. In a Foucauldian sense, though, it presupposes a certain governmentalized human whose desires can be self-governed.

During Health Week 1932, Miss J. Higson of the Archbishop’s Advisory Board for Preventive and Rescue Work gave a public lecture on moral education in childhood. Higson explained how to talk to children about sex. She argued that parents should deal with a child’s curiosity about sexual matters truthfully and “in such a way as to create a healthy… wonderment in the child’s mind, thereby forestalling all evil knowledge.” Higson also spoke about creating positive meanings of sex, signaling a clear departure from the “hush-hush policy”; she urged parents to tell their children about sexual attraction as a “marvellous story.” In so doing, Higson appeared to pave the way for a more positive and affirmatory sexual culture in the town. This
was reflected in the text of the 1932 Health Week pamphlet which implored parents to “not let another generation grow up thinking sex is a shameful thing.”

However, despite the much-vaunted new and revolutionary public discourse on sex, at the heart of Higson’s message was actually moral conservatism. Her speech was a call for instruction in self-discipline. She argued that children needed “teaching and understanding which makes clear that in the best things in life anything which lessens self-control is entirely against their own happiness and against the best interests of the race.” According to Higson, therefore, the purpose of sex education was, in fact, to equip the young with the willpower to control their sexual urges. We can suggest, then, that this local initiative of bringing “sex matters” into the public (and the public mind) was actually an attempt to firmly establish a particular (hetero)sexual norm. This located sexuality firmly within the domain of the family, marriage, and reproduction, and held restraint as the cornerstone of responsible sexual behavior. Foucault observed that the liberalization of sex and open discussion of sex was actually part of a modern project of regulation for state ends. Indeed, the purpose of this sexual discipline, as Higson pointed out, was the interests of the population or the race. Thus, the educational and disciplinary work carried out by parents in the private sphere of the home rendered the family and the private realm an important site of what could be termed “affective” social and sexual discipline. In Foucauldian lexicon, the parents had become a bio-political tool; the bodies of parents and children were moral resources helping to safeguard the health of the nation.

The 1932 Health Week pamphlet firmly pressed upon parents their responsibilities in this regard, claiming that “it is our duty to tell our children about sex and their origin.” In the health promotion literature, these duties often were cast explicitly within the framework of citizenship. For instance, the Rochdale Observer noted that Health Week intended to “arouse the practical interest of the individual citizen in the cultivation of his own and his family’s health by improved habits and by a recognition of personal responsibility.” The 1932 Health Week pamphlet keyed into the same theme, but more succinctly in its call to “enlist the personal and collective co-operation of citizenship” in the borough. The education of the young in sexual matters is recognized as having been a vital public arena for the negotiation of citizenship. We can, therefore, see the establishment of new parental responsibilities for education of the young as a new way of exploring not only the changing relationship between private and public but also, the connections between the individual and the nation. In so doing, we are highlighting the changing political obligations, as Brown terms them, of sexual citizens. The Rochdale Observer noted that some parents “realise[d] their obligations.” This demonstrates that Rochdale’s new sexual morality was an alliance between the officials of the state such as the Medical Officer of Health, voluntary organizations, and parents. This is another example of what can be termed “civic parenthood,” where parents and various agencies take an interest in the life and welfare of children.

Conclusion

In 1932 the Rochdale Observer reflected on changing sexual mores in the town. It noted that “times have changed, and with them our way of looking at things.” Health Week’s public education lectures that year had been “remarkably frank on topics which a decade or two ago were taboo in respectable company.” This attempt to adjust sexual attitudes reminds us that sexuality and sexual behaviors are not trans-historical but are socially constructed. As Hubbard has hinted, investigation into sexual pedagogy is worthwhile since it sheds light on the taxonomy by which normal and abnormal sexual behavior is defined. This paper has demonstrated the way in which a new regime of public sexual education was actually quite limited in the information it provided to the people of Rochdale. Sexual pedagogy from health officials prioritized inculcating
the self-discipline of sexual desire and ranged in tone from anti-sex to preaching responsible sexual behavior. In effect, it served only to enshrine the singular heterosexual norm of marital sexual relations in Rochdale. The primacy of heterosexual marriage in Rochdale’s sexual health education literature is evidence for the moral agenda at the heart of the town’s public health work, and furthermore it indicates little acceptance of a multiplicity of sexual relations, even within the category of heterosexual.

Of course, this rethinking of the subjective meaning of (hetero)sexuality in Rochdale also led to the sexual re-ordering of space. The “mistaken policy of secretiveness” which sought to privatize heterosexuality and sexual health was overtaken by “a new sex morality”: a new regime of public sexual discourse and education. The Rochdale archive indicates that bio-political concerns about the health and strength of the population provoked this re-territorialization of sexual matters into the public sphere. Uncoupled from its association with the private sphere, the public heterosexuality was a new tool to safeguard not only individual health but the strength of the nation. The main intention of educational work in the public sphere was for parents to acquire knowledge and pass it on to their children in the private sphere of the home and family. The Rochdale Observer drew attention to a “growing sense of citizen responsibility” in the town in 1932 which indicated that parental obligation was firmly couched in terms of citizenship duties to the nation. The changes in public and private life brought about by the articulation of an avowedly public heterosexual culture reconfigured the body politics of civic participation as parental work in the private sphere counted also as a form of civic parenthood for the nation. Moreover, the private sphere of home and family was co-opted as a site of social and sexual discipline as a part of the bio-political project of safeguarding population health.

These findings indicate that focusing on the political effects of venereal disease is a worthwhile mechanism for the investigation of the historical geography of (hetero)sexuality. The significance of the Rochdale case study in this regard is as a signal instance of the private nature of (hetero)sexuality as concurrently normative and illusory. As such, it raises several questions for future research. Exploration of the historical justifications for medical and social interventions into the private sphere would shed further light on the connections between the sites and scales of sexual politics, especially those of the body, the nation, and also the relationship between the citizen, health, and nation. Geographers of sexuality must also continue to address the significance of the relationship between public and private; the ways in which these realms marble; and those categories, behaviors, and concepts which can unsettle the divide. This paper has also indicated the way in which the study of biomedical authority can be used to shed light on the extent and consequences of the medicalization of sexual behavior. Perhaps, therefore, the most important area of investigation which follows on from this work could be to augment existing research into the relationship between changing sexual mores and major therapeutic advances in the treatment of sexually transmitted infections with local case studies.

NOTES


Del Casino Jr., “Health,” 40.

Ibid.


The post of local Medical Officer of Health (MOH) emerged in the 1840s as part of the sanitary movement in the UK which sought to control the spread of infectious disease. By the first decades of the twentieth century, the local MOH had a significant role in managing and coordinating local healthcare provision. MOHs oversaw state maternal and infant welfare programs channeled through local government, carried out medical checks on school children and coordinated healthcare provision for infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and venereal disease. The MOH’s duties also extended to environmental concerns such as pest control and food safety. Despite the centralization of healthcare provision at the national level in 1919 in the form of the new Ministry of Health, MOHs retained a considerable degree of autonomy and power at the local level, choosing whether to enact, ignore or alter healthcare legislations. For the period under consideration, 1920-35, the structure and organization of Rochdale’s public health services were typical, with the town’s local MOH exercising local leadership and discretion on both national and local health agendas. On the structure and organization of public health governance in the UK in the early twentieth century, see: John Welshman, “The Medical Officer of Health in England and Wales, 1900-1974: watchdog or lapdog?” Journal of Public Health Medicine 19 (1997): 1095-1105; Jane Lewis, What Price Community Medicine: The Philosophy, Practice and Politics of Public Health Since 1919 (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1986); Roger Cooter and John Pickstone, eds., Companion to Medicine in the Twentieth Century (London: Routledge, 2003).

Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.

16 Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.


20 The following collections were accessed at Touchstones Rochdale: Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Reports 1900-1940; Health Week Collections RH621.56 and RH621.56 (8895).

21 Rochdale’s venereal disease problem, affecting as it did in 1920 around 0.41% of the town’s population was at a virtually identical level to rates of venereal disease across England and Wales as a whole. In 1920, there were 200,000 new cases of venereal disease in England and Wales (population 37,524,000) representing 0.533% of the population.

22 Brandt, “AIDS in Historical Perspective,” 368.


24 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.

25 This is evident from Rochdale’s Medical Officer of Health Reports, 1920-1935.

26 Davidson, “Venereal Disease,” 292.

27 Del Casino Jr., “Health,” 47.

28 Davidson, Dangerous Liaisons.

29 Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 This echoes Foucault’s figure of the Malthusian couple, a rhetorical device which he argued conveyed the message that intercourse which did not follow the norm would harm sexual partners and society. See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction (London: Vintage, 1990).

34 Brandt, “AIDS in Historical Perspective,” 368.


41 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1924.


43 Ibid.
Davidson, “Venereal Disease,” 274. Little detail on the treatment of venereal diseases is provided in the Rochdale Medical Officer of Health reports. However, in 1934, the Report states that courses designed for the treatment of acquired adult syphilis vary from 26 to 48 weeks in duration for cases which come for treatment within the first year of infection. All Medical Officer of Health Reports for the period under consideration state the availability of arsено-benzol compounds free of charge for practitioners to prescribe to patients.


Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.


Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.

See in particular: Bland, “‘Cleansing the Portals of Life’: The Venereal Disease Campaign in the early Twentieth Century,” 192-208; Davidson, Dangerous Liaisons.

Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932. Topping was, of course, confirming Foucault’s later thesis about an explosion of discourse about sex. See Foucault, The History of Sexuality.

Lesley Hall, “Venereal Diseases and Society in Britain, from the Contagious Diseases Acts to the National Health Service,” in Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870, eds. Roger Davidson and Lesley Hall (London: Routledge, 2001), 120.

Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1930.

On the overlooked character of sexual diseases in the UK during the period under investigation, see Lesley Hall, “‘The Cinderella of Medicine’: Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” Genitourinary Medicine 69 (1993): 314-319.


Mort, Dangerous Sexualities, 202.

Ibid.

capitalist societies. It confronts the public consequences of private acts quite publicly (e.g. venereal disease) but also economic acts such as food safety and environmental issues. I am grateful to Michael Brown for this point.

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66 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.
70 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.
73 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.
74 Ibid.
75 Rochdale Observer, Feb. 20, 1932.
76 Bland has argued that the catalyst for this process was the women’s movement and feminists who campaigned against venereal disease, see Bland, “Cleansing,” 194.
79 See Sauerteig and Davidson, “Shaping.”
84 Rochdale Observer, Feb. 27, 1932
88 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.
89 Rochdale Observer, Nov. 7, 1934. The Hygiene Council (formerly The National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases until it became the British Social Hygiene Council in 1925) had a significant public role in creating policy on venereal disease, the provision of facilities for its treatment, and public health education about venereal disease. It was a leading provider of sex education and teacher training for this purpose.
91 Rochdale Medical Officer of Health Report, 1932.
92 Foucault has argued that the family was the perfect locus for the deployment of disciplinary power with respect to sexuality. Duschinsky and Rocha note that Foucault’s positioning of the family as the anchor point for sexuality meant that the family functioned as the eyes, ears and hands of educationalists, medical professionals, and ultimately the state. See Robbie Duschinsky and Leon Antonio Rocha, “The Problem of the Family in Foucault’s Work,” in Foucault, the Family and Politics, eds. Robbie Duschinsky and Leon Antonio Rocha (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 63-81.
93 Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.
94 *Rochdale Observer*, Feb. 27, 1932
95 Ibid.
97 “Rochdale Health Week and Its Purpose,” *Rochdale Observer*, Feb. 20, 1932
98 Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.
100 See Sauerteig and Davidson, “Shaping” on the disciplinary task of sex education of the young.
101 See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.
102 Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.
103 “Rochdale Health Week and Its Purpose,” *Rochdale Observer*, Feb. 20, 1932
104 Rochdale Health Week pamphlet, 1932.
105 Sauerteig and Davidson, “Shaping,” 5.
109 Ibid.
110 Hubbard, “Desire/Disgust.”
111 “Rochdale Health Week and Its Purpose,” *Rochdale Observer*, Feb. 20, 1932
112 Davidson and Hall, *Sex, Sin and Suffering*.
113 See in particular, Brandt, “AIDS in Historical Perspective.”
Queering Discourses of Urban Decline: Representing Montréal’s Post-World War II “Lower Main”

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I examine how urban redevelopment and the regulation of public spaces in Montréal in the 1960s transformed the representations of the Lower Main, the city’s historic red-light and entertainment district. I argue that although the Lower Main had long been central to anti-urban discourses regarding heterosexual prostitution, by the 1960s the increased regulation of the city’s queer and trans populations changed its meaning as a representation of the inner city in decline. A central objective is to use this case study to queer discourses of urban decline by considering how heteronormativity was involved in the construction of the city’s sexual margins in the post-World War II period. A related objective is to call into question the narrative of “decline” itself by providing one example of the opportunities it created for queer place-making.

Keywords: urban decline, the post-World War II city, queer populations, Montréal, St-Laurent Boulevard

Introduction

From San Francisco’s Tenderloin to New York City’s Times Square, post-World War II urban restructuring altered the economies, entertainments, and clienteles of many North American inner-city entertainment districts. In Montréal, the strip of cabarets, restaurants, and taverns located at the corner of Boulevard St-Laurent and Rue Ste-Catherine (“The Lower Main”) underwent this process. As the former bright lights facade of Montréal’s entrenched residential red-light district, the area had a reputation for “vice” that dated back to the late nineteenth century. By the late 1950s, however, urban restructuring, municipal reform politics, and moral regulation altered how the Lower Main was represented in the expanding metropolitan, entertainment, and sensationalist presses. Predictably, the changing fortunes of the Lower Main were generally associated with increases in poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, and drug use. However, its so-called decline was also represented through images of what were considered contentious “new” gender identities and sexualities: gay men were frequenting the Lower Main’s taverns, hotels, and cinemas; b-girls and sex workers of both sexes were working inside of its nightclubs; gays and lesbians were more visible among its working-class clientele; and its stages increasingly featured drag performances and the striptease. The apparent decline of the district had been so dramatic by the early 1970s that night club owners and booking agents told the press that the Lower Main was “dead,” as signified by the fact that the only remaining entertainment attraction of the district were les travestis, the drag performers.

In many ways, this representation of the Lower Main was a continuation of the discourses that had long depicted the area as an “immoral region,” a “necessary” location to accommodate...
sexual transgressions that were the source of public fascination and desire as well as abjection and disgust. However, this particular representation naturalized the area’s decline through the bodies of *les travestis* whose increased prominence on the stages of the Lower Main signaled the end point in a long period of decentralization, a process that had emptied the area of its “respectable” customers and left it to be appropriated by others. While this representation was certainly part of shifting class geographies that repositioned the inner city in relation to the expanding suburbs and the downtown, a critical reading suggests important links between discourses of inner-city decline and shifting gender and sexual norms in the post-World War II era. As Hubbard has argued, geographies of heteronormativity are constructed through a moral dichotomy between those landscapes that support idealized family life and zones of the city that are designated through the processes of urban governance as the proper location for “immoral” non-normative sexual behaviors. During periods of urban redevelopment and civic betterment, moral panics create pressure to relocate or even cleanse the city of its immoral regions making such regions symbolic locations through which to rework the heteronormativity of urban space. In the post-World War II period, the Lower Main was one such site. Represented in the press through crime reporting, entertainment news, and portraits of the area’s “decline,” moral panic regarding the transformation of this binary ultimately rendered it a duplicitous and ambiguous
space for heteronormativities. The production of its decline, the governance of its morality, and
the corresponding media spectacularization of its non-normative genders and sexualities made
the Lower Main symbolically central to the reworking of local heteronormativities in urban space.

In this paper, I use a case study of the Lower Main to explore the relationships between
the post-World War II discourses of urban decline and the emerging representations of queer
populations in the spatial discourses shaping North American cities. Drawing on queer
geography, I highlight the heteronormativity of these discourses and analyze how they served
to naturalize urban restructuring by locating non-normative forms of sexual and gender
embodiment within the declining inner city. I examine how post-World War II practices of urban
governance—including urban renewal, reform politics, and policing—intersected to transform
popular representations the Lower Main within Montréal’s imagined geographies. In contrast
with research that treats sex work, homosexuality, and transsexuality separately, the focus here is
on the intersection and aggregation of these identities in representations of one place. I begin by
reading the links between inner-city decline in the post-World War II period and queer histories,
advancing a framework for reading discourses of urban decline in the media. The case study
has three sections: it begins by situating the Lower Main within Montréal’s urban restructuring
in the 1950s and 1960s; next, newspaper clippings collections are used to describe the increased
regulation of this space by authorities; finally, I explore how these representations contributed to
the process of redefining heteronormativities by representing the Lower Main as a duplicitous
nocturnal queer space. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of this case study for the study
of heteronormativity, urban redevelopment and queer populations in the post-World War II city.

Queering discourses of urban decline

In the early 1990s, Robert Beauregard’s Voices of Decline contributed to the “discursive
turn” in urban geography by drawing attention to the role played by representations in the
process of restructuring post-World War II American cities. Focusing on the rhetoric embedded
in interpretations of urban decline, Beauregard argued that such discourses served a purpose:
to reconcile American national ambivalence about the twentieth-century city. In the post-World
War II period specifically, representations of decline naturalized uneven urban development
through a relational spatial imaginary that celebrated the modernization of the city by isolating
and spectacularizing areas of “urban decay” created by disinvestment. Discourses that centered
on areas of increased impoverishment and ghettoization in the inner city served to spatially fix
mainstream anxieties about the deepening contradictions of capitalist urbanism and racialized
inequalities in the declining inner city. As suburbs and central business districts expanded, societal
responsibility for the conditions in America’s inner-city areas could be resolved through a moral
discourse that scorned the populations who could not escape by repeatedly representing them
as a “concern” and by separating areas of decline from the modern promise of the rest of the city.

Beauregard argued that representations play an important role in the process of reconciling
the contradictions of capitalist urbanism, an argument that has been influential among urban
scholars. However, despite his specific argument that discourses of decline have a “moral”
component, geographers of sexualities have yet to consider its implications for the study of
sexualities in post-World War II cities. Granted, for Beauregard, the “moral” concern expressed
through discourses of decline is one of class consciousness, of “shared obligations in an unjust
society,” the moral dilemma of white middle-class suburbanites turning their backs on the city
and “letting” it decline. However, he argues that a complimentary aspect of this discourse was
to build on preexisting anti-urban sentiment by repositioning the city as a place that is not just
unsuitable for white, middle-class family life but also as “undesirable”: if suburbanites were
not going to live in the city and be responsible for its regeneration it had to be because it was
undeserving and incompatible with their ideals of how and where to live. Given that these post-World War II ideals re-centered on the reproduction of the nuclear family, it should follow that normative proscriptions about heterosexuality would have been part of the process of isolating and spectacularizing the inner city. However, while Beauregard skillfully demonstrates how representations of impoverishment and racialized ghettoization served to justify this turning away from the city, representations of sexualities are absent from his analysis.

While historical geographers have yet to explore the potential of Beauregard’s argument for the study of queer geographies of the post-World War II city, there are clearly links between the types of power relations that he traces and evidence from the historical literature on queer sexualities in North American cities. Histories of sexuality in the post-World War II period demonstrate that not only was heterosexuality reinvented through the production of a normative binary between heterosexual and homosexual, but also notably through the reproduction of “homosexual panic” that was the signature of Cold War concerns about national security in both the United States and Canada. As John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman argue, combined with the increased visibility of bars and the stability of cruising grounds for gay men in this period, homosexual panic also led to increased police surveillance and “unpredictable, brutal crackdowns” on gay and lesbian spaces. Moreover, urban histories of emerging gay, lesbian, and trans communities in the post-WWII era demonstrate that pockets of the “decaying” inner city became, on an ontological level, spatial resources for queer communities in the making. Indeed, the 1950s and 1960s represent a twenty-year period in which pre-liberation gay, lesbian, and trans populations in the urban West built an increasingly visible nightlife by appropriating space in the bars, taverns, hotels, and night clubs of “declining” inner-city entertainment districts.

The diversity of sexual and gender identities that made these inner-city areas central to discourses of decline have also been neglected in urban geographies of sexualities. While the sub-discipline essentially began with the study of how gay men regenerated “discarded” residential neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s, the spaces of pre-liberation gay, lesbian, and trans populations have yet to be analyzed in relation to broader urban processes. One major reason for this absence is the fact that most such research has focused on gay village formation within the context of the post-industrial or neo-liberal city after the 1970s. When pre-liberation spaces do appear in gay and lesbian urban studies, they serve as a “starting point” in the long narrative of claiming gay space or making a “gay village.” For example, modeling gay village evolution in England, Collins has argued that “locations of sexual and legal liminal activities and behaviour” located in urban areas “in decline” provided the “pre-conditions” for gay village formation. Drawing primarily on the examples of London’s Soho and Manchester’s Canal Street, he summarizes the key features of such sites:

1. Twilight/marginal area showing extensive physical urban decay
2. Presence of street-based and/or near off-street (predominantly heterosexual) prostitution
3. Significant stock of vacant premises
4. Low property prices/rental values
5. Typical presence of at least one gay licensed public house

Collins suggests that it was the liminality of aging bright-lights and dismantled red-light districts that created the “ecological” pre-conditions for the production of queer spaces in the city. However, the links between discourses of urban decline, place-making, and the diversity of sexualities located within such sites remain unexplored.

Beyond their location within the “ecology” of the post-World War II city, the place-making practices of the increasingly visible gay, lesbian, and trans populations in the 1950s and 1960s
were intimately wrapped up in the production and representation of the inner city as a place in decline. On the one hand, the outward movement of “respectable” middle-class families produced narratives of decline that stressed the “emptiness” of the inner city, revealing a blindness to the place-making activities of queer and other populations. Bryant Simons’s research on the rise and fall of a gay economy created along Atlantic City’s New York Avenue from the early 1950s onwards attempts to provide a counter-narrative. Using the example of the appropriation of bars and hotels by gay white men in this period, Simons argues: “Urban decline is not, and never was, a one way street. While some people were driving out of town, never to come back, others were moving into the houses and apartments they had abandoned. . . . Across the country, people of color and lesbians and gay men moved into devalued, deserted space and made them into new spaces.”

On the other hand, queer populations sometimes figured as representations of the decline in precisely the same kinds of planning texts that Beauregard analyzed. For example, in his study of lesbian and gay Philadelphia in the post-World War II era, Marc Stein provides a cogent discussion of the representation of gay men in discourses of urban decline using the example of Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Discussing what makes a vibrant urban park, Jacobs celebrated the constant use of Rittenhouse Square by diverse populations and contrasted it with the emptiness and decay of Washington Square, a public space appropriated by gay men. Stein argues that this dichotomy between normative heterosexuality and queer sexualities implicates narratives of urban decline:

> Good park, bad park. Mothers, children, shoppers, residents, employees, and young people on dates in Rittenhouse Square, a veritable showcase of the family, heterosexuality, capitalism, and consumer culture. Perverts in Washington Square, a den of depravity. The busy schedule of work and leisure in the West. The history of abandonment, invasion by perverts, and then a vacuum in the East. The “life” and “death” of great American cities. Sexual perversion functions here as a symptom, source and sign of urban disaster.

Each of these texts ask us to consider interrelated aspects of the moral discourses surrounding urban decline: if no one was in the empty city, it could be disregarded and ignored, only surreptitiously creating the opportunity for “others” to appropriate it; but the representation of queer populations could also be used to reinforce the idea that the city was deserving of abandonment because it was so “pervasive.”

While references to queer populations were probably rare in urban planning texts, by the 1960s they were anything but invisible in more popular discourses emanating from the growing media coverage of the inner city in decline. Over the course of this period, queer populations developed a very particular relationship with the media that has been well-documented by historians. Indeed, some of the first comprehensive histories of the making of gay and lesbian communities have stressed the importance of the rejection of negative stereotypes in the press and of police repression in bars as the catalysts for the gay and lesbian social movements. In the pages of the press, reports on the changing entertainments of the city at night, the policing of sexual morality, and the inner city’s decline co-existed and overlapped. Drawing on medical and sociological stereotypes, the mainstream and especially the tabloid and entertainment presses, provided exposés on the overlapping worlds of sex work, homosexuality, and transsexuality with the purpose of enticing readers into an “unknown world” that revolved around entertainment districts in the inner city. A source of great “moral” concern about changing gender and sexual norms, the populations that appropriated these spaces were also subject to constant police surveillance, often resulting in raids and mass arrests that were reported in the press and linked to discourses of “civic betterment.”
When the socio-sexual issues surrounding such policing were debated in the press, they discursively produced what Stein has called "raiding representations": media reports that legitimized the various political actors involved in urban governance by telling stories of how they were working to rid the empty city of its remaining vices. This process produced a complex set of representations of populations and places that could be read in multiple ways: viewed through a normative lens, they were obviously morality tales in which those who transgressed norms were disciplined and exposed; however, interpreted from a queer perspective, they also provided alternative information about the queer social worlds emerging in the declining inner city. Queering discourses of urban decline, therefore, not only involves reading alternative—often considered ephemeral—sources, but also critical engagement with the cartographies that can be read through the heteronormative discourses surrounding the social worlds of the declining inner city.

The following analysis, therefore, is an attempt to read these cartographies through a case study of the shifting representations of the Lower Main as an “immoral region” in the post-World War II period. To read these representations, two collections of newspaper clippings were consulted. First, I read the clippings files at the Archives de la Ville de Montréal, which are organized by theme and by street address. This collection primarily includes articles from the metropolitan French and English language dailies, but also some articles collected from more minor weekly and entertainment papers. Clippings for the Lower Main were selected from the address files and from thematic collections on policing, morality, prostitution, nightclubs, and entertainment. Secondly, I consulted the Dossiers de Presse, 1880-1984 collection at the Archives gaies du Québec. This collection was primarily created from clippings collected by queer newspaper readers in Québec who later donated their collections to the archives. It is a source of both mainstream and alternative publications, with a larger proportion of its clippings coming from tabloid, alternative, and entertainment papers. Articles from this collection were selected when they referenced locations related to the Lower Main during the time period.

Producing the Lower Main’s decline

Over the course of the twentieth century, Boulevard St-Laurent, popularly called “the Main,” played an important role in Montréal’s socio-cultural geography. It served as the city’s primary north-south commercial artery and remains the east-west dividing line for civic addresses. By the early twentieth century, it was imagined as an interstitial space, the borderline between the Anglo-capitalist city in the West and the more working-class French-Catholic parishes of the city’s East End, where populations and activities not easily assigned to either side created commercial and social worlds. Occupying this interstitial location, the Main became Montréal’s “corridor of immigration,” signified today by the remaining “ethnic” shops in the area to the north of the Lower Main and the historic “Chinatown” to its south. While the Lower Main was part of these histories, by the early twentieth century it was clearly developing another vocation: surrounded by the city’s growing and well-protected residential red-light district and with a concentration of theaters, small hotels, and licensed establishments, it developed into a bright-lights entertainment district that had a reputation for “vice.” By the early 1950s, attempts to dismantle the red-light district, competition from the new entertainments of the downtown core, and urban redevelopment began to transform the Lower Main into place that resembled Collins’s “precursors” to gay village formation: with its suggestive entertainments and overt public prostitution, it was a bright-lights district “in decline.”

A combination of the outward movement of inner-city, working-class families and urban redevelopment had increased the social and sexual marginality of the populations and activities of the area by the 1960s. Although in Canada suburbanization in this period was less dramatic,
like most other North American metropolitan areas Montréal did experience significant urban expansion, modernization, and redevelopment in these decades.\textsuperscript{32} Between 1941 and 1961, the population of Greater Montréal grew by seventy percent (from 1,618,000 to 2,757,000).\textsuperscript{33} This population increase was due initially to the post-war baby boom, but the most rapid growth would come in the 1960s as rural-to-urban migration and immigration intensified.\textsuperscript{34} Population growth, rising incomes, and a demand for housing contributed to the outward expansion of the city. As elsewhere, the decentralization process repositioned the inner city in important ways.

Those areas directly adjacent to the central business district were now seen as sites for its expansion, empty spaces where the old “blighted” neighborhoods and businesses could be replaced by large high-rise office, government, and modern apartment complexes. It was also central to plans to connect the expanding downtown core to the city’s outer edges through freeway construction and the widening of primary arteries. Built for Expo 67, the new subway system would also require significant space in inner-city areas.

All of these forces impacted the Lower Main and its surrounding neighborhood (the St-Louis and St-Laurent districts) in the post-war period (Figure 2). Between 1954 and 1955, the widening of a major artery (Dorchester Street) that ran through the middle of the district meant the loss of housing and, directly on the Lower Main, the loss of historic entertainment venues such as the Roxy Theatre. In the late 1960s, land further south was expropriated to build an open-air tunnel for the new Ville Marie Expressway, an underground highway connecting the east and west parts of the modernizing downtown core. These expropriations meant the loss of blocks of adjacent housing and a full block of the commerce on either side of the Lower Main, separating it from the old business district to the south. By the late 1950s, the area to its west had been slated for the eastward expansion of the downtown core. To attract investment eastward, the City began expropriating land to build Place des Arts, a new metropolitan arts complex that opened in 1963. It eliminated blocks of the neighborhood just west of the Lower Main. Close to its intersection with the newly revamped Dorchester Street, Hydro Québec, the provincial electric company, expropriated land in order to begin building its headquarters in 1959. In between, a conglomerate of the cooperative banking movement began expropriations to build a three-hectare office and retail complex, Complexe Desjardins, which began construction in the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{35}

If expanding the downtown core and connecting it to the suburbs with highways was seen as central to making Montréal modern in this period, another component was “decongesting” old inner-city neighborhoods through slum clearance and urban renewal. A 1954 municipal report (Rapport Dozois) detailed the living conditions in the area surrounding the Lower Main, documenting them by taking over 1,300 photographs. Based on this report, the City Council approved a plan to demolish 7.7 hectares of housing to the east of the Lower Main—including much of the housing in the red-light district—to make room for Montréal’s first urban renewal style public housing project, Les Habitations Jeanne-Mance, completed in 1961. Referring to the area, proponents of the project told the press that the city’s worst slums lay at the heart of Montréal and they needed to be rehabilitated in order for the city to progress.\textsuperscript{36} Shortly after it was built, a National Film Board documentary celebrated the contrast between these facilities (with modern kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms; large open rooms; and open spaces and playgrounds for fresh air) and the congested and unsanitary slums of the past.\textsuperscript{37} Not only did this civic betterment project give justification to claims that the neighborhoods surrounding the Lower Main were in decline, it also augmented this decline by accelerating population loss: between 1956 and 1971 the population of the district declined by 156 percent (from 21,229 to 8,290).\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, slum clearance and urban renewal had ultimately enabled officials to finally “put out” the residential red-light district by dismantling what had been its supporting infrastructure since the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{39}
Figure 2. Aerial view of the Lower Main area in the Post-World War II era. Adapted from VM97-3_04_352 (1962), Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Vues aériennes verticales de l’île de Montréal, 1958-1975, VM97-3_04_352. Available at: http://donnees.ville.montreal.qc.ca/dataset/vues-aerienne-de-montreal-1958-1975.

The destruction of the infrastructure of the brothel system also finalized the gradual displacement of sex work onto the streets and into the entertainment establishments along the Lower Main.40 Its taverns, barber shops, and pool halls had long been conduits for the red-light district, but throughout the 1940s and 1950s the cabarets and theaters had been important sites of mainstream heterosexual sociability.41 Popular histories of Montréal in the 1940s and 1950s describe cabarets on the Lower Main, such as the Folies Bergères and Au Faisan Doré, as memorable places that attracted international performers and large socially-mixed audiences.42 As journalist Al Palmer described it, the upper classes, attracted by these first-rate clubs, would come and spend an evening “slumming” on the shady and shoddy atmosphere of the Lower Main.43 Sex work and suggestive entertainments were already an important component of the economy along the Lower Main, but once the cabarets lost their broader audience and the surrounding residential
infrastructure was reduced, it became more centrally integrated into the economy of its cabarets. Burlesque and vaudeville entertainments and live bands gave way to more explicit striptease shows and, due to dwindling entertainment budgets, the use of pre-recorded music. As the Lower Main “declined,” more “respectable” places of heterosexual sociability were concentrated in the larger and more fashionable entertainment district in the downtown core. Although the downtown had many similar vocations, within Montréal’s entertainment and prostitution geographies, the Lower Main was strongly stigmatized along class lines.

The process of “emptying” the districts surrounding the Lower Main and the reworking of the social worlds surrounding its entertainment spaces did lead to the appropriation of this site as a resource for the creation of queer public cultures. As oral histories with gays and lesbians and trans and drag performers in Montréal demonstrate, by the 1960s, the mixed working-class spaces of the Lower Main were increasingly occupied by queer cultures. Moreover, these sites were distinct from the more “respectable” queer public cultures emerging in the downtown core (Figure 3). For example, Namaste’s research shows that trans and drag performers clearly distinguished between the more upper-class clubs of the downtown and those of the Lower Main. The clubs of the Lower Main were places where they socialized and worked as sex workers, but before 1960, they rarely performed here, especially not those performers who were well-known and capable of attracting a sizable audience. Gay geographies also reflect this dichotomy, with forms of more respectable sociability associated with the clubs of the downtown area near the intersection of Peel and Ste-Catherine streets. For some, the Lower Main was a place for slumming, but it was primarily an area where working-class Francophone gay men created public cultures. Here, gay men made use of its cinemas and hotels for sexual encounters, appropriated space in its all-male taverns, and frequented some exclusively gay spaces such as Taverne Altesse and Café Monarch. Gay, lesbian, and trans populations also created social worlds within the broader working-class nightlife culture. For lesbian subcultures in the 1960s, these mixed sites were especially important: barred from taverns as women until 1971 and without any downtown bars until 1968, lesbian public culture in the 1960s was limited to the mixed spaces of the red-light and the East End. At the Blue Sky, the Beret Bleue, and the Rodéo they mixed primarily with gay men. At the Café Canasta and the Casa Loma, their social worlds overlapped with the audiences for the drag shows. In many of these spaces, lesbians were also part of prostitution networks, working both as procurers and as sex workers.

Regulating the Lower Main

Newspaper representations of the people and activities of the Lower Main proliferated during this period of restructuring. Certainly, this sensationalization of the Lower Main can be attributed to the increased competition for the mainstream dailies from the many entertainment and crime tabloid papers (“journaux jaunes” or sensationalist press) that appeared in Montréal after 1945 when the influence of the Catholic Church on the Québec media began to diminish. However, shifts in municipal governance were equally significant. In 1960, Jean Drapeau brought the first organized political party, the Parti Civique (Civic Party), to power at City Hall where he held the Mayor’s seat until 1986. Drapeau had, however, been an influential figure in the municipal arena throughout the 1950s. He had already served as mayor between 1954 and 1957 after gaining political legitimacy as a prosecutor for the Caron Commission, an external inquiry into political corruption at City Hall. This Commission substantiated claims that Montréal’s police force—particularly its Morality Squad—had been protecting organized crime and its interests in gambling and prostitution in the red-light district in the 1940s and 1950s. Although Drapeau would be known as the mayor who “modernized” Montréal—constructing Place des Arts and the subway system as well as hosting the World Exposition in 1967 (Expo 67) and the
1976 Summer Olympics— in the 1950s he, like many North American mayors, built his reputation on a reform platform concerned with ridding the declining inner city of “vice.” Representing the interests of the ascending suburban Francophone petite bourgeoisie, he strove to “clean up” what was considered a “wide-open” town by finally ensuring that the red-light district was destroyed.55 In the 1960s, his Municipal Administration, in conjunction with the Morality Squad and the Québec Liquor Commission, employed a variety of surveillance techniques to control the area, which intensified as Expo 67 approached.

During his first term in office (1954 to 1957) Drapeau had initiated a campaign to enforce the closing hours of the clubs and investigate the health standards of the twenty-five hot-dog stands and quick lunches along the Lower Main. Using existing bylaws, his administration attempted to reduce gambling, nightlife, and entertainment in the area to a minimum.56 Popular histories indicate that this campaign was successful, describing the summer of 1955 as deadly quiet along the Main.57 However, Drapeau’s opposition to the proposed construction of Les Habitations Jeanne-Mance alienated the electorate and it lost him the election in 1957.58 Sarto Fournier’s administration (1957 to 1960) gave organized crime some respite, but in order to maintain legitimacy it staged campaigns to control the Lower Main. In 1958, for example, the police squad was instructed to investigate its nightclubs to ensure that dancers were conforming to the morality code and that minors were not being served alcohol.59 In July 1960, however, an assault of a waiter at the Canasta Café made it clear that organized crime networks still controlled the area.60 This led the Federal Member of Parliament for the riding (Harry Blank of St-Louis) to publically question the security of the Lower Main. He called for a tight clampdown on liquor licensing, arguing that the riding had the most cabaret permits in the Province of Québec.61 By August 1960, journalists reporting on a shooting at the Café Métro compared the Lower Main to the frontier towns of the “Far West.”62 These events delegitimized Fournier and in November of that year Drapeau made a successful bid for reelection.

Back in the mayoral chair, Drapeau began to perform a clampdown on the street’s clubs and cabarets that would continue until the summer of 1967 when Montréal hosted Expo 67.63 Following a serial newspaper exposé on “vice” in Montréal written by Drapeau’s reform ally Pax Plante in the summer of 1961, Drapeau increased the police presence on the street and, in conjunction with the Juvenile Court, made an unsuccessful proposal to make the Lower Main off-limits for children under sixteen years of age.64 His administration also created the Social Security Squad to specifically clamp down on organized crime in this area. In addition, the clubs of the Lower Main were central to specific campaigns to clamp down on nightlife in Montréal in the early 1960s. For example, in December 1961 a Morality Squad campaign to investigate reservoirs of organized crime identified twenty taverns and nightclubs, twelve of which were located along the Lower Main.65 By 1966, as preparations for Expo 67 approached, the administration developed surveillance strategies that specifically targeted the area. The Morality Squad’s visites de vérification (spontaneous police raids) in preparation for Expo began in July 1966 with the Lower Main. The justification for these raids was given by Police Chief Gilbert who argued that these were “cheap nightclubs catering to cheap people doing cheap things.”66 Then, in October 1966, the Mayor ordered an increase in the police presence along the Lower Main.67 The press reported that the police were patrolling the street “four-by-four” at night. Finally, in April 1967, the district attorney for the City issued instructions to taxi drivers not to bring tourists, who would be in Montréal for Expo 67, to specific clubs on the Lower Main.68

Another method used to suppress the Lower Main was restricting or refusing business, alcohol, and dance floor permits and licenses. Between 1960 and 1966, specific clubs along the Lower Main repeatedly had their applications for license renewals rejected. For example, twenty of Montréal’s forty-two night clubs advised by the Executive Committee of the Municipal Council
that their operating permits would not be renewed by the Québec Liquor Board in June 1963 were located in and around this intersection. Moreover, these were the same mixed clubs that were frequented by lesbians and gay men and featured drag, go-go dancer, and striptease shows. The owners of specific clubs of the Lower Main such as the Casbah, the Casa Loma, the Grand National, Le Plateau, Café St-John, and the Rodéo, continually appeared before the Québec Appeals Court throughout this period. These were the clubs known to have a large queer clientele. The owners of the Rodéo, Arlequin aux Deux Masques, and Café St-John, for example, were repeatedly refused multiple permits, including their alcohol permits. The justification for these restrictions was revealed during the appeals process and reported in the press. As the Director of Police, Adrien Robert, stated during appeal procedures in 1964: “I must state, Your Honour . . . that this section at the lower end of St-Laurent Street is an area where morality constitutes a constant problem and that investigations have been made of all the clubs in this district.” That same year, the Café St-John again had its alcohol permit revoked because, as the City’s municipal services director reported, there had recently been “sleazy activities” committed by people who frequent this club.

A careful reading of the press coverage of the pleas of club owners who were attempting to have their licenses renewed in the 1960s demonstrates that heterosexual female prostitution and violence from organized crime were not the only reasons for the suppression of the Lower Main. Certainly, the area’s most dominant images in the metropolitan press in the early 1960s were long established: its sidewalks and businesses were depicted as sites of violence from organized crime as well as places that posed the “danger” of solicitation by sex workers for heterosexual men. In 1966, six years after the clampdown on the Lower Main had begun, the entertainment weekly Le Cabaret ironically warned the female public of these specific dangers on the Lower Main: “Today, the bad guys and the working girls are still on the Main. . . . There are still fights and gangs there, so ladies, do not go down to the Main alone.” Reports of cleanup campaigns, raids, license infractions, and conflicts often led authorities to claim that the Lower Main was an unsuitable place for “ordinary” citizens, suggesting that it was incongruous with a Montréal undergoing modernization and reform. For example, when Drapeau’s administration had returned to power in 1960, he told the press that the Lower Main was the “blackest district in the city,” a place that “fun-seeking suburbanites”—who now supposedly represented Montréal’s “ordinary citizenry”—should avoid. However, this dichotomy between the Lower Main as the city’s “immoral region” and its ordinary citizenry in the suburbs would be further reinforced by newspaper reports of its queer subcultures and activities. As we will see, press coverage of its multiple and overlapping queer worlds demonstrated that the Lower Main was yet to be emptied. Quite the contrary: what remained on the Lower Main challenged not only the city’s morality and modernity, but also its heteronormativity.

Urban decline and the nocturnal queer city

If images of shootings, police raids, and overt public prostitution encouraged “fun-seeking suburbanites” to see the Lower Main as a place that was off-limits, images of the inner workings of the area’s queer social worlds significantly challenged post-World War II heteronormativities. The late 1950s and 1960s were not only a time of modernization and moral reform; this was also a time of homosexual panic in both Canada and the United States. In Montréal, among the first forms of queer visibility of this era were found in the representations of the Lower Main and the night world of its cabarets. As Namaste has shown, advertisements and reviews for drag performances were very visible in the entertainment papers throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Some performers, such as Lana St-Cyr, also ended up in crime reports of the era when the police deemed their shows “indecent.” At other times, drag performers and club workers appeared
in reports on bar raids and permit restrictions. Gays and lesbians also appeared in such crime reports as an undesirable component of the clientele and in reports regarding raids and arrests. However, media coverage of “the third sex” (gays, lesbians, and trans-identified people) was not limited to crime reporting. By the mid-1960s, queer visibility increased when exposés profiled gay and lesbian lifestyles and suggested that these populations were growing in Canada, Québec, and Montréal. By the end of the decade, debates regarding Prime Minister Trudeau’s 1969 Omnibus Bill (Bill C-150), which would decriminalize private homosexual acts in Canada, also turned the media spotlight on gays and lesbians and their spaces in the larger cities. In Montréal, preparations for Expo 67 and debates about a new municipal bylaw (By-Law 3416) that would restrict staff-customer relations in cabarets further increased local public awareness of the queer social worlds developing along the Lower Main.

Overall, the discourse of decline surrounding the Lower Main evoked important but multi-layered distinctions between night and day. For example, in 1956 *Le Petit Journal* published a profile of the area under the headline “The Main wakes up when you go to bed.” However, this diurnal aspect of the narrative of the Lower Main’s decline was not as simple as condemning this space by creating a comparison between morally superior, hardworking people who were in bed early at night and the immoral people who spent their nights on the Lower Main. It was something much more vengeful, more akin to Neil Smith’s arguments about the revanchist reform politics of New York’s Mayor Rudy Giuliani in the 1990s: reform interests, supported by the middle classes, wanted to eradicate the Lower Main from the modern city. Press portraits also reveal a shift towards a more disciplinary discourse that coincided with urban renewal and slum clearance in the area, a type of scorn for the people of the Lower Main that more closely resembled Beauregard’s moral discourse: if ordinary citizens were turning their backs on the Lower Main, it was no wonder because there was increasing evidence that its people were well-deserving of this treatment. For example, readers of a 1940 *MacLean’s Magazine* article were encouraged to see the Lower Main as a harmless but “necessary” entertainment strip frequented by young, transient men—sailors, military recruits, and day laborers—in search of dinner for a dime and a good time on a Saturday night. However, a 1957 portrait of the Lower Main published in the more sensational *Photo-Journal* turned the spotlight on the locals of the Lower Main, distinguishing day and night and linking each to its “pleasures and miseries.” Eight pages of staged photographs and commentary were used to describe the pleasures of the Saturday night visitors (which included groups of unaccompanied young men drinking beer, eating hot dogs, and shooting targets at arcades, or young heterosexual couples dancing and kissing openly in night clubs) and the miseries of “the people of the Lower Main” (including mafia kings, “night birds” or alcoholics, “slum dwellers,” and women walking the streets wearing tight shirts and jeans) who were still there when the next day dawned. The “pleasures” were clearly reserved for the visiting group, while “misery” was the domain of the locals who were trapped in a night world of poverty, alcoholism, and prostitution.

Queer populations did not appear in such portraits of the street in the mainstream press until the 1970s, when queer and trans identities became synonymous with the image of the Lower Main as Montréal’s “Boulevard of Broken Dreams.” However, the parallel universe of the sensationalist press certainly ties queer and trans identities to the night world of the cabarets of the Lower Main. As the sensationalist paper *Zéro* told the public in 1964, “the third sex” was taking over Lower Main at night, congregating there in the wee hours of the morning. Featuring a photograph of young men congregating on the corner of St-Laurent and Ste- Catherine streets (Figure 4), another *Zéro* article conflated the identities of gay men and male sex workers as well as masculine and feminine gender identities when they described their appearance and behavior: “[The third sex] can be found around St-Laurent Street. They have dyed hair, exaggerated gestures, irritating high-pitched laughs, and a feline walk. They travel in small groups, chattering loudly,
calling out to passing cars, smiling at passers-by, often mockingly—these are not girls, these are not guys.” The same article also claimed that there were now 90,000 lesbians in Québec. Although they could be found throughout the province, the article suggested that lesbians primarily inhabited a forbidden night world along the Lower Main. Other tabloids included stories about gays and lesbians along the Main who were pathologized with some regularity. For example, Higgins has found evidence of this link as early as 1958 when *Ici Montréal* would amuse its readers with stories of gay men, such as La tappette Rolande, who had apparently written his phone number in all of the toilets of the taverns of the Main. *Ici Montréal* also regularly chronicled the life of Ramona the Butch, who hung around in Café St-John on the Lower Main throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. Ramona was described in stereotypical terms: tough and territorial, she defended her turf at all costs and, in defending it, she had apparently acquired “more scars than a veteran of the foreign legion.”

Drapeau’s cleanup campaigns in the early 1960s also included the clampdown on gay, lesbian, and trans spaces, using the charge of “indecency” to control the night world surrounding the drag shows and gay sexual spaces such as parks and hotels in ways that made these populations, their activities, and spaces more visible in the pages of the crime reports. Such reports suggested that the Lower Main was central to “indecent” night life in the city. For example, when the well-known drag performer Lana St-Cyr was arrested for “indecency” in 1962, the *Le Nouveau Journal* published a large photograph of her being arrested at the Beaver, a club located a few blocks from the Lower Main (Figure 5). In that same year, the public’s awareness of the “deceptive” character of the clubs along the Lower Main increased when the details of a raid at Arlequin aux Deux Masques were published in the press. During the raid, four men were arrested for dancing together and tried for “indecency.” However, the story was more complex: two of the accused were employed as “dancers” by the club and were wearing women’s clothing, high-heeled shoes, wigs, and rhinestone jewelry. One of the clients pled “not guilty” to the charges on the basis that he thought that his dance partner was “a beautiful and real woman.”
By 1966, the clampdown on the Lower Main in preparation for Expo 67 further exposed the queerness of the night world of the Lower Main. Permit restrictions and a new bylaw restricting the interactions between employees and customers in Montréal’s night clubs were the primary methods that Drapeau’s regime used to regulate the night world of the Lower Main. In addition to new laws restricting striptease acts, the police proposed By-Law 3416 to City Council in February 1967 in an effort to restrict solicitation in night club spaces. Servers and other club staff in the cabarets were often connected to prostitution, and as Expo 67 approached, the newspapers turned the spotlight on clubs where tourists might fall victim to “dangerous women.” The police told

Figure 5. The arrest of Lana St-Cyr at the Beaver in 1962. Source: “Danseuse arrêtée en plein spectacle: Le juge, devra-t-il l’appeler mademoiselle ou monsieur?” Le Nouveau Journal, Mar. 26, 1962, 4.
the public that they were now declaring “a war on sharpies,” dancers and club employees who earned a commission from the bar tabs of the clients that they entertained. To defend the bylaw, the police argued that they had received many complaints from male tourists who had been handed huge bills at the end of an evening, especially in the clubs of the Lower Main. This led them to raid five nightclubs, all of which were located near the intersection of St-Laurent and Ste-Catherine streets (Café St-John, Rodéo Café, Le Cabaret, Pal’s, and Café Casbah). Bar employees in these establishments were described by the press as “skillful and dangerous creatures” while the male customers—especially those visiting the big city from rural Québec—were “dupes” who needed police protection. However, the bars that were raided and the debate about the bylaw further indicate that the police were hoping to limit the kinds of activities that had occurred at Café Arlequin in 1962: the original proposal was for a bylaw that would prevent all “female” employees from soliciting customers, but when it actually came before the city council for approval, it was suggested that it be extended to apply to all club employees. This was primarily because, in bars where the shows were organized for “the third sex,” “dancers, who are in reality men disguised as women, come and solicit the clients.”

The police also targeted the entertainments of Montréal’s night world in the months before Expo 67. The striptease had become a more central feature of the Lower Main’s night life in the 1950s, primarily due to the decreased budgets of the club owners—caused by the enforcement of closing hours and high legal costs for permit renewals—and the declining role of the area for middle-class, heterosexual sociability. In the spring, municipal authorities investigated clubs with topless dancers and tried to persuade owners to change their entertainment format so as to appeal once again to heterosexual “couples” and prevent the problems posed by developing “all-male” audiences. Those clubs that continued to feature topless dancers were raided a few weeks before Expo 67. However, the appeals of the club owners demonstrated that authorities were also targeting the social world surrounding drag shows. While numerous convictions for assault, attempted murder, gross indecency, prostitution, and serving minors had occurred in all of the clubs of the Lower Main, those that featured drag shows had the greatest difficulty having their permits renewed. The management of the Arlequin aux Deux Masques, for example, went before the court in April 1967 for a variety of infractions, but the provincial liquor squad built their case against the proprietors by emphasizing that “the club’s clientele seemed to be composed largely of homosexuals.” Again, concerned by the type of audience that this and other clubs attracted, the municipal authorities also suggested a change in their entertainments to attract a more “respectable” clientele. For example, the owner of the Café Casbah was granted a new license only after agreeing to replace the drag shows with more “respectable” forms of entertainment. This same club was singled out when the district attorney instructed taxi drivers not to take tourists to the Lower Main: it was described as unsuitable for tourists because it was a “cheap and sleazy bar” that featured drag shows.

Following Expo 67 and during debates about the federal Omnibus Bill, the decline of the Lower Main was increasingly signified by a queer takeover of its spaces. For example, in 1968, Le Nouveau Samedi reported on a male prostitution ring and featured a photograph of a doorway to a tourist room near the corner of St-Laurent and Ste-Catherine streets. Building on the fact that fifty-four men had been arrested here, the paper sensationalized the public that “the place that they [female prostitutes] used to occupy on the portion of St-Laurent Street that lies between Sherbrooke and Craig streets, familiarly called the Main, is now occupied almost exclusively by male homosexual prostitutes.” Later that year, Le Nouveau Samedi published a photograph of Ste-Catherine Street near the corner of St-Laurent Boulevard, describing the area as “the preferred hangout of homosexuals, prostitutes and pederasts” (Figure 6). If gay men were taking over the area’s sex trade, they, along with lesbians, were also taking over its hotels and rooming houses.
Figure 6. Photograph of Ste-Catherine Street at the intersection of Boulevard St-Laurent in 1968. The caption reads "Many of these establishments on Sainte-Catherine Street near St-Laurent are the preferred meeting places of homosexuals, prostitutes, and pederasts." Author’s Translation. Source: Le Nouveau Samedi, Nov. 16 to 22, 1968, 4.
As Chamberland has noted, in 1969 Nouvelles et polices judiciaires reported that the Lower Main was no longer “the headquarters of organized crime” but rather “the preferred hangout of lesbians and homosexuals who are congregating in the rooming houses of St-Laurent Boulevard.” And, as we saw at the outset of this paper, by the early 1970s the decline of the Lower Main would also be signified by the takeover of the area’s stages by drag performers. In a three-part series on the decline of the Lower Main published in 1974 in La Presse, the city’s major French language daily, the journalist focused the final installment on what had once been the Cafe St-John, now a drag club called Le Saguenay. According to the booking agent, this new club was one of the few clubs of the Lower Main that was still vibrant, attracting a broad clientele of gays, lesbians, and heterosexuals. He argued that since the Omnibus Bill, clubs could be more open about marketing the drag performers. However, he told the journalist: “You want to talk about St-Laurent Street? There isn’t much to say. It’s dead.” The journalist then concluded the series with: “As we have seen throughout this series, there isn’t much happening on the Main, between Vitré and Ste-Catherine. There remains, in all, one attraction: les travestis.”

Conclusion

The 1970s would mark both the apex and the end of the centrality of the Lower Main’s nightlife in most heteronormative discourses. In the early years of this decade, playwright and novelist Michel Tremblay would draw more attention to the Lower Main by using its queer night world as a parable of the oppression of the Québécois people by capitalism, the Catholic Church, and the Canadian Federation. Public attention to his plays (such as Les Belles-Sœurs, Sainte-Carmen de la Main, and Hosanna) and the 1974 film Il était une fois dans l’est (based on Tremblay’s plays), made the queer night world of the Lower Main more central to debates about national identity and Québécois liberation. By the mid-1970s, the battle for “gay liberation” in Montréal would largely be fought further west in the downtown core in response to cleanup campaigns for another world event, the 1976 Summer Olympics. And, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, gays and lesbians would also appropriate space in districts to the north and the east of the Lower Main, developing the Plateau Mont-Royal lesbian enclave and Montréal’s “gay village” in the early 1980s. But a heteronormative discourse of decline surrounding the Lower Main persisted. For example, journalist Jack Todd rearticulated this discourse when he described the Lower Main in 1987: “Last night, many of these puffy, bloodshot faces peered up from curbs or traded leers with the prostitutes — male, female or variants thereof — who provide these two blocks of the street with its gritty reputation.” The Lower Main would, however, remain central for sex workers, drag performers, and trans populations who continued to work and form community in its clubs. The Café Cléopâtre (the former Canasta Club), a trans performance club since the 1970s, is the only historic club on the Lower Main to survive the recent renovation of the district for the creation of Le Quartier des Spectacles, a redevelopment project that has sought to finally integrate the red-light district with the adjacent Place des Arts complex built in 1963.

The objective of this case study has been to explore the links between the discourses of decline that surrounded the Lower Main in the post-war period and the renewal of heteronormativity that came with the restructuring and modernization of Montréal in this period. Drawing on Beauregard’s arguments regarding the class-based and racial normativities of discourses of decline in American cities in the post-war period, I have argued for additional attention to the heteronormativities embedded in such narratives. The coincidence of rising homosexual panic and evidence of queer place-making in aging entertainment districts in this period suggests that heteronormativity was implicated in discourses that depicted the inner city as deserving of abandonment. In Montréal, these debates revolved primarily around the Lower Main as it was repositioned in relation to a city undergoing modernization as well as political and moral
reform. While in the 1950s the Lower Main was increasingly represented as a space of poverty, immorality, and gang violence, in the 1960s police repression placed increased emphasis on the protection of the public from the entertainments, staff, and social worlds that were emerging in the cabarets of the district. Initially, this discourse was more predictable, centering on controlling the striptease and reducing female prostitution. However, as Expo 67 approached, the street’s association with lesbian, gay, and trans identities provided reformers with further evidence of the inner city’s moral “decline.” As in other cities, this process not only gave the city a place in which to locate the “broken dreams” of the post-World War II period; it also provided a location through which to renew heteronormativities in response to a moral panic regarding the increased visibility of the “world of the third sex” and the queering of the city’s red-light district.

Representations of the Lower Main also played a productive role in shaping the city’s social and sexual geography at a time of intensive change. By bringing together class, sexual, and gender identities that were positioned on the city’s social and sexual margins, the images and the debates surrounding the Lower Main were also part of the city’s modernization process. On the one hand, they served the antithesis of the mainstream dream of a modern metropolis, an example of what authorities wanted to eliminate, especially as they prepared to welcome the world to Montréal for Expo 67. On the other hand, they gave expression to non-normative forms of sexuality and sociability that came into the public eye as the post-war metropolis expanded and some districts became available for appropriation. Like the sensationalist press through which it was often represented, the public image of the Lower Main was spectacular, a place of moral decline and corruption. However, for those who were looking carefully, it was also a location for queer and trans worlds in the making. Such images demonstrated that, despite the best efforts of authorities, the Lower Main was not empty: it was a vibrant social world of emerging queer public cultures, especially at night.

NOTES


2 Christiane Berthiaume, “Seule attraction de la Main: les travestis,” *La Presse*, July 18, 1974, C1. Viviane Namaste provides a linguistically and historically contextual discussion of the meaning of the term *travesti* in Québec in the 1960s and 1970s. The term was used to describe diverse and overlapping gender and performance identities including men who performed in drag but did not identify as women, men who wore women’s clothing, transgendered women, and transgendered women who were also performers. It was not until the late 1960s, when sexual reassignment surgery and hormones became slightly more accessible, that a distinction was made between *les travesties* and *les transsexuels*. In the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, it is more accurate to refer to these performers as *les travestis* and to their shows as drag shows. See Viviane Namaste, *C’était du spectacle! L’histoire des artistes transsexuelles à Montréal, 1955-1985* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2005), 5-6, 153-154.


4 Phil Hubbard, *Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1999); and “Here, There, and Everywhere: The Ubiquitous Geographies of Heteronormativity,” *Geography Compass* 2, no. 3 (2009): 640-658.

5 See, for example, Ross, “Sex and (Evacuation from) the Moral and Legal Regulation,” 199.

6 I use “queer” in a very open way here, perhaps close to the way in which it would have been used as a pejorative term in the post-WWII era to describe “the third sex.” This category included all people whose sexual practices and gender identities stood in opposition to heteronormativity at the time, namely gays, lesbians, and transgendered people. Although I would not necessarily describe cis-gendered women involved in heterosexual sex work along the Lower Main as queer, they certainly occupied a distinctly marginal moral location in relation to heteronormativity. Moreover, as working-class lesbians were part of these networks, it is impossible to distinguish and separate these categories in a discrete manner.

7 Recognizing that there are a variety of approaches and forms of deconstruction involved in the practice of queer geographies, my goal in this paper is close to the classic Foucauldian objective of queer theory as it has been interpreted in geography. Such a perspective is outlined by geographers Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash in their introduction to *Queer Methods and Methodologies*: “Queer theory challenges on the normative social ordering of identities and subjectivities along the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well as the privileging of heterosexuality as ‘natural’ and homosexuality as its deviant and abhorrent ‘other.’” Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, “Queer Methods and Methodologies: An Introduction,” in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Sciences Research*, eds. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1-23. For other sources that outline a queer epistemological approach in geography see Gavin Brown, Kath Browne, and Jason Lim, “Introduction, Or Why Have a Book on Geographies of Sexualities?,” in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, eds. Kath Browne, Jason Lim, and Gavin Brown (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 1-18; Michael Brown and Larry Knopp, “Queer Cultural Geographies – We’re Here! We’re Queer! We’re Over There, Too,” in *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, eds. Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift (London: Sage, 2003): 313-324; and Natalie Oswin, “Critical Geographies and the Uses of Sexuality: Deconstructing Queer Space,” *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 1 (2008): 89-103.


D’Emilio and Freedman, Intimate Matters, 293.


Ibid.

Simon, “New York Avenue,” 301. It should be noted that Atlantic City was only seen as “empty” by gay men due to the absence of “respectable” white middle-class heterosexual consumers, a perspective that completely disregarded the presence of the African American and Puerto Rican populations that had moved into the area.


21 Ibid., 85.


25 Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 156.


32 See Annick Germain and Damaris Rose, Montréal: The Quest for a Metropolis (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), 104-105.
34 Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération (Montréal: Boréal, 1992), 460-464.
40 Lacasse, La prostitution féminine, 116.
43 Palmer, Montreal Confidential, 80.
44 Bourassa and Larrue, Les nuits de la Main, 150.
45 Lacasse, La prostitution féminine, 63; Namaste, C’était du spectacle!, 54-57.
47 Namaste, C’était du spectacle!, 12-23.
48 Higgins, “Des lieux d’appartenance.”
50 Chamberland, “Remembering Lesbian Bars,” 235.
51 Ibid., 236.
52 Linteau, Histoire de Montréal, 525; Ross Higgins, De la clandestinité à l’affirmation: Pour une histoire de la communauté gaie montréalaise (Montréal: Comeau et Nadeau, 1999), 41.
53 Brodeur, *La délinquance de l’ordre*; Brian McKenna and Susan Purcell, *Drapeau* (Toronto and Vancouver: Clark, Irwin and Co., 1980).

54 Brodeur, *La délinquance de l’ordre*; McKenna and Purcell, *Drapeau*.

55 Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal*, 531; McKenna and Purcell, *Drapeau*.

56 Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la Main*, 151.

57 Weintraub, *City Unique*, 87.

58 Given that there was a severe housing crisis in Montréal in the 1950s and that the funds had already been secured for the project, Drapeau’s opposition to the construction of Les Habitations Jeanne-Mance angered and even baffled many political factions. As McKenna and Purcell argue, the project became part of a political struggle between Drapeau and the provincial Premier, Maurice Duplessis. See McKenna and Purcell, *Drapeau*, 109. As Germain and Rose note, Drapeau’s opposition to Les Habitations Jeanne-Mance was also related to his broader vision for modernizing Montréal. See Germain and Rose, *Montréal*, 82. Drapeau intended to extend the downtown core eastward by replacing the housing in the area with a radio and television complex that would be linked to Place des Arts.


64 For Plante’s newspaper expose, see Pax Plante with David MacDonald, “The Shame of My City,” *Star Weekly*, June 24, 1961, 2-6. For Drapeau’s unsuccessful attempt to prohibit children from the Lower Main see, “La Main, zone interdite au moins de 16 ans?,” *La Presse*, August 16, 1961.

65 Champoux, “Un nettoyage de grand style”; “Director Promises Police Clamp-Down”; Palmer, “Focal Point.”


72 Ibid.

73 Author’s translation. “L’histoire de la Main.”


75 Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*; Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*. 
The term “the third sex” was a pseudoscientific term used to describe any subject position outside of a normative sex/gender binary prescribed by heteronormativity, regardless of gender identity. It emerged with the development of sexology in the nineteenth century and was widely used to pathologize gay, lesbian, trans, and intersex populations by aggregating and conflating gender and sexual orientation. See George Chauncey Jr., “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conception of Female Deviance,” Salamagundi, 58/59 (1983): 114-146. In Montréal in the 1950s and 1960s, the term was widely used in both the mainstream and tabloid press to describe lesbians, gays and trans populations. Higgins, De la clandestinité à l’affirmation, 53.


Blair Gilmour, “St. Lawrence-Main,” MacLean’s Magazine, September 15, 1940, 19, 34.

Journalist Daniel Proulx’s history of the red-light district uses this phrase to describe the Main in the 1970s. The final chapter, “Grandeur and Decadence of the Main,” is introduced with a photograph captioned with the following phrase: “In the 1970s, the red-light was but a memory; the Main had become a ‘boulevard of broken dreams’” (author’s translation). See Proulx, Le Red-Light de Montréal, 70. It is likely drawn from the title of the song, written in the 1930s by Al Dubin and Harry Warren and made popular by Tony Bennett in 1950, which ridicules the “gigolos and gigilettes” of another red-light district, Place Pigalle in Paris.


Author’s translation. “Montréal aux prises avec un problème sérieux celui de troisième sexe,” Zéro, Spring, 1964, 3.


There were a variety of charges that the police could use to criminalize gays, lesbians, and trans populations in night clubs and cabarets during this period. Drag performers could be arrested for indecency and were subject to police harassment on the street and in cabarets. See Namaste, C’était du spectacle!, 45-47, 125. Lesbians were rarely arrested for indecency, but as Chamberland argues they were subject to police repression due to their association with the red-light district and as women who walked the streets at night. Usually their arrests were for other charges such as “underage drinking, vagrancy or disorderly conduct.” See Chamberland, “Remembering lesbian bars,” 237. Gay men were entrapped in public spaces,
subject to bar and bathhouse raids and arrested in nightclubs when dancing together. See
Higgins, “A Sense of Belonging,” 182-189. However, in the 1970s, the Montréal police began
to systematically use the charge of “gross indecency” to raid gay bars and bathhouses. See
Ross Higgins, “La régulation sociale de l’homosexualité,” in La régulation sociale des minorités
sexuelles: L’inquiétude de la différence, eds. Patrice Corriveau and Valérie Daoust (Quebec City:
Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2011), 82–120. For an overview of the legal regulation
of homosexuals in Montréal in this period see Patrice Corriveau, Judging Homosexuals: A
History of Gay Persecution in Quebec and France (Vancouver: University of British Columbia
92 “Quatre homosexuels, arrêtés au Café Arlequin, sont condamnés,” Le Nouveau Journal,
March 20, 1962.
93 Florian Bernard, “Montréal adopte des règlements sévères contre la prostitution dans les
cabarets,” La Presse, March 10, 1967; “New By-Law Cracks Down on Bar Girl Mingling,”
94 Burke, “Police Launch Night Club War.” For a detailed discussion of this bylaw and the use
of “phoneys” in Montréal’s nightclubs in the 1960s see Namaste, C’était du spectacle!, 29-33,
62-65. As in other North American cities, b-girls were hired to increase bar tabs in nightclubs
by sitting and drinking with clients. While the client consumed alcohol, the b-girls drank
“phoneys,” watered-down drinks for which the client was charged full price. See also
95 Asselin, “Gilbert s’explique.”
96 Jean-Claude Trait, “On se passera des billets doux mais il y aura moins de ‘poissons’ qui
97 Bernard, “Montréal adopte des règlements sévères”; “New By-Law Cracks Down on Bar
Girl Mingling”; “Règlements sévères visant à protéger les touristes contre certains ‘appâts
98 Author’s translation. Bernard, “Montréal adopte des règlementes sévères.”
13.
100 “Il n’y aura pas de seins nus à Montréal, durant l’Expo,” Dimanche-Matin, April 2, 1967;
“Pendant qu’on traque les ‘topless’, les ‘grosses légumes’ font des orgies,” Le Monde du
Spectacle, April 10-16, 1967.
104 Author’s translation. “Arrestation de 54 homosexuels par la moralité,” Nouveau Samedi,
105 Le Nouveau Samedi, November 16 to 22, 1968, 4.
est devenue le repaire des homos,” Flirt et Potins, August 2, 1969, 3.
107 Author’s translation. Berthiaume, “Seule attraction de la Main,” C1. See also, Christiane
Berthiaume, “Albert Gagnon raconte l’époque joyeuse de la rue Saint-Laurent,” La Presse,
108 André Brassard and Michel Tremblay, Il était une fois dans l’est (Montréal: L’Aurore, 1974);
Michel Tremblay, Les belles-sœurs (Montréal: Leméac, 1968); Hosanna: suivi de La duchesse de
Langeais (Montréal: Leméac, 1973); and Sainte-Carmen de la Main (Montréal: Leméac, 1976).

Recovering the Gay Village: A Comparative Historical Geography of Urban Change and Planning in Toronto and Sydney

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ABSTRACT: This paper argues that the historical geographies of Toronto’s Church and Wellesley Street district and Sydney’s Oxford Street gay villages are important in understanding the contemporary transformations currently ongoing in both locations. LGBT and queer communities as well as mainstream interests argue that these gay villages are in some form of “decline” for various social, political, and economic reasons. Given their similar histories and geographies, our analysis considers how these historical geographies have both enabled and constrained how the respective gay villages respond to these challenges while opening up particular possibilities for alternative (and relational) geographies. While there are a number of ways to consider these historical geographies, we focus on three factors for analysis—post World War II planning policies, the emergence of “city of neighborhoods” discourses, and the positioning of gay villages within neoliberal processes of commodification and consumerism. We conclude that these distinctive historical geographies offer a cogent set of understandings by providing suggestive explanations for how Toronto’s and Sydney’s gendered and sexual landscapes are being reorganized in distinctive ways.

Keywords: gay village, neighborhood, planning, urban change, Toronto, Sydney

Introduction

In this paper, we examine the historical geographies of the now iconic gay villages in Toronto’s Church and Wellesley Street district and Sydney’s Oxford Street (figures 1 and 2 respectively). We argue that a comparative historical geographies approach provides insights into the complex and multidimensional processes fomenting an ongoing and profoundly distinctive reordering of gendered and sexual landscapes occurring in both Toronto and Sydney. In doing so, we hope to contribute to the ongoing debates about the nature, characteristics, and implications of the shifting fortunes of some traditional gay villages in the Global North.
Figure 1. Toronto’s Gay Village – Church and Wellesley Street area.
Figure 2. Sydney’s LGBTQ neighborhoods: inner east and inner west.
We begin with a brief discussion of the current geographical scholarship on the emergence of gay villages in the Global North with an emphasis on the contemporary literature detailing the perceived “decline” of some longstanding gay villages, including those in Toronto and Sydney. In the next section, we explain why a comparative historical geography of Toronto and Sydney might be insightful and we lay out the distinctive historical geographies underpinning the emergence of each city’s gay neighborhoods in the post-World War II period. Our analysis considers how these historical geographies both enable and constrain the possibilities and potentialities for the respective gay villages while opening up particular possibilities for alternative (and relational) geographies. In doing so, we discuss convergences and divergences in the development of gay villages and other gendered and sexual landscapes in Toronto and Sydney. Our extensive conclusion underscores the cities’ differences and draws on our historical geographical analysis to pose questions about the future of their gay villages.

**Gay villages: segregation and integration**

A substantial body of scholarship examines the emergence and development of gay villages in the Global North in the period following World War II. This research highlights the dominant role that gay men (mainly white and middle-class) played in the development and growth of gay villages, initially through their appropriation of places for safety and support to their use of these neighborhoods for political, social, and economic security and activism. At the same time, lesbian and queer women also inhabited urban locations and neighborhoods and utilized gay village spaces, albeit in distinctive and less visible ways. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these districts increasingly engaged in local politics, consolidating their presence and creating community through economic development, the provisions of services, and political activism around rights protections. The HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s helped cement villages as hubs of LGBT life, and in places such as Toronto and Sydney they provided core services including hospice care, outreach, health education, and counseling services.

In the 1980s, gay villages were increasingly caught up in broader urban social and economic processes that saw them incorporated, through the neoliberal policy initiatives of the entrepreneurial city, into increasingly commodified and consumable urban landscapes. Currently, both Toronto and Sydney represent their respective villages as examples of their tolerance and openness to diversity. This seeming assimilation into mainstream urban life has prompted some scholars to argue that the assimilation of some LGBT people into mainstream life both reflects and reinforces LGBT “neoliberal sexual politics” that privilege those sexual and gendered minorities who are willing to participate in normative, middle-class, consumer society within monogamous married coupledom. This framing of a “homonormative politic” has prompted some to argue that we cannot understand this to be a universal or monolithic result and that we need to attend to the “difference, unevenness and geographical specificity” of gendered and sexual relations in the gay village and beyond.

As recent scholarship suggests, contemporary gay villages, including those in Toronto and Sydney, are experiencing forms of “degaying” within broader political, social, and economic processes at work in many Global North cities. The commodification of gay villages as tourist venues, as well as shopping and entertainment districts, has attracted a wide variety of consumers and businesses not necessarily identifying as LGBT. Many LGBT venues are now popular with heterosexuals while other social spaces such as bars and restaurants are becoming more mixed or have lost their queer sensibility entirely. In both Canada and Australia, legislative and social recognition of LGBT people has resulted in their increasing visibility in a broad range of locations beyond the gay village in places understood to be “gay friendly.” While many argue this new visibility is only available to certain normatively gendered and sexualized gays and lesbians,
others suggest these spatial changes reflect greater acceptance of sexual and gendered difference, as well as a growing social cohesion across a wide variety of neighborhoods. Nevertheless, as scholars argue, while some gays and lesbians are able to fully integrate into the mainstream, others continue to be marginalized as “queer,” that is, as those living outside of the homonormative lifestyles supported by legislative and social change.

Scholarship also suggests that gay villages are in decline because of increased internet and social media use, allowing LGBT and queer individuals to find other like-minded individuals without the need for expressly LGBT and queer spaces such as gay villages. Some LGBT and queer people, particularly youth, perceive the gay village as reflective of older generations’ histories, sensibilities, and lifestyles. These locations are arguably of little interest to newer generations, who are able to experience a wider variety of locations, identities, and subjectivities, and who are less interested, perhaps, in subscribing to essentialized gay and lesbian identities associated with gay villages.

Evidence of gay village “decline” in Toronto and Sydney

Both Toronto and Sydney have well-established gay villages, which over the last thirty years have been fully integrated into the fabric of each city’s downtown core. Toronto’s gay village emerged in the late 1970s and is presently centered on the intersection of Church and Wellesley Streets, one block east of Yonge Street, Toronto’s main downtown thoroughfare. Today, the village remains the hub of gay social, economic and political life with its collection of bars, restaurants, bathhouses, convenience stores, restaurants, and boutique shops. The 519 Church Street Community Centre serves a substantial LGBT population, many of whom live in the surrounding residential neighborhood.

Sydney’s gay village, popularly called Oxford Street, is adjacent to the Central Business District (CBD) in the inner east. Nightlife, leisure, and commercial activities are focused along Oxford Street between College Street and Taylor Square (presently), comprising bars, clubs, cafes, sex shops, and other retailers, while there is a congregation of LGBT venues, community facilities (social and health services), and residents in the surrounding suburbs of Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, Paddington and Potts Point. An incipient concentration of both establishments and residents was apparent in Oxford Street by the late 1960s. The Oxford Street “scene” is associated with gay men, but there are lesbian venues and services, and a neighboring residential concentration of both lesbian and gay couples. Oxford Street is epitomized as the “heartland” of Sydney’s LGBT community broadly—an imagining buttressed by the annual fanfare of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade.

In Toronto, concerns over whether the gay village was experiencing economic and social “decline” surfaced in the early 2000s when a series of economic downturns resulted in, among other things, the loss or closure of several longstanding and iconic businesses. LGBT and mainstream newspaper and magazine articles began exploring the shifting demographics of gay village life marked by an increasing number of non-LGBT people living, shopping, and/or socializing in the area and diluting the queer “feel” of the gay village as a whole and particular individual venues. While some writers regard these changes as a mark of the LGBT community’s coming of age, others are concerned about the potential loss of political, economic, and social strength offered by recognized gay neighborhoods.

As in Toronto, the early 2000s saw growing concern over the “demise” of Sydney’s Oxford Street as a gay village and safe space. Over the last decade, this concern has been expressed by both the LGBT and mainstream presses, with evidence resting on the closure of a number of long-standing, iconic venues (the c. 2002 closure of The Albury at 6 Oxford Street is sometimes considered “the final straw”), a growing straight nightlife presence (including a cluster of
straight clubs at the College Street end of Oxford Street), and increasing homophobic street violence. Alongside calls to “save” Oxford Street, media and community commentaries have pointed to the coalescence of another LGBT commercial, residential, and service concentration in Sydney’s inner west, centered on King Street, Newtown, and encompassing the adjacent suburbs of Camperdown, Erskineville, Enmore, Leichhardt, and Marrickville. This marks a divergence from the Toronto case and will be considered later in the paper: by the early 2000s, Newtown was already considered by LGBT and mainstream commentators as a consolidated “alternative” LGBT neighborhood, and indeed, a “new hub” of LGBT Sydney. Oxford Street, nonetheless, is still widely perceived as Sydney’s gay village, retaining commercial and residential LGBT concentrations (especially of/for gay men), with concerted efforts by the City of Sydney Council and local communities to revitalize its “gay character.”

At the present time, then, both Oxford Street and the Church and Wellesley village are undergoing some form of metamorphosis. In both cities there is considerable debate over the exact nature and underlying causes of these changes, whether they can be understood as positive or negative, and whether LGBT and queer political organizations should be actively engaged in guiding or directing these transformations. Given that both villages and related events, such as Pride and Mardi Gras, are used to demonstrate their city’s cosmopolitanism and competitiveness, mainstream interests, including local municipal councils and LGBT organizations, are concerned about the potential fate of their gay neighborhoods. As we argue here, in order to understand the nature and framing of these debates, it is important to understand each of these village’s historical geographies. In the following sections, we consider their respective historical geographies through three specific themes — post World War II planning policies, the emergence of “city of neighborhoods” discourses, and the positioning of gay villages within neoliberal processes of commodification and consumerism.

Historical geographies of sexuality in Toronto and Sydney

Historical geographies offer insights into current processes, through an examination of the “how” and the “why” of current developments. Referring to the development of gay commercial districts, Camilla Bassi argues: “Each locale possesses its own peculiar historical and social processes, the outcome of which is by no means certain.” Both Toronto and Sydney are world cities and major gateways for immigration and settlement. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to lay out in detail the similarities between Toronto’s and Sydney’s gay village development, we would argue that our own work documents the notably similar political, economic, and social histories of the ongoing development of gay villages in Toronto and Sydney. LGBT and queer political and social activism within discrete national contexts has been markedly similar but with varying and distinctive differences. Both Toronto’s and Sydney’s LGBT urban histories and geographies are positioned within the wider processes of queer globalizations and deployments (and taken up locally in particular ways). Taken together, this suggests the complex and multiple complications in developing understandings about the distinctive developments of gay villages in the Global North.

While there are numerous factors to consider in terms of both the emergence and contemporary circumstances of each city’s gay village, we focus here on three main themes — post World War II urban planning initiatives, the emergence of the concept of “neighborhood” as central to the health of inner cities and, in the context of contemporary neoliberal processes, local business initiatives, such as Toronto’s business improvement associations (BIA) and local government cultural and economic revitalization plans in Sydney.
This section examines the intertwined histories of Toronto’s shifting urban planning policies and the changing fortunes of what has become Toronto’s “traditional” gay village in the two decades after World War II. While attempts to demarcate stages of development are rightly critiqued as failed attempts to tidy up inherently messy and complex sets of processes, nevertheless scholarship considering Toronto’s urban development highlights three main stages in its evolution—the 1950s and 1960s urban renewal period, the turbulent reformist activism of the 1970s and early 1980s, and the transition to neoliberal governance structures in the post-1995 period. At the same time, Toronto’s loosely associated gay and lesbian socio-spatial networks consolidated into what was widely recognized as a gay neighborhood by the early 1980s. By the mid-1990s, neoliberal ideologies increasingly guided Toronto’s planning and economic policies, drawing the village into commodified, consumerist neighborhood development and ultimately positioning the gay village as symbolic of Toronto’s diversity, tolerance, and cosmopolitanism. The integration of the gay village into Toronto’s contemporary urban fabric is a result, in part, of its serendipitous beginnings in the 1950s and 1960s in the seedy and marginal downtown core, a location that would ultimately become the political, social, and economic heart of Toronto’s urban landscape.

As one of Canada’s major cities, Toronto’s population increased substantially in the late 1930s as the country geared up for war, and then again during the war efforts in the 1940s. Toronto’s factories, manufacturing industries, and related service industries offered stable employment opportunities for both men and women who flocked to Toronto in unprecedented numbers and many of whom lived in the inner city’s low rent apartments, boarding and rooming houses. Toronto’s downtown core, centered around Yonge Street from south of Bloor Street to Front Street, gained considerable notoriety, dotted with massage parlors, strip joints, discount stores and a seedy assortment of bars and restaurants, populated with those considered to have unsavory reputations and appetites. In keeping with the histories of other LGBT neighborhoods in North America, Toronto’s post World War II homosexual population clustered in and around these less desirable areas, able to live relatively open lives amongst other marginalized groups largely in the Bloor and Church Street district. So visible was Toronto’s homosexual subculture in the 1960s that newspaper articles in the mainstream press claimed that Toronto was Canada’s “homosexual capital.” Those seeking information on the locations of homosexuals could always rely on the lurid headlines in local tabloids to find each other.

In the post-World War II period, Toronto’s planning efforts were directed largely to the inner suburbs surrounding the city of Toronto. Such efforts were driven by a deep desire to return to pre-war norms about the heterosexual family and children. Developers and planners stressed the notion that raising a family required single family homeownership, with greater indoor and outdoor space. Governments directly intervened to encourage such developments through the provision of subsidized schools, hospitals, housing, and the construction of roads and major arterial highways.

In Toronto, the boom in the suburban developments undermined inner-city neighborhoods as the middle and upper classes moved to the suburbs, encouraging the construction of major roadways through older downtown neighborhoods. Inner-city housing stocks declined as larger homes were converted to multiple-unit rentals, alongside a deterioration of the housing stock, which supported planning initiatives for urban renewal and the demolition of older housing stock for public housing. Toronto’s gays and lesbians were unlikely to live in the newly developing suburbs, thereby encouraging many to live and work in the downtown core where their proclivities were more likely to be tolerated. Canadian cities (including Toronto) also experienced
substantial immigration in the 1950s and 1960s, which supported the refurbishment of inner-city housing stock as ethnic minorities began to concentrate in recognizable districts or territories. Neighborhood groups organized to prevent mass demolitions promoted by urban renewal schemes and highway construction, in part to support the preservation of many well-established downtown neighborhoods. The city of Toronto also undertook major redevelopments in the CBD including the construction of a new city hall, the construction of Eaton Centre retail space, and the promotion of high-rise residential and commercial buildings.

By the early 1970s, Toronto had a number of local social movements that, as Lynch and Ley argue, pushed back against the “technocratic practices of the state” grounded in modernist notions of urban renewal. The work of Jane Jacobs was highly influential in promoting vibrant low-rise and eclectic inner-city neighborhoods. As the city embraced these ideas, the downtown experienced “a wave of heritage protection and the beginnings of inner-city gentrification in the early 1970s.” Neighborhood preservationist movements were particularly successful in pushing back against development, prompting a shift in Canadian planning perspectives to one that increasingly regarded the downtown CBD as an important hub for regional economic health, the provision of goods and services, and a center for social and cultural life.

A nascent gay village: Toronto in the 1970s

The partial decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 opened up the possibilities for more public activism. LGBT political and social organizations were founded in downtown Toronto in the early 1970s. Groups such as the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT) established a community center, café, and library in the Church Street area. CHAT believed such spaces would bring together and politicize local gays and lesbians by providing alternative spaces to the bars and bathhouses. Clashes with anti-gay activists such as Anita Bryant and local pastor Ken Campbell, as well as organizing against police harassments of local bathhouses, fostered more aggressive forms of political activism geared towards defending homosexual commercial establishments. By the end of the 1970s, gay and lesbian activists fully recognized the Church and Wellesley Street area as a gay neighborhood and called for its defense, not only by gays and lesbians but also by the local municipal council. George Hislop ran as the first openly gay candidate for City Council in 1980 prompting one mayoral candidate to claim, somewhat ominously, that Hislop’s presence clearly demonstrated Toronto was becoming “San Francisco North.”

The election of a “reform” council in 1969 prompted calls to end major urban renewal projects and to protect and preserve inner-city neighborhoods. In the 1970s, local planning ideologies espoused a “postmodern strategy of place making, one that continually brought attention to the revitalizing capacity of the urban neighborhood.” As a result, ethnocultural neighborhoods were no longer perceived as temporary locations from which to aspire to assimilation but as stable and supportive communities contributing to the vibrancy of city life. Taken together, the new urban social movements, the development of stable ethnic enclaves, and the growing gay and lesbian rights movement encouraged an understanding of the Church and Wellesley Street neighborhood as one worth protecting as a legitimate political and social territory for gays and lesbians to participate in city life.

At the same time, in many North Americas cities there was a shift in perceptions about urban life as a growing number of single women, single men, and childless couples enjoyed downtown residential lifestyles, particularly the middle class. Scholarship recognizes the role of gays in the early gentrification movement in downtown neighborhoods, including “less affluent gays and other unconventional middle-class groups” and “avant-garde artists and others ‘non-conformist’ in their life style and politics.” Scholarship has documented the important role that
gay men and lesbians have played as early gentrifiers in more marginal locations in the city, including the impact of gay men in Toronto’s downtown Cabbagetown neighborhood adjacent to the nascent gay village in the early 1970s.49

**Neoliberalism and Toronto’s gay village**

In the 1990s, cities in Canada experienced increasing financial strain as the Ontario provincial and federal governments began downloading the costs of welfare and social programs, and infrastructure repair and management, to local municipalities. In response, cities increasingly employed more entrepreneurial, self-promotional approaches to attract new economic development. Neoliberal ideologies underpinned cities’ endeavors to market themselves through the creation of place identities, edgy architecture, urban design, and cultural spectacle.50 Cities understood the importance of “place-making” in creating a positive city image, making such locations magnets for employment, industry, and tourism. Cities also recognized that certain “lifestyles and symbolic economies that exist in these spaces through recreation, leisure, and cultural activities” also supported a city’s image as a vibrant place to live.51 By the early 2000s, Toronto’s gay village (as with other gay villages in North America, Europe, and Australia) was fully incorporated into the fabric of the post-industrial entrepreneurial city that knitted together commodified, consumer-based neighborhoods with downtown urban lifestyles.52 The gay village’s incorporation into commodified urban landscapes is a reflection, in part, of the aspirations of some gay men and lesbians for inclusion in a neoliberal politics that results in the privileging of some gay men and lesbians who desire to live within middle class, gender-normative, monogamous coupledom—a form of homonormalization.53

The HIV/AIDS crisis had a devastating impact on the LGBT community through the 1980s, while at the same time contributed to the consolidation of the neighborhood as a recognizable and stable gay and lesbian enclave. In coping with the ravages of the disease, the provincial and federal governments funneled funding and assistance into services centered in the village and supported spaces provided by the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), Casey House, and 519 Church Street.54 Given the centrality of the village in downtown Toronto, the majority of the services for LGBT people, including services for queer youth, remain there, although some services targeting queer immigrants are located closer to their constituencies.

**Toronto’s village today**

Today, Toronto’s village is unequivocally included as one of the important and distinctive inner-city neighborhoods in the city of Toronto’s marketing and tourism activities. Recently, anxiety about the possible decline in the village has grown, particularly with the loss of several iconic businesses, rising rents, and an influx of heterosexuals into the condominium market and entertainment venues. Legislative and social advances, including human rights protections and gay marriage, ensure that LGBT people are increasingly visible and mobile across a variety of locations, creating alternative yet relational geographies. Our own research suggests that rather than understanding changing gendered and sexual landscapes as one of decline and decay, it might be more suitable to understand these changing landscapes as part of more complex relational geographies between neighborhoods supporting visible queer populations and marking greater social cohesions.55 In Toronto, other neighborhoods supporting queer communities include Parkdale ("Queer West"), Brockton Village, Roncesvalles, and Leslieville. Scholarship also attests to claims by some that younger queers view the gay village as a relic of the past, as no longer relevant, or as a location that was never particularly welcoming of certain groups.56

Recently, the village has been presented with an opportunity for self-reflection in the wake of a successful bid for World Pride, held in Toronto in the spring of 2014, and the Pan American Games in the summer of 2015. One distinguishing feature of the urban commercial landscape in
Toronto is the ability of local businesses to establish Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) under the Ontario Municipal Act, 2001. This allows business owners to form an association with the approval of the local council and a two-thirds majority of local businesses. Once established, membership is compulsory and funds are raised through the imposition of an annual levy. The purpose of BIAs is to “improve, beautify and maintain public lands in the BIA and promote the area for business and shopping.” The Church and Wellesley Village BIA, created in 2002, has recently formed a closer association with the LGBT community through relocating to 519 Church Street Community Centre.

Preparing for World Pride and the PanAm Games provided the local LGBT business community with an opportunity to undertake more long-range planning around the future of the gay village and its role in LGBT and queer life. With the support of local city Councilor Kristyn Wong-Tam, the local BIA and LGBT activists launched a planning study to determine the future of the gay village. The BIA is largely working to preserve the long-term economic viability of the village as a tourist attraction. Partly as a result of the planning study, the BIA undertook several initiatives, including renovating Cawartha Park, commissioning a mural representing LGBT life, and the opening of “temporary parklets” along Church Street in the summer and fall of 2013.

Although the process is currently ongoing, it is possible to see the institution of particular narratives about the centrality and importance of the village for LGBT and queer people. This means, in part, a re-visioning of the village as a “place of arrival and return,” as a place for people to come out, and as a place for LGBT and queer people to gather for political and social protest.

Historical geographies of sexuality in Sydney

We now turn to a discussion of historical geographies of sexuality in Sydney, with particular attention to the emergence, development, and decline of the gay village around Oxford Street. This discussion picks up the three foundational themes—planning, neighborhood, and neoliberalism—and draws out Sydney’s similarities and differences in comparison with Toronto in support of our argument that an historical geographical approach offers insights on how and why these villages are developing in distinctive ways. We begin with the immediate post-World War II era, reaching to the 1970s, the decades that saw the emergence of a gay subculture in Sydney, at first subterranean, and eventually its material and spatial anchoring in and around Oxford Street.

Sydney is the oldest city in modern (i.e. British-occupied) Australia, founded in 1788 when the colony (later state) of New South Wales (NSW) was established. Since the late twentieth century it is considered Australia’s primary global city. The immediate post-World War II era ushered in a period of sustained population and economic growth. As part of the post-war rebuilding, the plans of federal and state governments for economic and social development (encompassing large infrastructure, manufacturing, and commercial projects) relied on policies encouraging population growth through both natural increase and state-sponsored immigration. These growth policies were implicitly heteronormative, encouraging sexual and social reproduction in and through nuclear family units, realized (as elsewhere in the Global North) in a post-war “baby boom” (with children of that generation called “Boomers”).

Such heteronormative policy was made explicit in urban planning directives, processes, and practices in gateway cities such as Sydney. Increased population meant a need for increased housing, and state and private housing organizations, financial institutions, and land developers geared new suburban estates and “home packages” toward heterosexual nuclear families. While the expanding Sydney suburbs were increasingly planned as sites of heteronormative family life, the inner city was seen as undesirable for residential development and more suited to industrial and commercial activities, including factories, warehouses, offices, and port facilities. The vision
was of the inner city as a zone of male employment where breadwinning husbands and fathers worked during the day, returning to their wives and children in heterosexual suburbia in the evening.60

In contrast with the suburbs as a place of family and moral order, nighttime in inner-city Sydney was imagined as a site of vice and immorality, perhaps best materialized in the clubs, street prostitution, violence, and crime associated with the red-light district in the inner east suburb of King’s Cross.61 It was in the liminal spaces of the inner city that Sydney’s gay and lesbian subcultures continued to find a home, as they had since the early part of the twentieth century.62 If there could be said to be any planning around sexual and gender minorities at this time, given that (male) homosexuality was still illegal, it could be found in police activities to disrupt “camp” venues, social gatherings, and public cruising, and to prosecute individuals. While urban planning served heteronormative social forms, legislation and police enforcement sought to limit and marginalize homosexual communities.63

Nevertheless, a subculture, and subcultural sites, did develop in post-war inner-city Sydney, for both gay men and lesbians.64 Historians suggest the subculture was arguably more concentrated and visible in Sydney than in other Australian cities.65 Indeed, it eventually consolidated into a highly visible gay village (Oxford Street) in the 1970s.66 In this light, the specific urban geography of Australia plays a part, and Wotherspoon tackles the geographical question: “Why, within Australia, did the fastest and most overt growth of a gay sub-culture occur in Sydney rather than in any other city?”67 He limits the answer first by population size. Anonymity, required for the marginal(ized) subculture, was found only in the largest cities. In post-war Australia, this meant Sydney or Melbourne. Of this choice, Sydney was preferable for personal, employment, and economic perceptions and realities. In the mid-twentieth century, Melbourne was perceived as conservative, restrictive, and snobby, while Sydney was described as an open, effervescent “city of possibilities.” This was borne out in the world of visual, performing, and literary arts, for instance, which took root more strongly in Sydney, and beckoned immigrants from Melbourne. Another consideration was cost: Sydney, especially the “undesirable” inner city, was considered cheaper to live in.

Relational geographies of Sydney, Melbourne, and other Australian cities were thus important in the spatial consolidation of gay subculture in Sydney. Nevertheless, the sites of that subculture – clubs, bars, cafes, baths – were mobile, transient venues that shifted across Sydney’s inner city during the post-war era.68 Gay men and lesbians, while increasing in population, remained underground. Their criminalization and their contestation of social mores meant that the subculture was marginal — socially and legally — and thus liable to social retribution and police raids. Venues clustered, and the clusters dissipated, across the inner city, from the CBD to East Sydney, King’s Cross, and Paddington. But the late 1960s brought public homosexual rights claims and murmurings of social acceptance in some liberal quarters, enabling enhanced visibility in the name of social and legal change, even while male homosexuality remained criminal.69 In the late 1960s a cluster of more visible gay clubs (e.g. Ivy’s Birdcage, Capriccio’s) settled on Oxford Street, and “from the early 1970s it was the Oxford Street area that became the focus for gay venues.”70 Amidst the relational and mobile geographies of the post-war period, the confluence of rights, politics, incremental social change, and an incipient geographical anchor provided the material foundation for a gay village in Sydney.

Consolidation of a gay neighborhood: Sydney in the 1970s to the 1990s

The consolidation of Oxford Street as a gay area occurred remarkably quickly with some fractions of the gay male community arguably inspired by the gay neighborhoods they could see emerging and flourishing in California: San Francisco’s Castro and Los Angeles’s West
Recovering the Gay Village

Building on the foundation of the successful bars of the late 1960s, there was a rapid emergence of new leisure and organizational venues in and around Oxford Street, which became a locus for a flood of new clubs and bars, new baths and sex-on-premises venues, gay bookshops, and the offices of the newly created gay press. The clustering of venues generated a “gravitational effect” whereby more venues catering to the subculture—and largely gay male clientele—were encouraged to move to Oxford Street.

This gravitational effect not only drew gay venues and facilities to Oxford Street and nearby, but it also drew a gay residential population to the suburbs surrounding Oxford Street, to Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, Paddington, and Potts Point. Of course gay men and lesbians had lived in the inner city earlier, given the relatively cheap cost of accommodation in these residentially undesirable areas, but the late 1960s also saw the beginnings of inner-city housing gentrification in Sydney. “Pioneer” gay gentrification, as documented in some magazines of the time (e.g. Oz), had commenced in the late 1960s, but the consolidation of gay commercial and organizational facilities encouraged more gay residents to move in. Within a relatively short space of time, a discrete geographical area had emerged as a site of “gay identity,” in both commercial and residential terms. Oxford Street had become a gay village. As Wotherspoon argued: “there was now a definite area where the new ‘gay’ man could feel at home, in territory that was clearly stamped in his image.”

The gay village continued to consolidate throughout the 1970s and 1980s, attracting further venues, organizations, and residents. During these decades, the gay press and their offices proliferated (Sydney was, and still is, served by multiple gay newspapers); the offices of gay rights groups relocated to the neighborhood; health services aimed at gay clientele moved in (including GPs, dentists, counselors and, later, HIV/AIDS services); and new services for gay youth (e.g. Twenty10) or religious gays (e.g. the Metropolitan Community Church) were established or moved in. Thus, “by the early 1980s Oxford Street between Hyde Park and the Paddington Town Hall had become known as the ‘Glitter Strip’ or ‘The Golden Mile’, and the surrounding area was referred to as ‘The Ghetto’, an acknowledgement of the high concentration there of both gay men and places catering for them.”

The development of the gay village has entailed successes but also failures. One of the failings of the quick and ad hoc consolidation of Oxford Street was the attention of venues and services to gay men and the displacement of lesbians in terms of services and residents. With gentrification of the area, lesbians, often with less financial means than gay men, were priced out of the housing market, while services aimed at lesbians and other queer women were similarly affected by increasing commercial rents. This contributed to the development of a discrete lesbian residential and service neighborhood during the 1980s in the inner west suburb of Leichhardt. Women’s health services, lesbian counseling services, women’s refuges, women’s and lesbians’ social and business clubs, and lesbian residents began to congregate. The suburb eventually earned the moniker “Dykehardt.” However, this was also arguably a loss to the Oxford Street village and local sexual and gender diversity, which remains largely associated with gay men’s leisure (except during the Mardi Gras Festival).

The consolidation of “gay territory” around Oxford Street also yielded some distinct benefits. The spatial concentration of gay commerce, organizations, and residents provided political strength—as well as perceived and real economic advantages—for securing rights claims. The concentration in the inner city strengthened the “voice” that impelled NSW anti-discrimination laws in 1982 and the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1984. Parallel with such changes in NSW parliament, a geographical hub for LGBT community organizations and leadership (and commercial and sex venues, and residents) allowed for a focused, coordinated, and joint response from the state and the gay community to the advent of HIV/AIDS in the early
1980s, generating one of the most effective responses in the world, targeting safer sex messages at the gay male community, and keeping infection rates relatively low (roughly 14 per 100,000 people compared with 167 per 100,000 people in the United States).\textsuperscript{77} Local politics has also responded to the LGBT residential concentration, with the local government (the City of Sydney Council) and representatives for the State electorate genuinely supporting LGBT causes. Since 1993, the State electorate member has been an independent candidate championing LGBT rights.\textsuperscript{78}

The neighborhood has been both an economic and a political success. This is seen, in particular, in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, a month-long LGBT festival incorporating a famous parade along Oxford Street, dance parties, a film festival, and cultural and sporting events. The event (at least the parade) has been held annually since 1978, when it was initiated as a local response in support of Stonewall Day. Since this inauspicious beginning, the Mardi Gras Festival has become an international tourist event supported by the NSW government and the City of Sydney Council, earning up to A$90 million per annum.\textsuperscript{79} From its political beginnings, the event—the parade particularly—has become a highly erotic display. This is perhaps emblematic of Oxford Street itself as a political locus of sexual rights. Knopp suggests, and we agree (particularly given one of us has been a Sydneysider since the early 1990s), that Sydney’s gay village impelled political success without compromising a highly sexualized subculture and erotic visual culture, which is something seen in few other cities globally.\textsuperscript{80} This can be further extended by noting that, in Australia, political claims are rarely based on a discourse of “civil rights,” as epitomized by the United States, but rather on a language of “equal rights” (as in Canada) that reflects Australian ideals and traditions of “a fair go” for everyone.

An end to village life in Sydney?

Oxford Street might have been at its peak as a gay village in the 1990s. The early twenty-first century has witnessed stories of the area’s decline in the LGBT and mainstream press—and indeed, material evidence in the closure of many iconic gay venues (e.g. The Albury, The Beresford, Flinders Hotel) and the substantive movement of many LGBT organizations to elsewhere in the inner city, alongside the notable increase in “straight” nightclubs along the street and associated homophobic violence and harassment from non-resident heterosexual men.\textsuperscript{81} Researchers suggest several reasons for this decline as a gay territorial locale, including increasing straight residents (and venues) due to the “cultural cache” of the gay village; rising rents pricing out both gay residents and businesses; and social acceptance and online networks, reducing the need for a geographical concentration of bars and clubs for social and sexual meets. The commercial strip itself has shifted toward a distinct nightlife focus, with a preponderance of nightclubs and a diminishing number of cafes, restaurants, and retail outlets.

This decline has not gone unchallenged, however. Attempts to arrest the decline have come from various quarters for diverse political and economic reasons. Middle-aged and older men, as well as generations of activists, remember Oxford Street as a site of political developments, coming out, and social life, and seek to hold onto this well-known gay territory for themselves and future generations. The City of Sydney Council seeks to sustain both the political and economic success of the gay village and its associated events (such as the Mardi Gras festival). Indeed, Oxford Street is incorporated in its neoliberal “city-marketing” strategy—the “City of Villages”—as an internationally-renowned “gay village.”\textsuperscript{82} To this end, the City of Sydney Council has instituted a series of strategies and plans aimed at reducing the problems facing the gay village and recuperating its perceived gay character (as bohemian, creative, and cutting-edge).\textsuperscript{83} These range from safety measures, such as police presence and the establishment of “safe space” along the street, to initiatives to re-occupy the street with “daytime” and/or creative enterprises by offering low-rent or rent-free shop fronts to artists and pop-up stores.\textsuperscript{84} These latter governance
strategies are an attempt to recover the gay village by rebuilding a broader local commercial base and thus enticing citizen-consumers back to the street through the “creative” or “cultural” economy — arguably a distinctly neoliberal approach.

It is possible, nonetheless, that the decline is now “rusted on” with limited means to arrest it, irrespective of neoliberal strategies or other political tactics. Indeed, the active legacy of mobile, relational geographies continues to rewrite Sydney’s sexual and gender landscapes. As noted earlier, the perceived decline in Oxford Street since the early 2000s has been matched by the evident development of another LGBT neighborhood in Sydney’s inner west, centered on King Street, Newtown, with a residential spread into the surrounding suburbs of Camperdown, Erskineville, Enmore, St. Peters, and Marrickville. This area has already been proffered by the LGBT media and local LGBT residents as the new LGBT heartland of Sydney. The most recent sign of “anchoring” this “new LGBT heartland” has emerged in 2014, with SX, one of Sydney’s two main LGBT newspapers, introducing a regular multi-page feature called “Spotlight on Newtown,” highlighting queer-friendly restaurants, bars, shops, and community organizations in the inner west. There is no similar section for Oxford Street.

Perhaps the most pertinent evidence of the ascendency of Newtown as an LGBT neighborhood is the very material presence of increasing numbers of LGBT venues and facilities. There are long-established LGBT commercial venues in the area, including The Imperial, Newtown, and Bank Hotels. Additionally, several LGBT organizations have moved into the area, including Twenty10 youth services, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, a Metropolitan Community Church congregation, and the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service. As shown by the new SX feature, the local neighborhood economy and social life caters to daytime communities as well as nightlife, with a proliferation of cafes, restaurants, and retail stores, some clearly “queer” in both staffing and aesthetic. Of significance also is the presence of venues and organizations that cater for the LBT in LGBT. The area is home to The Gender Centre, the key NSW advocacy service for trans and genderqueer rights. Much of Sydney’s lesbian social scene can be found in local venues, including The Imperial, The Bank, The Sly Fox and The Red Rattler. The neighborhood straddles parts of both the City of Sydney and Marrickville Councils, both of which are encouraging LGBT visibility and social inclusion by “marketing” LGBT commercial and residential concentrations in Newtown and Erskineville (Sydney), and Newtown and Enmore (Marrickville). Thus, councils provide some measure of boosterism for this “new” LGBT neighborhood, which is also perceived, experienced, and “marketed” distinctly from Oxford Street.

While Oxford Street is typically understood as a gay male space, Newtown and the inner west are seen as providing a home for a broader demographic of sexual and gender minorities, including lesbians, queer women, and trans people. The Australian Census 2011, for instance, found that the ten suburbs with the highest concentration of male and female same-sex couples were both in inner-city Sydney, but while male couples are most concentrated in Darlinghurst, Surry Hills and Potts Point in the inner east, female couples are concentrated in Newtown, St. Peters, Enmore, Erskineville, and Marrickville in the inner west, alongside still significant concentrations of male couples. The combination of residential concentrations of female and male couples, as well as a congregation of LGBT commercial venues and organizational services since 2000, indicates the presence of a LGBT neighborhood in Sydney’s inner west. While some suggest that this challenges the continuance of Oxford Street and adds to its decline, others contend that the inner west caters to and provides a home for a different LGBT demographic – one perhaps more inclusive of sexual and gender diversity than the “traditional” gay (male) ghetto.
Thoughts on historical legacies and the future of the gay village

We argue that the distinct historical geographies of the Church-Wellesley and Oxford Street gay villages help to position each differently within the urban fabric of, respectively, Toronto and Sydney. These different historical geographies and urban legacies enable (perhaps) divergent futures. Toronto’s Church-Wellesley village now finds itself in a different, and more hopeful, set of circumstances in terms of determining its future vis-à-vis Sydney’s Oxford Street. To begin with, the use of the “ethnic” model of territorial identity in Church-Wellesley village arguably benefitted from an earlier recognition and incorporation of “other” ethnic differences in processes of political inclusion, cultural heritage, and urban planning than in Sydney. The village’s location, initially marginal, benefitted from being close to Yonge Street when the city began rejecting urban renewal planning and instead embraced inner-city preservation. Toronto’s lesbian and gay political movement surfaced at the same time as these inner-city movements, such as those by Chinese and Caribbean organizations, and despite the fact that gay and lesbian organizations were not accorded equivalent respect, their representation as a social movement with a territorial base was persuasive in terms of making rights and territorial claims.

The drive to preserve ethnic heritage, social and cultural difference, and unique neighborhoods emerged much later in Sydney, not taking hold until the 1990s. Since then, in Sydney as well as Toronto, the local city councils have incorporated their “gay villages” into “city of neighborhoods” discourses, aimed at boosting initiatives around creative industries, marketing, and tourism by commodifying the diversity, cosmopolitanism, and lifestyle of the inner city. But there has been a difference here between Toronto and Sydney, arguably resulting from the earlier recognition of Church-Wellesley as a unique neighborhood in Toronto. Even as the City of Sydney Council rolled out its ‘City of Villages’ campaign in the early 2000s, Oxford Street was not identified as the only gay village in Sydney. Already by the early 2000s, the City of Sydney was identifying Newtown and Erskineville, which lie within its jurisdictional boundaries, as other gay spaces in the inner city alongside Oxford Street. While we are certainly not championing neoliberal city-marketing, it nevertheless seems that by the time the City of Sydney recognized the Oxford Street gay village as such, and sought to capitalize on this territorial identification, neighborhoods in Sydney’s inner west were already garnering a “queer” reputation, leaving little room for Oxford Street to continue to claim uniqueness as a gay village. Since the time of these first campaigns over a decade ago, Oxford Street has continued to decline materially and imaginatively as the gay village within Sydney, while Newtown and the inner west have continued to solidify as queer neighborhoods.

As a result of the different political and territorial legacies of Church-Wellesley and Oxford Street, it seems that late 2000s discourses about the deterioration and decline of gay villages arguably promoted debates about the preservation and future of Church-Wellesley before it reached the state of decline being experienced by Oxford Street. Major LGBT service providers such as 519 Church, Queer Youth, and ACT remain in the village, while St. Mike’s is the major trans surgery hospital. Indeed, the village evinces a strong institutional base in the form of 519 Church, the BIA, and a lesbian-identified city councilor dedicated to the economic and social health of the area. These institutions are taking advantage of high profile events such as World Pride and the PanAm Games for self-reflection and to “rebuild” the territory and identity of the village. Taking the opportunity presented by these events, institutions such as the BIA are seeking to rebrand the village, offering new narratives about its role—a role that embraces, to a certain extent, the ability of LGBT people to be visible in other neighborhoods but at the same time argues (and tries to incorporate into the narrative) the ongoing importance and centrality of the village in the lives of new generations of LGBT and queer people.
This is not to say that such attempts have not been made around Oxford Street. The placement of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade (and other festival events) in Oxford Street, as an international hallmark event bringing thousands of visitors, annually renews the narrative about Oxford Street as a “gay homeland.” The City of Sydney Council has attempted to arrest the decline of Oxford Street’s daytime economy and street life through enticing creative and cultural industries into the street with low-rent spaces. And there is certainly a call from older generations of gay men to preserve and remember Oxford Street as central to the Australian gay imaginary since the 1960s, and notably during the gay rights era of the 1970s and 1980s. However, we suggest the particular historical geography of Oxford Street has yielded specific pressures and fewer opportunities to stabilize its territory and identity.

For instance, there are some quite geographical issues concerning the location and physical affordance of Oxford Street and its connection with Sydney’s downtown core. The Church-Wellesley Village is located downtown, and has benefitted from being in Toronto’s core, near the Eaton Centre, iconic Maple Leaf Gardens, refurbished Dundas Square, and Ryerson University, a location central to urban regeneration schemes. Oxford Street, however, is one suburb east of Sydney’s CBD and separated by parkland, a seemingly minor difference but consequential for its integration in urban change. The significant regeneration of Sydney’s CBD that has taken place since the 1980s has focused on the northern end (Circular Quay, The Rocks) and western side (Darling Harbour, Barangaroo) of the city core, with the east (Hyde Park, East Sydney, and Oxford Street) receiving less attention. Oxford Street itself—the road—is a main traffic thoroughfare, six lanes wide, from the CBD to the eastern suburbs, and not a place for sightseeing and daytime leisure vis-à-vis refurbished Circular Quay, Darling Harbour and The Rocks. This, along with the westward movement of the downtown “core,” adds to Oxford Street’s disconnection from transformation and regeneration schemes. The residual space of Oxford Street, once with a vibrant daytime economy of restaurants, cafes, and retail, has in recent years transitioned to a nighttime economy based on clubs.

The changes in Oxford Street’s business profile, its disconnection from the CBD, and the movement of the city’s core toward the west, while not “causing” the development of Newtown as a queer neighborhood, have arguably helped facilitate changing LGBT spaces and networks. Mobile linkages and differences between Oxford Street and Newtown create distinctive relational geographies for these LGBT neighborhoods. Linkages include networks of LGBT venues, organizations, and residents. Differences include distinct daytime and nighttime economies linked to certain identities, such as largely gay male nightclubs on Oxford Street compared to queer/mixed venues (bars, pubs, cafes) in Newtown, Enmore, and Erskineville.

In Toronto, however, given its specific historical geographies and affordances, the Church-Wellesley village seems to be regrouping and rebranding with some success, partly due to current opportunities with local businesses and politicians who are committed to the village and taking advantage of upcoming hallmark events. The Church-Wellesley village arrives at this point in time with similar pressures as Oxford Street in terms of rising rents, changing demographics, and new social media taking clientele, etc. Yet it is also quite differently incorporated into the urban fabric—both the downtown core and other neighborhoods—enabling opportunities to proactively write a narrative in response to changes and draw on resources to stabilize itself. While there are alternative neighborhoods emerging, such as Queer West and Leslieville, they are not materialized in the relational geographies of LGBT landscapes in the way Newtown has become embedded as a queer neighborhood in Sydney, with a distinct profile connected with but contesting Oxford Street. In Toronto, Church-Wellesley village, at least for now, seems to have sustained its place in the city by re-embedding and rebranding itself.
NOTES

1. We are grateful to funding for this research provided by a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant, 2008–2012, and a University of Western Sydney International Research Initiative Scheme Grant, 2012.

2. In this article, we use the acronym “LGBT” as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. Identities are often grouped together as “LGBT” to reflect collective interests and community as sexual and gender minorities. Lesbian generally refers to women who are sexually attracted to other women, and gay refers to men who are attracted to other men. Trans is used by individuals who are alternatively gendered across a range of embodiments. We use queer to denote a particular contemporary moment when some individuals reject a gendered and sexual specificity but still position themselves within non-normative sexual and gender understandings—a positioning that is reflected in recent urban changes.


15 Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*.


Sullivan, “The End of Gay Culture.”


Manon Tremblay, David Paternotte, and Carol Johnson, eds., The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State: Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011).


Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire; Warner, Never Going Back.


John Sewell, The Shape of the City.


37 Bunting et al., *Canadian Cities in Transition*.


42 Ibid., 330.

43 Hernandez et al., “Transforming Downtown Yonge.”


Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*


Nash and Gorman-Murray, “LGBT Neighbourhoods and ’New Mobilities.’”

Nash, “The Age of the ‘Post-Mo.’”

Municipal Act 2001, Ontario, s. 204.


Game and Pringle, “Sexuality and the Suburban Dream.”


Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*.

Willett, *Living Out Loud*.

Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*.

Ibid.


Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, 19.

Ibid.


Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, 190.

Ibid.


Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, 193.

Ruting, “Economic Transformations of Gay Urban Spaces.”

Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, 191; Ruting, “Economic Transformations of Gay Urban Spaces.”


Clover Moore, 1993-2012, a straight woman embracing LGBT rights, and Lord Mayor of Sydney since 2004; Alex Greenwich, incumbent since 2012 (when Moore was forced to resign due to new NSW legislation preventing anyone from holding local and State office simultaneously), a gay man, gay rights activist, and former convener of Marriage Equality Australia.


Knopp, “Sexuality and Urban Space.”


Reynolds, “Endangered Territory, Endangered Identity.”

These local government strategies and plans, which are discussed on the City of Sydney Council website (http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au), include the Oxford Street Safety Strategy, the Oxford Street Revitalisation Strategy and the Oxford Street Cultural Quarter Action Plan.


Reynolds, “Endangered Territory, Endangered Identity.”
Afterword: When Has Sexuality Ever Been About Sex? A Review of Historical Geographies of Sexualities

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ABSTRACT: This review of historical geographies of sexualities identifies three strands of work: sexual community formation; subject production and population regulation; and processes of production, reproduction, and evolution. In all three, sexuality is situated at the nexus of the individual and the social, and it resists positive representation. It is instead examined by proxy, especially its “place” in the material rather than metaphorical sense. With a few exceptions, this small body of work is largely in conversation with presentist geographies in subdisciplines outside of historical geography. So too are the contributors to this special issue, who point historical geographies of sexualities in new directions by considering current debates over the marginalization of sexuality in accounts of more generic geographical processes, the critical opportunities of comparative approaches, the materiality of ignorance and invisibility, and the productivity of silence.

Keywords: sexuality

Introduction

In 2001 historian Matt Houlbrook issued a twofold challenge for a historical geography of sexuality: “First, it must situate geographies of sexual encounter, identity, and experience within wider urban social relations. Second, it must bridge the division between discourse and practice by relating the experience of sexual subjects to their representation as marginal—and vice versa.”¹ He argued that late 1990s work largely failed to bridge the gap between representation on the one hand, and material space and experience on the other. His critique was indebted to the work of historical geographer Miles Ogborn, and more generally to geographical historical materialism. If Houlbrook the historian foregrounded the need to talk about actual sex, sympathetic geographers have emphasized the need to talk about actual space.² Michael Brown argues, for example, that sexualized spatial metaphors such as the closet “work because they themselves are always somewhere (and at some scale), and that whereness enables and constrains social relations.”³ Although all of these scholars are heavily influenced by Foucault’s well-known arguments about the discursive production of sexuality, they, like Foucault, are careful to separate history from genealogy. History is committed to a referential relationship to material desiring bodies doing things in some past time and space, however constructed that epistemological relationship and its conditions of possibility may be in genealogical terms. If the defining problematic of a historical geography of sexuality is the relations between sexuality, space, and time, this is cross-cut by two others that are far more general: the relation between representation and materiality, and between the individual and the social.

Given this complexity, the development of historical geographies of sexualities over the past decade or so has proven more diverse than disciplined even as it has remained rare. First, material
“experiences” of sexuality are notoriously difficult to retrieve from the archive, and geographers are notably allergic to a simplistic “did they or didn’t they” approach. Second, sexuality is imbricated in every other social relation, and work on it is dispersed across subdisciplines. In such a disparate body of work, “it” is usually “about” something other than sexuality, making conversation across this literature infrequent, and generalization difficult and beside the point. Sexuality does not simply refer to erotic desire per se, but also to its production, identification, experience and regulation. And these phenomena are not simply individual, but they circulate in material, affective, and representational economies that exist in every conceivable spatialization. Finally, these phenomena are not simply static, but change over time and have multiple histories and temporalities.

In short, I argue that the actual, if not necessarily defining, problematic that drives the sheer variety of historical geographies of sexualities is in fact sexuality’s place between the individual and the social. This “place,” at once material and metaphorical, is also relational. Such geographies can be found in varying combinations in historical work on other modes of difference, and in present-oriented work on sexuality. In my reading, sexuality’s elusiveness as both an archival and empirical object fairly compels consideration of its material, discursive and relational place. It is this compulsion—due to sexuality’s particular resistance to positivist representation—that makes this problematic more than a banal restatement of the problem of the social (for presentist geographers) and its retrieval from the past (for historical geographers). In historical geographies of sexuality, sexuality’s place takes several forms I will explore below, most notably the objects of community, subjectivity, and population, as well as life processes of production, reproduction, and evolution. I will then consider the four contributions to this special issue and their points of departure from the main themes of the existing field of literature.

For purposes of this short article, I will respect the disciplinary convention of historical geography and limit my focus to sexualities that are in some sense past and leave aside much of the great deal of historical work that largely contextualizes present-day concerns. I will also focus on the work of geographers and/or others’ work in geographical outlets since the 2000s and only briefly consider here the voluminous geographically-minded work in a number of other social science and humanities disciplines, such as Houlbrook’s. Despite my adherence to disciplinary boundaries, the literature surveyed here far exceeds the subdiscipline of historical geography. Only one article cited here was published in this journal, only a handful in Journal of Historical Geography, and only a couple of books have been published within historical geography series. It appears that those least likely to cite historical geographies of sexualities are historical geographers at large. Thus historical geography is only one of many places to look for historical geographies of sexualities.

Several strands of larger literatures are worth mentioning because they are frequently cited in varying combinations. Unsurprisingly, a common touchstone is the work of Houlbrook’s historian colleagues on LGBT communities (mostly in the United States) and the regulation of prostitution (mostly in the British Empire), ranging from George Chauncey to Judith Walkowitz. Geographers heavily cite these authors’ agenda-setting monographs, but with a ritual disciplinary complaint that their spatializations “raise more questions than they answer.” They seek to show how place, networks, scale, and other spatial tropes are not simply containers and boundary markers, but are instead integral to understanding and theorizing identity and community formation, regulatory agendas and practices, and the conditions of possibility for any experience.

Even more pervasive is Michel Foucault’s middle work on the historical and spatial production of sexuality, and its rethinking of power, subjectivity, and modern government, that has so deeply shaped the field. Limited space precludes an in-depth discussion here, and overviews of Foucault’s work are ubiquitous. But, perhaps surprisingly, the most obvious
candidate, *The History of Sexuality vol. I*, is infrequently cited. Rather, historical geographers have more often engaged a range of Foucault’s associated work on discipline, biopower, and governmentality. This has often been refracted through subsequent scholarship, such as the moral regulation literature exemplified by Alan Hunt, who has explored the specificities of Anglophone subject production through the law, and postcolonial scholarship exemplified by Ann Stoler, who has relocated metropolitan subject production to the colonies and insisted upon the inescapable racialization of sexuality.9

Finally, more present-oriented literature on sexuality and space and broader geographies of exclusion are frequently cited by historical geographers of sexuality.10 Despite different methodological necessities—the use of interviews, field observation, and contemporary cultural productions—this literature has provided influential ways of thinking about the “fluid” spatialization of sexual normativities and resistances while provoking the historical question of how those spatializations arose and persisted while others disappeared. It is not that these works are completely unconcerned with the past—indeed, it is standard practice to provide some historical context to present-day geographies. Nonetheless, their temporal framing privileges the ongoing reproduction or becoming of current sexualities and spaces.

In summary, historical geographies of sexualities are strikingly scarce. Historians have dominated this area of enquiry, and while they are engaged in terms of bringing greater spatial specificity to the history of sexuality, historical geographers often gear their work toward conversations with geographers engaged in contemporary research rather than with each other. Sometimes this is as a historical corrective to presentist literature written over the past few decades, especially in the case of sexual geographies of lesbian and gay communities. Along with adding a consideration of space to that of time, historical geographers mobilize more recent theoretical contributions such as the iterative performativity of identity, the fluidity of space and its mutually constitutive relationship to identity, and the contingency of identity and community formation. Empirical social, cultural, urban, and political geographies date quickly, yet float in the eternal present of academic discourse, and it can be all too easy to universalize them temporally as well as geographically. Historical geographies of sexual community seek to anchor their empirical objects, and the processes that produce them, in time as well as place.

When it’s about . . .

These several approaches to the elusive object of sexuality are reflected by the main placeholders for sexuality examined by historical geographers. One distinct body of work carries on social history’s political imperative to document the emergence and change of communities of sexual minorities. Another concretizes sexuality by spatializing more abstract notions of subjectivity and population as objects of modern government. A third, smaller but important strand, looks to the ways processes rather than objects are sexualized, specifically economic production, social reproduction, and biological evolution. Through all of these strands, sexuality, qua bodily desires and acts, makes fugitive appearances as it is continually displaced by seemingly more tangible objects of inquiry.

Community formation, change, and failure

The notion of community is often popularly evoked to offer a sense of belonging. While historical narratives often depict community as a casualty of modernity, for sexual minorities of various sorts, urban capitalist modernity has been productive of community by offering space and time for non-normative experiences to be shared and to coalesce into social identities and subcultures.11 Local histories of gay or lesbian communities have explored the relative visibility of local-scale spaces such as commercial establishments, community organizations, and gay villages.
Often celebrated in the mainstream and LGBT presses and depicted in earlier academic work as spaces of liberating visibility, recent work has underscored the internal contests and exclusions that have given shape to gay villages and other forms of sexual community.

Catherine Nash queries the gay village’s history in terms of its representational politics in the case of Toronto. “[F]rom the outset, Toronto’s gay and lesbian-identified spaces were a battleground for attempts to fix the meanings given to the identity of those engaged in same sex behaviors.”12 Through archival work and interviews, she asserts a series of dominant framings of community politics while exploring their contradictions and complexities. During the 1970s, this commercialized spatial fix of sexual identity was not only contested by homophobes, but also internally by those who objected that such a gay ghetto was depoliticizing rather than enabling. She traces how public articulations of community identity saw major shifts over the 1970s due to conflicting spatializations. These included an assimilationist model of suburban domesticity, a liberationist sensibility skeptical of the growing gay ghetto due to a wish to undermine repressive identities of sexuality and gender, and a gay minority discourse that claimed the gay ghetto as a basis for community. In a closer consideration of the gay minority shift, she shows how gender was also a serious internal division as gay-male-dominated spaces and organizations came to represent gays and lesbians to the wider public despite focusing almost exclusively on male, and largely white, middle-class concerns.13

Julie Podmore also focuses on the difference gender makes to sexual community formation in the case of Montreal, and the fate of distinctly lesbian visibility over the 1980s and 1990s.14 She notes the rise of disjunctive spatial enclaves for lesbian and gay communities with quite different population mixes experiencing different fortunes in post-industrial urban restructuring. The political relations between them also varied, as did divisions of class and language. Add to this a new generation of women embracing a queer identity and eschewing a specifically lesbian-feminist identity, and the result was the disappearance of self-identified lesbian visibility in commercial establishments and other venues. Now queer women are visible in mixed venues in the gay village, while men still have the option of male-only spaces, albeit in reduced numbers. For Podmore, lesbian invisibility is no trans-historical fact of lesser market power as is often suggested, but in the case of Montreal, a recent and highly contingent product of gender and other social relations materialized in space through capitalist urban processes. Also, crucially, this is not simply a tale of exclusion of self-identified lesbians, though she acknowledges this does happen. Rather these processes are highly productive, and “in the 1990s the production of lesbian nightlife brought opportunities to experiment with the commodification and queering of lesbian identity.”15

Jason Prior also explores this vexed relationship between commodification and queering (not his terminology) by showing how gay male community assimilation sometimes explicitly relies upon its mainstream sexualization.16 Due to legal and planning system changes over the 1980s and 1990s, bathhouses in Sydney went from being discursively framed as neighborhood contaminants to crucial amenities for a gay community seen as increasingly integral to the wider (heteronormative) Sydney community. Furthermore, this was accomplished through a legal reframing of what counted as public and private space for sexual activity.17

However, gay and lesbian communities are not the only ones to oscillate between sexualization and desexualization through spatial means. Caroline Daley shows how nudists in New Zealand shifted location “from bush to beach” in the mid-twentieth century due to shifting sexual mores and landscape ideologies.18 She particularly shows how discursive misplacement can have material effects. Interwar naturists in New Zealand founded camps in the bush in search of prelapsarian sexual purity, while moral conservatives misrecognized nudism as a phenomenon of the beach, which was an increasingly sexualized space of shrinking bathing suits.
and beauty contests. “That [naturists’] critics did not accept this spatial retreat to the bush helped bring nudism to the public’s attention and legitimise nudism on beaches. Ironically, nudism’s opponents created the symbolic space for nudists to make the transition from bush to beach.”

Community can also fail to take place. Chris Brickell’s necessarily speculative reading of a 1949 court case of two New Zealand men who cruised three sailors in a Dunedin park shows how different masculinities can come into conflict in particular places. One of the sailors complained to the police, and the result was an internationally scripted encounter between men desiring sex with men that went wrong for the locals when they were arrested for indecent assault. Situated two decades before the gay rights movement, my characterization of this as failed community may be unwisely teleological. Yet as Brickell notes, historians have shown how a transnational subculture already existed among such men, and that soon the term “homosexual” would popularly encompass both “normal” men who played the “active” role, and “poofs” and “pansies” who played a “passive” role, into one category. And as many others have shown, ultimately the category of the homosexual would be spatialized through rapidly shifting economies of visibility and community formation.

All of these papers, some in quite different ways, explore the spatialities of minority and subcultural sexual communities in terms of individual and collective identities, not all overtly sexual. A recurring theme is the ways internal conflict is constitutive of community. A second is the ways shifting representations of community can be materially productive, often in ways far exceeding the intentions of their authors. By showing how sites of community formation are nodal points for desiring individuals, circulating discourses and larger social processes, this body of work demonstrates, as historian Clair Potter puts it in a recent review of queer urban histories, “the insufficiency of any urban history that begins and ends at the city limits.” In this, historical geographers have moved in similar directions as historians in recent years in emphasizing the ever-frictional becoming of any sexual community.

**Subject production and population regulation**

While historical accounts of sexual communities have mostly concerned twentieth-century Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, work on subjectivity is more often situated in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century USA and British Empire. Identity and subjectivity are overlapping categories, but here I focus especially on the capacities, characteristics, and limitations of agency so crucial to defining subjectivity. These geographies are sometimes less indebted to historians, and more reliant on Foucault’s work on bodily discipline and normalization, and on feminist thought on embodiment. Furthermore, they often focus more on the spatial, material, and discursive “conditions of possibility” for agency and less on recovering specific instances of its exercise. If the fluidity of and conflict over space are constitutive of communities, the mobility of bodies consistently figures as a condition of possibility in historical geographies of subject production. The most common mobile body here is the female prostitute, would-be or actual, who traveled along the circuits of empire, emigration, and internal migration during the dislocations of Western imperialism and urbanization. Medicalized as a source of disease and thus a danger to all, she was a common object of regulation. Despite a commitment to subjectivity and agency in these historical geographies of sexualities, it is those of the regulators that come through most clearly in this body of work due to the archival traces they were able to leave behind.

Some such work offers straightforward accounts of people exercising agency, as in Richard Phillips’s critique of a common historiographical assumption that policy concerning sexuality in the British Empire was simply a top-down affair. For example, he demonstrates that state legislators and other local actors were quite active in shaping nineteenth-century Australian policy regarding the heterosexual age of consent and prostitution, especially a proposed adoption
of Britain’s infamous Contagious Diseases (CD) Acts. These were sharply criticized by activists across the globe such as Josephine Butler for giving the full force of the law to the sexual double standard by mandating medical inspections of female prostitutes near a number of military cantonments. Similar proposals to the CD acts were also defeated in Sierra Leone, with a more localized strategy of sexual regulation emerging that involved multiple actors, ranging from colonial officials to the local Creole community. Phillips’s insistence on charting sexual regulation and resistance in postcolonial geographies not only illuminates the political agency of individual subjects, even if in the service of a “flexible imperialism,” but also scales up the argument in order to de-center Europe as the subject of history and knowledge.24

Philip Howell offers a more fine-grained “microgeography” of prostitution regulation in Liverpool, Cambridge, Gibraltar, and Hong Kong in a monograph focusing on the varied geographies of police enforcement.25 The CD acts loom large here, and he emphasizes their military function through a “politics of place” rather than the “imposition of some abstract or regulatory power.”26 He shows how war and empire have been central to sexual regulation more broadly, not least through strategies of spatial containment entailed by regulationism. Through painstaking work with police and military records, among other sources, Howell shows how various actors attempted to materialize containment on the ground in response to local conditions while in the service of defending the Empire.

Whether at home or abroad, “progress” has long underpinned British self-representations of government, including that of sexuality. Philip Howell, David Beckingham, and Francesca Moore offer an explicit warning against such Whiggishness, here in the case of Liverpool’s changing policies toward female sex workers.27 Despite framing their paper in terms of mid-2000s policy debates, their substantive study is of Victorian policy in Liverpool, which also used similar policies of containment and localization to regulate prostitution. What was at stake here was not only the regulation of sexual conduct, but also Liverpool’s reputation as a city that had an enlightened approach to managing the “problem” of prostitution through spatial means. Liverpool Council has long articulated itself through policy pronouncements and police practices as a city that deals with its “problem” members according to the British state’s favorite self-image: with “fairness.”

Stephen Legg’s work on prostitution regulation in colonial India develops a number of points raised by these (post)colonial geographies of sexualities. Among other things, he identifies and theorizes alternative spatializations to place that also help constitute sexual regulation. In an exploration of the interwar debates over the League of Nations’ attempts to curb the Government of India’s toleration of brothels, he shows how the scale of state sovereignty came into question. According to Legg, scale should be “critically considered as a narrative device, a measure of distance and a technique of governmentalities (from the personal to the international), rather than a plane at which structural processes operate.”28 Furthermore, scale should be seen specifically as a product of networks and assemblages, in this case through the agency of the League’s traveling Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East as its members physically decamped to India to investigate conditions. However, sometimes agency is enabled and disabled at a more individual and affective level, as in the case of Melisent Shephard, a British “imperial feminist” who went to India on behalf of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene.29 She sought alliances with local reform groups, but her increasingly racialized explanations for the toleration of brothels in India undercut her efforts, and her most intimate and effective relationships over her fifteen years there continued to be with reformers on the other side of the world in England.

Sometimes sexuality was produced through networked mobility that went the other way. Samuel Hyson and Alan Lester look to official records and diaries of Indian soldiers hospitalized in southern England during World War I to show the sexual anxieties prompted by the presence
of Indian men in small towns such as Brighton.\textsuperscript{30} As in the colonies, the perceived threat was to white women, but as the archive suggests, this was a fear largely experienced by military officials. Local newspapers expressed excitement at the presence of such exotic men and ran stories of various encounters between the soldiers and the locals. Nonetheless officials running the hospitals enacted strict surveillance, often limited contact between soldiers and female nurses, and in some cases even went so far as to confine the soldiers to hospital grounds behind barbed wire—a practice unsurprisingly resented by the soldiers laying down their lives for the empire.

As with historical geographies of community, in much of this work sexuality is internally contested, here as a matter of biopolitics. For example, Emine Evered and Kyle Evered examine regulationism in early republican Turkey. They detail intrastate conflicts over the regulation of prostitution and by extension, the sexualities of all women, as the Kemalist state sought to build a “modern” capacity to control the spread of syphilis and thereby ensure the health and productivity of its population.\textsuperscript{31} Doctors figured prominently in the Republic’s political class, and they were in a position to drive a policy of regulationism in the 1920s and 1930s, even as the approach fell out of favor internationally to be replaced by a prohibitionist stance toward prostitution. This was prompted in part by an internal exoticization of the rural—so-called secret prostitution that promoted the spread of syphilis was deemed characteristic of “traditional” interior Anatolia rather than modern cities. A prohibitionist stance toward regulating prostitution was on the rise internationally, but for many Kemalists it was too “modern” for Turkey, and regulationism would have to remain in place while the country modernized.

The United States, a large federal polity with high rates of industrialization and immigration but a perceived lack of administrative capacity, faced some analogous governmental challenges to both imperial Britain and republican Turkey at this time. But it was to Britain that US regulators responded as the two countries were connected by language and a transatlantic middle class that facilitated the exchange of ideas and practices. For example, in early twentieth-century Seattle, Progressive-era juvenile courts sought to normalize young subjects by disciplining their sexuality. According to Elizabeth Brown, “drawing on the technologies of the individual, the culture of expert knowledge, and the apparatus of the state, the normal and accidental delinquent, replete with white, middle-class, heterosexual sensibilities, is defined as the representative of childhood that the juvenile court is entrusted to protect.”\textsuperscript{32} As in Foucault’s famous description of sexuality as a “dense transfer point” for multiple operations of power, the space of the courtroom operated analogously as a material as well as a metaphorical site.

A truism of the governmentality approach is that geographies of regulation far exceed the state. In my own work on the Progressive-era United States, the movie theater was a new urban heterosocial leisure space contributing to a moral panic about the recruitment of young white women for prostitution.\textsuperscript{33} Social reformers sought to shape cinema’s intensely haptic visuality by regulating the moving image on screen and its space of exhibition to reinforce morally sound outcomes in an impressionable young audience as they made their way in the new mass industrial city. The desired outcome of this moral visualization was the avoidance of the “white slavery” of prostitution in favor of companionate marriage. Furthermore, sexuality’s simultaneous privatization in an increasingly egalitarian domestic space was articulated as the source of the liberal white female subject’s self-government, and thus the basis of the “success” of the Anglo-Saxon race as the agent of global progress.\textsuperscript{34}

This “new woman,” whose newfound mobility and independence was exemplified by images of her riding a bicycle, was not just a figure of US cities at this time. Kate Boyer shows how young women gained economic opportunities in Montreal through the feminization of clerical work in its banking sector.\textsuperscript{35} But their position was precarious as these formerly all-male work places not only became heterosocial, but also heterosexual, due to men’s supposedly
innate propensity for “distraction” in the presence of women. Women attempted to manage their
embodiment through modest business attire and avoiding interactions that could be construed as
flirtatious. Bank managers went so far as to segregate work areas by gender and install separate
elevators and catering facilities, but they resorted to firing women deemed disruptive, even as
they acknowledged its unfairness. Along these lines, I have also explored the disruptive presence
of “other” bodies — but here, representationally — in D.W. Griffith’s film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)
and its depiction of the aftermath of the US Civil War and its celebration of the birth of the Ku
Klux Klan.36 A complex geography spanning scales from the household to the nation spatializes
subjects in whom sexuality, race, class and gender are codetermining. This renders African
Americans, and European Americans who desire them, inappropriate sexual subjects unfit to
govern. They are thereby out of place in the state and national capitols they usurped during
Reconstruction.

But it is not just the individual, embodied subject this strand of work addresses. Michael
Brown and Larry Knopp ask a question central to many such geographies: “‘Sexuality,’ writes
Foucault, ‘exists at the point where the body and the population meet.’ But just *where* is that
point?”37 In the case of World War II Seattle, public health officials seeking to control sexually
transmitted disease faced a dilemma common to any regulatory project. Govern bodies, spaces,
or both, and through what relation? Brown and Knopp unpack two epistemological approaches
used by officials to map “venereal locations” vs. “venereal places.” The first was a nomothetic,
epidemiological approach mapping the abstract space of the city along with its sexualized, raced,
genre, classed and aged bodies to deduce the causes of diseases’ spread. The other was an
ideographic, ethnographic approach to the neighborhoods affected, the data from which was
used for policing prostitution. The answer to the authors’ question, then, is not straightforward,
as the spatiality of disease could only be constituted through multiple practices of mapping and
materializing different epistemologies, none of which *could* ever be quite adequate. Borrowing
Foucault’s vocabulary, what was at stake in the “anatomo-politics” of identifying and regulating
sexualized body-subjects was the “bio-politics” of protecting the health of the larger population
of which they were a part. Yet these body-subjects were also a danger to the population because of
that “dense transfer point” of sexuality — and other social relations such as age and race.

Brown continues this project into the mid-twentieth century and builds on Legg’s above-
cited governmentality work by examining what he calls the “prosaic geographies of the local
state.”38 He offers a detailed account of several dualisms driving local biopolitics of venereal
disease governance. These were in the realms of epistemology (scientific vs. geopolitical/
military conceptualizations of venereal disease), techne (top-down vs. self-disciplinary modes of
intervention), visibilities (descriptive vs. predictive), identities (at-risk vs. risky bodies) and ethos
(moralizing certain identities vs. a morally “neutral” approach to regulation). Such governmental
dualisms are symptomatic of sexuality’s elusiveness. As Brown notes, “What I found in the
archives was evidence not so much about VD and the homosexual per se, but rather more the
place in which that homosexual body would have been governed.”39

A frequent motif in this strand of work on biopolitics is the propensity in modernity to
divide and govern populations through the reproductive category of race by enframing it through
sexuality as an individual property. Natalie Oswin’s work on the history of sexual regulation
in Singapore shows how the Singaporean state has sought to produce disciplined subjects who
would productively comprise a new nation. It has actively shaped multiple aspects of Singaporean
life, in the biopolitical sense of that word. These have included sodomy laws, imposed by the
colonial government in part at the behest of the Straits Chinese elite who sought to demonstrate
their modernity, and thus fitness to govern, through showing a commitment to monogamous
heterosexual marriage. It is a finding that complicates claims by activists seeking to overturn
sodomy laws by depicting them as strictly a homophobic British colonial inheritance.\textsuperscript{40} Housing has been a particularly pervasive means of government for creating a productive population by restricting approximately 80% of its availability to heterosexual nuclear families of citizens, a practice that queers not only those in same-sex relationships, but also singles, unmarried parents, migrants and others.\textsuperscript{41}

Biopolitics are also geopolitics. Kolson Schlosser offers a reading of prominent Cold War neo-Malthusian texts in the United States to show how they articulated not only an internally stratified population to be governed in terms of growth and the consumption of resources, but also its relation to other national populations that may be more or less economically “developed,” and pose more or less an existential threat. While “populations (as opposed to territory) were rendered intelligible as a means for policing them,” territorialization at the international scale came to the fore through the act of comparison in asking the question of “the who of reproduction as much as the how many.”\textsuperscript{42} For the same time and place, Matthew Coleman shows how this bio-geopolitical territorialization has been effected through immigration laws excluding homosexuals. But in his reading of congressional debates and court decisions regarding immigration, he points out that “the abstracted scale of geopolitical inquiry prioritized in much geography research seems at odds with the encounters that make up the geography of state power.”\textsuperscript{43} He focuses instead on how immigration law is also a means of domestic social control, most notably by distinguishing the processes of border protection and deportation.

Historical geographies of sexual subject and population production emphasize the mutually constitutive nature of individual agency and social discourses and practices. Here, sexuality cannot be separated from other modes of differentiation such as race, which Foucault noted functions as a “caesura” that divides populations into those whose lives are worth cultivating to promote the health of the social body, and those whose lives are deemed inimical to that flourishing.\textsuperscript{44} This has not been confined to more polite forms of government at a distance. As Coleman and others emphasize, this act of division involves the violence of state sovereignty at multiple scales from the bodily to the international. To rephrase Brown and Knopp’s question, asking literally where that caesura has been and how it has enabled modern government, both of selves and others, has been a central preoccupation of this body of work.

\textit{Life processes: production, reproduction, evolution}

Evident in the foregoing discussion is that third reproductive category, gender. Francesca Moore, noting gender’s peculiar theoretical absence in Foucault’s governmentality work, explores how the subjectivity of the “bad mother” was produced in Lancashire a century ago in order to improve infant welfare by relocating the causes of morbidity and mortality.\textsuperscript{45} Moore shows how social reformers problematized environmental determinism by blaming working-class mothers rather than the spaces lacking sanitation provision they were forced to inhabit. This “biopolitical concern for the quality and quantity of the British race” operated through the premise that middle-class women had the capacity and responsibility to teach their “less fortunate sisters” to be good mothers. This they did within the space of the Bolton School, and through neighborhood visits.\textsuperscript{46} This paper does not address sexuality directly, but rather one of its many possible results—production, both biological and social. Yet given the division of labor over who has been (and still largely is) responsible for reproduction, Moore’s work shows how gender is as much a biopolitical production as sexuality and race, and that it is indissociable from them as an indispensable division for governing populations. Implicit too in this Foucauldian formulation is class, a point made more explicit in James Tyner and Donna Houston’s work on the punishment of interracial heterosexual relations in the United States.\textsuperscript{47}
The need to avoid arbitrarily separating reproduction and production in understanding social change informs Heidi Nast’s study of 500 years of spatial change in the Kano Palace of northern Nigeria. In a political economy-oriented analysis, she shows how royal concubines were powerful political actors in their control of the palace’s grain trade and indigo dyeing which materially enabled royal power. Nast uses a combination of present-day aerial photographs and colonial photographs, observation, and interviews with descendants of concubines and slaves to document how the social relation of sexuality (imbibed in gender relations, slavery, and royalty) was spatialized. Her case study supports the bold claim that “in agrarian-based state contexts reproduction moves history.”

The nexus of social reproduction and economic production that sustains subjects and populations is not only highly gendered. Through sexuality it helps constitute the boundaries of the human in the most literal sense. Carl Griffin explores relationships between humans and animals in the agrarian economy of late eighteenth-century England. As “embodied capital,” animals mediated human-human relations, especially in the case of bestiality prosecutions which frequently involved working-class defendants and property-owning witnesses. Griffin characterizes bestiality as sexual “violence” along with more overt forms of sexual maiming. Yet Michael Brown and Claire Rasmussen query the construction of bestiality as violence in their examination of a far more recent sex panic stemming from the US Supreme Court’s invalidation of sodomy laws in 2003. A number of states suddenly found themselves without valid anti-bestiality laws as they were frequently rolled into sodomy laws. In Washington State, those seeking to solve the “problem” were faced with a quandary: how to frame sex with animals as an abuse of their rights, while framing animals themselves as human property to be bought, sold, put to work, and eaten?

Shifting from animals to plants, Carla Hustak reads birth-control advocate and paleobotanist Marie Stopes’s inquiries into human and plant sex into each other. Stopes’s work at New Brunswick’s Fern Ledges in the early twentieth century comparatively evaluated plants’ evolved fitness for their environment in strikingly colonialist and heteronormative terms, while her later work on human sexuality explicitly naturalized a particular notion of white, metropolitan heterosexuality in terms of plant sex. “The ‘human’ could be seen as subject to the same sexual processes as plants in the making of natural environments,” Hustak notes. Similarly, “the non-human shaped and was shaped by racial, class and sexual hierarchies in a particular place.” In this eugenistic framework, harnessing sex to breed fitter plants and humans enmeshed both in the same life processes.

Most of this work overlaps with the analytical concerns of the previous section on populations. But the explicit attention to sexuality’s place in economic production, social reproduction and biological evolution as biopolitical processes (in contrast to urban processes) is noteworthy for showing how these were central concerns of Foucault, and that taking inspiration from his approaches to subjectification and governmentality need not be incompatible with political economy or feminist analyses. Furthermore, the wealth of different sources examined—some non-archival—indicates the need to avoid reducing sexual regulation to the state, even if its archive is usually the largest and most accessible. Here as in other historical geographies, sexuality’s place is everywhere.

New historical geographies of sexualities

The papers in this special issue offer distinctive answers to the question of sexuality’s place between the individual and the social. The contributions of Catherine Nash, Andrew Gorman-Murray, and Julie Podmore take the continuing problematic of community formation in directions that are unusual in historical geographies of sexualities. Francesca Moore reasserts the
importance of the private sphere of the heterosexual nuclear family as a biopolitical site, a central point of feminist critique as well as Foucault’s *History of Sexuality Volume I* that only occasionally figures in this body of literature. Marianne Blidon makes the crucial but frequently neglected methodological point that archival silences are productive, while pressing the point that war, too, is a nexus of the individual and the social.

Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray’s comparative take on the historical geographies of gay villages in Toronto and Sydney emphasizes the need for specific, local contextualization in debates over the alleged decline of gay villages in various Western countries, and their futures. Their comparison highlights some sharp differences between two otherwise broadly similarly situated cities. The Toronto LGBT community’s early adoption of an ethnic minority model of activism combined with a more connected location and a compulsory business improvement association has led to a stabilization of its Church-Wellesley Village, not least as a tourist attraction. Sydney’s Oxford Street, on the other hand, emerged with less institutional and legal support and is now the object of perhaps belated efforts to reinvigorate its daytime economy, while the more residential district of Newtown has emerged as a more diverse (i.e. less male-identified) LGBT neighborhood in a different part of the city.

Their comparative approach is implicit in a great deal of present-oriented work, either as an assumption (e.g. the comparison implicit in diffusionist accounts of gay identity) or as an object of critique (e.g. in efforts to rethink the same by decentering the West). But here this approach usefully grounds emergent neoliberal approaches to community territorialization in historical-geographical specificities that gain critical purchase through a well-chosen comparison. But for historical geographers more specifically, it offers a way of overcoming the solipsism of the case study by, perhaps paradoxically, emphasizing the ubiquity of given urban processes through their different local materializations.

Julie Podmore seeks to reinsert the insights of historical geographies of sexual communities back into more “mainstream” narratives of urban change, an example of a more generally outward-looking approach that “talks back” to the larger discipline of geography and beyond (see also Brown’s earlier-cited *Urban Geography* plenary lecture). Here her continuing development of Montreal’s historical geography of sexuality shows how sexuality has been central to post-war discourses of urban decline, which have been more widely characterized as concerning race and class in North American cities. She shows how the various and shifting sexual communities of Montreal’s Lower Main, a fairly typical North American inner-city transition zone, were represented in relation to urban renewal efforts, not only in terms of the city’s internal ordering, but as it appeared on the world stage through mega-events such as Expo 67 and the 1976 Olympics. Sexuality co-constitutes urban processes as much as other social relations such as class, yet this fact has yet to substantially impact mainstream understandings, academic or otherwise, Richard Florida’s “gay index” notwithstanding.

In her contribution, Francesca Moore relocates sexuality, framed here as a biopolitical transfer point, from the neighborhood to the family home in 1920s Rochdale, England. Public health officials, noting an alarming rise in venereal disease rates, engaged in a sex education campaign to “responsibilise parents” for the sexual health of their children, and through them, the nation and the race. Moore emphasizes how this was an explicit problematization of the public-private divide, a spatialization health officials recognized as producing an unhealthy ignorance of sexuality inimical to a healthy moralization of (hetero)sexuality. In contrast to accounts that emphasize the continuance of maternal feminism at this time, Moore makes clear that this public-private bridging of sexual citizenship responsibilized women and men equally. Furthermore, her approach reasserts a point often neglected in historical geographies of liberal governmentality. This is that the problem of state knowledge is not just a generic problem of
visibility, but can instead be configured by a specifically liberal spatiality—the particular public-private divide characteristic of liberal-capitalist societies. Work from a disciplinary or biopolitical perspective frequently shows how women in particular have often been denied the status of being the subjects of rights, as in the case of work on sexual regulation in imperial Britain or my own on the Progressive Era United States. But Moore also points out that the public-private divide is built into the material environment of industrial cities and reinforced by household legal protections against the state, both of which conspire to produce ignorance.

Gender is also central for Marianne Blidon, but rather than focus on discipline, she examines the constitutive role of embodied encounters for state sovereignty in the guise of war. In words that might have come from Coleman’s above-cited work, she argues, “Far from being a matter of intimacy, sexuality is part of geopolitics and a politics that relies on the production of a sexual world order.” Her reading of officers’ memoirs from the Napoleonic Wars is as much methodological as empirical. Silences in the archive are as productive as strategies of veridiction for producing a particular geopolitical division, that between virtuous French women, and foreign women who cannot be “raped” because they have no virtue to violate. In these memoirs, French soldiers’ sexual violence toward foreign women is often presented in offhandedly voluntaristic terms, or rhetorically blamed on the women themselves. The soldiers are positioned as the victims of foreign women’s immorality, even as “certain anecdotes leave little doubt as to the constraints weighing on these women.”

Blidon calls for a more nuanced approach to reading archival material that pays due attention to the strategies of truth-telling recorded therein, which can in turn help make sense of the structured silences within the material. More common in historical geographies of sexualities is an approach that examines the production of “positive” knowledge explicitly represented in the archive. This ranges from overtly state-created discourses such as Brown and Knopp’s comparison of nomothetic and ideographic representations of venereal disease, to aesthetic representations such as my examinations of the affective power of cinematic moral narratives. But Blidon reminds us it is also imperative that historical geographers attend to silences, omissions, and ellipses in the archive, for what is not said, and how it is not said, are as important as what is said in producing the place of sexuality.

Conclusion

The contributors to this special issue offer several substantive and methodological points of departure from the places of sexuality that have dominated English-language historical-geographical work. I cannot claim my survey of the existing field in which they have intervened is exhaustive, but given the rarity of historical geographies of sexualities, it is close. And what prevails is a longstanding concern with historicizing the ever-moving target of community formation, an effort to write histories and genealogies of modern sexual regulation and its productive role in subject- and population-formation and government, and an examination of processes of production, reproduction, and evolution that are not only classed, gendered, and racialized, but also sexualized. These four new papers do not move beyond these objects and processes so much as rethink them.

Podmore resists sexual minoritization in mainstream explanations of generic processes such as urban change, while Nash and Gorman-Murray advocate comparativism. Moore underscores the importance of materially situating structures of ignorance and invisibility, and governmental efforts to overcome them. Blidon examines the productive role of an unlikely pairing—war and silence—in the study of past geographies of sexualities. None of these are new in and of themselves. Feminist, Marxist, post-colonial, and anti-racist geographies have long insisted upon gender, class, and race as inherent to geographies in the modern world, and to
knowledge claims about them, albeit with decidedly uneven uptake. A more recent resurgence in debates over comparativism in urban geography has underscored the problems of privileging exemplary sites of widespread yet inherently variable geographical processes. The specificity of liberal spatiality was a frequent motif in postcolonial and governmentality literatures of the 1990s and early 2000s. The violence of state sovereignty is bread and butter for political geographers. And Foucault’s admonition to attend to silences is frequently cited but rarely followed. This is because sexuality usually speaks by proxy, and sexuality’s place is more legible than sexuality is itself. As historical geographers attend to the archives of this place, in whatever form it takes, they are finding, and will continue to find, that this nexus of the individual and the social is as diverse, conflictive, and productive as it is in the present-day geographies of sexualities that dominate the discipline.

NOTES
2 Here Houlbrook writes of urban processes, but in subsequent works concrete urban spaces come to the fore; e.g. Matt Houlbrook, Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
6 Phillips, Sex, Politics and Empire: A Postcolonial Geography, 8.
9 For works on the production of law, see: See Alan Hunt, Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Felix Driver,


19 Ibid., 152.


21 Ibid., 89.


23 Richard Phillips, *Sex, Politics and Empire: A Postcolonial Geography*.


26 Ibid., 2.


31 Emine Evered and Kyle Evered, “‘Protecting the National Body’: Regulating the Practice and the Place of Prostitution in Early Republican Turkey,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 20, no. 7 (2013): 839–57.


39 Ibid., 2.


46 Ibid., 65.


49 Ibid., xviii.


53 Ibid., 894.

54 Ibid., 893.


59 Ibid.
The Colonial Origins of the State in Southern Belize

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ABSTRACT: Recent research in Belizean historiography has improved our understanding of twentieth-century colonial state relations and the transition to the post-colonial authoritarian democratic state. Following a concise review of these works, I draw on archival documents to examine the origins of the British state in southern Belize. This analysis provides two principal findings. First, the earliest state institutions were founded at the behest of colonists from the defeated Confederate States to facilitate labor discipline over their workers. Once established, local state officials sought to learn about and gain influence over Indigenous communities. Second, the nascent colonial state was relatively authoritarian and inattentive to local accumulation and social needs. Thus from its inception the state was organized around race and class relations.

Keywords: state, colonialism, political economy, history, Indigenous peoples

As with most former British colonies, Belize’s state is a democratic constitutional monarchy. Yet to describe this state in such terms obscures as much as it reveals. This is not only because the quality of democracy is questionable in a country where an oligarchy holds a de facto monopoly on political-economic power and the masses are largely passive. There is also a conceptual issue. To describe any state as a constitutional democracy is to emphasize its formal, legal character and thereby deemphasize its inherently social and relational character. As Belizeans know, there is a fine line between personal and political relations. Thus any coherent explanation of the Belizean state requires historical-geographical analyses of social and political life. As a contribution to this end, this paper provides the first attempt to examine the origins of state institutions in southern Belize. I treat the Belizean state as the crystallization of the prevailing ensemble of social relations. I argue that these social relations (ergo the state) are fundamentally rooted in the colonial era and the type of capitalist society it engendered. To grasp the contemporary state in southern Belize and its ongoing conflicts with Indigenous communities over oil, timber, and other resources therefore requires taking account of these colonial origins.

To generalize, the historical literature on Belize’s state prior to the mid-1970s is distorted by an Anglophilic tone and pro-colonial presuppositions. Consider, for instance, the preface to the three volumes of archival documents edited by one of the colony’s governors, John Burdon. Burdon writes that the history of the colony “reflects the utmost credit on the race of adventurers to whom Great Britain owes her Colonial Empire. It brings out their daring, their tenacity, their fundamental desire for and achievement of British law and order.” This narrative, it goes without saying, marginalizes non-European perspectives. It is also geographically deterministic: in this view, what distinguishes the history of Belize from that of other former British colonies is its geography, particularly its resources and location in the western Caribbean and Central America. Such colonial historiography could only produce a self-justification for colonization, an alibi that is teleological and Eurocentric. Belizean history is naturalized as a story of a territorial nation-state called forth from the land.
Fortunately, over the past thirty years a critical literature has called into question the earlier historiography. I will only briefly mention three scholars who have recast the making of modern Belize by emphasizing the dialectic of colonial rule and popular struggles. O. Nigel Bolland inaugurated the critical study of colonial British Honduras (as Belize was then known) through a series of monographs on the history of colonialism. Cedric Grant wrote the foundational history of the nationalist movement and formation of modern politics. And with his critical monographs and his widely used history textbook, Assad Shoman—politician of the left and expert on the Guatemalan claim—is arguably Belize's most important living historian.

Shoman also wrote an important (but rarely cited) analysis of the Belizean state. Applying Clive Thomas' framework to Belize, Shoman argues that the distinctive features of its "authoritarian democracy" are rooted in the colonial political economy of the nineteenth century. In this period, Belize had an "extreme monopolization of land ownership," with the vast majority of lands in the hands of a tiny oligarchy that ruled an economy "based almost exclusively on the export of mahogany." Underneath this ruling class were the masses, comprised of a small urban proletariat and a much broader "working class and peasantry made up of the non-white population." Within this colonial society the role of the state was principally to maintain order and facilitate the outward flow of unprocessed timber. The creation of institutions, which might have counteracted the extractive character of British colonial capitalism, was retarded by the persistent Spanish claim to the territory:

Because of the ambiguous state of sovereignty—with the British acknowledging Spanish sovereignty but still fighting to maintain exclusive possession—the usual state institutions were underdeveloped, with the powers held respectively by the settlers and the colonial representatives in continuous conflict.

I will return to these points (with which I agree), but pause here to note a geographical limitation of the critical historiography. With few exceptions these studies focus on people and events in Belize City, the largest city and headquarters of colonial government. This has left those of us who seek to understand historical processes in the outlying districts (particularly rural areas) with little material to work. Granted, Belize City was the locus of power and population, but throughout the nineteenth century the majority lived elsewhere. None of the aforementioned studies discuss the history of southern Belize (i.e. south of Dangriga). This paper complements the critical historical literature empirically by providing the first account of the origins of the colonial state in the Toledo District, the southernmost part of Belize. I also address one of this literature's theoretical lacunae by framing my study with Marxist state theory—work hitherto absent, but which has a great deal to contribute.

As is well known, Marx never elaborated a coherent theory of the state, so Marxist accounts of the state build upon Marx's concepts, historical analyses, and method. These accounts are distinguished from conventional schools of political theory (including those prevalent in most studies of the Belizean state) by the general argument that the capitalist state is never a neutral arbiter of economic or social conflict, but rather a cause and effect of the underlying structure of capitalist social relations—which are inherently unequal. Within this rubric, multiple schools can be discerned. Let us briefly consider two and their implications for Belizean historiography.

First, instrumentalists see the state as an instrument wielded by elite social classes in their struggle to maintain power. This view could be drawn from Marx's statement in *The Communist manifesto* that "the Executive of the modern state is merely the organizing committee for the collective interests of the bourgeoisie": the "merely" is a problematic adverb, since capitalist states do things which are positive for the proletariat (e.g., build schools). Consider too Sweezy's claim...
that the state is “an instrument in the hands of the ruling class for enforcing and guaranteeing the stability of the class structure itself.” This position is untenable. To begin, social class structures are not perfectly stable. Moreover, this approach cannot account for the conflicts internal to the state that cut across class boundaries, e.g., when the bourgeoisie is divided into distinct groups that fight one another for state control. Thus, adherents of this approach tend to explain state practices reductively, by reference to the corrupt motivations of individual leaders (a common tendency in the analysis of Belizean state). Finally, powerful social groups in capitalist society often seek to inhibit state action. If the state is indeed an instrument, it is not always employed by capital: it is often blunted.

Another approach focuses on the ways that particular accumulation processes shape the capitalist state’s form and structure. Capitalism is by its nature uneven, crisis-prone, and wrought by conflict, and the state acts as one of the central means of assuaging capital’s often contradictory and destructive tendencies. The state, in this view, reflects the concentration of the balance of forces in capitalist society. Elites pursue their interests through the state—thereby helping to sustain their elite positions as well as the accumulation processes that abut them—under competitive conditions that evolve historically with no guarantees nor predetermined path. As a class, capitalists in Belize compete with those of other countries and are commonly divided into competing factions, each seeking to address the challenges facing the class in a fashion that best suits its particular interest. Indeed since its inception as a class, the Belizean elite has been both closely allied to and competitors with capitalists from other countries—particularly England—who sought to shape the state in ways that contributed to the extraction of profit from Belize. The alliances between competing groups of elites and their overseas backers around specific class projects have often shaped specific intra-state and party rivalries. This approach, often associated with the work of Nicos Poulantzas, is analytically rich but frequently difficult to apply. One basic challenge is that, for any given point in time, it is difficult to pinpoint the contours of Belize’s capitalist class and its specific political and economic interests. This is by no means to deny the essentially class character of Belizean society, nor the existence of capitalist elites. Rather it is to emphasize the complexity of class processes—which are always articulated through other forms of identity, including race, religion, and gender—and to signal that insofar as the state is a product of class conflict and intra-elite competition, it rarely operates as a clear-cut instrument of bourgeois rule.

Two conclusions follow. First, rather than treat the state simply as a pre-given thing, we should see it as a stage of social conflict on which strategies for capital accumulation are forged through inter- and intra-class competition. Second, we must historicize the various processes that shape the state and society. By framing my inquiry in this way, I am drawing upon Bob Jessop’s strategic-relational approach, an elaboration of Poulantzas’ theory. In Jessop’s approach, a given capitalist state is studied as “a strategic terrain, as the crystallization of political strategies, and as a specific form which offers structural privileges to some but not all kinds of political strategies.” This approach allows us to interpret the role of the Belizean state by examining the state as a terrain of struggle for the formation of particular accumulation projects and the effect of the essential political-economic relations of that society. Analytically, this approach points us toward historical-geographical research into three intertwining phenomena: first, the political-economic relations of production, exchange, and consumption; second, the social relations that constitute the state and its institutions; third, the mediation of the state and society through the contested process of winning the active consent, or hegemony, of subaltern social groups. My focus here is solely on the second aspect, particularly on the social relations of class and race.

Within this purview, a preliminary description of the Belizean state today would emphasize that, although formally democratic, the state is substantively authoritarian. There is
a marked dominance of the state over civil society (insofar as they can be separated) and social movements (e.g. for labor and environmentalism). Social power is tightly concentrated among an elite historically unified as much by race and geography as by class (though the three intersect). Political power is centralized around the Prime Minister and his closest allies. Elections are monopolized by two parties that mobilize through networks with strong social and familial ties. Since the 1980s, when neoliberal economic policy became entrenched, these parties have only rarely displayed any meaningful ideological differences. Clientalism and corruption are rife. The form and nature of the state have not been seriously challenged since political independence in 1981.23

While this may provide an accurate and useful preliminary description, any attempt to explain this political condition and its historical persistence would need to account for the distinct social classes, institutions, and geographical variations that shape state-society relations in all their particularity. For this, we will need a theoretically informed account of Belize’s political economy, derived through geographically sensitive studies of state-society relations as they have evolved through time. As yet, no such account exists for southern Belize for any period: considerable spadework must still be done. This paper contributes to this broader project by offering an account of the origins of the colonial state in southern Belize.

The Toledo District in colonial British Honduras

One of Belize’s leading historians, J.O. Palacio, has discerned 1872-1945 as “the climax of colonialism in the history of Belize.”24 Speaking more roughly, capitalist relations—commodity production, labor markets, and abutting state institutions—were quite weak in southern Belize in the middle of the nineteenth century, but firmly in place by the end of the 1940s. The colonial state in Belize during this period was comprised of an odd combination of social relations.25 State culture—as gauged by language, style, and administrative form—was thoroughly British-imperial. The state’s structure was narrow and hierarchical, with no pretension of democracy. At the top of the hierarchy was the governor, officially the local representative of the Crown: hence the titular head of the government for most of this period was Queen Victoria (who ruled 1837-1901). The governor was appointed by the secretary of state for the colonies in London. In British Honduras, most governors arrived with prior colonial and/or military experience in British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. While the governor was responsible for managing the colony, most business was conducted by the colonial secretary, who responded to most of the Minute Papers that passed through the Government House.26 Like commerce, political power was spatially concentrated in the British zone of Belize City. Beyond the city, each district was governed by the district commissioner (or “DC”) who served as magistrate, tax collector, customs agent, and so on: the de facto local sovereign.

In remote Punta Gorda, the colonial headquarters in southern Belize after 1884, the DC effectively served as the sole representative of the Crown. In 1882, the boundaries of the Toledo District were defined and its first magistrate, Francis Orgill, appointed. The first district commissioner, B. Travers, was appointed two years later. In four subsequent decades, all DCs were British; an uneven transition to use of “local” staff—meaning Caribbean-born, upper-class Creole men—started in the late 1920s.27 The first Belizean to serve as DC to Toledo was S.B. Vernon, a Creole man elected chair of the Toledo Legislative Council in 1943. There were never any Maya or Garifuna DCs.28 With brief exceptions, political leadership in Toledo has remained with the Creole minority (including the Vernon family) down to the present day.29

Other key colonial institutions in the South were maintained by Europeans, though not typically British. The churches and schools were administered by Jesuits, mainly from Ireland and the US.30 The large forestry companies were financed and managed by a blend of German,
British, and American capitalists. Agricultural colonists included Confederates from the US South, Germans, and the Indigenous subaltern groups of southern Belize: the Maya and Garifuna.\textsuperscript{31} The Garifuna, however, were not regarded as Indigenous by the colonial state, and the presence of the Maya was either denied or ignored. Indeed the prevailing narrative in the colonial historiography is that southern Belize was empty at the time of the British arrival. Consider Burdon, writing as late as 1931:

\begin{quote}
There is no record of any indigenous Indian population and no reason to believe that any such existed except far in the interior. There are traces of extensive Maya Indian occupation—temples, wells, foundations, cultivation terraces—all over the Colony, wherever the land is suitable for agriculture. But this occupation was long before British Settlement. The almost complete disappearance of the once teeming Maya population from these regions is one of the problems of Maya Archaeology.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Apart from indicating the denial by the colonial state of the existence of the Indigenous peoples, statements like this suggest how the displacing of the Maya in Belizean historiography works through a discourse in which the Maya are troped as failed civilizers. The Maya were not regarded as a proper “indigenous Indian population” because the British did not at this time recognize their historical-geographical continuity. The British saw only the “traces” of “once teeming Maya”: a residue of a lost civilization, a problem for science to explain.\textsuperscript{33}

From the vantage of the present this is hard to grasp. How could the British colonial government have no way to see the Maya people in their colony and recognize their Indigeneity? One answer is that the British had practically no knowledge of the Maya and their lands—particularly the interior of the southern portion of the colony—before the 1900s. Data on the Maya communities accumulated after church leaders, state officials, and anthropologists wrote about them (in that order). Apropos the state, consider two lines of evidence. First, there are abundant statements in the archival records to the effect that the interior is largely unknown and unvisited. In 1859, one colonial official wrote, e.g.:

\begin{quote}
The Southern portions of our territory have never been explored, and according to the Crown Surveyor they contain inhabitants who...have never yet been seen by European or creole.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

The Maya of Toledo were largely hidden from the state’s gaze until the end of the century. The colonial state operated with a skeletal structure, and state officials practically never left Belize City for the interior.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, the Maya of Toledo lived in the most remote part of the colony and although Maya people had lived there long before the 1890s, the British state had few engagements with them.\textsuperscript{36} Reports by DCs from the Toledo District between the 1880s and 1930s suggest that trips outside of the main settlements along the coast of southern Belize (Monkey River Town, the Toledo Settlement, Punta Gorda, and Barranco) were rare and brief. Typically one or two of the largest Maya villages were visited annually by the DC (e.g. in 1895, for the first time, a governor visited San Antonio—then as now, the largest village).\textsuperscript{37} State officials would return every few years with a small team, producing a report on community life and resources for London.\textsuperscript{38}

The second line of evidence is cartographic.\textsuperscript{39} Maps drawn prior to 1900 typically describe Toledo as “unexplored,” and topographic features are substantially misplaced (one common feature is to show an unbroken line of mountains running from SW to NE). Consider the maps from 1885 and 1891, i.e. the period when the first state institutions were founded (see Figures 1, 2). Both feature major topographical errors and label the district interior as “unexplored.”
Figure 1. Map of the Colony of British Honduras (1885, Harrison & Sons). Source: author’s collection. Note that the interior of the Toledo District is labelled “Mountainous Unexplored Territory Query Inhabited.” The representation of the mountains is inconsistent with local topography.
Figure 2. Usher’s map (1891) showing private properties in southern Belize. Source: US National Archives, Washington DC. Note that the interior of the Toledo District is marked ‘unexplored’. As in the 1885 map, representation of the mountains of the mountains—drawn “As seen from Cayes” (the coast)—is inconsistent with local topography.

But there were plenty of Indigenous people in southern Belize. Many Garifuna people had settled in southern Belize by 1802 and another group arrived in 1832 (the event celebrated by “settlement day”). And although their population declined due to Spanish reducciones and slave raids, Maya people have lived in the area known today as southern Belize for thousands of years. There is now an abundant literature documenting the presence of Maya people in the interior of southern Belize prior to the 1880s; drawing from diverse sources, a group of scholars have documented linguistic, archival, oral-historical, geographical, and other lines of evidence indicating an unbroken history of Maya occupation of southern Belize. Yet this literature has been imprecise about the historical geography of the earliest local British state institutions. Hoffman’s study of the historical production of colonial territory is a landmark contribution in this respect, but here too the treatment of southern Belize is relatively weak.

“Masters and servants”: state and society in colonial Toledo

The ostensible reason for staffing a District Commissioner in the south was the “considerable amount of smuggling” in the region, a practice that threatened the state’s territorial order: hence the fixing of the district’s boundaries coincided with the appointment of a magistrate in 1882. But archival evidence suggests that other dynamics were more fundamental.
At the end of the US Civil War, some Confederates sought to colonize parts of Latin America, from Mexico to Brazil, in the hope of maintaining their independence and their peculiar institution.\textsuperscript{44} In 1868 a group of Confederates settled just north of Punta Gorda, at that time a modest Garifuna village that produced a livelihood by fishing and farming.\textsuperscript{45} The Confederate settlers purchased land from the colonial government and an investor named Phillip Toledo (for whom their estate, and then the district, took its name).\textsuperscript{46} The Confederates hoped to build a tropical agricultural colony, but after a cholera epidemic, most returned to Mississippi and Louisiana.\textsuperscript{47} The few who remained planted sugar estates, looking towards Punta Gorda as a source of labor power. Yet they encountered difficulties attracting laborers from the Garifuna community, which after hundreds of years of struggle against slavery and colonialism had secured a measure of autonomy in their coastal settlement.\textsuperscript{48} Nor were Maya people living in rural villages drawn to work for the Confederates. But without access to labor, the sugar estates would fail and with them their colony.

The Confederates made a series of appeals to the colonial state for help with their “labor problem.” The British state officials clearly regarded the Confederate settlers at Toledo as natural allies, due to their race, language, and desire to build agricultural estates. In 1872, the state facilitated the importation of laborers from India.\textsuperscript{49} Today the descendants of these laborers are defined for the census as “East Indian”; the colloquial term used, without strong prejudicial association, is “Coolie.” Yet even after importing low-wage laborers, the Confederate estate owners were unsatisfied. They repeatedly turned to the colonial state, asking the governor to deputize one of them as the local magistrate so that they could discipline their laborers with the force of law.

The governor sympathized. In April 1882, he forwarded to London a letter written by the settlers at Toledo, appending a letter summarizing the situation and expressing his support for their cause:

[The settlers] are praying for the appointment of a paid District magistrate...At present, [Toledo] is only visited once in three months by the Magistrate of the Southern District [based in Stann Creek town] who remains there for a day or two. Such visits are productive of good will but the presence of a resident Magistrate is necessary if only for cases between masters and servants which can only be dealt with by a paid magistrate...In the vicinity of this part of the Colony, new settlements are being made, considerable acreage has been taken up. The people from the Bay Islands [i.e. the Garifuna] are turning their attention thither and it is almost a certainty that the population will more than double itself within this year.

The memorial was presented to me by a deputation specially sent, who represented that labor is in such demand and wages so high, that the men employed are so independent as to be almost beyond control—that if a dispute arises and cannot be amicably settled, it has to wait the visit of the District Magistrate, perhaps, for a period of nearly three months or the master has to proceed to the headquarters of the District, procure a summons, return for the hearing of the case, and probably expend a considerable sum in addition to the loss of time....And when this is done, the servant, if dissatisfied with the result, will probably not return to his work and will evade arrest by proceeding into the boundaries of Spanish Honduras or Guatemala, which can be reached in a few hours.\textsuperscript{50}
Thus the Confederate colonists who wanted to create sugar plantations spurred the state to create a district magistrate (subsequently commissioner) at Toledo. The first post was even offered to one of the Confederates, James Hutchison, with the understanding that a British DC would be appointed two years later. The Colonial Office was reassured that the revenue collected by the DC “will more than repay the expense entailed.”

Thanks to the surplus value produced by their agricultural laborers, by 1890 some of the settlers had sufficient capital to expand into exporting mahogany—the mainstay of colonial Belize—which generated sufficient wealth to allow a few to return to the US South with abundant savings. The account of a geographer, Desmond Holdridge (1940), explains the transition:

> The rancor of the settlers toward their homeland [i.e. the USA] had disappeared by the third generation...[A] kind of get-rich-quick psychology grew up, it is said, and men concentrated on making as much money as they possibly could in order to return wealthy to the United States. This...accounts for the extension of acreage beyond the point where it could be worked by the white settlers and forced the employment of colored labor...and the unfortunate social result already described...By 1910 the settlement was well on the way to extinction.

So far as I can tell, the “unfortunate social result” to which Holdridge refers is that the Confederate settlers were compelled to live in close proximity to Garifuna, Maya, and “Coolie” people.

Even with subsidies from the colonial government, the Toledo settlement was short-lived. Prospering through the 1880s, it peaked in size and wealth around 1890 before falling into a permanent decline. Even as their so-called “Coolie” laborers enriched their estates, the Confederates complained about the lack of disciplined labor. The true limitations of the Confederate colony lay in turbulent markets for unprocessed agricultural goods, the challenge of maintaining soil fertility, and—if Holdridge’s account is correct—the settlers’ racism. The settlement effectively collapsed around the turn of the century when cane yields declined during an international slump in the price of sugar. A few Confederate families stayed on for several more decades, and as late as 1916, the DC of Toledo reported that “the Sugar Industry at the Toledo Settlement...provided work for a considerable number.” But by 1918 only a few descendants of six Confederate families remained: together they managed twelve consolidated estates, averaging 530 acres; presumably the relatively successful farmers purchased estates from emigrating, failed colonists. That year the remaining families begged the state for money to build a sugar mill and a new road (as well as an import tax on sugar). The state rejected these requests, ending the rich legacy of subsidies, thus sealing the fate of the Toledo settlement.

Though short-lived, the Toledo settlement transformed the landscape of southern Belize in several ways. The estates, drawn up during a period of speculation on timber lands, were subdivided into agricultural estates. The Confederate settlers’ failure to secure labor from the Indigenous communities led to the importing of East Indian laborers whose descendants still make a livelihood on the lands purchased by the Confederates. Although the crops have changed, the region remains marked by certain landscape features laid down in the 1870s: unusually long, straight property lines, extending due North and South, perpendicular to the road from the sea at Cattle Landing. The East Indian families who inhabited parts of the formerly Confederate estates could not afford to purchase the land outright were locked into leasing relationships that maintained an outward flow of capital. Today this region, known as “Rancho,” is among the poorest in Belize.
Administering colonial Toledo

Let us briefly consider the material qualities of the early colonial state relations in southern Belize. We have already seen that these were slow to crystallize, even in rudimentary form. In 1895 Punta Gorda—at the time one of several Garifuna villages located along the southern coastline—was declared a town and made district capital: henceforth the DC and the Toledo District Board (also founded 1895) kept offices there. Elementary state institutions followed slowly, each DC requesting resources to expand its capacities. In 1896 the hospital was established, followed by telephone contact with Belize City in 1905. State agents always remained few: as late as 1903, only 94 civil servants administered the entire government, with about two in the South. Belize was considered to be among the most unhealthy and remote of the British colonies, and the South had an especially poor reputation. The first magistrate of Toledo fell ill and died shortly after his appointment; upon receiving the news, London replied that his replacement could not expect to have “a very good life.” Hence the DC-of-Toledo position attracted inexperienced candidates. The district was not so much forgotten as avoided. All this contributed to weak state institutions.

The political economy of the South in this era exhibited a blend of capitalist and precapitalist social relations. Maya, Garifuna, and East Indian households built their own homes and produced most of their own food through agriculture, fishing, and hunting; to generate money needed to pay land taxes and purchase imported commodities (clothing, soap, and foodstuffs) they sold surpluses, particularly in the form of pigs exported to Puerto Barrios or Belize City. The sale of labor power was informal and occasional, purchased by firms exporting forest products, particularly timber and chicle. The colonial state collected little revenue from the export of these products; what little investment and accumulation occurred in the colony was concentrated in Belize City. As Bolland memorably noted, “until the middle of the nineteenth century the British settlement at Belize resembled little more than a trading post attached to a massive timber reserve.” This was particularly true in southern Belize, where the local state never effectively taxed land and consistently ran deficits, even during periods of economic growth. The local state made no pretense of offering democratic representation or providing services for social welfare. Medical care was largely traditional; education, such as it existed, was organized by the church.

An 1883 letter to London written by Lt. Governor Harley reveals something of the state’s capacity in the South. His report is worth citing at length because it provides the fullest description of southern Belize and its early state institutions from a colonial official in this era. It also gives a sense of the attention given to racial depiction of the (relatively little known) subjects Harley encountered and employed:

I paid a visit to the Southern part of the Colony...with the express purpose of visiting the Settlement of Punta Gorda, to which a Magistrate has recently been appointed. This settlement has hitherto not received much attention at the hands of the Government, but it occupies an important position on our boundary... Punta Gorda is a settlement of Caribs, numbering about six hundred, and I am sorry to say without much industry, however, little has been done for them and they continue to live in a state of primitive simplicity, satisfied with cultivating the small patches of Crown Land which they rent from the Government in yams &c, and corn, which with the fish they can supply themselves with daily is all they require. When they want money they will work on some of the adjacent Estates [i.e. the Toledo settlement] until they have earned sufficient to pay their rent and taxes, and buy a few yards of cloth...
I had received reports that the Magistrate was living in a hut which consisted of one room, which had to serve the purposes of living, sleeping, and administering justice. I decided to enquire for myself into the facts of the case. I found all that had been imparted to me but too true. I took the Colonial Engineer with me, as I had in view not only reporting on the accommodation provided for the Magistrate, but that for the Police and Prisoners. Nothing could be worse… I have made arrangement also for the suitable lodgment of the Magistrate and his Court close to the Police Station, in premises for sale in a short time, which the Colonial Engineer reports as being very suitable, and which will cost considerably less than having to build a house….61

The colonial engineer suggested that the government purchase the buildings that subsequently became the courthouse and DC’s headquarters.62 The Colonial Office replied by approving “the action you have taken with respect to quarters for the District magistrate,” but construction of state buildings was slow. Almost two years later, Governor Goldsworthy visited the same area and found that “except the Magistrate’s House at Punta Gorda and the Police Stations at [Dangriga and Monkey River] there are no public buildings [South of Dangriga] and as to public roads except in the villages themselves they do not exist.” He then describes Punta Gorda and the Toledo settlement:

Punta Gorda, the next village of any size, lies at almost the Southern limit of the Colony—it has a population of about 500 nearly all of whom are Caribs. The village is picturesquely situated on the sea coast… There is a Magistrate’s House and Police Station—the former recently built and the latter in a terrible… condition, a sum has however been placed on the estimate for a Court House and a Police Station combined. During my visit, by heading a subscription, sufficient funds were obtained for building a school house, & it is now in course of construction—Hitherto there existed no means of educating the children.63

Goldsworthy’s report was written in 1884. Remarkably, the state buildings called for were not completed until 1916:

The Court House, Offices, and other official buildings connected there-with at Punta Gorda were completed [in 1916], with the exception of fencing the land upon which they stand, this will I understand be erected at an early date. A new Flag and Light Staff was erected at Punta Gorda, and various repairs done to the Public Hospital and Assistant Medical Officers Quarters.64

Essentially no further investment was made by the colonial government in public buildings before the beginning of “self-government” in 1964. At Independence in 1981 there were still no public buildings south of Dangriga worth mention. The former DC headquarters in Punta Gorda was razed in 2006 after decades of decay and disrepair; the old post office and courthouse were badly damaged by fire in 2013. There were no campaigns to resurrect these colonial buildings as historical monuments and their degradation produced no discernable expressions of nostalgia. They comprise, after all, only the ruins of an unmemorable state.

Conclusions
To conclude I will summarize two key arguments that follow from this analysis. The first is that state was organized from the outset around class and race relations. One anthropologist writes that Toledo appears as if “God had shaken the earth and everything that did not fit into
some space had spilled into this small pocket...Down the front of God’s lacy apron they slid...They shook themselves, these creatures who had no other residence...and decided to make the best of things.” The metaphor is too clever. For if anything played the part of God in this story, it was the British Empire. The Garifuna came to southern Belize as war refugees, hounded by fear of enslavement; the Maya were in southern Belize long before European contact, but faced waves of dispossession until the Q’eqchi’ and Mopan resettled ancestral homelands; the East Indians were brought as indentured laborers to work for Confederates. The British claimed the territory principally for commercial advantage in timber exports. Their earliest state institutions were founded at the behest of the Confederates to discipline their would-be “servants.” The Indigenous Maya and Garifuna always far outnumbered the Confederates, but the latter alone received the state’s attention and assistance. By the end of the nineteenth century the Confederate colony was in permanent decline, and the state’s attention shifted to securing hegemony and finding opportunities to generate exports from the South. An implicit racial hierarchy—Europeans on top (with the British in charge), Creoles in the middle, the East Indians, Garifuna, and Maya on bottom—was inscribed into and reproduced by the state.

The second conclusion is that the fundamental, problematical characteristics of the post-colonial state in southern Belize were present from the late-nineteenth century. The palpable weakness of state institutions of contemporary southern Belize was in evidence more than a century ago. The paucity of public institutions, the emphasis on labor discipline and law-and-order, the brevity of terms by officials (and their limited spatial movement) are symptomatic of the state’s basic incapacity to promote social welfare or to discipline capital. And yet this small state, backed by the authority of the British Empire, organized through authoritarian institutions, was sufficient to secure a new social order and facilitate the extraction and export of primary commodities. In sum, the history of early state formation in southern Belize is a story of the consolidation of a marginal colony with a capitalist economy under British hegemony. The general pattern reveals what Bob Jessop describes as “the relative subordination of an entire social order to the logic and reproduction requirements of capital accumulation.” The social order in southern Belize remains so subordinated today. Hence it was not necessary to save the old colonial buildings. Their legacy is embedded in the social relations living out around them.

Acknowledgements

I thank Cristina Coc, Will Jones, Maria Lane, Kristin Mercer, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts. The usual disclaimer applies.

NOTES

AB: Archives of Belize (Belmopan)
PRO: Public Record Office (National Archives, Kew, London)

1 Popular elections determine the composition of the House, where the standard-bearer of the leading party becomes the prime minister and appoints a cabinet of ministers.

2 On these limitations of Belize’s democracy, see Assad Shoman, Backtalking Belize (Belize City: Angelus, 1995); Mark Nowottny, “No Tyrants Here Linger: Understandings of Democracy in Modern Belize” (Unpublished MA thesis, Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2007); Dylan Vernon, Big Game, Small Town: Clientelism and Democracy in the Modern Politics of Belize (1954-2011), PhD dissertation, University College London (2013); also the numerous, regular editorials by Evan X. Hyde in Amandala, Belize’s leading newspaper. On the economic history of Belize, see N.S. Carey Jones, The Pattern of A Dependent Economy:


4 Texts written in the first decades after British Honduras became an official colony served to produce “the colony” and “British Honduras” as a space of extractable resources. The history of this object thereby becomes told as an unfolding of knowledge about these resources. See, e.g., Charles Swett, A Trip to British Honduras, and to San Pedro, Republic of Honduras (Lexington, KY, Forgotten Books: 2012 [1868]); Samuel Cockburn, Rough Notes and Official Reports on the River Belize, the Physical Features of British Honduras, Taken in 1867 & 1869 (Kingston, Jamaica: C.L. Campbell, 1875); Daniel Morris, The Colony of British Honduras, Its Resources and Prospects, with particular Reference to its Indigenous Plants and Economic Productions (London: Edward Stanford, 1883); and Wilfred Collet, British Honduras and Its Resources (London: The West Indian Committee Rooms, 1909). These texts are rarely cited after the publication of Charles Wright et al., Land in British Honduras (London: HMSO, 1959), the apex of this genre.


7 Cedric Grant, The Making of Modern Belize: Politics, Society, and British Colonialism in Central America (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1976). This book was initially a PhD dissertation written at the University of Edinburgh of 1969. So far as I am aware, Grant’s study marked the end of his engagements with Belize.

8 O. Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman, Land in Belize 1765-1871 (Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1977); Assad Shoman, Thirteen Chapters of a History of Belize (Belize City: Angelus, 1994); Assad Shoman, Backtalking Belize (1995); Assad Shoman, Belize’s Independence and Decolonization in Latin America: Guatemala, Britain, and the UN (NY: Palgrave, 2010). The latter provides a rich historical analysis of Guatemala’s claim to the territory of southern Belize, a conflict rooted in different interpretations of the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of 1859 (Shoman 2010, 29-35), as well as an explanation of Belize’s successful campaign to internationalize its appeal for independence.


12 Ibid., 198.

13 Ibid., 193.

14 E.g., in 1895 Belize District was home to 12,227 people and southern Belize 8,156 (Stann Creek District 4,388; Toledo District 3,768): PRO CO 123/218 (Despatch 125). Yet this
population count for Toledo was almost certainly an undercount, since, as explained below, the colonial state did not have extensive data on the Maya communities.


18 Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: NLR, 1978); Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: NLR, 1979). To be sure, this paper does not realize the full potential of the Poulantzian approach to the study of Belize. Apart from limitations of space, Belize’s archival record is spotty — hurricanes and fires have taken a toll — and the texts that do survive, generally written by British colonial officers, do not offer material that can be easily used to these ends. I hope this study effectively signals the need for further theoretically informed historical research.


25 Elements of a British colonial state date to 1765, when the European settlers agreed to “location laws” to formalize their land rights. In 1786 these rules were codified into Burnaby’s Code, the first civil law. The first superintendent of British Honduras, Colonel Despard, was appointed in 1786. The first constitution and Legislative Assembly were established in 1854. Belize was declared a colony in 1862 and became a Crown colony in 1871. On the establishment of British Honduras as a Crown Colony, see O.N. Bolland, *Formation of a Colonial Society*, 1977.

26 Government House was built in Belize City in 1814, almost thirty years after Despard became the first superintendent of British Honduras.

27 In Belize, “Creole” may refer to a broad and diverse social group comprised of the descendants of African people, often mixed with European ancestors, and/or the distinctive
language spoken by this group. See Palacio, “May the New Belize Creole Please Rise” (1988); Melissa Johnson, “The Making of Race and Place in Nineteenth-Century British Honduras,” *Environmental History* 8 (2003): 598-617; Ken Decker, *The Song of Kriol: A Grammar of the Kriol Language of Belize* (Belize: Belize Kriol Project, 2013). A Creole minority dominated politics in Punta Gorda Town, and thereby the Toledo District generally, from at least the 1910s until the 1980s. Their hegemony diminished for two reasons. First, the size of their community declined. In the 1980s Creoles made up 26 percent of the population of Punta Gorda; in 2000 they comprised only 15 percent of PG and 5 percent of the Toledo District (data from Census 2000). This demographic decline is largely attributed to the greater international mobility of Creoles, especially with respect to migration to the US, relative to other social groups: many chose to escape poor economic conditions in Punta Gorda through education and employment abroad. Second, the Creole community has lost much of its economic base to other groups (especially Chinese migrants) who have won most of the “Creole share” of the wholesale dry-goods market.

28 Some Garifuna people, particularly men, were employed in other, subaltern roles (particularly as police and teachers), across the South.

29 The current representative of Toledo East, Mike Espat, is serving his fifth term. While some of his family are of Arab descent, in the terms of southern Belize’s racial profile he would be considered a member of the Creole minority.

30 The Catholic mission was established in Punta Gorda in 1845. On the church in colonial Toledo, see Wainwright, “‘The First Duties of Persons Living in a Civilized Community’” (2009).


32 John Burdon (1931), 41. Burdon brackets the question of the existence of the Maya as a problem for archaeology. Archaeology has been both the inspiration and hegemonic form of knowledge for debating “the Maya question” since it was first posed in the early twentieth century. The first Minute Papers in the Archives of Belize that refer specifically to “Mayas” in southern Belize concern the discovery of “Indian ruins.” See, e.g., AB MP 3267-1894: “Indian Ruins on the Rio Grande, Toledo District” (1894).

33 Wainwright, *Decolonizing Development* (2008), Chapter 3.


35 PRO CO 123/162/36: “Trip to Western Districts” (1878).

36 In 1859 the superintendent of British Honduras said of the Mayas: “We know but little of these people” (cited in John Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras: Volume III* (1935), 221-2).

37 See, e.g., PRO CO 123/203/135: “Report on Indian Settlement of San Antonio” (1893). This report states, “This visit is paid annually by the District commissioner during the dry season when the road is cleared and the bridges are repaired....”

38 PRO CO 123/218 (Despatch 125).

39 On the role of cartography in the colonization—and, potentially, decolonization—of Indigenous lands in Mesoamerica, see, e.g., Raymond Craib, “Cartography and Power in the


41 This claim presumes, of course, a continuity in the meaning of “Maya” which should be historicized. See Wolfgang Gabbert, *Becoming Maya* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, 2004). The Spanish reducciones were created by Catholic (mainly Jesuit) missionaries in Guatemala to concentrate Maya people in places where they could be more easily governed.

42 See note 31.


45 An 1868 map of the proposed Garifuna land reserve in Punta Gorda shows that the settlement had twenty-two buildings (C. Dwight, “Plan of the Carib Reservation at Punta Gorda from the Original Map Drawn from an Actual Survey Made June 1868 by C.S. Dwight, Sworn Surveyor,” AB map collection, no catalog number).

46 The Toledo, Young, and Co. acquired much of the private land for sale in Belize in the 1860s by buying the estates from smaller companies that went bankrupt. By 1871 they held more than a million acres of land, but the company went bankrupt itself in 1881. Most of their lands passed to the state in lieu of unpaid land taxes.

47 Donald Simmons, *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), Chapters 6, 8.


49 PRO CO 123/147/13: “Application for Coolie labor” (1872).

50 PRO CO 123/167/45: “A District Magistrate at Toledo: Recommends the Appointment of, and Encloses a Memorial from Certain Planters and Others Praying for Such an Appointment” (1882) (my italics). The enclosed letter, written in Punta Gorda in April 1882, was signed by twenty-two men, including the names of most of the estate owners in Toledo: Watrous, Payne, Copeland, Ezell, Gamble, Wilson, Lester, and Pearce. Most give their occupation as “Sugar Planter, Toledo Settlement.”

51 Ibid. London agreed to approve “the temporary appointment of Mr. Hutchinson but so that before coming to any decision as to the permanent appointment of a District Magistrate.” In the context of local poverty, the expenses were not inconsiderable. Across the whole colony the greatest expenditures in this era were for the police and administration. In 1884, for instance, the largest single item among state expenditures (comprising 7 percent of the total budget) was the police.


53 The Confederate colonists’ anxiety about maintaining their racial “purity” features prominently in Holdridge’s (1940) account of the community. Holdridge notes that “the settlers’ fear of absorption” into the local community led them to send their children abroad
for education, thus depriving the community of “white labor” (p 385). Hence while the 
“growth of the colored settlement at Punta Gorda was ensured,... stagnation of the white 
settlement at Toledo became inevitable” (Ibid.). By the 1930s the remaining colonists felt 
“isolated,” filled with an abiding “resentment of the social conditions that, in view of their 
racial convictions, force them to leave as their children grow older” to preserve racial white 
purity (p 391).

54 Michael Camille, *Historical Geography of the Toledo Settlement, Belize, 1868-1985: A Transition 
from Confederate to East Indian Landscapes*, unpublished MA Thesis (Baton Rouge: LSU 
Department of Geography, 1986), 36.

56 AB MP 3983-19: “Forwarding Petition Regarding the (1) Price of Sugar as Fixed by the Food 
Control Committee and (2) Removal of Import Duties on Agricultural Implements” (1919); 
AB MP 1371-19: “Deputation from the Planters in the Toledo District Regarding (1) Erection 
of a Central Sugar Factory and (2) Manufacture of Industrial Alcohol” (1919); AB MP 1372-
19: “Deputation from the Planters in Toledo District Regarding Import Duty on Sugar” 
(1919).

57 Through the 1950s communications between state officials in the south and the city were 
predominantly conducted via written despatches exchanged via boat traffic.

58 I write “about two” because it is difficult to specify the exact location of officials from the 
records. Between 1903 and 1914 there was a rapid growth in the civil service; in eleven years 
the number of colonial officials increased to 160. State employment continued to grow at a 
consistent rate until 1926, when there were 215 state officials, an average addition of more 
than five officials per year. Layoffs in 1932-1937 reduced the number of officials, but then 
rapid growth picked up again in 1938-1940. But even this larger staff represented a small 
fraction of the population. In 1921, when the population of British Honduras was forty-
five thousand, the state was run with only 162 civil officials (data from AB: Blue Books for 
specific years). According to the 1921 census, only 1.2 percent of the population came from 
the UK or US.

59 PRO CO 123/170/131: “Death of Mr. H. Orgill, Magistrate for the Toledo District” (1883).
61 PRO CO 123/169/37: “Visit to Southern District” (1883).
62 Ibid. Gustav Von Ohlafen, the Colonial Engineer, writes: “There is now for sale at Punta 
Gorda a suitable frame house twenty four feet by thirty five, elevated from the ground 
and roofed with corrugated iron, which with a few trifling alterations and the addition of 
a water cistern will make a convenient residence for the Magistrate, the present one (now occupied by Dr. 
Hetherington)—be converted into a Court house” (9 April 1883).

District” (1884).
64 AB MP 1265-16: “Annual Report for the Toledo District for the Year 1916.” In 1921 
the colonial secretary asked Taylor, a former DC, to explain the origins of the building 
arrangement in Punta Gorda. He replied: “When I visited Punta Gorda in 1899,...there 
was no Hospital at Punta Gorda, and Sir Bickham suggested the purchase of Mr. Cramer’s 
house there, for the Commissioners Quarters, and the present one (now occupied by Dr. 
Hetherington)—be converted into a Hospital;—the idea was considered a good one” (AB 
MP 3566-21, 1921).
65 Kathryn Staiana-Ross, “Introduction,” in Bismark Ranguy, *Toledo Recollections* (Benque: 
Cubola, 1999), 7.
66 See notes 21, 22.
“Fighting for the Rock at Home and Abroad”: Barbuda Voice Newspaper as a Transnational Space

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ABSTRACT: One of the basic tenets of transnational-migration scholarship centers on the role of rapid communication in facilitating greater connections between migrants to their home communities. Utilizing the concept of transnational space, I will illustrate through a case study how islanders from Barbuda maintained complex connections to home, particularly in terms of their unique land tenure, through a monthly transnational newspaper edited by a New York Barbudan Russell John. Employing a careful analysis of the first five years of its publication, my study will provide alternative understandings of the ways in which Barbudans historically maintained quite intricate connections to home through slower forms of communication. This study sheds light on communication prior to the ready availability of the telephone on the island. Concentrating on a single newspaper published in the New York City, I show how it facilitated involvement from Barbuda’s transnational population to the island home, creating a powerful transnational space of connection.

Keywords: Caribbean, transnational migration, newspapers, common property, communication

The people who first built a path between two places performed one of the greatest human achievements….The bridge symbolizes the extension of our volitional sphere over space.\(^1\)

The story of Barbuda Voice begins with a son who sought to fulfill the aspirations of his father.\(^2\) His father loved his homeland of Barbuda and held fast to a dream—a dream that one day his people would be united through the pages of a newspaper.\(^3\) The son, Russell John, born in America in 1927 on 145\(^{th}\) Street in New York City, had the means to make his father’s dream a reality. In the fall of 1969, serving as editor-in-chief, John birthed a monthly newspaper that would finally run its course twenty years later in 1990.

Russell John and his newspaper Barbuda Voice served to bridge the people of Barbuda together in a way that was unprecedented in the island’s history. The Voice is both a story about one man’s labor of love on behalf of his father’s homeland and a powerful example of the ways immigrants maintained connections to home in very complex ways prior to the onset of rapid communication technologies.

Researchers in the early 1990s attribute the onset of rapid transportation and communication as one of the basic tenets of transnational-migration scholarship in facilitating greater connections between migrants to their home communities.\(^4\) Building on this scholarship, this case study will provide a historical look at how one Caribbean island, Barbuda, maintained complex connections to its transnational communities through a monthly newspaper.\(^5\) Barbuda Voice newspaper is a powerful example of communication predating ICTs (information and communication technologies) that facilitated connection among Barbudans to their homeland through news stories, editorials, language pieces, fundraisers, conventions, and petitions. Through its monthly pages, The Voice (re)inscribed Barbudan identity and served as a central advocate and forum.
to preserve the communal land tenure on the island. The role overseas Barbudans played in preserving the communal land tenure—particularly lively discussions over land in the pages of *The Voice*—is an overlooked theme in the discussion of Barbuda’s “triumph of the commons,” yet *The Voice* documents their involvement, initiative, and concern month after month.

The analysis begins with a brief overview of literature on transnational migration, communication, and other diasporic newspapers; then includes a brief history of the island, its common property, transnational population, and the formation of the newspaper. The emphasis then shifts to the primary focus of the piece, a case study highlighting how the newspaper facilitated complex connections among Barbudans both on and off the island prior to the widespread adoption of the telephone to protect the island’s communal land tenure. The analysis concludes with a discussion of *The Voice* as a transnational newspaper space.

**Paradigm shift: Transnational migration**

The early 1990s witnessed a paradigm shift when scholars of migration began to notice something new as a result of the increased global penetration of capital and processes of globalization. Before then, the term immigrant had evoked images of permanent resettlement; an abandonment of the former way of life, often involving a long and grueling process of learning a new language in order to assimilate to a new country. The word migrant, on the other hand was usually used to describe someone who was engaged in short-term work where the stay was temporary. When scholars encountered a process that did not quite capture either of these categories—they called the process transnationalism and the people involved transnational migrants (or transmigrants). Transmigrants’ lives are often said to transcend the confines of the sovereign state, as they are able to maintain familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political relationships across international borders.

In order to sustain these complex relationships across international borders, transnational migration scholars argued that technological advances in transportation and communication facilitated greater transnational interaction. Alejandro Portes and others write, “Transnational enterprises did not proliferate among earlier immigrants because the technological conditions of the time did not make communications across national borders rapid or easy...Communications were slow and, thus, many of the transnational enterprises described in today’s literature could not have developed.” Emphasizing rapid communication, scholars have turned their attention toward these connections.

Scholarly work examining the intersection between transnational migration and communication focused primarily on the role of changing technologies in facilitating connections between transnational migrants and persons at home, particularly mobile phones, phone cards, and the Internet. These technologies “allow families to connect virtually in lieu of geographic proximity” and include video chat, international phone cards, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Skype. Scholars have noted especially how these technologies annihilate space by time.

The theoretical underpinnings of transnational migration suggest innovative communication technologies have enabled the increased interaction between transnational migrants and their place of origin—particularly with a focus on the family unit. The rapid widespread adoption of the cellphone and other ICTs among migrants “has overcome access barriers to other technologies and media including radio, television, newspapers, and traditional phone landlines.”

While certainly there is reason to celebrate the connecting capabilities of these new technologies, we must be careful not to overlook the intricate connections maintained in the past,
as well as consider the uneven spread of these technologies. Sidney Mintz, for example, in the context of the Caribbean writes, “By examining the history of migration in the 19th century, the author finds grounds for contending that the view of transnationalism as a qualitatively different phenomenon is exaggerated.”16 Those conducting fieldwork in the Caribbean, particularly in Antigua and Barbuda, will most certainly observe the importance of the print newspaper. For example, The Daily Observer arrives in Barbuda via the morning flight from Antigua.

Discussion of newspapers in the transnational literature has often centered on the difficulties of homeland newspapers reaching the diasporic community. For example, Jean-Yves Hamel focused on the limited reach of newspapers in the homeland of Timor-Leste and how the Internet provided unparalleled access to the diaspora.17 Unlike Hamel’s attention to the island of Timor-Leste, this study joins a body of literature that centers on the role of newspapers originating in the diasporic community.

In an examination of Arabic publications in America that appeared at the turn of the twentieth century, Alixa Naff estimates that between 1892 and 1907, twenty-one Arabic dailies, weeklies, and monthlies were published in New York City, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Lawrence, Massachusetts.18 The editors generally had no prior journalistic experience; newspapers did not exceed eight pages, and they boasted significant advertising for Syrian businesses. According to Naff, “The editors reported events in the homeland, social news of Syrians in America, immigrant success stories, feature items and literary works.”19 Many of these newspapers had their start because of the political motivations of their editors and written contributions from immigrants were quite commonplace. For many Syrian immigrants, newspapers “kept the homeland alive in their minds and stirred their emotions.”20 Similar to Syrian newspapers, accounts of the Caribbean press in the United States note how newspapers like Carib News created role models, shaped identities, and identified common experiences of West Indians living in the United States, while also satisfying a desire for news concerning newly emerging independent nations.21

In a study of Chinese transnational newspapers in the San Gabriel Valley, Joe Chung Fong found that many of the Chinese community newspapers in Los Angeles were free of charge, challenging assertions of access. He writes, “One cannot cast away the significant role the regional Chinese papers have played in the Los Angeles County. American born-Chinese [sic] still subscribe to Asian Week by mail….They have contributed to the diverse voices of the Chinese migrant community.”22 More recently, Alan Patrick Marcus briefly considered the cultural consumption of Brazilian immigrants in the United States in the form of Portuguese language Brazilian newspapers that focus mostly on immigration public policies.23

Building on these scholarly endeavors, this study seeks to explore rich themes of place-making, identity, and connectivity through a case study of the Barbuda Voice.24 This case study calls into question issues of access and contends that transnational migration scholarship, as some have already noted, give more credence to the agency and creativity—in essence the transnational spaces—that immigrants historically utilized to maintain connections to home.25

Methods

This article draws almost exclusively from the first five years of publication of the newspaper (1969-1974); however, when appropriate, I contextualize the discussion within a larger framework of the twenty-year tenure of the newspaper. The in-depth analysis of the first five years was done because the newspaper was in its infancy, developing its identity as well as covering important issues concerning land development and associated statehood status. Most importantly, however, the early years of the newspaper illustrate connectivity prior to a reliance on and ready availability of the telephone on the island.
To understand the broader themes that emerged from these early years, I coded the content, drawing out emergent themes, to further elucidate the intricate relationship between Barbudans living abroad and the island as revealed on the pages of *Barbuda Voice*. Examples provided within this piece are representative of the themes present within those early years. While the memories of Barbudans may have faded or even altered over the years, the archive of *Barbuda Voice* reveals how this newspaper connected Barbudans both on and off the island. While the majority of this article is based on the newspaper content itself, I also conducted semi-structured interviews in New York City with the newspaper’s editor Russell John and his wife Peggy, in addition to semi-structured interviews with Barbudans in the United States and on the island who recalled memories of reading the newspaper.

**Historical background**

The island of Barbuda in the Lesser Antilles developed and retains a distinct communal land tenure that is largely different from the private property and family lands of other Caribbean islands. This tenure evolved over time in part because of a unique history of failed efforts in large-scale plantation-based agriculture during a nearly two-hundred-year history (1680-1870) as a leased entity of the Codrington family of England. This family instead directed the enslaved population to graze livestock, fish, and raise provisions for the Codrington sugar plantations on Antigua, developing a complex herding ecology that complemented agriculture and Barbuda’s environmental constraints during drought years. It was under the Codrington-lessee family that enslaved and eventually free people began to regard the island as their own. They insisted before and after slavery on the use of provision grounds scattered throughout the island. This sense of possession prompted one overseer to write to the Codrington family out of frustration in 1823, “They acknowledge no Master, and believe the Island belongs to themselves.” Livelihoods before and after emancipation in 1834 consisted of shifting cultivation, livestock grazing, fishing, hunting, and poaching, and in times of abundance, excess provisions were sold in Antigua.

Several short-lived leases followed after the Codringtons surrendered their lease in the 1870s. Eventually, in 1898, the colonial office took control of the island. Six years later, a 1904 ordinance provided additional support for individual house sites and defined Barbudans status as tenants of the British Crown. From 1899 to 1967, Barbuda as a Crown Colony was largely a backwater in the empire, and the islanders were left largely to fend for themselves.

Historically, Barbudans maintained a communal land ownership that had until the last few decades included subsistence agriculture and open-range livestock as its primary use. However, bouts of difficulty obtaining wage-labor from the commons propelled a steady stream of migration. Much like other parts of the Caribbean, Barbuda has a complex migration history that mirrors the larger British West Indies, a regional migration to other Caribbean islands beginning after emancipation in 1834 and then an expansion to the US, UK, and Canada after World War II.

In the twentieth century, the Barbudan overseas diaspora resided largely within the North Atlantic world and Caribbean. World War II was the primary pull factor for migration as countries sought to replace their overseas workforce. Barbudans seeking education and skilled work in the UK settled in the Midlands, particularly Leicester. One Barbudan woman recalled in 2009:

> It was a time after the Second World War ended...England started to talk about they need workers, they need people to help them develop their country because England was badly damaged during the 1939-45 war. And I thought, oh maybe this would be a good opportunity for me to go and do something else, if not do something else, develop just my education.
Though my research came across at least one Barbudan whose family had resided in North America before World War I, it was not until the 1960s that the US and Canada really began to ease migration restrictions. Those that arrived on a more permanent basis settled in large cities such as New York and Toronto.

In addition to these cities, there were regional centers such as neighboring Antigua and the US and British Virgin Islands where Barbudans settled. Tourism created a boom in migration, particularly to the U.S.V.I where there was a proliferation of jobs in construction, domestic work, and taxi transportation. In St. Croix, for example, the Hess Oil Refinery served as a major employer.36

Traditionally, a Barbudan by definition included those born on island and abroad, with both having access to communal lands.37 When Barbuda joined Antigua in Associated Statehood in 1967 and Antigua sought to use this new relationship to develop Barbuda’s communal lands, Barbudans living abroad took notice.38 Barbuda Voice preserved their opposition and discussions during this time. Beginning in 1967 and accelerating with independence in 1981, the national government attempted to assert control over Barbuda, converting what it viewed as public lands into private property or long-term leases. Antigua insisted, especially after 1981, that the new central government now controlled these former Crown lands.

Another approach to controlling Barbudan land by Antiguan officials involved unilateral deals with foreign developers, such as the proposed 1969-70 sale by the Antiguan government of a quarter of Barbuda to a foreign resort developer, also opposed by Barbudans (to be discussed in greater detail later). Barbudans both on island and off generally resisted such attempts to end the communal land tenure even though the land uses that had once mutually supported it, mainly open-range herding but also shifting cultivation and charcoal burning, were in decline. 39

The tumultuous relationship between Antigua and Barbuda as well as the corruption of the Antiguan government at the time played out in other ways.40 The Antiguan government often tried to suppress dissenting opinion as evidenced by its treatment of Tim Hector, editor of Antiguan newspaper The Outlet founded in 1968 under the Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement.41 Hector’s newspaper was often a thorn in the side of the longstanding V.C. Bird government, the first premier and prime minister of Antigua. In editorials, Hector would criticize the government and point out quirky development schemes that could affect Barbuda. For example in an editorial written in 1981 entitled “A Solution” he writes,

Barbuda has a unique, and indeed admirable Land Tenure System in operation for 121 years at least….To say that Antiguans must have a Right to purchase land in Barbuda may sound reasonable on Lester Bird’s glib tongue. But in reality, two, just two Real Estate Sharks in Antigua would control the best land in Barbuda by arrangement, above or beneath the table.42

Hector often spoke to the concern expressed by many Barbudans in the past that privatization would limit the affordability of living on island, as it has done with many other Caribbean islands whose economies were heavily dependent upon tourism.

Both the George Walter and the V.C. Bird governments enacted a number of legal measures aimed at the press, particularly to silence Hector’s outspoken newspaper.43 The government arrested and jailed Hector a number of times due to his criticisms, seized copies of his newspaper, and raided his newspaper office.44 During this time, Barbudans sought out their own communication space that would express Barbudan points of view in order to protect their land from the Antiguan government. They found this space through The Voice.
Communication technology can be quite empowering for minority groups often providing a “mediated space in which they can produce their own material and where they have been previously marginalized in mainstream media forms…where people can throw off structural constraints and create new configurations of community on the basis of chosen identities.”45 It is in the context of an oppressive political climate that Barbuda Voice, throwing off the constraints of the Antiguan government (censorship, exposing corruption), came into existence to create an outlet outside of Antiguan control in order to produce material written by the minority Barbudans on behalf of the islanders’ welfare.46 Notably, the newspaper was not based in Barbuda where it could have faced greater scrutiny from Antiguan leadership; rather it emerged out of the epicenter of US-Barbudan migration at the time—The Bronx.

The connection between migration and Barbuda’s commons has often narrowly focused on a relationship of “population resource balance.”47 Lowenthal and Clarke emphasize that young Barbudans migrating to New York and Leicester kept population growth in check, subsequently protecting the island’s resources, leading to a triumph rather than a tragedy of the Barbudan commons. This paper will build on this idea but ultimately use The Voice to illustrate that not only did Barbudan emigration protect the commons, moreover Barbudans abroad were actively engaged in discussions of the commons and ultimately its preservation. This case study will highlight Barbudan concern over the future of the communal tenure as well as Barbudan access to resources—particularly the land prior to formal independence in 1981. Barbudan descendant Russell John, alongside the Barbudans United Descendants (BUD Society), founded the newspaper during this tenuous time in the island’s communal land history.

Russell John and The Voice

Russell John’s parents migrated to New York from Barbuda in the early part of the twentieth century where his father, Newland R. John, worked as a carpenter and caulker of boats. John recalled as a child overhearing his parents recount stories of Barbuda with their friends in New York: “Barbuda was common talk among their friends because all their friends came from Barbuda and they sat around the table and talked. My big ears picked up everything they said.”48

John created the paper to honor a request from his father, who “wanted to see a newspaper to bring the people together.”49 The major purpose of the Barbuda Voice was to connect Barbudans living all over the world to the events and happenings both on and off the island. An interview with Russell John provided a historical perspective on the involvement of Barbudans prior to the publication of The Voice. He recalled in 2009 that before the newspaper Barbudans would write only letters to their relatives: “That’s one of the reasons the Barbuda Voice was there to bring it all together, to contact those people and put it all together into one paper.”50 John knew that Barbudans were spread everywhere: England, the West Indies, America, and Canada. He saw the newspaper as a “common thread among them,” a way to see if he “could tie all those loose ends together.”51 For two decades this monthly newspaper served to update Barbudans about island happenings. While this piece will focus primarily on the issue of land tenure, The Voice also facilitated and highlighted a number of political, philanthropic, social, and linguistic connections on its pages.

When the newspaper was first published in 1969, the telephone was not a viable communication option so the newspaper was one of the only ways to stay “abreast as to what was going on.”52 The first telephone call was placed from Barbuda to New York City on July 10, 1970, not quite a year after the first issue of the newspaper went to press. In 1970, there were only two telephones on the island and they were both in the station house, and only one was available for public use. This made placing or receiving a phone call an involved process. As one Barbudan recalled:
The police station you had to go in there....And then the dreaded phone call at seven or six in the morning because you know that’s the only time someone has access. There were never too many of those calls that’s for sure. A lot of letters. We were much closer then.53

The production of a monthly newspaper was rather time consuming. Peggy John, who worked alongside her husband, said in 2007, “He [Russell John] did a lot of the work, all the typing we did right here at home in our kitchen. We sent out to the printers and mailed them to different people that subscribed at the time.”54 To gather news, John made frequent trips throughout the year to Barbuda. As a result of his dedication, the newspaper circulated the Atlantic including the greater Caribbean region, particularly Barbuda, Antigua, the Virgin Islands, as well as the United States, Canada, and England. The Johns never collected a salary but rather they “did it as a labor of love.”

Newspaper content

The monthly newspaper Barbuda Voice was short in length, averaging ten to twelve pages that would feature island news, various announcements (weddings, deaths, graduations) from the Barbudan diasporic community, advertisements particularly for Barbudan businesses in New York City, editorials, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, poetry, world news, interior-design pieces for the soul and the home, and writing by Barbudan religious leaders.55 Letters to the editor originated from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and various islands in the Caribbean including Barbuda. Subscribers paid four dollars for a yearly subscription. Scholars of ICTs often note disparities in access to established communications such as radio, television, newspapers, and landlines. For those who did not have a newspaper subscription, it circulated readily among family and friends.


Barbudans were quite vocal to express praise for the newspaper project and what they believed to be its purpose to raise awareness for Barbudans abroad so that they might understand the issues presently facing the island. Alvord Harris wrote from New York City, “We believe this paper will do more for Barbudans in the future than anything else that has been tried.”56 Some Barbudans viewed the paper as a powerful tool that could be used to influence decision makers: “I think we as Barbudans, if we have any Brains at all, we will keep this paper going with our grievances, because this paper, whether you know it or not, goes into the hands of some very important people and people that can help us with our problems.”57 Reverend Pat Thomas wrote from Cincinnati, “It does appear from the many articles written in the Barbuda Voice, that Barbudans on foreign soil and some at home are now realizing the plight of our beautiful country.”58 Toward the end of the first year of publication, the editorial staff wrote, “We hope that through our efforts we have gotten to know each other a little better.”59

Barbudans were not passive readers of the newspaper either. One New York Barbudan in August of 1971 called for a physical checkup of the newspaper lest it succumb to “editorial vacuum,” saying, “The Editor should not ignore it and perhaps he ought to take the paper in for a checkup. Perhaps he ought to find out what the readers think.”60 The Barbuda Brotherhood Social Club reprimanded The Voice in 1971 when it printed a report by Barbudan Senator Teague suggesting unemployment in Barbuda had decreased when conflicting reports from islanders indicated that it in fact had not.61 One response from the Barbuda Brotherhood Social Club stated, “As Barbudans living abroad, we are very concerned with what is going on at home—or may-be we should say with what is not going on at home. So we look forward with great anticipation for each issue of the Barbuda Voice, our only source of information.”62
In an interview in 2010, former Barbudan politician Francilla Francis echoed this sentiment stating Barbuda Voice served an important function in dispelling rumors circulating off the island: “It was really good and helpful for us, the Barbudan community abroad, giving us firsthand info on what happened at home. You had people here who would send firsthand information and not somebody printing something they heard somebody say.” The Barbuda Brotherhood Social Club also expressed similar sentiments stating it was their “only source of information.” Generally, Barbudans felt the newspaper provided accurate information allowing them to stay informed and take appropriate action based on the information in the newspaper.

**Barbuda nation and home**

Because of the encompassing definition of a Barbudan, The Voice not only connected fellow Barbudans living in different parts of the world, it also reminded them of their obligatory duty to their Caribbean home—the responsibility to care and write letters to the newspaper. One example out of many is the editorial entitled “A Message to Barbudans Everywhere.” Its author writes, “It should be obvious to all Barbudans by now that the fate of their home is in their hands. THIS GENERATION OF BARBUDANS DO NOT HAVE TO DISCOVER THEIR MISSION, IT IS OBVIOUS. IT IS NOW UP TO US TO FULFILL OR BETRAY IT.”

Barbudans called upon their fellow islanders using a shared past to sacrifice on behalf of the island home. Interestingly, in at least twenty instances in the five years of coverage, Barbudans wrote of their island as a country despite the 1967 Associated Statehood Status with Antigua.

Many Barbudans who lived abroad and some who were not even born on the island referred to Barbuda as home and called upon a common Barbudan heritage. Edna A. Crutchfield wrote, “America is ok, but Barbuda will always be ‘home’ for Barbudians at home and abroad.” Rev. Jerome John gave the reader a bit more insight about his feelings as a Barbudan despite being a first-generation American: “I was born in New York City and I showed my allegiance to the flag by serving in the armed forces in the time of war. But my roots, my heritage, my ancestry is solidly implanted in Barbuda. Why? Because that little island gave life and foundation to my mother and father, and I am proud of them and of the place.” One of the most powerful representations of this feeling and longing for home was a poem written by editor Russell John actually entitled “Home.” He wrote it on behalf of his parents and other Barbudans living abroad who still referred to Barbuda as “home.”

Those who were born or lived in Barbuda,  
Know of a different day.  
In the heat of the sun,  
Their mornings [sic] work done,  
They bathe at River or Low Bay.  
Those who were born or lived in Barbuda,  
Know of the “Village Well”,  
From slaves toil and sweat,  
Serves the Villagers yet,  
Could it speak, what a history to tell.

....  
Those who were born or lived in Barbuda,  
And ever chanced to roam.  
Where ere they may be,  
You can guarantee,  
They speak of this Island as “HOME”.
In this poem, John references a number of significant landmarks on the island: the Village Well, Low Bay, and River. He reaches out to all Barbudans, suggesting whether born on or off the island, Barbudans can relate to some of these common experiences and places. As in other entries, John is drawing upon a shared identity and experience in this poem.

Land

Historically, Barbudan identity has inextricably been tied to the land. The land is a rallying cry—a critical component of self—for those at home and abroad (see previous discussion on the definition of a Barbudan) and is mentioned in some form in almost every issue of The Voice between 1969 and 1974. When the land tenure faced undoing, Barbuda Voice served as an active forum and engine of action to discuss potential development projects and the issue of deeding.

Barbudans attached important meaning to their relationship with the island’s land, and have a rich community discourse as to how they acquired their rights. An interview with long-time leader of Antigua V.C. Bird called attention to this deeply entrenched oral history: “You see, there’s a misunderstanding in the minds of the people of Barbuda, that Codrington gave them the island personally as their own possession. So when he left there, he left the land which belonged to the Crown, for Barbuda was always Crown property. So therefore, Codrington could not give them Barbuda.” As Bird points out, Codrington did not have the legal right to make such a relinquishment to Barbudans. Some Barbudans today still proclaim the island was in fact willed to them by the Codrington family.

A powerful discourse permeates the newspaper concerning the land, in which Barbudans often invoke the heritage of their enslaved ancestors under Codrington as a rallying cry for all Barbudans to protect and preserve the land. Table 1 is a collection of quotations within the time of analysis in which Barbudans called upon their birthright as an attempt to unite Barbudans around the world to take a stand against anyone seeking to rob them of their land. Diaspora case studies often discuss evoking community through symbolism, which helps maintain and foster a collective identity. In this example, Barbudan identity is often intertwined with the land. As Poole (2002) argues,

Hence we can apply Anderson’s (1991) notion of the “imagined community” where a particular idea of community is constructed around certain histories and symbols and practices. This notion is applicable to virtual communities in that they may exist solely on a macro level, hence they are imagined in that the participants many never meet but the narratives may also help maintain the collective identities of communities sharing a locality, a mosque web site for example.

Thomas Faist writes that in order to maintain high degrees of social cohesion, communities often separated by great distances rely on a “symbolic and collective representation,” such as the representations and Barbudan symbolism highlighted here. Faist writes, “Symbolic ties function to bridge vast geographical distances that cross nation-states borders for members of kinship or ethnic migrant groups.” Barbudans will often say that the one thing that truly unites them is their land tenure. Another scholar, Charles Tilly, notes that this representation often involves a narrative. The Voice evoked a Barbudan narrative such as the one put forth by V.C. Bird, while calling forth heritage and birthright amongst its pages. These passionate sentiments argue Barbuda’s land tenure is a birthright, an important heritage, and legacy to be protected from development initiatives and deeding.
Table 1. Barbudan quotations from *The Voice*, calling upon their birthright (land).

- “I always thought that Barbuda was ours, God gave that land to us.”
- “We will be loosing [sic] our heritage and finally we will be slaves for him…”
- “There are many of us who would sell our birthright for a little porridge and allow our children to suffer.”
- “That Bradshaw bodes nothing but evil for Barbuda and is up to no good but to rob people of their Birthright.”
- “Surely they do not wish to sell their birthright for work.”
- “It is also our opinion that in order to best preserve the rights and privileges of the Inhabitants of the Island, any development project proposed for Barbuda should be under Leasehold terms for small areas and that development should be under the control of Barbudans.”
- “The people and their heritage should never be destroyed.”
- “Don’t sell your privileges for money, keep it for your children’s children.”
- “Friends let me say if you are right, no matter if they kill you they can’t take your rights away from you.”
- “You who put your sweat and blood into the land for a century. You who were the first real inhabitants of the Island, you gave the land life when no one else wanted or cared about it.”
- “…Without sacrificing your age old rights of freedom on the island.”
- “So anyone that comes to you with this story about giving deeds, he is planning to take away our privileges of having access to free land.”
- “We don’t realize the privileges we have until it is gone and it will be too late then, so let us fight to keep our Island and don’t let these land grabbing people who call themselves Government, get our land.”
- “My people as squatters on the God Given Rock of Barbuda, are awakening to their rightful place in the sun…we want the dignity of labor restored to our land, so that the joy, peace, liberty, self-respect and unity of living enjoyed by our fore-fathers, be a reality.”
- “Our fore parents have toiled, sweated and thrashed, all they got from this is the right to this land, which is handed down to the future generations. Let us keep this land to all Barbudans by birth.”
- “So Barbudans, let us continue to raise our voices with meaning, this is serious business, they are after our BIRTHRIGHT and this is the only loophole they can use to sell our land from under us.”
- “I felt that this was a most important matter dealing as it does with the one and only asset of the people of the island.”

1 L. Frank, March 1970 p. 7
2 Letter to the Editor, February 1970, p. 3
3 Bud Grass, February 1970, p. 6
4 McChesney D.B. George, May 1970 p. 1
5 Raeburn Griffin, May 1970, p. 6
6 Editors, May 1970, p. 9
7 Rev. Jerome John, June 1970, p. 4
8 Bud Grass, July 1970, p. 3
9 Glascoe Punter, September 1970 p. 6
10 Rev. Jerome John, October 1970 p. 8
11 Rev. Jerome John, October 1970 p. 8
12 Glascoe Punter, October 1970, p. 11
13 Glascoe Punter, January 1971, p. 7
14 Irene Punter, April 1971, p. 2
15 Raeburn Griffin, June 1973, p. 8
16 Glascoe Punter, August 1973 p. 4
17 McChesney George, January 1974, p. 8
Fighting for the Rock at Home and Abroad

Barbuda’s history is replete with a number of development schemes (largely initiated by the Antiguan government) targeting the island’s commons and The Voice is careful to document them. Shortly after its inception in December of 1969, the newspaper drew attention to a proposal by Canadian Robert Bradshaw of Tradewinds Investment Limited. The May issue of 1970 further clarifies the intentions of this development initiative, which would take nearly a quarter of the island and sell sites to prospective hotel developers and home builders. The Antiguan government would receive 20 percent of the profits, while 5 percent would remain in a Barbudan trust.\(^7\)

The BUD Society held a meeting with Bradshaw in New York City to discuss the project and its implications for Barbuda. Those attending the meeting in New York passed around a petition protesting the development project that eventually made its way to Antiguan Premier V.C. Bird. The Voice discussed the project in greater detail after the overseas meeting with Bradshaw and presented the petition by way of newspaper publication to Barbudan subscribers in May of 1970.

We the relatives and friends of the Natives of Barbuda hereby affix our signatures to this petition….Let it be known that Barbudans living outside of Barbuda are UNITED AND AWARE, and will take any and all legal measures to protest any injustices perpetrated or intended to be perpetrated on their loved ones living on Barbuda.\(^7\)

The petition elucidates the involvement of Barbudans living outside the island and their desire to protect the common property from outside developers, while also highlighting the role of The Voice as a facilitator of this act of protest. More importantly, it illustrates the attention politicians both in Antigua and Barbuda heeded to the newspaper publication and its editor Russell John.

In addition to development projects, Barbudans were active in writing to the newspaper in regards to the subject matter of land deeds. Glascoe Punter wrote from New York about the Antiguan government’s scheme to deed land in Barbuda.

I understand the new Government is planning to give deeds to the people for their land….If Barbudan people accept deeds for their land the Government will sell Barbuda piece by piece and who don’t have land at the time would have to buy land from then on….So anyone that comes to you with this story about giving deeds, he is planning to take away our privileges of having access to free land and is going to sell out Barbuda to help build Antigua.\(^7\)

In a column in the June 1973 issue entitled “Title Deeds: Trick or Treat?” the editor described a conversation with the then Premier of Antigua, George Walter over title deeds in Barbuda. He wrote, “It’s a very important project being pursued by the Government at this time is to give the people of Barbuda title deeds to their plots of land. [This was also the endeavor of the Bird Administration.] To date, he says, the people have opposed it. This, he feels, is very foolish as he sees it as an advantage to them.”\(^7\)

The editor Russell John then told the Premier that the “nay movement toward title deed, should be given intense investigation before any decisions are made. That all the legal ramifications should be brought out for the information of the people.”\(^7\)

Barbudans living abroad were often quite impassioned in their opinions over the titling of land based on their experience living off island. Interestingly, British Barbudan Hilbourne Frank applied the 1973 land crisis in England to the potential loss of his homeland in Barbuda, should the land be deeded.

Barbudans here in Britain wish to warn and advise our people at home and abroad of the dangers facing them with the land question and of the economic and social benefits which the proper cultivation of the land could secure in terms of general revenue.
Any student of history can easily recount how the European masses have been cheated of their land rights and today the people of Britain and elsewhere struggle to own a home. Inflation in land values has soared beyond the means of millions of families. It is the said rotten system of Land Titles which Barbudans at home are now queuing up to innovate within our legal framework.82

In the very same issue, Barbudans from England submitted nine letters expressing their desire that land should not be deeded. Raeburn Griffin wrote of this dissension in regards to title deed: “I heard people saying if they have title deeds they can borrow money from the bank. Yes, that’s true, but if this money is not paid back to the bank, your land has gone to the bank....DO NOT SELL LIKE THE ANTIGUANS, SELL, SELL, SELL.”83

Another perspective on the deeding of lands came from former representative McChesney George who called out Barbudans living abroad particularly in England, for their supposed hypocrisy in trying to dissuade Barbudans at home from deeding their lands. In this excerpt, readers get a feel for the tension that often existed between those at home and those abroad.

Can you and any or all of the writers inform me of any Western Civilised nation where the people of a country are prevented by Law from holding Legal Title to lands they have bought and own and on which they have spent a great deal of money to put houses and other amenities?84

*Barbuda Voice* was a conversation among Barbudans living all over the world, and George’s questions to Barbudans living abroad did not go unanswered. Rolston Drinkwater responded to George in a letter to the editor in October 1973 pointing out George’s own transnational connections: “We all know you McChesney George, you were born in Brooklyn, New York in America. You sold Barbuda once and still would like to do so because you are the one who would like Barbuda to have Title Deeds. No more selling.”85

The issue of deeds came to a head in 1974 with the convening of a Barbuda Convention in July of 1974. The convention is another extraordinary example of connectivity illustrated and facilitated by *The Voice* in relation to Barbuda’s land. The convention was held in Barbuda and it came about through the efforts of Barbudans living in Barbuda, England, and New York. Among the newspaper’s pages was a convention advertisement that called for Barbudans to not only attend the convention, but also to submit discussion topics:

For many decades now Barbudans everywhere have watched their island go from bad to worse in many respects....Many have written and many have spoken about the need for united action. But the call for unity has not been answered. To this end the suggestion of a convention has been made and this is an invitation open to all Barbudans everywhere to get together in the first week of July, 1974 to give vent to their feelings and desires in respect to our social, economic and political problems.86

The convention hoped to create a consensus on Barbuda’s land, particularly title deeds. Frank submitted a resolution after the convention in a later edition of *The Voice*. The resolution stated that no administrative body of any kind should enact the issuing of title deeds to Barbudans and that the majority of Barbudans should reject land deeds, instead preferring that the communal land tenure should continue.87 This resolution among other numerous write-ins by Frank, illustrates the involvement of Barbudan transnationals in the land affairs of Barbuda and their often-impassioned response to its potential undoing.
I call upon you all, fellow-brothers, to reject any form of land transactions. Money they will bring but don’t be fooled land is worth more than money. Nobody ever bought land in Barbuda, therefore nobody should sell. I command you as a friend, reject these land-stealers. Keep the ground God has given you to till.88

The lively discussion of deeds would continue in later editions of The Voice, outside the five-year focus of this study.

Larger significance

While this paper has focused on land, the newspaper facilitated regular, frequent, and meaningful interactions among Barbudans both on and off the island prior to the ready availability of telephone communication in Barbuda.89 Among the pages of Barbuda Voice are hundreds of documented examples of meaningful transnational-migrant engagement. Barbuda Voice allowed Barbudans to interact with one another and stay informed with their island homeland as never before, particularly in terms of the pressing issue of land security. While some scholars are quick to applaud the conjoining effects of new technologies like the Internet and cell phones for transnational migrants, I argue through this case study that we have underestimated the agency of migrants in using "slower" forms of communication, making Barbuda Voice and other newspapers like it important spaces that facilitated transnational involvement.90

In an effort to theorize both concepts of space and communication geographies, Paul C. Adams writes, “not only do communications mediate between space and place …space is where communication happens but is also one of the things created by communications.”91 The Voice served as a valuable space for the meeting ground of Barbudans living all over the world that incorporated the new experiences of Barbudans living both on and off island.92 The Voice reminded Barbudans of their identity and obligation to the island, while also reflecting the influences of British, American, and Canadian-Barbudan experiences living abroad. While firmly grounded in several states and the “nation of Barbuda,” the space of The Voice influenced land-tenure questions on the island. For example, Hilbourne Frank’s knowledge of land-tenure practices in England served as a catalyst to protect the communal lands on Barbuda. He sought to protect rather than privatize Barbudan land. In fact, his position as a transnational migrant afforded him the opportunity to maintain “two quite distinct ways of life” engaging with both a private and communal land tenure system in England and on the island.93

It is through Barbuda Voice that Barbudans were able to create their own space for discourse to combat the often-corrupt undertakings of the Antiguan government and “transform ‘traditional’ power relations.”94 Throughout the five-year period of analysis, the Antigua government went to extreme measures to quell any form of criticism from the press as illustrated by the harassment of Tim Hector and his Antigua newspaper. Outside the control of the Antigua government, The Voice empowered Barbudans because it was a Barbudan forum. Russell John revealed in 2009 that Antiguan police on the twin-island often harassed him.95 “We didn’t realize at the time that the paper was so powerful. We were just writing a paper….I think they were trying, it was done to impress me, stop doing what I was doing. It didn’t work. Cause they really couldn’t tell me anything.”96

Forming transnational social movements is not easy; “sustaining collective action across borders on the part of people who seldom see each one another…is difficult.”97 Yet Russell John and his newspaper project managed to connect Barbudans around the Atlantic in creative ways to counter Antiguan hegemony in a time period before ICT onset.

Rather than transform power relations completely, transnationals often create new pathways to power, a point that is clearly illustrated by The Voice.98 What happened in The Voice is
not at all different from Laura Kunreuther’s study of the Nepali diaspora’s use of radio and local press to oppose the government during a time when it tried to silence the opposition.99 Much like its ICT communication antecedents, The Voice was also “capable of bringing issues to the surface of public opinion and debate, despite attempts at silencing or censoring them.”100 As Poole and others have noted, perhaps the connecting power of modern technologies may be exaggerated as some case studies suggest.101 One Barbudan told me in 2009, “Now that we can just pick up the phone and call, we don’t.”102

Conclusion

Nearly thirteen years after its first publication in December 1982, The Voice was exhibiting signs of decline as editors announced that subscriptions had indeed fallen below the level of financial sustainability.103 Interestingly, during this time Russell John chose to highlight what he felt were the important accomplishments of the newspaper:

Through the last 13 years, some of which the island was virtually incommunicado, the Barbuda Voice kept Barbudans, The Antigua Government, Caribbean leaders, the British Government, U.S. Legislators, and the many influential friends of Barbuda aware of all the major developments in the island….In effect, the paper has been a medium for Governments, Corporations and private individuals to address the widest scope of Barbudans and other interested parties as possible.104

Notwithstanding these early obstacles, The Voice would hold on for eight more years and by 1990 (its last year of print) the newspaper was bi-monthly, its pages consisting primarily of obituaries and regional Caribbean news. The onset of ICTs, particularly greater access to telephones, quickly dated the newspaper’s content and after twenty years of service the editors were ready to move on to other projects. The demise of the newspaper is also emblematic of larger issues at play on the island. After independence with Antigua in 1981, (arguably one of the last subjects of great importance covered by the newspaper that also truly brought Barbudans together), the island has faced increasing social fragmentation and is deeply divided over politics centered on representation in the Barbuda Council, the island’s governing body.

Despite its ultimate demise, through The Voice, Barbudans were able to successfully rally members of the Barbudan population living in the Caribbean region, Leicester, the Bronx, Toronto, and elsewhere in a critical time in the island’s history. Important topics regarding Associated Statehood Status and the protection of common property remained a priority for the newspaper. Transmigrants were actively engaged in land-tenure preservation facilitated during this time by and through The Voice. The monthly newspaper during its tenure shared important information for both the diaspora and island, enabled political mobilization and action on behalf of the land, and most importantly (re)inscribed Barbudan identity calling on islanders to care for the happenings on Barbuda.105 Though dubbed a “slower” form of communication, much like its ICT successors, Russell John, alongside his wife Peggy, took on the seemingly impossible task of creating a space that would serve as a bridge of connection for Barbudans living around the world.

Acknowledgments

This piece is dedicated to Russell and Peggy John. I would also like to acknowledge the people of Barbuda, Andrew Sluyter, LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology equipment and travel funding, the National Archive of Antigua and Barbuda in St. Johns, and the National Anthropological Archive in Washington D.C. (Riva Berleant-Schiller Papers). In addition, thank you to Dydia DeLyser’s writing seminar participants, Phillip Schmutz, Chris Curtis, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.
NOTES

2 Throughout this article, I will interchange Barbuda Voice and The Voice when referring to the newspaper, just as the editors and subscribers often did.
9 Basch et al. 1994.
11 Portes et al. 1999, 223.
15 Bacigalupe and Lambe 2011, 14; Hamel 2009.
17 Hamel 2009.
19 Ibid, 321.
20 Ibid, 321.
25 Alison Mountz and Richard A. Wright (1996) researched the origins of the term “transnational” and found an early use in a piece by Randolph S. Borne written in 1916 for *Atlantic Monthly*. Borne writes, “America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors.”
35 Interview by author 2009.
37 Potter 2011.
38 Several islands in the British Caribbean maintained a semi-independent status until they achieved full independence. During this time, Britain maintained defense and some foreign affairs.

For a more thorough exploration of this topic, see Robert Coram’s *Caribbean Time Bomb*.

John A. Lent, “Mass Media in the Leeward Islands,” in *Mass Media and the Caribbean*, eds. S.H. Surlin, W.C. Soderland (New York, Gordon and Breach, 1990), 103-11; Walter passed the Newspaper Surety Act, which required newspapers to deposit $60,000 XCD in the event of a libel case, in addition to a $600 XCD license fee, while Bird amended the Public Order Act of 1968, “that made almost any criticism of government a criminal act,” (John A. Lent, 110); The Newspaper Surety Act temporarily shut down both the *Workers Voice* and *Times* because of the exorbitant bond and license fees required.


Poole 2002; For more information on the corrupt practices of the Antiguan government see Robert Coram’s *Caribbean Time Bomb*.

Lowenthal and Clarke, 155.

Russell John 2009.

Ibid.

Russell John 2009.

Ibid.

Interview by author in 2009.

Interview by author in 2009.

Peggy John, interview by author. Telephone (2007), October.

Often religious in nature, they were inspirational pieces for daily living and home decoration.

*BV*, December 1969, 6.

*BV*, October 1971, 3.

*BV*, July 1970, 8.


See for example *BV*, August 1971.

*BV*, October 1971, 6.


*BV*, October 1971, 6


Fieldwork from 2007-2010 in Barbuda reveal that even after thirty years of independence with Antigua, Barbudans in conversation still refer to the island as their “country.”

68 BV, October 1970, 7.
69 R. John 2009.
70 BV, October 1970, 7.
71 BV, December 1982, 5.
73 Poole 2002, 55.
77 BV, May 1970.
78 BV, May 1970, 10.
79 BV, October 1970, 11, italics mine.
80 BV, June 1973, 8.
81 BV, June 1973, 8.
82 BV, June 1973, 8.
83 BV, June 1973, 8.
84 BV, September 1973, 5.
85 BV, October 1973, 6.
86 H. Frank, BV, January 1974, 3.
87 BV, November 1974.
88 BV, November 1974, 8.
93 Ibid.
96 Russell John 2009.
97 Tarrow 2005, 7.
98 Mahler 2002.
100 Hamel 2009, 31.
101 Poole 2002. See also Miller and Slater 2000.
102 While outside the scope of this study, Barbudans do connect to family members and friends living off island through Facebook and other forms of social media. However, informal observations from several years of fieldwork suggest that the use of FB does not seem have the same impact as Barbuda Voice once did.

103 BV, December 1982.

104 BV, December 1982, 1.


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ABSTRACT: The production of nature literature in geography has proven to be a valuable analytical tool for several reasons, not least because it highlights Marx’s dialectical concept of the metabolism of nature and society. Neil Smith’s work in particular shows that the ideological function of nature in Western thought is that it collapses external nature into universal nature, thus abstracting and generalizing class interest. The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first and foremost purpose is to sharpen and clarify this literature by applying it to the tension in Jack London’s literary oeuvre between his staunch socialism and his social Darwinism. Doing so helps tease out analytical distinctions between, for example, nature-society interaction and dialectics or between naturalism and materialism. The second purpose is to lend insight into this alleged contradiction in London’s work. The fact that he tried to marry the ideas of Spencer and Marx is a normative contradiction, but ontologically it reflected a material conception of history characteristic of Engels more so than Marx. This is shown by relating London’s familiar literature on wilderness adventure to his less familiar literature on Progressive Era socialism and, in some cases, bloody revolution. More specifically, the former genre is read as a spatial metaphor for the historical transition to capitalism, and the latter is read in terms of how the concept of “strength” in London’s work becomes a proxy for “value.” This enables an investigation into the ideological function of nature in London’s literary corpus.

Keywords: production of nature, Jack London, naturalism, material conception of history, dialectics, metabolism

Introduction

Jack London’s work is relevant to historical geography because the underlying structure of his narratives can shed light on the politics of the Progressive Era. His work ranges from well-known tales of wilderness adventure, to less well-known expositions of socialist politics infused with Social Darwinism, to early twentieth century poverty journalism. Much of his literature describes the spatiality of empire as a proxy for his particular “material conception of history.” London himself was implicated in the creation of that empire both materially and symbolically: as a sailor he participated in seal-hunting ventures near Japan, searched for what he considered “untouched” Indigenous populations in the South Pacific, and participated in the Klondike Gold Rush of the late 1890s. Most of his stories are informed by his ventures at the edge of empire, and invariably posit the enduring rule of natural law in all human affairs; he was an unflinching socialist who nevertheless situated value in nature. London’s life and work wraps the spatiality of empire and the temporality of capitalism together in narrative form.

Academic treatment of London himself varies wildly. Biographer Earle Labor argues that his reputation as a sexist, racist, pugilistic, and plagiaristic drunk is a distortion of the “real” London. Other renderings of London reverse that logic, arguing that he was “the most-read revolutionary Socialist in American history, agitating for violent overthrow of the government and...
the assassination of political leaders—and he is remembered now for writing a cute story about a
dog.”3 His unsavory views on race are well documented, and as a self-educated proletarian who
enjoyed a meteoric rise to literary fame, his penchant for self-promotion and vanity are obvious
in his work.4 However, this paper is not so interested in Jack London the person, but rather the
material conception of history that made his work popular.5 He was deeply impressed with
Herbert Spencer, but sought to use literature to show how Spencer’s philosophy would ultimately
vindicate Marx. This putative contradiction has been at the center of critique of London’s work.
Some have explained it as confusion on London’s part in that he “wrote better than he knew.”6
Others have argued that despite his revolutionary rhetoric he was intellectually conditioned by the
petty bourgeois class he found himself in as a professional writer, or by the Taylorist fascination
with efficiency of motion in a rapidly expanding industrial society.7 For his part, London said
that early in his career he transitioned from a belief in Nietzschean individualism to socialism on
account of his experience “tramping” across the United States.8

Yet another explanation is that perhaps his naturalism and his socialism are often seen as a
contradiction in the context of efforts among twentieth-century western Marxists, such as Lukács,
to rid Marxism of any and all naturalism.9 I think such efforts are entirely laudable, and in that
sense London’s work embodies a normative contradiction. But ontologically, the contradiction is
only between London and, for example, Lukács, but within London’s work I think it reflects the
multiplicity of Marxist strains of thought. While London revered Marx, his work had a decidedly
Engelsian bent, in the sense that it often conflated materialism and naturalism. Using naturalist
philosophies toward socialist ends was much more commonplace in London’s time.10

Jonathan Berliner offers an interesting reading of London’s work towards resolving its
central contradiction. He does this primarily by reading London’s depiction of material history
and class struggle as “a dialectical one, with the social processes supported by the natural one.”11
In short, London saw the brutalities of unbridled capitalism as physically shaping a proletariat
he regularly termed the “abysmal brute,” which would pit a kind of primitive, “natural” strength
against bourgeois strength towards an inevitable revolution. London saw the coming revolution
as “violent and thoroughly rooted in biology.”12 When read in light of Marx’s prediction that
capitalism would turn “the worker into a crippled monstrosity” it is easy to read London’s
work as dialectical.13 However, I argue that reading dialectics into London’s work becomes very
questionable when read in light of the geographic literature on the “production of nature.” I
situate my reading of London in this literature by using London’s discourse on “strength” as a
proxy for “value.” Marxian dialectics understands use value as rooted in labor’s metabolism of
humans and nature, but exchange value as an abstraction arising from the material condition
of production known as capitalism. Exchange value fundamentally changes labor’s relation to
nature, so while value may be rooted in both labor and nature, in capitalism it is rooted only in
labor. Engels, on the other hand, was more directly Darwinian, and saw value even in capitalism
as rooted in nature. By comparing London’s wilderness adventure literature with his explicitly
socialist literature, I will argue that his conception of strength is more in line with Engels than
Marx, and as such exemplifies what Neil Smith called the “ideology of nature.”14

This paper also adds to recent geographic literature in the domain of geohumanities,
recognizing the novel as a “spatial event” that emerges “at the intersection of social practices and
geographical contexts.”15 As such, it helps historicize the particular forms of produced nature
in capitalism—particularly the frontier. This literary intervention foregrounds the frontier as a
process of domination rather than a place that is constructed, and illustrates how frontiers are
“projects in making geographical and temporal experience.”16 London’s work naturalized an
imperial project that in fact had historically and culturally specific motivations.
The ensuing section reviews the production of nature literature in terms of how it understands nature-society dialectics in terms of Marx’s concept of metabolism. The section transitions into a brief discussion of Neil Smith’s meditations on the “ideology of nature” and how this relates to value. Section three begins with a discussion of London’s short story “The Strength of the Strong” in order to establish strength as a proxy for value in his material conception of history. It then splits into two subsections, one on his work in the genre of wilderness adventure, and other on his work as a socialist agitator. Here I focus on his distinction between primitive and bourgeois strength, and how London’s obsession with the return of primitive strength in socialist revolution evinces the “ideology of nature.”

Dialectics and the production of nature

Noel Castree points out that while Marxists have long been opposed to naturalism, eco-Marxists have a strong naturalist bent. Eco-Marxist naturalism is often based on a reading of Marx that conflates naturalism and materialism. Ted Benton, for example, argues that Marx and Engels “thought of their work as naturalist and materialist,” but that they did not extend their naturalism to the capitalist economy out of a need to distance themselves from physiocrats such as Malthus. Part of the reason for confusion is that materialism is sometimes thought of as a trans-historical causative force. This confusion is, to some degree, a consequence of Engels’ need to connect Marx’s posthumous work back to Darwinian evolution in order to translate them into the popular literature. Geoff Mann argues that much of what is called Marxism today is actually Engelsian, and that Marx himself was much less committed to strict materialism.

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels applied dialectics to the natural world thusly: With men [sic] we enter history. Animals also have history, that of their derivation and gradual evolution to their present position. This history, however, is made for them, and in so far as they themselves take part in it, this occurs without their knowledge or desire. On the other hand, the more that human beings become removed from animals in the narrower sense of the word, the more they make their own history consciously, the less becomes the influences of unforeseen effects and uncontrolled forces on this history....If, however, we apply this measure to human history, to that of even the most developed peoples of the present day, we find that there still exists here a colossal disproportion between the proposed aims and the results arrived at, that unforeseen effects predominate, and that the uncontrolled forces are far more powerful than those set into motion according to plan. And this cannot be otherwise as long as the most essential historical activity of men, the one which has raised them from bestiality to humanity and which forms the material foundation of all their other activities, namely the production of the requirements of life, that is to-day social production, is above all subject to the interplay of unintended effects from uncontrolled forces....And what is the result? Increasing overwork and increasing misery of the masses, and every ten years a great collapse. Darwin did not know what a bitter satire he wrote on mankind, and especially on his countrymen, when he showed that free competition, the struggle for existence, which the economists celebrate as the highest historical achievement, is the normal state of the animal kingdom.

Two things are of note here. First, Engels sees human history in terms of a separation from natural law, one that is instigated by the social relations of production. But what creates the human experience of misery, for Engels, is that this separation has not gone far enough, and in fact that
what Darwin accurately presaged was that an economy based on the self-regulating market was doomed to failure because it was based on the laws of the animal kingdom.\textsuperscript{23} Second, while Engels’ desire to transcend natural law is in line with Marx, his use of dialectics (or lack thereof) is not. Marx’s description of the human relation to nature was based on the metaphor of metabolism largely absent in Engels’ work, and in fact Marx never directly cites any particular causal agent of history.\textsuperscript{24}

In contrast, the production of nature literature understands nature-society dialectics in terms of Marx’s concept of metabolism. The metaphor of metabolism has gained significant currency in recent years, because it captures the dialectics of nature and society more precisely than simply saying nature and society “interact.”\textsuperscript{25} In discussing the labor process, Marx states,

\begin{quote}
Labour is, first of all, a process between man [sic] and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

In recognition of this, Smith argues that “elements of first nature...are subjected to the labor process and re-emerge to be the social matter of the second nature.”\textsuperscript{27} First nature is what Marx referred to as external nature—a nature prior to human contact that nobody has ever experienced. Second nature is the metabolic outcome of the human use of nature as both nature and humans change in form.

To see nature-society metabolism dialectically precludes the mistaken claim that Marx saw nature as the source of value as much as labor. When discussing the use of nature to create use-values, Marx states that across all societies labor “mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself.”\textsuperscript{28} Marx says nature is a limiting factor, but this is in the creation of “real wealth,” which derives only from use values. In a capitalist society, wealth derives from exchange values. Rather than overreacting to physiocrats, Marx was offering a materialist reading of history in which human labor metabolizes use value, which yields a pragmatic form of wealth. Another dialectical process further spirals outs from there: money mediates the exchange of use values, leading to exchange value, which is an abstraction of material value. Labor is the source of value in a capitalist system, not universally across time.\textsuperscript{29}

Smith’s production of nature thesis has been critiqued for re-inscribing nature-society dualisms by supposing that only under capitalism is second nature produced.\textsuperscript{30} As Michael Ekers and Alex Loftus point out, however, Smith argues that second nature has always been produced metabolically, but that the form of this production changed under capitalism. They argue that “the key is to historicize the specific forms that the making of nature takes, and to be able to do this in geographically situated ways.”\textsuperscript{31} Smith’s work details not only the production of nature, but also the production of space itself under capitalism, arguing that “the romanticization of Nineteenth Century America was a direct response to the successful objectification of nature in the labor process.”\textsuperscript{32} By this he means that the imperialist expansion into peripheral regions, such as the very Klondike Gold Rush in which London participated, was driven by a material reality—the capitalist growth imperative. However, it had to be disguised as something driven by ideational motives, such as the triumph of the spirit showcased in \textit{The Call of the Wild}.\textsuperscript{33} Such idealist accounts by their nature abstract and universalize class interest, which for Smith is the
very definition of ideology. Romantic literary tales such as The Call of the Wild thus, on one level, serve an obvious ideological function with very material consequences: the capitalist production of space otherwise known as the “frontier.”

But on another level, narratives that abstract material realities into idealist motives are based on what Smith calls the “ideology of nature,” which is a conflation of “external” and “universal” nature.34 External nature refers to non-human nature, while universal nature refers to there being a “natural” order of things. What is included in universal nature varies from materialism to naturalism to psychoanalysis to metaphysics. Smith argues that westward expansion across North America involved discourses of conquest, which extended external nature into universal nature. In other words, universal nature—a broad abstraction of the “order of things”—arises out of material practice, and comes to mean that social relations are guided by a foundational ontology indistinguishable from ecological laws. This is how materialist explanations come to be misunderstood as naturalist. Quite apart from suggesting that only under capitalism is nature produced, Smith was critiquing this very notion in Alfred Schmidt’s reading of Marx.35 Smith argues that Schmidt assumes universal nature as anything prior to the bourgeois era. This non-dialectical reading of history assigns to nature its own metaphysical existence independent of its metabolic relations with humans. Per Smith, Engels’ very attempt to distil a dialectics of nature itself in Dialectics of Nature commits the same false assumption.36

Jack London’s “The Strength of the Strong”

Characteristic of Schmidt’s readings of Marx, discussed above, London’s narratives promote a clear sense of material foundation to history constituted by natural law. It is a historical ontology, which recognizes rupture, but nevertheless presumes that if nature creates value at any point in history, it remains a source of value at any point thereafter. While London could not have been influenced by Schmidt, he did read Marx, Spencer, and Darwin, and almost certainly Engels.37

In 1914 London penned a short story called “The Strength of the Strong,” which serves as one of the clearest parables for what London saw as the evolution of civil society out of the state of nature.38 The story is set in a mythical, pre-modern land populated by warring fish-eaters and meat-eaters. The former exist only as an aggregate of in-fighting families with no social structure beyond the family unit. Eventually they are attacked and driven to a new valley by the meat-eaters. From this event they decide that their strength exists in the creation of a set of rules whereby they create law, government (a chief), division of labor including agriculture and border defense, and private property. Then comes money fashioned by women from sea shells and the rise of a feudal structure in which the men who own the land, control the fish traps and livestock, and determine the money supply by exacting a tax of one third of the food produced. They live fat and happy while others suffer. When the others protest, the feudal aristocracy pays them a small wage to become guards against the meat-eaters, and promotes pro-fish-eater nationalism so that fish-eaters forget how hungry they are. With the wage relation comes capitalism, a market develops, and fish are thrown back into the sea and corn is left to rot in order to drive up prices, while people starve. Unemployment rises and the capitalist class hoards money. A character called “the Bug” is employed by the capitalist class as a singer of songs, each of which directs community anger at rabble-rousing individuals who point out the corrupt system. Said rabble-rousers are accused of wanting to go back to the pre-modern ways of living, and are thus stoned to death even by hungry villagers. The Bug’s music represents the function of culture as an oppressive force designed to obscure the prevailing conditions of oppression, mostly by branding dissenters as endangering the group from the meat-eaters.
The story is quite in line with the extended quote from Engels discussed previously. Engels understood historical materialism as “man” raising itself from bestiality to humanity through the creation of systems of production. Engels’ diagnosis of the problem, however, is that the baser laws of nature still dictate social outcomes because natural law has not been transcended enough so long as markets are unregulated (that is, they are regulated by natural law). This happens in “The Strength of the Strong” to the extent that the fish-eaters do create more food, but suffer extreme inequality as their own legal institutions are usurped by the powerful.

According to Smith, Schmidt’s reading of Marx presumes that second nature is produced only under capitalism, and that it represents a rupture from a pre-capitalist unity of people and nature. While that presumes a historical ontology different from that of Engels, in many ways this concept of rupture is reflected in “The Strength of the Strong.” The last of the rabble-rousers makes an impassioned plea that there were in fact two different types of strength, one good and the other evil. He argues that cooperation, the creation of law, government, and division of labor were all a good kind of strength because it made life materially better. He argued that the wage relation was an evil type of strength based not in muscles or will to labor, but instead in the control of property, capital in the form of fish traps and sea shells, and labor (he is also stoned to death). The idea that “strength” as culturally defined (by the Bug) in capitalism can be wholly different than “strength” in pre-capitalism, parallels the idea that value comes from labor in capitalism only, even if it also came from nature in pre-capitalism. This reading of the story thus recognizes its implicit rupture in the nature of value, vis-à-vis strength, but also, contra Schmidt, that the metabolic production of second nature pre-exists capitalism, as people labor within nature to create use value early in the parable. However, particular forms of second nature, such as the concept of modernity or fish-eater nationalism, are particular to capitalism.

This very theme of naturalist ontology manifesting itself in class struggle is persistent in London’s work, only in different ways. His wilderness adventure literature is ostensibly a spatial metaphor to describe historical transition. Perhaps reflecting his cynicism regarding the futility of socialist politics, London ended “The Strength of the Strong” without narrating any meaningful resistance. His earlier work in the theme of Progressive Era socialist politics was different however, often demonstrating the return of natural law, in the form of “good strength” re-manifesting in capitalism to counter “evil strength.” The remaining sections will demonstrate how this reflects the “ideology of nature” in London’s work.

London as wilderness writer

London’s The Call of the Wild tells the tale of Buck, a St. Bernard and German Shepherd mix who is stolen by a desperate house servant (Manuel) from a California ranch and sold into the black market for sled dogs (to facilitate the Klondike Gold Rush). As London puts it, Buck is “jerked from the heart of civilization and flung into the heart of things primordial,” indicating that the story is both an adventure to the margins of empire and a metaphor for transition backward through time. Most of London’s work in this genre reads as a narrative of ruptures as one moves from modernity to pre-modernity or vice versa. However, certain elements of his work illustrate both transitions in the material foundations of society as modes of production change and the abstractions emanating from those material foundations. Perhaps the clearest example is London’s description of how Buck regains his lost instincts—his “ancient song”—as he travels further and further into wilderness:

Thus, as a token of what a puppet thing life is, the ancient song surged through him and he came into his own again; and he came because men had found a yellow metal in the North, and because Manuel was a gardener’s helper whose wages did not lap over the needs of his wife and divers [sic] small copies of himself.
What puppeteers Buck’s transition is the capitalist profit motive and class struggle; what results from it is that Buck re-connects with his pre-modern, instinctive self. Buck regaining his “ancient song” can be read as the integration of external and universal nature in pre-capitalist times (the “ideology of nature”). Examples of this abound in *The Call of the Wild*. London describes Buck’s beating into submission by a man with a club as his “introduction to the reign of primitive law.” When Buck learns to kill rival dogs in the sled team in his struggle for supremacy, London states that “mercy was a thing reserved for gentler times.” The idea of mercy was an abstraction appropriate only in a condition of material comfort characteristic of what London calls the Southland, or the spatial equivalent of the bourgeois, capitalist era. Primitive law refers to a lack of abstract systems of ethics in pre-capitalist times, when “ethics” and “survival” are indistinguishable, as both are rooted in nature. London explains that as Buck learns to steal meat from other dogs in the sled team, he had no time for morals in the Northland and that it was his innate nature to survive. The connection between his reversion to a cruder moral code and the deep historical past is emphasized as this natural drive is explained as a form of species memory “howling down through the centuries and through him.” The “ideology of nature” is present here as the pre-capitalist past is characterized as a time when nature and ethics were one and the same thing. The fact that it was capitalism that drove this reversion to an amoral system of ethics is a commonplace trope of London’s work.

Buck is eventually rescued from an abusive situation by his final owner, John Thornton. Thornton and his friends strike gold in a remote part of the Yukon, and while they spend the summer mining it, Buck is allowed to roam freely. Buck feels two competing forces on his attention: the “call of the wild,” which is his instinct to hunt, and his “love” of John Thornton. Again, the former represents his pre-capitalist universal nature, and the latter represents an ideational motive characteristic of the bourgeois era. The narrative plays out: the call of the wild is stronger than love, Buck takes off hunting for several days, and in his absence Thornton is killed by a band of Native Americans (Buck typically served as protector of the group). The gold nuggets mined by Thornton and his friends are described as the book closes as washing back into the stream from which they came.

On one level the metaphor is obvious: pre-capitalist universal nature trumps bourgeois abstraction, and consequently the capitalist enterprise collapses as its ultimate symbol (gold) reconnects with nature. On another level, however, the notion that capital could re-connect with nature in its destruction highlights the conditional possibility of its very existence. In other words, the otherwise obvious metaphor suggests that for London the transition to capitalism happens as universal nature is replaced by nature-society dualism (cf. Smith’s critique of Schmidt). The narrative is decidedly materialist, but not Marxist. Marx saw nature and society as operating in a metabolic relationship even prior to capitalism. The gold flowing back into the river is not a metaphor for this metabolism as it only happens after, and as a consequence of, a violent rupture in which nature seeks its revenge over capitalism. In *The Call of the Wild* the source of value is nature in the form of gold, with labor, in the form of placer mining, dog sledding, etc., coming into play only later in modernity.

*White Fang* has virtually identical themes, but works in the opposite direction, and nature does not triumph over capital in the end. White Fang is born a wolf cub in a den in the Yukon—his mother is half dog, half wolf, and his father is entirely wolf. The story of White Fang’s conception is related by London as the “sex tragedy of the natural world,” as three wolves fight to the death for the privilege of mating with White Fang’s mother. This is clearly the primordial nature described in the beginning of “The Strength of the Strong” and the end of *The Call of the Wild*. From White Fang’s birth forward, he experiences shifting material foundations and pursuant abstractions as he moves from pre-capitalist universal nature to bourgeois capitalism.
For example, as a puppy he is captured by a Native American band, domesticated, and eventually incorporated into a dog sled team. He comes to think of humans as gods whose power is absolute. The sled dogs are competitive with each other, each challenging White Fang for status as lead dog, while the “gods” simply have to lash White Fang to get the entire team moving forward. This is the first development in the story of a capitalist class extracting labor value from workers. Docile but not affectionate toward his master (Gray Beaver), White Fang as lead dog learns to apply an amoral natural code to the other dogs under his supervision:

He was a monstrous tyrant. His mastery was rigid as steel. He oppressed the weak with a vengeance. Not for nothing had he been exposed to the pitiless struggle for life in the days of his cubhood, when his mother and he, alone and unaided, held their own and survived in the ferocious environment of the Wild. And not for nothing had he learned to walk softly when superior strength went by. He oppressed the weak, but he respected the strong….His outlook was bleak and materialistic. The world as he saw it was a fierce and brutal world, a world without warmth, a world in which caresses and affection and the bright sweetesses of the spirit did not exist.47

White Fang’s vision of a cruel and oppressive world reflects London’s Social Darwinism. But in terms of how London’s work constructs a time-space nexus, another question emerges: Does this simply reflect the pre-capitalist universal nature, given that White Fang is still in the Yukon and in the possession of Native Americans? After all, the overtly racist London collapses Native Americans into nature by calling them “man-animals.” Or does it reflect the continuation of what Engels saw as “the normal state of the animal kingdom” in free-market capitalism?48

I argue that it is the latter for the following reasons. First, if one assumes The Call of the Wild as a template for material history in reverse order, then Buck’s transition from working in a dog sled team to roaming wild marks the transition from capitalism to pre-capitalism. Buck did not entirely hear the “call of the wild” until his dog-sledding days were over and Thornton let him loose. White Fang actually oscillates between wildness and laboring under a capitalist master, but nevertheless his position in the mode of production marks the transition to capitalism. One could argue that because Native Americans were described by London as “man-animals,” this dog sled team marks the transition to feudalism before the eventual transition to capitalism. However, in The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels were clear that the transition from feudalism to capitalism was marked by the replacement of guilds with a hierarchy between owners of capital and labor.49 The metaphor of the dog sled team more closely resembles capitalism because of the hierarchy of Gray Beaver (capitalist), White Fang (foreman), and the other dogs (proletariat) than it does a closed guild. Second, it is within dogsledding that White Fang learns abstract concepts like justice and the value of property, which are abstractions created out of material practice that do not exist in pre-capitalist universal nature. Finally, London emphasizes that White Fang learned as a cub in the wild to eat small things and fear big things, but then applied these natural laws in the dog sled team—a context in which he is made docile by his master and turned against his fellow workers. London describes White Fang’s primordial nature as clay that is molded into form in the organized environment of the dog sled team. To this point in the narrative, then, White Fang parallels an Engelsian reading of material history, in which capitalism is universal, primordial nature in a different form.

The next significant rupture in London’s portrayal of material history is White Fang’s battle with a bulldog named Cherokee. At this point White Fang has gained regional notoriety for thrashing to death all opponents in a regional dog fighting ring. But Cherokee wins by gaining
hold of the loose flesh of White Fang’s neck and methodically strangling him. Before White Fang dies and bets are settled, however, White Fang’s final owner, a wealthy geologist named Weedon Scott, steps in and rescues him. Cherokee represents modernity because he comes from the Southland. In some ways Cherokee could be read as a classic example of produced nature, because the creation of bulldogs as a breed exemplifies nature-society metabolism. Part of the point of this paper, however, is that London’s narratives of material history are not dialectical and not entirely Marxist. Thus Cherokee, being of altered, non-wolf form, represents merely modernity. His death duel with White Fang is a clash between pre-modernity and modernity, but is stilted by Scott’s human compassion. Scott then adopts White Fang and takes him to live on his affluent ranch in California; modernity wins.

White Fang’s transition to his final home in California helps show why it matters for this analysis whether Cherokee, and the world into which White Fang is now entering, represents modernity rather than the Marxist production of nature. At the California ranch he develops a love for Weedon Scott that competes against his baser instinct to kill the other animals (chickens, dogs, etc.). Contra *The Call of the Wild*, the ideational concept of love wins out over the call of the wild as White Fang obeys Scott’s injunction not to kill. The rupture between bourgeois capitalism and pre-capitalist universal nature is not complete however: the domesticated dogs have their own instinct, such as a collie’s instinct to chase White Fang away from the other animals. White Fang has completed his ascendency to the leisurely spaces of the capitalist class, but even here, as Engels suggested would be the case, natural law plays a role in the protection of property. The collie instinctively protects property from White Fang. White Fang wants to kill anything and everything, but learns to distinguish those domesticated animals that have sworn allegiance to the gods, which by this point in the narrative represent the capitalist class, and those wild animals that have not done so. This implies a universal nature still manifesting in capitalism that disciplines life outside the capitalist system, and protects the mode of production within it.

London’s overlap with Engels is therefore clear. If *White Fang* evinced a historical materialism in concert with Marxist dialects of nature and society, it would not illustrate such a naturalistic, chronological reading of material history, where if nature creates value ever, it must create it always. Working with this narrative as a metaphor, then, nature and labor both determine value in capitalism for London, while only labor does for Marx. Moreover it is universal nature—White Fang’s instinct—that allows him to create value for the capitalist, as his wolfish nature is used to protect property and allows him to kill a human intruder in the end. The fact that as the story concludes White Fang is pronounced entirely wolf and not dog only secures the parable that much more bluntly: universal nature disciplines unruly labor.

To put it another way, in Marx’s view of capitalism, nature and society are governed by exchange value, which is an abstraction of material practice. On the California ranch, life is also governed by abstraction, but it is the echoes of primordial nature that enable the system to continue, which implies that the struggle to transcend natural law is not complete (per Engels). This is the dualism of the ideology of nature, not dialectics. While normatively speaking it is in conflict with his socialist politics, ontologically it is consistent with the material history embedded in his more blatantly socialist literature.

**London as Progressive Era socialist**

London’s wilderness adventure literature was ostensibly about nature, but implicitly political; his socialist literature was the reverse. For example, in *The People of the Abyss*, a nonfiction account of living conditions in London’s East End, London relates the tale of a young boy who is jailed for stealing from an old woman because he was afraid of being jailed for begging. Having regularly described the East End as “wilderness,” London describes the boy in terms nearly
identical to White Fang’s, as a “young cub seeking his food in the jungle of empire, preying upon the weak and being preyed upon by the strong.”

His analysis of poverty in the East End was an attempt at political economy heavily influenced by Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism. In his semi-autobiographical *Martin Eden*, he states that Spencer served as his “compass and chronometer” chiefly for his capacity for “reducing everything to unity.”

Though Spencer repudiated socialism, London appropriated his monist vision toward advocating socialism, chiefly by arguing that natural laws of mutualism would render obsolete the “normal state of the animal kingdom” in laissez-faire politics, as Engels put it. In *War of the Classes*, London writes:

> The weeding out of human souls, some for fatness and smiles, some for leanness and tears, is surely a heartless selective process—as heartless as it is natural. And the human family, for all its wonderful record of adventure and achievement, has not yet succeeded in avoiding this process. That it is incapable of doing this is not to be hazarded. Not only is it capable, but the whole trend of society is in that direction.

That the selective process is rooted in nature but that “man” can extract himself from it is a normative contradiction for sure. Ontologically speaking, London at least iterates a mechanism for how “man’s” escape from nature is in fact rooted in nature. Essentially it involves the brutality of class struggle driving the “abysmal brutishness” of the working class to overcome the cultural power of the bourgeoisie. In other words it is everything that did not happen in “The Strength of the Strong”: “good strength,” rooted in the use of muscle power toward the common good, comes back to displace “evil strength,” rooted in the control of exchange value toward domination. London’s mechanism thus reflects the manifestation of pre-capitalist universal nature in the Bourgeois Era characteristic of *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. How exactly this happens is elucidated in *The People of the Abyss*, *The Iron Heel*, and *Martin Eden*.

As pointed out by Ronald Paul, London’s analysis of poverty in *The People of the Abyss* reflects an incongruity between his Nietzschean superman ideal and his socialism. On one hand, London repeatedly questions the mental and physical capacities of London’s working class. Upon meeting a couple of would-be revolutionaries in the East End, London states that despite his “evolutionary belief in the slow development and metamorphosis of things,” he lacked faith in their agency, and characterizes them as such: “Poor fools! Not of their sort are revolutions bred.”

On the other hand, the broader context of the book situates their lack of agency in the effect of industrial capitalism on the makeup of their bodies. London states that:

> Class supremacy can only rest on class degradation; and when the workers are segregated in the Ghetto, they cannot escape the consequent degradation. A short and stunted people is created—a breed strikingly differentiated from their masters’ breed, a pavement folk, as it were, lacking stamina and strength. The men become caricatures of what physical men ought to be.

To be sure, London’s analysis is patriarchal, classist, and pseudo-scientific. When he wrote this book in 1903, he yet believed that revolutions were led by the transcendent Nietzschean superman, which the abyss could not produce. Only later did he abandon this idea in favor of a theory of the return of abysmal brutishness in the Bourgeois Era.

Berliner sees the connection between the return of abysmal brutishness in bloody revolution and the afore-quoted effects of class degradation as an indication of a dialectical understanding of nature and labor. While below I argue to the contrary, there is at least some evidence of this. Marx
and Engels had argued that “not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class.”57 Later they state that “the modern labourer…instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class...what the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers.”58 Even if his driving mechanism was a Social Darwinism disdained by Marx and Engels, London’s narratives of class struggle match that of The Communist Manifesto. This is particularly clear in a short story called “The Apostate,” in which a young boy must work brutally long hours in a jute mill to help support his working class family.59 The boy is described as becoming “an appendage of the machine.”60 He is in perfect rhythm with the looms he works and becomes the quickest worker in the factory, at least until he lies down in a box car and decides to go “tramping.” He is an “apostate” because he has forsaken the religion of wage labor. The story potentially implies the metabolism of the boy into capital and the jute into rope. However, I argue that when read within London’s overall body of work, the assimilation of the boy into the rhythms of the machine reflects London’s Spencerian mechanism for bringing about the socialist revolution.

This is most clearly illustrated in London’s dystopic articulation of revolution, The Iron Heel. Written in 1908, The Iron Heel relates the story of two failed attempts at violent revolution against a brutally oppressive oligarchy, nicknamed The Iron Heel, between the years 1912 and 1932. London’s literary mechanism is a three-fold narration of this period. The story is told from the perspective of Avis Everhard, who writes this manuscript on the eve of the second failed revolution, but through most of it she is discussing the actions and theories of her husband, socialist revolutionary Ernest Everhard. The book also begins with a prologue by (imaginary) historian Anthony Meredith, who is discussing the historical significance of the manuscript roughly seven hundred years after the second failed revolution. Meredith’s commentary is also found throughout the manuscript. Meredith lives in a futuristic, socialist utopia called The Enlightened Age, in which cultural forms like selfishness, vanity, and ethical delusion are banished along with the material order from which they would otherwise arise. Meredith states in the beginning that the second failed revolution was followed by many more such failures over the next three hundred years (he is writing four hundred years into The Enlightened Age), which he characterizes as necessary stepping stones in a biologically inevitable progression toward socialism.

London’s teleological view of the biological inevitability of modernity is evident throughout the narrative. For example, early in the book Ernest Everhard gives a speech at a dinner of a Philomath Club consisting of wealthy capitalists. Everhard thrashes the Philomaths in his oration, insults their morality, and warns them of the coming bloody revolution. Avis Everhard describes the rumbling that arises from the Philomaths: “It was the forerunner of the snarl…the token of the brute in man….It was the growl of the pack, mouthed by the pack, and mouthed in all unconsciousness.”61 That the capitalist class is described as having primitive, animalistic motives indicates that they represent the “normal state of the animal kingdom.” For Marx, exploitation is inevitable in capitalism. As Everhard eviscerates the Philomaths, however, he accuses them simply of mismanagement of the economy, as if piecemeal technocratic solutions would have avoided the creation of abysmal brutishness. Capitalist exploitation is understood here as a random accident on the way to modernity, not as inevitable.

In a later meeting with a group of small business owners, Ernest Everhard accurately describes Marx’s theory of surplus value, and invokes the distinction between good and evil strength made in “The Strength of the Strong.” Everhard argues:
There is a greater strength than wealth, and it is greater because it cannot be taken away. Our strength, the strength of the proletariat, is in our muscles, in our hands to cast ballots, in our fingers to pull triggers. This strength we cannot be stripped of. It is the primitive strength, it is the strength that is to life germane, it is the strength that is stronger than wealth, and that wealth cannot take away.

It is that primitive strength that London—via Everhard and quoting Marx—feels will sound the “knell of private capitalist property.” The strength of the capitalist class, as depicted in The Iron Heel, is its ability to dispose of surplus capital in the funding of the arts, architecture, construction of new cities, etc. This becomes the mechanism through which the Iron Heel can monopolize culture, creating a sense of moral self-righteousness amongst the capitalist class, and is the role played by The Bug in “The Strength of the Strong.” The narrative ends with a scene of utter chaos in Chicago as revolutionists, the Iron Heel, and the “abysmal brutes” (the poor), come together in a violent struggle and the second revolution is quashed. The revolutionists’ strategy was to tap into the primitive strength of the poor, described by Avis Everhard as:

Concrete waves of wrath, snarling and growling…drunk with hatred, drunk with lust for blood—men, women, and children, in rags and tatters, dim ferocious intelligences with all the godlike blotted from their features and all the fiendlike stamped in, apes and tigers, anemic consumptives and great hairy beasts of burden, wan faces from which vampire society had sucked the juice of life.

Here is illustrated London’s mechanism for the inevitable downfall of capitalism. Labor is molded into a beast devoid of moral rules; as Avis Everhard puts it, “it is the beast of [the oligarchy’s] own making.” The “law of club and fang” in Buck’s Yukon experience, which came to destroy the pursuit of gold in The Call of the Wild, comes back to wage war on the capitalist oligarchy. Pre-capitalist universal nature manifested on the California Ranch in White Fang toward the protection of private property; here it does so in the name of its destruction.

But does this distinction between different types of strength, one born of nature and the other of abstraction, imply a dialectics akin to different kinds of value, one born of labor and the other of exchange? After all, Marx and Engels had argued that “in Bourgeois society…the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past.” By this they mean that only in Communism does society escape from natural law. This is implied in The Iron Heel inasmuch as life under the capitalist oligarchy is ruled by the clash of bourgeois and primitive strength, whereas life in The Brotherhood of Man, as characterized by Meredith, exists in total peace and masters the past as an object of knowledge.

But while in one sense, yes, London creates a mechanism for how capitalism plants the seeds of its own destruction, that much can be taken from Marx without also recognizing his dialectical method. Moreover, there is very little in The Iron Heel that is not somehow explained by nature. Even if Meredith states in the beginning that the Iron Heel was not a necessary stepping stone to socialism, he later says that “the capitalist stage in social evolution is about on par with the earlier monkey stage,” and that is how it is characterized throughout the book. The revolution of the proletariat is equally “natural.” Whereas Marx saw a rupture in the nature of value, from nature and labor to only labor, The Iron Heel is patterned on an Engelsian ontology in which the relation of value to nature is trans-historical.

This manifests again in his semi-autobiographical novel Martin Eden. Eden’s tale is a proxy for London’s rise to literary fame and transition to socialism. Eden is a working class hero who develops a love interest in a wealthy bachelorette named Ruth. He represents everything London idealizes as “good strength”: his previous sea-faring adventures were raw, unfiltered
experience; his muscles and superior-if-uneducated intellect are constantly gushed over; and his
resolve to “conquer” the bourgeoisie by winning the affection of the woman who represents it.
Ruth, conversely, has led a sheltered life, her intellect comes from education rather than brains,
she is slender, incapable of basic chores, and she sees Eden as wildness in need of taming.

In his proletarian life, Eden works various blue collar jobs, and has a gang of mates and
the affection of a working class girl named Lizzie, all of whom see his true value. As he ascends to
the bourgeoisie, his energies are directed toward self-improvement (learning manners, brushing
his teeth, etc.). Eden struggles in his fledgling career as a writer, consistently turned down by
magazines of the day and nearly starving in the process. He feels that the value of his work is
greater than Ruth’s college professors and friends simply on its own artistic merits. Ruth, on the
other hand, feels that his work is inferior because it has not sold. Value in bourgeois society is
therefore equated to exchange, while in proletarian society it is equated to utility. Ruth breaks
off the engagement due to her family’s disapproval; Eden becomes a literary trend and strikes
it rich; Ruth professes her love but he is no longer interested. Eden longs for Lizzie and his old
gang, but feels he cannot go back to them. Torn from everything that was real but lost in a world
of individualism, Eden commits suicide in the last paragraph of the book.69

One interpretation of Martin Eden is that it represents London’s attempt to bury his
Nietzschean individualism insomuch as Eden’s pursuit of individual self-improvement leads to
the loss of his vitality and his death.70 London’s depiction of the nature of artistic value, however, is
more relevant for this analysis. Late in the book, Eden becomes disgusted with the fact that while
his work was written but unpublished he starved, but when it was published and he became rich,
they suddenly invited him to dinner. He launches a harangue against them:

It was work performed! And now you feed me, when then you let me starve, forbade
me your house, and damned me because I wouldn’t get a job. And the work was
already done, all done. And now, when I speak, you check the thought unuttered
on your lips and hang on my lips and pay respectful attention to whatever I choose
to say. I tell you your party is rotten and filled with grafters, and instead of flying
into rage you hum and haw and admit there is a great deal in what I say. And why?
Because I’m famous; because I’ve a lot of money.71

That “work performed,” endowed with artistic value regardless of whether it is published,
should be just as meritorious, implies use value produced through labor. That he eats too well
rather than starves upon the sale of that use value implies the dominance of exchange value in
capitalist society. And because here exchange value rules over life and death one could argue that
a form of value particular to capitalism and independent of natural law has arisen.

I argue against such an interpretation, however, because in London’s work nothing is
independent of natural law. Just as Ernest Everhard reduces poverty to the poor management
practices of the capitalists (not the inherent result of capitalism), Martin Eden attributes the power
of exchange value to the bourgeoisie’s internal natures. It is the type of people he puts on trial — the
fact that they value only money – not their structural position in society. Ernest Everhard did the
same with the Philomaths. Thus the bourgeois laissez-faire politics they represent is portrayed as
the manifestation of pre-capitalist universal nature even in capitalism. It is capitalism as “monkey
stage” as Meredith put it; the “token of the brute in man” as Avis Everhard put it, or the “normal
state of the animal kingdom” as Engels put it. Eden’s sling shot from starving artist to bourgeois
dinner parties does not happen because of a historically specific abstraction known as exchange
value, it happens for the same reason that White Fang protects property, that the collie chased
White Fang from property, that the Iron Heel crushes the rebellion, and that Buck learns to hunt—because individualism is part of universal nature. Or to put it in Jack London’s terms, because Herbert Spencer said it could be no other way.

Conclusion

The contradiction between Social Darwinism and socialism in Jack London’s work is certainly a normative one, but not an ontological one, at least within London’s literary oeuvre. His work reflected a tendency in the early twentieth century to find a natural basis for socialist policies. London, like Engels, saw bourgeois individualism at the heart of laissez faire politics as form of pre-capitalist, universal nature. London’s work posited a return of a more basic “good strength,” based in muscle power and the will to labor, in socialist revolution. The portrayal of both capitalism and socialism as based in natural law in London’s work is characteristic of what Neil Smith termed the “ideology of nature.”

Moreover, showing London’s intertwining of nature and class struggles as indicative of the “ideology of nature” helps historicize the particular forms of the production of nature implicit in Progressive Era “frontier” ideology. Smith’s point was always that what has changed is how nature is produced, and that under capitalism space itself is materially produced. The frontier is less a place innocently constructed than it is a process of domination, and this paper has explored how London’s literary corpus is implicated in that process. London’s prose was sexist and classist, but his ontology was inescapably racist as he equated the space between core and periphery, and particularly between Indigenous peoples and white men, with human evolutionary progress from the state of nature. His work thus weaves through discourses of naturalism, socialism, and the construction of frontier space.

NOTES

1 This is evident in his work, but for more on London and empire see Donald Pease, “Psychoanalyzing the Narrative Logics of Naturalism: The Call of the Wild,” *Journal of Modern Literature* XXV (2002): 14-39.
5 He was also the most popular foreign author in Russia, at least until Stalin’s regime, according to Jonathan Berliner, “Jack London’s Socialistic Social Darwinism,” *American Literary Realism* 41, no. 1 (2008): 52-78.
6 In the sense that his writing skills were in advance of his intellectual skills, not that he underappreciated his own writing. This is according to Earle Labor, “Introduction,” in *The Portable Jack London*, ed. Earle Labor (London: Penguin, 1994), xiv.
12 Ibid., 60.
17 The fact that these were written for young adult audiences only foregrounds the importance of understanding their underlying ideology.
23 Karl Polanyi also demonstrates how the ideal of the self-regulating market extends from Towsend’s mythical tales (though told as if they were real) of dogs and goats in conflict on a Robinson Crusoe-esque island. See Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).
24 Timothy Luke, Social Theory and Modernity (London: Sage, 1990). Luke argues that while Marx never specifies it, he implicitly suggests that technology is the driving agent, but I believe Luke’s argument is weak in this regard. Also, the inability of a class analysis to explain the course of history is one of Karl Polanyi’s critiques of Marx; see Polanyi, The Great Transformation.
26 Marx, Capital, 283. Also quoted in Smith, Uneven Development, 54.
27 Smith, Uneven Development, 68.
28 Marx, Capital, 133.
29 This is based on my reading of Capital, but is also argued by James O’Connor, Natural Causes (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998); Geoff Mann, Disassembly Required (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2013); and others.
30 Castree, “Marxism and the Production of Nature.”
32 Smith, Uneven Development, 25.
34 Ibid.
36 Smith, Uneven Development. It should also be noted that this non-dialectical reading of history is the temporal version of the conflation of external and universal nature that Smith calls the “ideology of nature.”
41 Ibid., 20.
42 Ibid., 36.
43 Ibid., 28.
44 Called the Yee-hats. London made them up.
45 Although this theme is tucked into the beginning as two working-class men with a dog sled team are paid by a wealthy patron to escort a body in a casket out of the frozen Yukon in winter. They remark that only the wealthy could afford to worry about something like proper burial. They are pursued by wolves, one of which is White Fang’s mother, who eventually eats all of the sled dogs and one of the men. The other man survives out of sheer luck.
47 Ibid., 142.
56 Ibid., 220.
58 Ibid., 64-65.
60 Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, 58.
63 Ibid., 157.
64 Ibid., 234.
65 Ibid., 219.
66 That this manifestation of universal nature takes the form of “primitive strength” is implied even in the surname Everhard.
69 Jack London himself died at the age of 40 from an unspecified tropical disease.
This roundtable emerges from a well-attended session in honor of Graeme Wynn at the International Conference of Historical Geographers held in the Ondaatje Theatre at the Royal Geographical Society, London (UK), on July 7, 2015. With Wynn’s retirement in prospect, it seemed an opportune moment to gather and reflect on his scholarship and many contributions to the discipline at a conference to which he has contributed a great deal over the years.

While Wynn has played an important role in the success and growth of geography and historical research at his home institution, the University of British Columbia, this session sought to look outwards at his many national and international career engagements, connections, and interventions. Although Wynn’s work has shaped the sub-discipline of historical geography for a generation, it is also widely recognized and cited in environmental history and regional geography. He has contributed foundational texts on the historical geography of New Brunswick, New Zealand, and northern North America. Best known for his monographic works on the historical geography of forests, he has also written important syntheses, studies of urban geography, and reflective essays about the discipline. As an administrator he has helped to build and sustain the humanistic tradition in geography and, in the Canadian context, to found the emerging field of environmental history. As an editor he has sustained important disciplinary journals like the *Journal of Historical Geography* and regional journals like *BC Studies*, while inaugurating and developing UBC Press’s “Nature/History/Society” series, the leading outlet of environmental history and historical geography books in Canada. This roundtable gathers an international cast of geographers and historians to reflect upon the course of Wynn’s scholarly career, its emphases and contributions.

We begin with Andrea Gaynor’s reading of Wynn’s contributions to the historiography and historical geography of the Antipodes. Although born in South Africa, raised and educated in England, and a graduate student and professor in Canada for most of his career, Wynn took his first position at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. While this post represented a relatively brief period in his career, Wynn’s New Zealand experience left a deep impression, and he continues to conduct research in the Antipodes. Andrea Gaynor is a professor of history at the University of Western Australia and a leading figure in Australian environmental history whose research spans agricultural, water, and fisheries histories. In addition to monographs and edited collections on these themes, Gaynor has conceived of Australian environmental history synthetically and is the author of the chapter on “Environmental Transformations” in the latest *Cambridge History of Australia* (Vol. 1).

Jane Carruthers’s essay on Wynn’s contributions to the international scholarship on environment and empire follows. Although Wynn has never conceived of himself as a historian...
of the British Empire and Commonwealth, his work has made important connections among the histories and geographies of settler societies, and not only within the Anglo world. In many respects, Wynn’s work shuttles between an intensely local focus and a capacious comparative framing. The past President of the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations and a leading South African environmental historian, Jane Carruthers is well-placed to appreciate and analyze Wynn’s international contributions to environment and empire scholarship. As an emeritus professor of history at the University of South Africa, Carruthers is a specialist in the human and environmental history of parks and conservation, and a well-known figure in the international field of environmental history.

Since Wynn’s work straddles the invisible boundary between environmental history and historical geography, it is well to reflect upon how it does so, from what perspective, and with what effects. Robert Wilson, a former PhD student of Wynn’s, whose own work also falls between these two sub-disciplines, and who has made important contributions assessing the historiography of both fields, reflects on how Wynn’s work crosses these intellectual boundaries and why. Wilson is an associate professor of geography at Syracuse University and the author of Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway (University of Washington Press, 2012).

Finally, Larry McCann, an emeritus professor of geography at the University of Victoria, considers Wynn’s contributions to the geography of Canada. Beyond Wynn’s contributions to regional geography, he is also a distinguished authority on Canadian Studies at large, a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a former McLean Chair in Canadian Studies (2012-2013) at the University of British Columbia. McCann shares interests with Wynn in the historical geography of Atlantic Canada, Canadian cities and the urban planning movement. At an earlier stage in his career McCann also edited some of Wynn’s work in his magisterial collection, Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada (Prentice Hall 1982), still the best historically-informed introduction to the regional geography of Canada.

Separately, these essays highlight important dimensions of Wynn’s scholarship; read together, they demonstrate Wynn’s remarkable ability to attend carefully to place and context while at the same time thinking comparatively and synthetically across space, time and environment.
Broadening Horizons: Wynn in and about the Antipodes

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The early 1970s were an exciting time to be a historical geographer. The world was grappling with the consequences of ongoing decolonization; immigration policies had been, or were being, transformed in several nations; new social movements were changing political and intellectual landscapes; and environmental issues were taking on a new, critical urgency. Historians and geographers working in this context were seeking and finding new problems, questions, sources, and approaches. In North American universities, environmental history began to emerge as a field of inquiry and historical geographers were establishing their own journal and regional conferences. Meanwhile, down under, a range of scholars—Les Heathcote, Joe Powell, Jim Cameron, and George Seddon among them—were producing rich studies of historical relationships between people and antipodean environments.

It was in this context, in 1974, that Graeme Wynn completed his PhD at the University of Toronto and moved to New Zealand, where he spent two years as a lecturer at the University of Canterbury. During this relatively short stay Wynn met his wife-to-be Barbara, who would in subsequent years support his academic career; together they would raise two children. The visit also sparked an interest in the historical geography of New Zealand, and to a lesser extent Australia, that has spanned the entirety of Wynn’s academic career.

On arriving in Christchurch, one of Wynn’s first tasks was to review the local historical geography scene, an exercise that resulted in an article published in the *Journal of Historical Geography* in 1977. Though there had been some uncertainty over the future of historical geography in Australia and New Zealand in the 1960s, Wynn found that much had been accomplished. He also, however, identified “immense possibilities for further work.”2 There had been much discussion about the need for geographers to adopt more quantitative approaches and produce more theoretically informed studies. The work undertaken in this vein did not impress Wynn, who with the bold vigor of all good early career scholars deemed “the best of it . . . no more than a preliminary to further research” and “the worst of it . . . both precious and pretentious.”3 Characteristic of Wynn’s scholarship, however, this critique was not mean-spirited, but a steppingstone to broader questions. In this case, the questions were about the purpose of geographical research: “Is it to develop theory . . . or is it to understand particular parts of the earth’s surface?” Should geographers prioritize “abstract universals” over the “rich complexity of the local scene”?4 He found in favor of the latter. More specifically, Wynn astutely identified the need for more research on Māori and Aboriginal geographies, as well as micro-scale studies of particular areas and examination of the ecological implications of rapid urban growth in the antipodes. He urged geographers to undertake studies of geographic and social mobility, of attitudes to land as reflective of the ethos of Australian and New Zealand societies, and more.

While completing this timely review, Wynn also undertook significant original research, publishing in 1977 an important paper on “Conservation and Society in Late Nineteenth-Century New Zealand” in the *New Zealand Journal of History.*5 Here, he used debate around the New Zealand Forests Act of 1874 to explore settler attitudes toward conservation. The paper
exemplifies Wynn’s expressed aim of understanding the past by getting under its skin through his sympathetic insight into the settler mindset. In both this and a later piece also looking at the 1874 Act, true to his belief that researchers should always keep the “big picture” in view, Wynn placed these local developments in their broader global context. He traced the flows of ideas and people within and beyond the British Empire, and how they came together in a particular historical moment to produce “one of the earliest state conservation measures in the British Empire.” These works were groundbreaking at the time, and continue to generate discussion and debate in forest history, historical geography, and environmental history.

In the early 1980s, Wynn again visited Canterbury — this time for five months — and found his intellectual friends living there facing “challenging times.” In response, he published a spirited defense of geography in an anti-intellectual era, emphasizing the continuing significance of the discipline, and the liberal arts more generally, for understanding the contemporary world. He exhorted geographers in particular not to restrict their focus to time and space while sideling the human element: Wynn encouraged them to “reach unashamedly into the core of human experience to help people understand themselves.” This understanding of the essential purpose of geography, one it shares with history, perhaps explains in part why it is that Wynn has so readily straddled the boundaries, such as they are, between the two disciplines.

This visit to Canterbury also gave rise to a wide-ranging essay on “Settler Societies in Geographical Focus,” published in Australia’s leading historical journal. Reviewing recent historical-geographical research, Wynn synthesized a range of studies to produce some general conclusions about settler societies. In particular, he emphasized the significance of local structural factors over imported ethnic traditions, as well as the terms under which land was accessed, and the structure of local labor markets. It is a work that continues to be cited, most recently in 2015.

Narrowing the focus just a little, Wynn also at this time produced some reflections on the writing of New Zealand history in response to the recent publication of the Oxford History of New Zealand. Here he addressed the relationship between historians and the public, and once again asserted the necessity for historians and historical geographers undertaking studies of New Zealand to “consider their subjects in the wider context of European settlement overseas.” Wynn also discussed how experiences in other settler societies might provide useful starting points from which to examine problems in New Zealand history. This was followed by a deft sketch of some of the key historical features of New Zealand society in which Wynn connected political philosophy, mentalité, and relationship to the environment within a comparative framework. He concluded that:

In the most general terms, it would seem that the opportunity of New Zealand has reinforced a basic faith in the small man, a belief in the competence of the individual, and a sense of the importance of private property among most of its people, for whom home, family, independence, prosperity—the leitmotivs of middle class life—are pervasive values.

Even thirty-odd years later, this remains a sharp perspective, at least for Pākehā society.

In this essay, Wynn also advocated an approach to research and writing involving zooming in and out, between rich detail and broad analytical synthesis. He himself deployed this strategy to good effect, for example in a plate produced for The New Zealand Historical Atlas on faunal and floral colonization, and an article arising out of that project, “Remapping Tutira.” Published in the Journal of Historical Geography in 1997, this paper examines the bio-geographical transformation of New Zealand, with specific reference to Herbert Guthrie-Smith’s classic work of New Zealand natural history. Wynn uses Guthrie-Smith’s book empirically, to identify patterns
in the arrival of new species into New Zealand. However, as he puts it, *Tutira* is more than an environmental impact statement; it is a work that “demands engagement with questions of how humans have used, and interpreted their interactions with, nature." As well as enabling detailed analysis of when and how various unintended introductions transformed the New Zealand landscape, Guthrie-Smith’s book provides further evidence supporting Wynn’s earlier sketch of New Zealand society, in particular the preeminent “drive for profit, progress, and material improvement.” Ultimately, for Wynn, *Tutira* is an environmental history with “lasting relevance to understanding the choices that face humankind and the world they inhabit.”

Wynn’s continuing engagement and fascination with the historical geography of New Zealand is reflected in his contribution of a chapter on forests to *Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (2002), revised for the new edition *Making a New Land* (2013). Drawing on recent research as well as his earlier work, Wynn provides abundant and well-marshalled local detail while still maintaining an international outlook. Here New Zealand is insular but not isolated; rather it exemplifies the processes that shaped the modern world, including “exploration, encounter, exploitation, adaptation and transformation” as well as disquiet and reflection.

Reviewing Wynn’s scholarship on the antipodes, one is struck first and foremost by his commitment to encouraging scholars in the region to undertake comparative studies, or at least situate their work in a broader context. The early 1970s were a time of heightened national reflection in Australia and New Zealand: as Britain turned to the EEC and withdrew troops from “east of Suez,” and long-standing immigration policies were overhauled, antipodean Labour governments fostered a new nationalism that prioritized national and local identities over an older pan-British one. In this context, much antipodean scholarly research and writing focused on national or regional distinctiveness rather than connection and similarity, which was perhaps too readily associated with the old imperial regime. In doing so, however, they lost sight of the bigger picture. In 1984, Wynn complained, quite fairly, that “a good deal of recent writing about New Zealand [and he might have added Australia] ignores the wider horizon . . . the consequence is work that is often rich in contextual detail but which lacks the analytical bite to render its findings of compelling significance to those interested in societies beyond those islands.” Now, a few decades later, the political and social context in both nations has changed. Against populist and conservative governments many academics have eschewed the national in favor of analyses connecting local events and places with global networks and contexts. While some antipodean studies remain essentially parochial, it is now common for historians and geographers, working for example within the frameworks of transnational history or settler colonialism, to explicitly draw connections between their histories and the bigger picture. In this context Wynn’s antipodean explorations have stood well the test of time.

NOTES

1 I would like to thank James Beattie and Graeme Wynn for feedback on earlier drafts of this essay.
4 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 116.
18 Wynn, “Remapping Tutira,” 440.
19 Ibid., 438.
21 Ibid., 123.
Graeme Wynn: The Historical Geography of Environment and Empire from the Edges

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University of South Africa

Graeme Wynn is an outstanding academic and productive writer, but he is a modest person and it is therefore both appropriate and a pleasure to review and parade some of his ideas and writings. We need to do so not only to laud a researcher and teacher with a long and outstanding career, but also—and perhaps more importantly—to remind ourselves of the positive difference that a single scholar can make. In Graeme’s case, this has been not only to his discipline, but also to other related fields of study, in addition to his impact on his university and as a public intellectual. Graeme’s CV attests to the many prizes he has received, distinguished visitor invitations, election to prestigious academies and positions within them, and to his remarkable contribution to the teaching and administration of geography as a discipline of study.

In his CV, Graeme Wynn has described his academic career in the following way: “For more than forty years, I have sought to understand human transformations of the earth.” These two words—“human” and “transformations”—are portmanteaus freighted with contradictions, complexities, histories, and, of course, geographies. To an understanding of many of these elements, Graeme has done justice. Unlike many academics who explain their work as being in the widest of fields but yet focus only on minutiae, Graeme’s achievement has been to keep the larger perspective in mind while always interrogating its rich contextual detail. In the layers of both scope and locality, he has made an immense contribution in a voluminous publication record.

In reflecting on Graeme’s thinking and writing about environment and empire, we are left in no doubt of his conviction that of those human transformations he seeks to understand, the imperial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been the most pivotal. The impact of British imperialism captured his imagination in the 1970s when he first set out to examine New Zealand and Australia and, since the 1980s, Canada. These early studies of segments of the British world were seminal in first drawing his attention to how imperialism had transformed all geographies, be they political, social, cultural, economic, and environmental. Graeme’s personal biography itself straddles the British world of settler societies and he has written of these from the inside out rather than of the British Empire per se from the outside in. Born in South Africa, educated in England, a teacher in New Zealand, a researcher in Australia, and a resident, teacher, and visiting professor in many places in Canada, the University of British Columbia primarily, there is probably no single geographer with better personal experience of many elements of the emerging modern British Commonwealth and its significant settler societies.

Geography is essentially a child, handmaid and catalyst of empire. In the nineteenth century it transformed itself into a professional discipline with intellectual authority over economic, environmental, social, political, and cultural evidence. By the end of that century, it was “the queen of all imperial sciences . . . inseparable from state knowledge.” It was geopolitically powerful, but inseparable also from knowledge of natural resources and their exploitation. Geography facilitated the exercise of political power, giving conceptual hegemony even where
real control might be lacking, and—as was the case with the forests of Canada and the minerals of southern Africa—economic hegemony as well. Graeme is aware of geography’s power, and that of historical geography in particular with its twin and equal emphasis on space and time. This, for him, is its essential and distinctive importance as a field of study.

Graeme has referred to settler societies as “containers” that absorbed hundreds of thousands of British immigrants. Certainly, he has argued, they belong within the imperial frame, but we need constantly to question that frame. Graeme’s understanding of the development of European settlements overseas, the history of migration, and the connections between environment and empire have been expressed in many of his publications, especially those dealing with Canada and the exploitation of its natural resources. In doing so he has invigorated imperial studies in historical geography by analysing the the tensions between margins and periphery, imperial and colonial, as they ebb and flow. Graeme Wynn works at those ebbs and flows, investigating the sub-imperialisms within settler societies at larger and smaller scales, uncovering fresh complications, nuances, and human and environmental relationships. He is alert to the many forms that imperialism may take, and he is well placed to consider varieties that may be French, British Canadian, Pākehā, Boer, or even the capitalist imperialism of the United States. Wynn’s ongoing project on the “Commonwealth of Scholarship” in British settler societies, in many respects uniting Canada, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand with Britain, will certainly be a landmark in its analysis of the intellectual and disciplinary networks and the exchange of ideas within this matrix of historical geography of common as well as distinctive forms of imperialism.

Graeme’s work has always been rooted in locale and in studying the humans and natural resources in them. Although in English-speaking circles the word empire immediately brings to mind the British imperial and colonial project, the civilising mission, etc., within empire there are sub-imperial thrusts, particularly from settler societies, of which Graeme is well aware and about which he has written. I believe that this uncovering of the deeper layers and configurations of sub-imperialisms is where one of his research strengths lies. As Graeme has recognised in his work with Matthew Evenden, empires are also multi-manifestations (if there is such a word) of political empires, but borders and boundaries between them are often porous, as they write “claimed and contested . . . re-territorialised as national and imperial space.” Essentially imperial, colonial and national boundaries cross-cut bioregional spaces and occlude what might be termed “naturally” bounded demarcations like drainage basins, vegetation biomes, and ecological zones.

The University of British Columbia appears to be a worthy nursery for eminent scholars of empire. In his article in issue 4 of The Canadian Historical Review of 2014, Graeme paid tribute to John McKenzie who was among the first historians deliberately to link imperialism and nature. John, anxious to escape what he regarded as the confines of Britain, obtained his PhD from the University of British Columbia after experiencing, in different ways, Glasgow, Zambia, and London. He thus shares a cosmopolitan biography with Graeme Wynn. Reading Wynn’s article which, in tribute to McKenzie, is sub-titled “Empires of Nature and the Nature of Empires,” I doubt that Graeme would welcome being referred to directly as a scholar of empire, because he has subverted it, in a sense, by concentrating on its effects on indigenous people and settlers rather than analysing the empire as such. His contribution to The Illustrated History of Canada reflects this ability to probe the interstices of empire, to consider its margins—New Zealand for instance—and to draw from various histories, forestry being just one, the changing impact of the imperial project on the landscape and on various human communities.

It is appropriate that there was a panel presentation to celebrate Graeme’s contribution to his discipline at the International Conference of Historical Geographers held in London in July 2015 at the august premises of the Royal Geographical Society, with its resonances both of
Graeme Wynn

geography and empire. Much of the eminence of the Royal Geographical Society had to do with the energetic and politically-minded president, Sir Roderick Murchison, who linked the society’s geographic role with the scientific bureaucracy and political leadership, giving the public “an authentic, though culturally conditioned, vision of the diversity of environments and cultures into which their representatives were prying.” Graeme’s achievement has been to complicate that cultural conditioning by considering the undercurrents that developed within the colonial order among human communities that—in time—came to envisage their spaces, environments, and their histories, differently.

Graeme has made his approach to his discipline quite clear. He readily accepts that “historical geography has to evolve, and that its future form will likely be quite different from its current and earlier manifestations.” This is so because, he believes (quoting Carl Sauer), that the subject needs to be ruled by inquisitiveness, not by demarcating boundaries, policing them and remaining within them. Scholars need to produce works that bring new perspectives and that are read with excitement. This is, I consider, what he has achieved in his adventurous interpretation of environment and empire in settler societies. He delights in the theoretical rigour of historical geography on the one hand, and its specificity as an interpretive tool on the other.

Historical geography in Canada is distinctive and strong, thanks in part to Wynn’s contributions, but he has enlarged and augmented it by considering the country within the wider ambit of empire, thus venturing into historical waters that require an extended set of intellectual skills. Historical geography is one of the broadest of fields, and Graeme’s focus has always included the historiographical while never losing the particularities of space, time, and environment. Graeme is a self-reflective scholar, never losing sight of his own thinking in the maelstrom of ever-changing disciplinary trajectories. Empire is the hanger on which Graeme hangs different geographies and histories. These are not discrete: Graeme is carefully attuned to the changing nature of space and, importantly, is bold in straddling the disciplines that consider it. Of these, studies of places—such as empires, settler societies, and expanding nationalities—that form a transnational network where disciplines intersect and multiply, and where transculturation is vitally important; Graeme Wynn has become a master of many of them.

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8 Wynn, “The landscape of Canadian Environmental History.”


15 Graeme Wynn, “Understanding Canada as Transcultural Space” (Keynote Address, 10th Graduate Student Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-Speaking Countries, University of Trier, July 2013).
Graeme Wynn, Historical Geography, and Environmental History

Robert Wilson

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Syracuse University

Graeme is a historical geographer and environmental historian, but marking where the historical geographer ends and the environmental historian begins is a tricky task. Graeme is a leading scholar in both fields, and over the past forty years historical geography and environmental history have cross-pollinated in so many ways that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish each from one another.

Given the trajectory of Graeme’s career, these overlapping interests are not surprising. Graeme earned his PhD in 1974, just a year before a group of historians founded the American Society of Environmental History (ASEH). While remaining a geographer over the years, Graeme would find many kindred spirits among environmental historians, join their intellectual community, and eventually come to be one of the field’s leaders. Graeme did more than just attend environmental history conferences. By the 1990s, he was playing a pivotal role in nurturing the field of environmental history in Canada, which at that time was still in its infancy.

There are two ways to measure Graeme’s contributions to historical geography and environmental history. One is through scholarship and the other is through service—his role as a mentor, editor, and administrator. Through both, Graeme served to deepen the connections between historical geography and environmental history and sculpt them in important ways.

While today the connections between historical geography and environmental history are clear and strong, they were not always that way. When Graeme completed his PhD in the mid-1970s, neither the discipline of geography nor the field of historical geography in particular seemed very receptive to historical scholarship on the relationships between society and the environment. Geography was still enthralled with spatial science—although with the emergence of Marxist and humanist geography this began to change—and largely uninterested in environmental matters. Those geographers who were drawn to environmental issues, such as cultural ecologists, worked mostly on Latin American topics, not ones in Canada or the United States. As Graeme himself has argued, historical geographers at the time, especially in Canada, were deeply influenced by the methods and topics promoted by Andrew Hill Clark. Given this state of affairs, Graeme’s dissertation and book *Timber Colony* was an important contribution in reorienting historical geography toward more sustained attention to environmental matters.

Graeme forged some of his initial connections with environmental history not through ASEH, which was still quite young, but through the Forest History Society (FHS). *Timber Colony* served as an entryway into the FHS, a group that Graeme became closely involved with during the 1980s and early 1990s. The FHS deepened its connection with the field of environmental history, and in 1996 the FHS’s journal *Forest and Conservation History* merged with *Environmental History Review* to create a new journal, *Environmental History*. In this way, Graeme’s growing connection with environmental history can be seen as part of the larger trend of environmental history and forest history forging a tighter relationship.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, social theory was having a profound effect on human geography. In an influential 1991 article, the historical geographer Cole Harris urged historical...
geographers to creatively employ the ideas of Jurgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens, and Michel Foucault. In coming years, poststructural, postcolonial, and feminist theory increasingly informed the work of historical geographers, and other theorists were ascendant: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Bruno Latour. Such theorists increasingly influenced the work of historical geographers. But that’s a bit misleading, for many of the geographers working on historical topics eschewed the “historical geography” label entirely and instead saw themselves as part of cultural geography.

Graeme was skeptical of human geography’s wholehearted embrace of social theory. In an important 1999 article, “A Fine Balance: Geography at the Millennium,” Graeme voiced his concerns. While sincerely acknowledging the many benefits of geography’s newfound interest in social theory, Graeme was also deeply critical of what he saw as postmodernism proponents’ tendency to overstate their case, to focus on representation, and to reject the Enlightenment Project. He was particularly concerned that such an un-nuanced critique further drove physical and human geography apart. This is key because environmental historical geography relied, to some extent, on the natural sciences—not because they offered an objective view of nature, but because they enabled geographers to write richer accounts of the interplay of society and environment in the past.

What does all this have to do with Graeme’s role in historical geography and environmental history? Quite a bit, for most environmental historians shared his concerns about postmodernism and never embraced social theory as much as many human geographers did. And when they did employ social theory, it was modest and the direct effect on the text was often muted or relegated to brief discussions in the endnotes. Indeed, the world environmental historian John McNeill has gone so far as to say most environmental historians are “refugees from . . . theory.”

It should come as no surprise, then, that Graeme found a community of likeminded scholars in environmental history. They valued many of the same sorts of scholarship he did: work with a focus on the physical landscape, a materialist orientation, and an embrace of interdisciplinary perspectives. While regional historical geography went out of fashion in geography, environmental historians produced environmental histories of states, nations, and ecological regions. In short, the sort of historical geography Graeme valued continued, mostly not in the discipline of geography but, ironically, in environmental history.

As important as Graeme’s scholarly contributions have been where historical geography and environmental history intersect, his role as an advisor, editor, and administrator is perhaps even greater. Graeme has advised nineteen MA students and eleven PhD candidates, most of whom wrote theses and dissertations on environmental topics. He also founded and continues to edit the UBC Press “Nature | History | Society” series. Established in 2007, the series has become the leading environmental history monograph series in Canada and one of the more important series for society and environment scholarship in the world, and it includes monographs by geographers and historians. Series such as this with leading academic presses have done much to raise the prominence of environmental history.

More recently, the American Society of Environmental History recognized his contribution to environmental history scholarship and his key institutional role by selecting him as the next president of the ASEH. He will be the first geographer and Canadian to hold this position, and few scholars are better suited to run this organization. He will bring not only his deep knowledge of and engagement with Canadian environmental history and historical geography, but also his expertise in global environmental history. Long before it was fashionable, Graeme encouraged environment and society scholars to situate their work in a transnational and comparative framework.
Graeme’s many articles and books, such as *Timber Colony* and *Canada and North America: An Environmental History*, will define his place as a scholar of historical geography and environmental history. But he has helped build and sustain both fields through his tireless service work. His influence will endure through his scholarship, but even more so through the many students he mentored, writings he edited, book series he founded, and institutions he shaped. It is quite a legacy, and we should all be so lucky to have careers half as rich and as influential as Graeme’s.

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9 Graeme was also program chair for the 2014 2nd World Congress in Environmental History.

Coming Ashore: 
Graeme Wynn and the Canadian Landscape

Larry McCann
Department of Geography
University of Victoria

“For almost forty years I have sought to understand
the human transformation of the earth.”

This straightforward, down-to-earth statement occupies a single line in the expansive curriculum vitae of Graeme Wynn. Both declaration and document record the foundation and achievements of a career that might not have been, if it were not for the stringent requirements of becoming a master mariner, Graeme’s first career choice. But to the great benefit of Canadian historical geography, and of Canadian Studies in general, a slight deviation from the essential requirement of a ship’s captain to possess “20/20” eyesight cast Graeme adrift, only to come ashore in Canada, where he set about pursuing MA and PhD studies at the University of Toronto. After a sojourn in New Zealand, he returned to Canada to take up a position in geography at the University of British Columbia. From this base, Graeme has developed an international scholarly reputation of the highest standing.

Graeme was well-schooled at the University of Toronto in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His mentors were the historical geographers Jim Lemon and Cole Harris, and a historian, Craig Brown. Here, he spurned the avant-garde—the quantitative revolution in geography—to find favor with a more holistic geography that embraced, as widely as possible, the interplay between land, society, and history. The physical environment, the migration of Europeans overseas, population dynamics, ethnicity, family life, the settlement process, the waxing and waning of regional economies, the politics of dependency, the conservation of the natural environment—these are but a few of the themes that have captured the imagination of an incisive, voracious mind that is always in search of the wider landscape significance of the commonplace, and of everyday occurrences.1

In researching Canada’s past—its evolving, ever-changing landscapes—Graeme’s geographical inquiries have ranged widely, from farmstead, village, town, and city to local area, parish, county, colony–province, hinterland region, and nation-state. No recent century has escaped his attention. He is equally comfortable and skilled in discussing and interpreting events of the eighteenth century as he is of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. In his pursuit of a deeper understanding of Canada’s geographical past, Graeme has cultivated a research strategy that blends the use of rich archival sources and meaningful theoretical principles to explain the shaping of the Canadian landscape. And as his historical scholarship matured and evolved, he has delved deftly into other humanistic realms for scholarly inspiration, probing the art, literature, and music of Canada in search of a telling metaphor that will underpin a narrative of time and space.

The die of Graeme’s lifelong research strategy was cast on the Tantramar Marshes more than four decades ago. This borderland region between present-day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the Maritimes region of Canada was, in the mid-eighteenth century, a distinctive landscape of imperial conflict (France vs. England), of the mixing of cultural groups (Acadians,
Coming Ashore

New Englanders, Yorkshiremen, and Loyalists), of the impact of diking technology on natural resource development, of early conservation strategies, and of the importance of an early staple trade (hay) to the economic advance of a small hinterland region. To Graeme’s great credit, the themes of this master’s thesis were contextualized by the political economy of a mercantile world and the trans-Atlantic and inter-regional movement of people to this outpost of empire. As a measure of the lasting worth of this early research, the Tantramar Heritage Trust, based in Sackville, New Brunswick and possessors of a thriving publishing arm, asked Graeme to revisit his early research and comment in a thoughtful, critical way about its lasting influence and relevance for modern conservation strategies. The result is a handsome monograph and a reflective essay, “Of Time and Tides,” that introduces new ideas based on recently unearthed archival sources.

Smitten by the diversity of research possibilities offered by the Maritimes region—of the “human transformation” of this east-coast, hinterland region—Graeme took on the herculean effort of investigating, for his doctoral dissertation, the timber trade of colonial New Brunswick, a staple trade par excellence. It was herculean in the sense that in order to research the topic, Graeme’s first task was to bring order to a chaotic archive of colonial records held by the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John. In the 1960s and 1970s, bona fide researchers, once their “spurs were earned,” were allowed into the stacks of regional archives to search for musty nuggets that would set them along a vein of rich archival treasures. The result was certainly golden: an award-winning book, Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick. Some of the book’s themes were already part of his research repertoire—population and settlement, land and livelihood, economic transformation—but others were newly considered: family history, entrepreneurship, dependency theory, and government regulation.

Graeme’s research has never been bound by theory; rather, explanation has emerged by answering questions that arise from drawing out, inductively, the possibilities of explanation presented by a full array of empirical evidence. Questions that could not be answered with full certainty remained as a spur to subsequent research and publication—viz., from his doctoral work, articles on environmental degradation caused by the over-exploitation of the pine forests of New Brunswick. Incidentally, here were sown the seeds of an initial, effective foray into the environmental history of Canada, with full reward to be reaped several decades later. This is one of the distinguishing marks of Graeme’s research strategy: he has the great ability to recognize the potential worth and long-term usefulness of primary research materials.

Here’s another example of this strategy: while researching the timber trade, Graeme explored settler society from several perspectives, one of which was the family economy and life course of early Scottish families in the Kennebecasis River valley of southern New Brunswick, especially several generations of the Robertson family. Genealogies were searched, as were nominal census returns, and much factual information was recorded. But information on such things as the actual place of birth in Scotland and the characteristics of that place, and the eventual destination of out-migration to the United States and New Zealand, were put to one side, but only for the time being. Almost a decade later, the Robertsons would be examined in greater detail, incorporating new archival materials gained from a research trip to their cultural hearth in Scotland and while on sabbatical leave in the antipodes. Only then could the material be addressed in a more meaningful way by placing these New Brunswick family histories within the context of the trans-oceanic movements of settler societies.

A purely “local,” micro-analysis has never sufficed for Graeme, even when it seems, at first glance, that interpreting the geographical character of a local landscape is the primary research objective. In research carried out in the 1980s, this appeared to characterize Graeme’s investigation of mid-nineteenth century Hardwood Hill, a small, Scottish immigrant farming community in rural Pictou County. Familiar sources were tapped, including census, land, and
marriage records. But the study’s essential research question—what was the response of farm families to broad technological, economic, reformist, and regulatory forces affecting agricultural practice?—meant looking for answers well beyond Hardwood Hill and Pictou County. Local records were blended with a broad knowledge of mid-nineteenth century farming technologies, colonial government policies regarding trade in agricultural products, the religious divide within the Presbyterian Church, emerging thoughts on the conservation of soils, and so much more. We soon learn why Hardwood Hill stands as the exemplar of something much larger in scope: people who took leading roles in agricultural reform had either close ties to, or deep familial roots in, Hardwood Hill and Pictou County. Knowing this, of course, depended on a continuous effort to read widely and probe deeply into untapped archives, not just for primary data, but also for long-forgotten published secondary sources of the mid-nineteenth century.8

A source developed years before might not have direct application for current research, but more likely than not, will be used in future writing.9 On Graeme’s “to do list” is a book that will examine the peopling of British North America from the late-eighteenth century down to Confederation. Its completion will make recourse to the on-going, painstaking collection of population data. To wit, Graeme’s broad, synthetic survey of the population dynamics of the Maritime colonies from the late eighteenth century down to the mid-nineteenth century has already resulted in multiple applications. Where did those people come from? How did the makeup of population change over time? How were local economies related to population dynamics? This research has already led to benchmark articles in geographical journals and a major contribution of several plates to separate volumes of the Historical Atlas of Canada.10 These cartographic efforts reveal Graeme’s passionate belief in the power of maps. Maps can serve as the starting point for asking research questions; maps establish a spatial context for historical analyses; and maps reveal much about regional character. Rest assured, “The Peopling of British North America Project” will bear witness to the utility of maps and long-retrieved historical data.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Graeme was called upon by several editors in the late-1980s and 1990s to contribute major, synthetic essays to studies of Canada’s regional geography and its history. Several well-known books—(1) Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada, (2) The Illustrated History of Canada, and (3) North America: The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent—bear witness to his creative scholarly abilities. In the order of this list, Graeme’s expertise, creative mind, and pen flow freely along a trajectory from the Maritimes to Central Canada and then “out” west, offering spatio-temporal interpretations of Canada’s history and changing landscape. Besides their geographical value, these are major contributions to Canadian Studies, offering insights and knowledge of a broadly based humanistic and inter-disciplinary kind.11

Yes, “out” west. As a colleague of the well-established and senior historical geographer Cole Harris at the University of British Columbia, Graeme cast his research eye towards regions and places other than Quebec and British Columbia, the domain of his mentor’s enquiries. As others have noted, Graeme is alone among Canada’s geographers to have contributed meaningfully and in depth to the historical geography of the antipodes. But British Columbia has called out for Graeme’s attention, and he responded by writing about the urban landscape—about neighborhoods and city landscapes. With his University of British Columbia colleague Tim Oke, a climatologist, Graeme co-edited Vancouver and Its Region, a study that embraced both physical and human geography.

For this book, Graeme wrote about the evolution of Vancouver’s landscape, producing a lengthy essay, a masterly synthesis titled “The Rise of Vancouver.”12 And so he should have, for he has taught a course on the historical dimensions of cities and happily guided students, visitors, and others across the fascinating landscapes of this West Coast metropolis. One of the charms of
this essay is the way that Graeme again employs a micro-analysis to elucidate broader themes, this time of one neighborhood, the Dunbar area in Point Grey. In this case, the compilation of street directory, assessment, and other primary information encompassed his “home turf,” the neighborhood where he actually resides in Vancouver. Like Hardwood Hill and Pictou County, the choice is astute. Personal observations made over several decades are married with essential empirical facts and city-wide planning and other studies to recount the historical urban geography of Vancouver’s economy, society, and landscape.

Canada’s urban landscape comes into view at other times in Graeme’s writing, most notably in a well-received, authoritative book, Canada and Arctic North America: An Environmental History, in which several chapters are devoted to explaining how planning principles and practices of conservation and sustainability are associated with, for example, the spread of suburbs, the utility of urban parks, and the densification of cities. On another “urban” occasion, an essay on the working-class character of East End Vancouver neighborhoods was co-authored to appear in a collection of essays edited by Graeme, People, Places, Patterns, Processes: Geographical Perspectives on the Canadian Past. Importantly, this book confirmed Graeme’s editorial talents, which have included stints as co-editor of the Journal of Historical Geography (2006-12), editor of BC Studies: The British Columbia Quarterly (2008ff), and general editor of books published by UBC Press in its “Nature–History–Society” series (2005ff). The number of titles in this series is fast approaching the 20 mark, which means that the readers of these books have also been given the opportunity to read a thought-provoking “Foreword” to each book, which together comprise a substantive essay written by Graeme that establishes a wider appreciation for the books. These essays fall within the scope of one or several fields of inquiry—historical geography, environmental history and Canadian studies in general—and in each field Graeme is recognized, through awards and executive positions, as a leader.

Like an ocean current that ebbs and flows, bringing change, the “tides of time” can wash ashore something of singular importance, far from its point of original departure. With 20/20 hindsight, it is easy to recognize the many outstanding contributions that Graeme has made to many spheres of influence since coming ashore, almost a half-century ago: research, teaching, administration, and community and professional service.

Notes
1 See the autobiographical comments that form part of the “Distinguished Historical Geography Lecture, 2012” of the Historical Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers, which was published as Graeme Wynn, “‘Tracing one Warm Line Though a Land so Wide and Savage’: Fifty Years of Historical Geography in Canada,” Historical Geography 40 (2012): 5-32. Also useful is Graeme Wynn, “Thinking About Mountains, Valleys and Solitudes: Historical Geography and the New Atlantic History,” Acadiensis 31 (2001): 129-45.
3 Graeme Wynn, Culture and Agriculture on the Tantramar Marshes (Sackville, NB: Tantramar Heritage Trust, 2012).
4 Graeme Wynn, “The Assault on the New Brunswick Forest, 1780-1850” (PhD dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Toronto, 1974).


12 Graeme Wynn, *Canada and Arctic North America: An Environmental History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio Press, 2007).

BOOK REVIEWS

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Outside the Hacienda Walls: The Archaeology of Plantation Peonage in Nineteenth-Century Yucatán.
by ALLAN MEYERS
reviewed by Steven L. Driever
This fascinating urban environmental history provides a wide-ranging overview of the diversity of landscapes both natural and built that make up the understudied Sacramento region. The book is divided into four distinct sections: Boomtown Sacramento, Valley Reclamation, Government Town, and Reclaiming the Past. It ambitiously covers the time period from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. Each author’s contribution provides depth and breadth to a growing body of knowledge of the organic relationship between environmental history and the history of urban growth and development in the American West. Each author attempts, successfully on the whole, to come to terms with “the paradoxical nature of Sacramento’s ‘commingling’ of nature and culture” (p. 5) from a variety of perspectives ranging from Sutter’s ‘Indian business’ and the Gold Rush to the American River Parkway, one of the largest urban parks in the country. Each essay contributes to the overarching notion that Sacramento was a city unwelcoming to urban development and explores the engineering feats required to create a city out of a region that, on the surface at least, was inhospitable to urban growth and development.

The book opens, appropriately, with a nuanced reflection on Sutter’s “Indian business” (p. 26) which ran the gamut from slavery to coercion to paid labor. This, according to Hurtado, ultimately led to the situation in which “Indian labor exacerbated the conditions that led to Indian dispossession and dependence” (p. 30). The reader is presented with a three-dimensional story of Indian experience rather than the too-often used outdated, simplistic representation of Indian as victim. The chapter on the Gold Rush offers a new way to consider it by examining the pressure that the Gold Rush population explosion exerted both on the human community and nature. Gold Rush histories tend to represent the population explosion as primarily transient while
Owens considers the “ordinary people who decided to stay and make this place a home” (p. 60). These are the people who ultimately grew into a middle class that turned to urban planning, engineering, and technology to carve a city out of an unfriendly natural environment. We are introduced in this first part of the book to the geopolitics of urban planning and the influence of the railroad. The chapters on early urban planning and the railroad offer new insights into the relationship between these activities and the ecology of the region. In short, the authors in this section successfully depict the birth and growth of Sacramento as a “war against nature” (p. 35), a war, of sorts, that included such ‘weapons’ as building levees and diverting the course of the American River rather than relocate the town site off the floodplain.

The chapters in Part II interweave stories of swampland, water, farmers, state and federal governments, grassroots activism, and increasingly sophisticated engineering that contributed to the transformation of the Sacramento Valley. The process of ecological and environmental alteration shaped Sacramentans’ relationship with their city and their region. The relationship between California and Federal flood control initiatives clearly illustrates the politically charged business of controlling access to water in California. The final chapter in this section seems, at first glance, like it doesn’t fit the overarching theme of the book with its focus on boosterism, suburbs, and narrative, but one quickly sees the connections with the other topics. The development of ‘agriburbs’ and agricultural boosterism were built on the alteration of the natural environment highlighted in the previous three chapters.

Part III provides an enlightening synthesis of the disparate effects of New Deal projects, World War II military installations, and nuclear energy on the landscape, both human and non-human. There is a relative dearth of academic analysis on these topics in this region that the reader feels the section offers new and interesting analysis on this aspect of Sacramento’s history. Sacramento was hard hit by the Depression and benefitted from New Deal programs that resulted in, for example, construction of the iconic Tower Bridge, which connected Sacramento to itself (across the river) as well as to the San Francisco Bay area. The Depression saddled the city with crippling unemployment and Hoovervilles filled with desperate people who couldn’t afford homes. The chapter on the military influence provides an in-depth examination of the role the military played, and continues to play, on defining the region both in terms of human population and natural landscapes. The story of Rancho Seco is one of social responsibility and a grassroots movement to shut down the problematic nuclear reactor. It is also a story of people from different backgrounds and different political stances coming together to work for common cause. This has, in other eras and other situations, at times been the story of Sacramento.

The three chapters in Part IV explore the development of the American River Parkway, Indian gaming, and historic preservation of Old Sacramento. The American River Parkway is considered the crown jewel of Sacramento. This large urban park was first envisioned over a century ago. The brief, but thorough, exploration begins, appropriately, with the river itself. The reader is taken through the political, economic, and social processes and consequences of establishing such a massive park that remains “for the most part a natural environment rather than a rendition of a landscape architect’s vision” (p. 241). Perhaps the one weakness of the book is the chapter on Indian gaming. While environmental change has a place here, it is on the margins of the essay. It also seems too wide-ranging for a book on the Sacramento region, as it is more about the state than Sacramento. I found myself wanting the author to focus on Sacramento and explore the impact and importance of Indian gaming there more deeply. However, when taken in the context of the development of a tourist industry with the Parkway, gaming, and historic preservation of Old Sacramento, it belongs. The chapter on Old Sacramento presents a vision of contrasts between preservation of the past and urban development for the future. The author asks questions that have not yet been answered and leaves it appropriately to future generations to determine the value of historic preservation and where it fits in urban development.
The Epilogue ties up loose ends and situates Sacramento in place in the Great Central Valley while exploring political, social, and environmental contrasts between the southern and northern ends of the Valley. As Smith argues, whatever the future for Sacramento, understanding “the region’s environmental history before and after the gold rush” (p. 320) is central to meeting the political, social, and economic challenges lurking on the horizon. This volume, accessible to the layperson as well as academics, provides some of that important foundation. It also makes the reader want to revisit (or visit for the first time) the city of Sacramento armed with a new understanding of its rich, varied, and sometimes troubling history.

Kathryn Davis
San Jose State University


Craig Colten traces the geographic history of the US South’s relationship with water in Southern Waters: The Limits to Abundance. Using extensive research of court cases, federal and state agency documents, and historical sources, Colten examines the South’s policies and procedures related to water quality, conservation, and management. He carefully outlines how the South differs from the West in policy and procedure, explaining why, despite the fact we assume that the humid South is a region of abundance, there is a limit to the precious water resources, a limit that becomes more real every year.

The book begins with a brief introduction placing it in the context of other water studies both within and outside the South and situates water in the southern narrative. Colten examines how settlers viewed water as a resource, but also a risk that brought floods and waterborne disease. He then briefly addresses the changing situation from abundance to shortage in the South in modern times. Colten clearly outlines the thesis for the book: how and why has the South undergone this extreme transformation from surplus to emerging shortages. He claims this squarely places Southern Waters inside a larger body of literature in sustainability, asking how we can define long-term trends as a means of predicting future needs and supplies.

Before examining the two different states of water in the South (abundance and shortage), Colten uses Chapter one to examine water’s differing meaning to various groups from Native Americans to European explorers to African slaves. Each group’s opposing views shapes and impacts the interactions they had with one another regarding water. This chapter also introduces the methodological and ideological frameworks the author blends and uses to interpret historic documents, setting the stage for what will follow.

Chapters two, three, and four address the issues of excess water in the South, examining wetland management policies, flood control policies, and public health measures to control waterborne disease. In Chapters five, six, and seven, Colten then addresses issues of shortage in the South, focusing on conflicts over shipping lanes, limits to the abundance of fish, and issues of shortage not in quantity, but in quality. The concluding chapter brings the story of water in the South to the present, focusing not only on the increase in awareness of shortage in the South by the entire US, but also the escalation in unsustainable water use in the region, despite mounting evidence that there are limits to abundance.
Colten admits in *Southern Waters* that regional studies have fallen out of fashion in geography. Yet, he justifies his decision to write a regional study, stating that the climatic and cultural cohesiveness of the South makes it an ideal framework for understanding the changing narrative of water abundance and shortage throughout the US. He also defends his choice of the South as a framework, citing numerous calls for work in the region. Most water sustainability studies have been done in the arid West. The reality in the humid South is decidedly different and the history of policy and practice is longer. Conflicts over water in the South are couched in issues of race and socioeconomic status. To understand water rights and access in the region today, you have to merge the Old South with the New South. No other region of the US faces these types of cultural and historic challenges.

*Southern Waters* presents an interesting history of the South’s changing relationship with its water supply. For those seeking a book focusing on water policy in a region where shortage was traditionally not an issue, this is a good read. If someone is looking for good examples of presenting massive amounts of information effectively, this may not be the appropriate book. The author does do a number of things well. Each chapter begins with a clear introduction of the issues it will tackle and the point that is being addressed. In many cases Colten is able to effectively pull together research by geographers in numerous sub-disciplines to craft a well-honed message that looks at both the historical and legal context. For each issue examined in *Southern Waters*, whether it is flood or drought, the author presents a number of examples from different states, never focusing solely on one state over another. These examples sometimes drone on to excess, however, repeating themes over and over again. In other places, the narrative seems lacking of good concrete examples, such as the discussion of European toponyms for water bodies that were discarded by governments in favor of the Native American place names.

In another case of excess, each chapter has a concluding section, often a nice feature to summarize important ideas. Colten’s concluding sections in each chapter are, however, redundant. Ironically, the entire book has no real conclusion, though. The last chapter, titled Conclusions, actually reviews the current limits to abundance of water in the South. There is no concluding section that pulls together all the author’s thoughts to tell us what it means, not only for the future of the South, but what other regions can learn from the southern experience. Colten’s extensive research on water policy and history in the South would have been more effective if he had put as much time and effort into summarizing the book in the last pages as he did in summarizing each individual chapter. After the lengthy introduction that placed the book into a larger literature of geographic studies of water, it would have been nice to have a solid conclusion that tied everything together.

In short, *Southern Waters* is an excellent piece of research and an important part of the regional narrative of the South. It is, however, a book that you may want to take apart. Individual chapters provide excellent historical and legal context with a rich set of examples, but the book as a whole lacks a clear conclusion to tie it into the larger body of research on water sustainability policy and practice in the US. In the introduction Colten claims that his thesis places *Southern Waters* in the core research area of sustainability, but there is no concluding evidence to support the book’s connection to a larger sustainability narrative. In the end, it is simply another disconnected regional study that lacks a broader context.

Dawn M. Drake

*Missouri Western State University*

The history of historical geography has been marked by the regular appearance of books reassessing the subject and pointing toward the future. Nearly all such retrospectives, including the present volume, begin with Carl O. Sauer’s, “Foreword to Historical Geography,” which was his presidential address to the Association of American Geographers given at Baton Rouge in 1940. By the sixth sentence Sauer had revealed his purpose. “We can hardly claim to be getting our chief intellectual stimulus from one another,” he wrote, “waiting impatiently on the research of colleagues as needed for our own work.” And he continued, “So long as we are in such a condition of uncertainty about our major objectives and problems, attempts must be made from time to time to give orientation to ourselves along a common course.” North American Odyssey continues this tradition of seeking a common course just as it illustrates Sauer’s observation regarding “uncertainty about our major objectives.”

In the usual application of the labels we all use, Carl Sauer is rarely called an historical geographer. As perhaps the only American geographer who needed no label, Sauer delved deeply into the past to find satisfactory answers to the questions that interested him. James J. Parsons once recalled that Sauer’s North America course at Berkeley was “relentlessly historical,” and “had Daniel Boone ‘peeping over the crest of the Appalachians’ at the term’s final lecture” (Annals, AAG, March, 1979, p. 11). Ralph Brown’s classic Historical Geography of the United States (1948) made no mention of a Civil War for the simple reason that it took place after the period Brown wrote about. Did historical geography require a buffer, a gap in the record of a century or more, between its own focus and that of, say, the economic geographer whose research only extended back to the previous Census? It is a foolish question, but one that I suspect has been the subject of heated discussions in doctoral examinations and faculty meetings.

No answer to the “what is historical?” question will be found in this volume, nor is there much interest in it nowadays. Instead, Editors Craig E. Colten and Geoffrey L. Buckley sensed what they call “the need for a fresh tack” and asked their authors to prepare chapters “based on topical and methodological approaches.” The result, predictably, is an amplification of the uncertainty about objectives that Sauer identified.

Both the old and the new are included among these twenty-two essays and more than a few echo what geographers wrote about in times past. Karl Raitz brings back the free-wheeling urban system models developed by John R. Borchert. Michael Conzen’s essay is reminiscent of what once interested James E. Vance, Jr. Geoffrey Smith and Andrew Suyter present graphical models of diffusion and flows reminiscent of the many contributions made by Terry Jordan-Bychkov and Donald W. Meinig. Land survey systems have survived the test of time and are illustrated in the chapters by Timothy Anderson and William Wyckoff.

New directions include chapters on urban planning by Edward K. Muller and Jasper Rubin who add a perspective that surely belongs under the heading of historical geography. African-Americans are brought into the picture by Derek Alderman, Joshua Inwood, and E. Arnold Modlin, Jr. Tourism, Native Americans, gender, wilderness preservation, wildlife, labor, and environmental justice add still more chapters to the already broad array of subjects. But apart from a brief mention in the chapter by Mona Domosh, house types seem to have disappeared from the geographer’s landscape, as have barns, fences, and nearly everything rural and agricultural. A focus on images and icons, supported by black-and white photographs of the sort found in numerous archives, has replaced the former emphasis on data and maps. Material culture, once regarded as a key to tracing historical lineages, is reduced to icon status as well.
Broad though the scope of this collection is, there are some puzzling gaps. One gets the sense that historical geography has become more of a teaching subject than a research orientation and that “themes” have taken the place of research questions. Historical geographers in times past were proficient data manipulators, but the authors of *North American Odyssey* make little use of the routine data analysis techniques that are now clickable on everyone’s computer. What would historical geographers of old been able to accomplish had the Excel spreadsheet been available to them? (One can imagine the delight Andrew Clark would have had using a spreadsheet to calculate sheep-swine ratios in Nova Scotia.) Historical data are available to all of us, free of charge, and in downloadable form that can be copied, cut, and pasted straight into a GIS mapping program, but there is little hint that this matters in historical geography. Advances in biological genetics made possible by genome mapping have answered questions about agricultural origins and dispersals that intrigued Carl Sauer and his students. That research should interest today’s historical geographers, but none of it is mentioned in this volume.

One has to agree with the editors (p. 1) that *North American Odyssey* proves that historical geography is “alive and well,” but it seems to have been shorn of the big questions that once guided it. Will reorganization around popular themes in current geographical scholarship guarantee the subject's future? One will have to wait another decade or two – for the next volume in what has become something of a series – to learn the answer.

John C. Hudson
*Northwestern University*

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James Daschuk's *Clearing the Plains* is a devastating read. This might be expected, as a detailed study in the “loss of aboriginal life,” but the most forceful elements of Daschuk’s work come in unexpected ways. The overarching narrative of Euro-American (in this case, Canadian) role of disease in demographic declines and dispossession of aboriginal peoples is familiar to scholars in various fields. In the nineteenth century, it was a declensionist narrative told with clearly defined aggressors and victims. In recent decades, however, considerable work has been done by scholars to problematize those simple narratives by emphasizing indigenous agency and resilience, introducing theoretical frameworks of settler colonialism and later, decolonization, and so forth. *Clearing the Plains* fits within these historiographies, but introduces a number of novel analytical points. In the end, by fleshing out the government policies and bureaucratic mechanisms behind indigenous death and dispossession, Daschuk both deepens our understanding of, and broadens the scope of, a very shameful history. Historians, geographers, political scientists, and others would do well to familiarize themselves with this work and integrate it into their own scholarship and pedagogy.

The text is divided into two parts, with five and four chapters respectively. The first five chapters attempt to lay out the deep context for the “organic” factors in aboriginal population decline from pre-contact to the early nineteenth century. The role of biology, he argues, is a necessary backdrop for understanding the role of human agency in aboriginal history. For many, this will be the portion of *Clearing the Plains* with the most familiar content and concepts. It is also where the study feels rushed. The first chapter, for instance, glosses over the topic of pre-contact indigenous health and environmental relationships – a rich topic with deep historiography and
scientific literature – in merely ten pages. Indeed, it need not be the focus of the text, but a topic worth a slightly more robust literature review. As the narrative introduces Euro-Americans into the continent, the role of fur traders, and Native involvement in developing and expanding trade routes and networks illustrate how disease spread, affected communities, and eroded aboriginal health conditions into the period of the Hudson’s Bay Company monopoly. These chapters are challenging, but fall in line with familiar narratives of Euro-American geographic expansion and its effects on aboriginal peoples. Though familiar, Daschuk successfully argues how the subsequent history of destructive Canadian policies must be contextualized in the ongoing biological history of Native health and demographic decline.

With that context as foundation, Daschuk builds a damning narrative of how Canadian policies hastened the decline of First Nations health conditions and failed to mitigate various preventable catastrophes. These last four chapters move fully through the remainder of the 1800s. Chapter 6 explores the role between late-stage epidemics (smallpox in 1869-70) and Native desires for treaties. Experience pushed some during the late numbered treaties stage to demand that medical provisions be included in the treaties. As Canada pushed onto the plains, carving out sections for settlement and completing treaties with regional Natives, ongoing health issues were compounded by the precipitous collapse of bison herds in the late 1870s and widespread starvation, tuberculosis and other attendant ills. Daschuk explains, “Half-hearted relief measures during the famine of 1878-80 and after, which kept plains people in a constant state of hunger, not only undermined the government’s half-baked self-sufficiency initiative but also illustrated the moral and legal failures of the crown’s treaty commitment to provide assistance in the case of a widespread famine on the plains (p. 100-101).” Here, the full weight of Daschuk’s study is revealed. Disease and death on the Plains were spread through Euro-American contact for centuries, and in the broadest sense, Canadians shoulder some blame for that. At this late stage, however, Canada’s expansion and the disease and famine it brought unfolded within a legal relationship where Canada was responsible for providing care. The very legal frameworks by which the Canadian state legitimized their geographic expansion also bound them to save Native peoples from the disasters they were introducing. In these obligations, Daschuk shows, they failed.

If the broad indictment of Canada’s failure to fulfill its treaty obligation is damning, the last two chapters’ description of on-the-ground abuse proves even worse. Through the reserve system, local officials held tremendous power through the control of food and medical supply distribution. Often, they used that power to not only personally profit (through various unethical business practices) but control indigenous behavior. Misappropriated funds, distribution of spoiled food, withholding of desperately needed supplies and rations, sexual abuse, and other mistreatment led to widespread rebellion in 1885. Finally, the completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway accelerated white settlement of the Plains. This led to even greater restrictions of Native peoples, further abuse in the withholding of food and supplies, worsened health outcomes, famine, and death. It is difficult to read.

In the end, what does all of the condemnation mean? First, it helps dispel the still common mythologies of friendly agricultural expansion onto the Plains. Both before and during widespread Canadian settlement of the region, natural and consciously-made Canadian policy cleared the Plains of indigenous control in the most horrific ways. The general sense of guilt or, in the least, cognizance of the indigenous lands upon which Canada is built, is not uncommon in contemporary national rhetoric. Even the violence of warfare is commonly acknowledged. However, the manmade mechanisms by which the land was wrested from aboriginal peoples through preventable epidemics and starvation are rarely discussed. The prevention of Native death by disease and starvation was well within the capabilities of Canada’s settler colonial project.
during the 1800s. The failure to do so must be integrated into national conversations about the region’s past and present. Daschuk’s concise and direct study should help drive that conversation. It is with no small amount of irony that the book won the 2014 John A. MacDonald Prize from the Canadian Historical Association, being named after the very politician who oversaw much of the policies condemned by Daschuk. The award is well-deserved.

Brenden W. Rensink
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Despite being the second word in the title, the subject of Matthew T. Huber’s book is not oil itself, but rather the American society that is built around and runs on oil, hence the name Lifeblood. Just like oil is used to power cars, Huber uses oil as a vehicle to understand the creation of the American society and the American dream. In his own words: “This book centers upon oil and the role of energy in shaping a particular regime of mass consumption” (p. xviii). In order to do that, he examines four distinct periods in the long-term development of petro-capitalism in the United States: overproduction and collapsing prices in the 1930s, the era of stable and cheap-enough oil between 1945 and 1973, and the oil crises in the 1970s and 2000s.

Those who are looking for an overview of American oil production and consumption, or energy use in general are advised to look elsewhere, for example Michael J. Graetz’s The End of Energy: The Unmaking of America’s Environment, Security, and Independence (2011), which by the way would complement Lifeblood wonderfully.

Essentially the book describes how ill-suited the American dream, as it was built under times of cheap oil, is for times of expensive oil and the current time with the need to cut down our consumption of fossil fuels to combat climate change. I do not buy Huber’s claim “that oil’s relation to the “American way of life” is central to the rise of neoliberal hegemony in the United States” (p. xv). For sure; the “American way of life” would be much different without the mobility provided by oil. But is it enough to explain the rise of a particular form economic and political ideology? In a simplified way, the argument is the following: mobility provided by cheap oil allows the creation of mostly white suburbs fostering petite bourgeois strata of mostly white suburban homeowners increasingly distrustful of high taxes, the public sector and redistribution of wealth.

For sure cheap oil explains the fact that the United States consumed in 2010 over one fifth of the total world consumption of oil, double that of the second biggest consumer, China. “Overall, 71 percent of U.S. petroleum consumption goes toward transportation, and 93 percent of all energy consumed in transportation comes from petroleum” (p. ix). Considering how important a role oil plays in the American society, it is interesting to read how difficult it is to get its price right. Whatever the price of oil, it always seems to be wrong. For example, in the 1930s the main worry was that the price of oil was too low, as in some parts of Texas, oil was selling for as little as $0.02 per barrel. Fearing the prospect of violent revolt, the governor of Texas, former oil executive Ross Sterling, declared martial law in the East Texas fields, and four thousand troops were sent to enforce the field’s “allowable level of production as dictated by the state’s conservation authority” (p. 49). Quite a contrast to events decades later, when prices skyrocketed following the OPEC oil embargo or several instances where troops were deployed to oil-producing countries in order to keep the oil production undisturbed.
To be honest, I first had difficulties cutting through the Marxian jargon in the beginning of the book, but the readability increases as the book proceeds, as well as the interest of the content. My efforts were rewarded in the concluding chapter: Energizing Freedom, with Huber’s insightful questioning of linking oil to freedom. “I found it quite ironic that a gas station could have the audacity to proclaim itself a site of freedom, with all oil’s associations with various forms of unfreedoms—war, despotic petro-states, and social and environmental injustice along the commodity chain” (p. 155). Huber leaves the reader on the last pages of the book with the question: What kind of energy for what kind of freedom? Unfortunately, he does not answer this very crucial question. While I opened this review by criticizing his far-flung claims, here I would have hoped for some visions. This is not to criticize the book, the first step in finding a cure, is having a diagnosis. Huber for sure provides one diagnosis. You might not agree with it, but for sure it raises thoughts.

Personally, after reading a book whose main content is to describe the large contribution the American notion of freedom has had in creating the current climate crisis, I started to wonder whether this same powerful notion of freedom could be turned into a solution of the same problem. What if the middle class consumer would use its purchasing power to buy electric cars, freeing them from queues at the gasoline pump forever? What if city planners and authorities would re-create walkable and bike-friendly communities with good access to public transportation, providing freedom also to those who cannot afford buying a car, as suggested in *Transport Beyond Oil: Policy Choices for a Multimodal Future* (2013)?

Huber is criticizing the return to “localization” as the solution to our energy and climate predicament for not only being based on a romantic nostalgia for a preindustrial age of small-scale agriculture but also for naively downplaying the extent to which modern society is fundamentally entangled within fossil-fuel forms of globalized production. But what if American farmers would reframe the notion of freedom as a freedom from imported oil, and would power their tractors with biogas produced from agricultural waste, while the remaining product would serve as an effective fertilizer freeing them from energy-intensive nitrogen fertilizer?

Jan Kunnas
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I begin my Geography of the Arctic undergraduate class with a deceptively simple question: where is the “Arctic”? Is it the Arctic Circle (66°33’N latitude)? Is it the 10°C July isotherm, which similarly, though much less straightforwardly, encircles the globe’s high northern regions? How about latitudinal treeline (which maps closely onto the isotherm, but with much fuzzier boundaries) or the limits of permafrost? Perhaps it would be better to simply settle on the Arctic Ocean basin and littoral states—though that raises the thorny issue of Denmark’s inclusion or exclusion, via Greenland. These state-centric boundaries also risk ignoring the important material and cultural presence of Arctic indigenous territories like Sápmi and Inuit Nunaat. And these contemporary geographical manifestations of an indigenous Arctic intersect in complex ways with longstanding “southern” imagined geographies of the Arctic, whether classical notions of Ultima Thule or more recent geographical assessments of “nordicity.”
Similar definitional conundrums are encountered, investigated and provided new insight in this excellent collection of essays. To the debates over “what is north,” the authors and editors of Northscapes contribute a novel critical focus on the “technology-environment” nexus in the north and its role in shaping place and environment in the region. Rejecting the notion of the north as empty frontier or Arctic sublime, the collection’s focus on technologies (from the transformative to the mundane) highlights the complex interactions of northern peoples, northern environments, and exogenous actors, from explorers and settlers to sheep and crops. “Technology” is here conceptualized in the broadest of terms to encompass a wide variety of material and conceptual mediations between humans and the non-human environment, from systems of knowledge and classification, to agricultural practices and home-building techniques, to more conventionally understood technologies such as railways and aircraft. In so doing, Northscapes develops a provocative understanding of the globe’s seemingly “remote” northern spaces as (to quote the epilogue by Finn Arne Jørgensen) a networked region (internally and externally connected), a hybrid landscape of nature, culture and technology, and a site of consumption (by insiders and outsiders) (p. 277-78).

Unlike many edited collections, Northscapes is at once diverse yet coherent in its approach to its subject. Emerging from the activities of a new Nordic Environmental History Network, the chapters include case studies from around the circumpolar Arctic, with the notable exception of Greenland (which is, nevertheless, touched on in the opening chapter on the natural history of the Arctic). Organized into four main themes (Exploring, Colonizing, Working and Imagining the North), the temporal range varies considerably, from the Viking-Norse period (AD 850-1250) to more or less contemporary expressions of place and history. This geographical and temporal diversity opens up interesting opportunities for comparative reflection on the Arctic experience, both within and between chapters. For instance, in her chapter on Soviet northern colonization, Julia Lajus explores how the nascent Soviet state looked to models and practices from Norway and Canada to guide its conquest of Arctic lands and resources. Similarly, the emphasis throughout the volume on environment, land and resources at the expanding peripheries of Euro-American societies invites comparisons between the chapters on the assimilation of these territories into regional and global networks of settlement, colonization, knowledge and trade.

Readers interested in the historical geography of the Arctic will find much of interest in these pages. Authors tackle topics including the circulation of knowledge about the north, Nordic cultural landscapes, agricultural landscape transformations, technology and urbanization in the north, and imaginative geographies of “northernness.” What they will not find are many geographers. The bulk of the authors are themselves historians (joined by an anthropologist and archaeologist), and while the selected bibliography features many geographers, from Braun to Wynn, one wonders whether even greater conceptual coherence and depth might have been provided through a more explicit engagements with geographical concepts around peripherality, frontiers, and resources, such as those emerging from the “new” resource geographies. The generally excellent final essay, for instance, relies on William Cronon’s excellent, but now somewhat dated Nature’s Metropolis to frame a discussion of the north as resource hinterland, yet considerable work by resource, economic and, yes, historical geographers since that book’s publication have both expanded upon and refined this concept considerably (including in the Arctic context).

These comments aside, Northscapes represents an excellent contribution to the burgeoning environmental, historical and geographical literature on the Arctic. Through its theme of technologies (including both “tools” and systems of knowledge), it brings a novel focus to bear on the region’s human-environment dynamics and highlights the deep continuities in the long-
term human effort to adapt to and transform the Arctic’s intemperate landscapes. The collection should remain an important contribution to the historical-geographical study of the changing Arctic for years to come.

Arn Keeling  
Memorial University of Newfoundland


In The True Geography of our Country, Joel Kovarsky reviews the role of maps and geographic information in the life and career of Thomas Jefferson. In the introduction, Kovarsky states that he intends to “demonstrate the importance of geography and maps as the foundational scaffolding for his [Jefferson’s] varied lifelong pursuits” (p. 3). The eight chapters describe Jefferson’s interest in land surveying, his Notes on the State of Virginia, his geographical library, his role in planning government expeditions to explore the American west, his correspondence on geographical and cartographic topics, his role in the development of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, and his interests in astronomy and other geographically-related subjects. Kovarsky has succeeded in compiling a review of materials and sources related to Jefferson and geography, but he has neither provided the reader with a cogent thesis nor with any new interpretations or analysis of Jefferson’s geographical work or significance. These limitations of the work are troubling for at least the following reasons.

First, there is already an ample – perhaps bloated – body of literature on Thomas Jefferson that includes published versions of his writings and other primary documents. It is thus puzzling that so much of the text of this book consists of lengthy quotations from Jefferson’s correspondence and other writings. For example, if Jefferson’s instructions to Meriwether Lewis had never been published, then it would be understandable for the letter to be quoted at length. Kovarsky even prefaces this quotation with an acknowledgement that Jefferson’s instructions are “well-known, lengthy, detailed, and oft-quoted.” Similarly, the chapter about Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia is largely a summary of Jefferson’s descriptive work with several lengthy quotations. The chapter on Jefferson’s library is only four and one half pages in length and consists mostly of quotations and lists. More troubling than the superfluous text is that there is rarely an attempt by the author to interpret Jefferson’s writings or to discuss the historical or geographical issues raised by the text that he quotes. Kovarsky simply informs the reader that these writings provide information about the maps and geographical knowledge that Jefferson possessed or sought. My criticism is not so much that Kovarsky wastes ink by publishing lengthy quotations of primary sources that have been published before, but that he fails to engage the reader in an analysis of the historical and geographical significance of these materials.

Second, Kovarsky does little to engage the secondary literature on Jefferson. Although multiple sources are cited, there is little discussion, analysis or interpretation of this work in light of the primary materials that the author has reviewed. The reader is left wondering what Kovarsky has to offer that has not already been presented by Donald Jackson, John Logan Allen, James P. Rhonda, or other scholars concerned with Jefferson’s place in the history of geography and cartography. The author seems to dodge the question of how this book contributes to Jeffersonian scholarship (or scholarship on the history of cartography or the American West) by dismissing the prior literature as voluminous and discussion of it as beyond the scope of the book. This is
particularly unfortunate. Despite the strengths of the scholarship of Jackson, Allen, Rhonda, and others, there is still much that could be learned, brought up-to-date, or otherwise revised and improved upon when attempting to understand the enigmatic Thomas Jefferson and the early years of American geography.

Third, if the author is excused for not being a Jeffersonian scholar, then it might be expected that his expertise in cartography would shine some new light on Jefferson within this field. While Kovarsky presents a few maps that are more limited in availability, most of the maps in this book are easily accessible online through the David Rumsey Collection, the U.S. Library of Congress, or other sources. Not only are these maps readily available, but they are printed in this book in grayscale, in a small format, and are occasionally broken across the binding. I question what purpose it serves to publish small and unreadable versions of well-known maps such as Humboldt’s *Carte Generale Du Royaume De La Nouvelle Espagne*, Arrowsmith’s *Map Exhibiting all the new Discoveries in the Interior Parts of North America*, or Melish’s *Map of the United States*. More importantly, why are these maps presented with so little original interpretation or analysis of them in the text? Once again, the inclusion of numerous previously published primary sources and, more importantly, the failure to engage in interpretation and evaluation of those sources in the text is upsetting.

Finally, if there is a central thesis of the book it is that maps and geographical knowledge were important to Jefferson. Not only is this thesis rather weak and uninteresting, but it is argued through circular logic: Jefferson wrote about maps and geography therefore maps and geography were important to Jefferson.

In sum, this book will prove to be a disappointment for those seeking original and substantive scholarship on Jefferson, his influence on American geography and cartography, or his geographical knowledge. The one exception is the chapter entitled “Foreshadowing Manifest Destiny”. In this chapter, Kovarsky discusses the roots of Manifest Destiny and Jefferson’s geographical thought. This chapter is an exception in that Kovarsky relies less on lengthy quotations and is more focused on interpretation beyond description. Unfortunately, the remainder of the book fails to provide many fresh insights or interpretations. Charitably, the book offers a worthwhile description of key sources and would be a useful introduction for those seeking a brief review of the landscape of Jeffersonian geography.

Andrew Milson
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★ ★ ★

*Mastering the Niger: James MacQueen’s African Geography and the Struggle over Atlantic Slavery.*


*Mastering the Niger* is a comprehensive and complex account of the engagement of the Scotsman James MacQueen (1778-1870), in one sense and location a “sedentary” or “armchair” geographer, with various forms of the production, dissemination and reception of geographical knowledge and their relation to opposing discourses on Atlantic slavery, notably at the time up to and beyond the British abolition of the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1833) with particular reference to Granada, the West Indies, the River Niger, and West Africa. Three contextual chronologies are offered for this analysis: “from the emergence of the British anti-slavery campaign to the peak of humanitarian influence on the early Victorian state; the intensification
of British exploratory activity in West Africa, the solution of the so-called Niger problem, and the subsequent commercial and humanitarian expeditions up this river, and the institutionalization of British geography as a field of knowledge and set of practices” (p. 7).

The book is in three parts, prefaced by an introductory chapter entitled “Mastering the Niger,” which narrates MacQueen’s production of *A New Map of Africa* in 1841, incorporating over twenty-four years’ assembly and analysis of geographical data, its publication in journals such as *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, and its links and those of earlier maps that he had produced in relation to the question of the course and termination of the River Niger. MacQueen correctly asserted, in 1816, that the Niger terminated in the Atlantic Ocean between the bights of Benin and Biafra, a fact confirmed by the Landers’ expedition in 1830. His map also linked with the Niger Expedition of 1841-42, intended, among other things, to help eradicate slavery from non-British territories through a substitution of legitimate commerce. From 1796 to 1821 MacQueen was manager of a sugar estate in Grenada in the West Indies, from part of whose labour force he had extracted knowledge of West Africa. The growth of abolitionism towards the end of the eighteenth century had promoted debates about the “representation” of Africa through intertextual debates, “fought not only on worldly and textual sites, but also across them, as those on both sides cited earlier accounts and made comparative points to substantiate their arguments” (p. 9).

The first of the three parts of the book, entitled “Sources,” analyses anti-chronologically the detail and sophisticated inter-linkages of many different sources of geographical knowledge, starting with MacQueen’s ideas and proposals from 1821 and 1822, moving to his commercial occupation in Glasgow in the early 1820s, and a demonstration of links between commercial bookkeeping methods and later systems of geographical data collecting and processing, and then to his experience in Grenada. Actions and ideas discussed include proposals for the establishment of a West Africa Company; the contexts of geographical research in the late eighteenth century; and the Atlantic culture of commercial speculation and MacQueen’s construction of his Niger theory.

The second part, “Courses,” incorporates responses to his Niger theory and related African proposals, tensions and contrasts between “armchair” knowledge and first-hand observation; the outcome of consideration and attempted practice of his ideas for Sierra Leone and for the Niger scheme, including the Niger Expedition of 1841-42. The final section “Termination” analyses the main issues between the early 1840s and 1870, the year of MacQueen’s death, with particular reference to such questions as the source of the Nile and the Livingstone Zambezi expedition, together with his increased contacts with the Royal Geographical Society, which had changed since the early contact with John Barrow, who had charged MacQueen as being a “closet” geographer in a review of his *A Geographical and Commercial View of northern central Africa: containing a Particular account of the Course and Termination of the Great River Niger in the Atlantic Ocean* (1821), in *The Quarterly Review* in 1821.

The essence of the Lambert book is described by the author, following Ian Baucom, as comprising not only a struggle between competing theories of right (slaves’ right to freedom and traders’ right to trade), but also the context of the links between geographical knowledge, African exploration and Atlantic slavery - a struggle between competing theories of knowledge, so that “Geographical discourse played a dual role...providing a means for debating slavery and representational forms for doing so, but also helping to reveal the competing theories about the locations – literal and figurative –from which credible knowledge concerning slavery could be produced” (p. 27).

David Lambert has produced in many respects a highly original and innovating piece of research and writing. Its structure, outlined above, is quite unusual and differs from conventional chronological narrative structures and sequences. The prime reason is that it is written mainly
about attempts to master knowledge within a fairly restricted geographical context. The arguments are tightly reasoned, and raise many new questions about the moral geographies of slavery and sources for related knowledges, not least the provision of geographical information by the slaves themselves of the regions from which they had been forcibly exported.

This sophisticated book is very well referenced and illustrated, with a good bibliography and index, including links to many manuscript and printed sources. It contains interesting maps, though the scale at which some are reproduced makes for some difficulty of interpretation.

The innovative style of the narrative does periodically pose problems of interpretation of what is presented, with occasionally slowing of the pace of the argument, sometimes by the partially helpful periodic vade mecum summaries of where we have got to and where the author tells us we are going, and in some other sections, where the density of semiotic technicalities again slows the pace.

The wider contexts of slavery and its moral/immoral geographies are rather taken for granted, and the non-expert reader could have been helped a bit more with this. On the whole, however, this is a work which contributes much to the knowledges underpinning and forming a history and historical geography of a crucial topic, and does so with an impressive technical and conceptual expertise. It is undoubtedly a significant trail-maker in the field of the historical geography of knowledge and its attempted applications.

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★★★★


Coupled with racialized landscape theory as presented in _North American Odyssey: Historical Geographies for the Twenty-first Century_ (Craig E. Colton and Geoffrey L. Buckley 2014. chap. 15, p. 273) and “Teaching Jim Crow Pedagogy” theory in _Teaching Ethnic Geography in the 21st Century_ (National Council for Geographic Education 2015. chap. 8, p. 68), this statewide analysis of racial cleansing could catalyze a new race relations research paradigm in Arkansas. Logically organized, clearly written and easily readable, this book deconstructs a temporal (1883 to 1924) and spatial (state, county, city) social movement to establish “whites-only” counties and cities therein throughout Arkansas.

For divergent reasons, two research methodologies stood out in this book: archival newspaper content analysis and oral history interviews. The author artfully utilized statewide and local newspaper archives and “uncovered enough events of geographical and thematic diversity” (p. 8) to create a representative and multifaceted database of racial cleansing practices in Arkansas. To the contrary, however, despite the availability of an African American oral history archive with a focus upon white segregationist tactics including racial cleansing within the context of African American Jim Crow culture and society, the author chose not to rely on oral histories as another primary research source “because there continues to be a prejudice among those who might be defensive about their communities’ reputations” (p.8). Therefore, he overlooked the 2001Duke University Oral History Project and book with Arkansas as a target state, _Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South_. By ignoring African American oral histories, voices expressing African American agency and resistance to racial cleansing were minimized if not absent from this book.
The Introduction (Chapter 1) and Conclusion (Chapter 6) flowed as a cohesive, carefully crafted race relations essay. Chapter 1 provided a review of pertinent racial cleansing literature, a multidisciplinary definition of racial cleansing, an explanation of place-based racial cleansing cognitive mapping, along with a clear articulation of the audience and goals for the book. The author also asserted the significance of a solid historical groundwork of racial cleansing research to raise shared consciousness and provide critical terminology as the first step in moving beyond the legacy of the past and undoing (generational) “enduring injustices” (p. 17). The subtly crafted Conclusion (Chapter 6) described racial cleansing as an exclusionary strategy, positioned racial cleansing in an economic geography context, delineated the phases of racial cleansing along a continuum and framed racial cleansing in relationship to national/global policy and practices. However, references to Jim Crow and African American social justice agency were missing from this essay.

The remainder of this book, Chapters 2 through 5, delineated a historically sound temporal and spatial database of racial cleansing case study and case vignette descriptions of discriminatory incidents across Arkansas’s racialized landscapes. The chapter headings set forth a topical framework for identifying racial cleansing events. Successively, reflective of white motivations, these terms -- politics, land/labor, criminality, unknown and multivalent causes -- (re)presented racial cleansing as a continuum rather than as an absolute (p.140).


First, Loewen and Jaspin demonstrated how census data and population geography could be used to define the respective spatial scope, scale and locations of segregated Sundown Towns and racial cleansing counties in the United States. Lancaster chose not use a similar approach to describe the spatial scope and scale of racial cleansing as a statewide phenomenon in Arkansas. Because of the statewide density of racial cleansing events in Arkansas, a statewide map or map series would have strengthened the visual (re)presentation of the scope, scale, locations and places of racial cleansing in Arkansas.

Second, Loewen positioned the Sundown Town movement within the context of Jim Crow laws and culture as the defining foundational white supremacist ideology and strategy during the “nadir” of American race relations from 1890 to the 1930s. Surprisingly Lancaster did not similarly frame racial cleansing within this ideological context. Consequently, missing an opportunity to use racial cleansing to further amplify Loewen’s conclusion that “most Americans have no idea that race relations deteriorated from 1890 to the 1930s in the United States” and that “Sundown Towns could not be understood outside this historical period” (p.25).

Third, in terms of the place-based dimension of racial cleansing, Jaspin used county and state maps to contextualize each racial cleansing case study. He graphically illustrated the scope and scale, locations and places of racial cleansing events. Notwithstanding Lancaster’s clear place-based descriptive narrative, maps were noticeably absent in this book.

As a Jim Crow segregationist tactic, racial cleansing measurably created white racialized county and city landscapes throughout Arkansas. Lancaster powerfully situated these racialized landscapes in terms of black and white Arkansans having two entirely different mental maps of Arkansas (p.14). Characterized as “enduring injustices,” he also speculated about Arkansas’s legacy of racial cleansing and its impact upon African American agency after “being driven into exile and away from property then left forfeit to local whites, and being intimidated into avoiding these areas that later offered some measure of prosperity, as exemplified in the economic boom
experienced by those Ozark communities along the White River and its upland tributaries when the Army Corps of Engineers created lakes that transformed rural areas into popular resorts or even the boom that hit northwestern Arkansas” (p. 15).

A recent *Jonesboro Sun* article “Mayor denounces pro-white billboard” (May 2, 2015) illustrated the continuation of Arkansas’s racial cleansing legacy into today’s society. Located in mostly white Pope and Boone County, the anonymously purchased billboard space proclaimed “It’s Not Racist To Love (heart symbol) Your Own People” at both sites. As an African American female born, raised, educated and employed for eighteen years as a college geography instructor, Lancaster’s book resonated with me. Beyond “tree of talking” reconciliation (p. 16), this historical text, when integrated with historical geography theory, themes, and methods has unique potential to make race relations discourse more place-specific, to make natural resource management economic development policy and practice more racially equitable in Arkansas and to serve as a place-based research model and laboratory for similarly situated states.

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★★★★

*Outside the Hacienda Walls: The Archaeology of Plantation Peonage in Nineteenth-Century Yucatán.*


Meyer’s book, representing some twenty years of fieldwork and research in the Yucatán Peninsula, is an excellent example of the power of interdisciplinary scholarship. This volume is primarily about Tabi, one of the many privately owned towns that dotted the Yucatán landscape between Mexico’s independence in 1821 and the Mexican Revolution beginning in 1910. Although Meyers does discuss and describe in some detail the hacienda compound of Tabi, he is interested in the core buildings of Tabi (the owner’s palace, the sugar mill, the church, and so forth) only to the extent that they shed light on the social conditions of households that lived in debt peonage outside the hacienda’s walls. His goal is to reconstruct the plan of Tabi – its roads, households, parcel boundaries – and the social hierarchies of individuals and families revealed through the analytical methods of archaeology supplemented by oral histories and other historical records. In Meyer’s opinion, the latter is elitist, constructed by literate actors (what Redfield would have called part of the great tradition), but archaeology is democratic, unearthing the material relics of daily life and thus allied to the little tradition of the masses.

The author introduces the reader to Tabi’s layout via the one old surviving map of the estate that dates to 1817 and is found in Tulane’s Latin American Library. That map is a rather stylized representation of the hacienda not drawn accurately to scale. Antonio Benavides Castillo, a Mayanist Archaeologist, carried out an archaeological investigation of Tabi in the 1980s. His survey was unscientific, but it did reveal a number of occupied blocks arranged in a grid pattern around a central plaza. Thus, the stage is set, and we can see that Meyers is taking on a huge project to reconstruct an accurate spatial plan of Tabi. Fate, however, also aided Meyers in his project. The Yucatán Caste War (1847-1855) was an extremely violent Maya revolt against high taxes and encroachment on their lands by Yucatecos (whites and mestizos residing in the Yucatán), and sugar haciendas like Tabi, located just south of the Puuc Ridge in north-central Yucatán, were a prime target. Although Tabi was damaged in the war, its main buildings were largely spared, possibly because the hacienda served as a headquarters for Jacinto Pat, one of the Mayan leaders in the revolt. The hacienda gradually recovered only to have the Constitutional Army
of the Mexican Revolution in 1915 torch the cane fields and peon debt records and then order the inhabitants to leave forever. That man-made disaster helped preserve Tabi in a Pompei-like state. Finally, the State of Yucatán converted Tabi and several thousand acres around it into an ecological reserve. When the State transferred control to the Yucatán Cultural Foundation, an NGO, archaeology was included in the heritage management, opening the door to a team of researchers from Texas A&M University to locate Tabi village structures.

Meyer’s analysis of Tabi begins with the historical record, which provides a fairly rich account of the individual owners and the estate’s changing areal extent and production statistics. He reviews the apparent origin of the estate in 1733 as a cattle ranch and its enlargement and transformation by the 1780s into a sugar hacienda whose labor requirements led to large-scale debt peonage. The hacienda probably peaked in size and resident laborers in the 1890s, but despite a modernization of production methods, debt peonage persisted. The historical record, unfortunately, is spotty with regard to the debt peons. Meyers finds the oral history records from court documents and the like sparse and contradictory. Censuses, taken irregularly, do not reveal the occupations of the peons. Although census data do indicate a good deal about the ages and family status of the villagers as well as the presence of imported Korean and Chinese laborers and significant ethnic intermarriage, the demographic record sheds no light on the spatial arrangement of Tabi village, either physically or culturally.

Where history stops, archaeology starts for Meyers. The meat of this book, what sets it apart, is his discussion of some twenty years of intermittent fieldwork, starting in 1996, to locate and delineate the roads, plazas, cemetery, property boundaries, house foundations, backyard patios of Tabi. After receiving permission to dig in some house sites, Meyers and his team used a transect method to establish equidistant sample points in selected residential blocks. Pits were then dug and the exhumed soil sifted for artifacts, mainly potsherds of earthenware, most coarse but some refined. The former were correlated with stockade-cottage plots of the peons and the latter were associated with masonry-house plots of salaried workers, principally mayacoles (field foremen). Other evidence of social distinctions included bone-species diversity and rim sherds (remnants of vessels), all more prevalent in the masonry-house plots, which were found adjacent to plazas or along main roads. To further refine his spatial model of the village plan, Meyers draws on the studies of rubbish by Hayden and Cannon, Thomas Killion, and Rani Alexander to test for soil phosphorous of organic residues of human activity. This field method facilitates the estimation of household size and the delineation of specialized areas within houselots (e.g., cooking areas and rubbish zones) where no visible surface traces remain.

Although rather specialized, this volume is highly readable and well illustrated. Students of geoarchaeology will get a good sense of how a field project in the Yucatán is developed, organized, and effectively executed over many years. They also will come to envision haciendas, at least those in late-colonial and nineteenth-century Yucatán, as integrated in a world economy of commodities and labor. Researchers considering an investigation of one of the many other haciendas in Mexico can benefit from a study of Meyer’s methods for artifact and soil-chemistry sampling. If we want to better understand the full historical meaning of peonage, its diversity, and its subtle spatial expressions, this reviewer is persuaded that we need more archaeology of haciendas and their villages.

Steven L. Driever
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Historical geography encompasses an expansive field within human geography. Any particular study of geographies of the past can at times inhabit many subfields of human geography. Consequently, historical geography does not lend itself well to a one paragraph definition or to a few theoretical maxims. Any new student of historical geography can find the variety of content daunting. Newcomers to the field would be well-served by a detailed overview of academic historical geography. With the publication of *Key Concepts in Historical Geography*, such an overview exists.

John Morrissey, David Nally, Ulf Strohmayer, and Yvonne Whelan served as joint authors for this text – a text that is part of a wider series by SAGE Publications focusing on the most important concepts in several of the social sciences. (Similar *Key Concepts* books exist for different sub-disciplines of geography, including political geography, urban geography, and economic geography.) The *Key Concepts* series editor prefaced that this historical geography text allows for deeper explanation than a dictionary, broader understanding than a monograph, and more background material than a textbook. This is an excellent description of the strength of content found in *Key Concepts in Historical Geography*.

The book is arranged in a logical structure with eight broad category sections: “Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies,” “Nation-building and Geopolitics,” “Historical Hierarchies,” “The Built Environment”, “Place and Meaning”, “Modernity and Modernization”, “Beyond the Border,” and “The Production of Historical Geographical Knowledge.” Each category is not a chapter by itself; rather, these sections contain three defined concepts each. For example, the “Historical Hierarchies” section contains entries covering “Class, Hegemony and Resistance,” “Race,” and “Gender.” Morrissey, Nally, Strohmayer, and Whelan each authored six chapters.

All 24 concept chapters (each about ten pages in length) include conceptual explanations paired with the related methodologies or applications of a given concept. For instance, Yvonne Whelan’s excellent piece over the “Landscape and Iconography” concept is separated into an introductory section that discusses the historical understanding of landscape from Sauer to Meinig, a section on new cultural approaches to landscape since the 1980s, a section addressing memory and identity from the 1990s (including a mini-case study on Dublin), and a conclusion section that addresses critiques of landscape studies while appropriately situating current research within academic geography. Throughout each chapter, relevant scholarship is mentioned – the “Landscape and Iconography” section identifies specific works by Cosgrove, Daniels, and Duncan when discussing new cultural geographies of landscape.

Yet, the text is not a monotonous literature review. Foundational pieces of scholarship and the intellectual evolution of ideas are intertwined in this very readable book. A well-culled list of suggested readings follows each chapter. Perhaps most useful to historical geography students are each section’s concluding “key points” that succeed in providing clear, summary-style paragraphs of a chapter’s central ideas.

Several sections within this book deserve extra praise. The aforementioned example concept of “Landscape and Iconography” by Whelan is joined by the author’s companion pieces on “Conceptualizing Heritage” and “Performance, Spectacle and Power” – three vibrant concept chapters that give clarity to geographers working on place and meaning, often “at the boundaries between cultural and historical geography” (p. 9).

Another section, “Beyond the Border,” contains three persuasive concept chapters by Nally that address “big picture themes” for academic historical geographers (p. 10). While the
concept topics of “Globalization,” “Governmentality,” and “Nature-Culture” might typically be viewed through a twenty-first century lens outside of historical geography, Nally does admirable work to stress the historical (and historical geographical) relations of these important ideas.

An additional strong suit in this work is the final section of the book which focuses on the production of knowledge within academic historical geography. Strohmayer’s “Historical Geographical Traditions,” Morrissey’s “Illustrative Geographies,” and Morrissey’s “Evidence and Representation” collectively address “the conditions of possibility for historical geographical scholarship to emerge” (p. 11). These concluding chapters form an important step-back view of the meaning of “historical geography” that is valuable for new student and experienced researcher alike.

One strength of the four authors is their diverse academic background, with a variety of academic training in North America and Europe. The authors currently hold academic positions in Ireland and the United Kingdom, which serves well to represent the very strong academic tradition of historical geography in the non-U.S. English-speaking world. Additionally, the inclusion of four separate authors did not hamper the overall quality of the book through stylistic differences in writing or voice.

While innovative scholarship in historical geography (not to mention scholarship in historical GIS) is increasing, this work is not necessarily comparable to one particular research monograph within some portion of historical geography. Instead, this book works within a framework between textbook and encyclopedia. It is tempting to assume this text would be compared by students to the well-known work *The Dictionary of Human Geography* by Gregory and Johnston (2009), but the breadth and length of concept chapters in *Key Concepts in Historical Geography* is far greater than a dictionary. The best comparisons are the additional *Key Concepts* texts focusing on geography offered by SAGE Publishing.

No summary work can perfectly describe a discipline, and at times in *Key Concepts in Historical Geography* there exists an opportunity – paradoxically – for both “more” and “less” information in particular chapters. Furthermore, greater contextualizing of additional major works across even more subfields of human geography could be useful for positioning different aspects of historical geography. But these objections are slight, and likely borne out of the format. This scholarly, detailed overview is a commendable work.

In the introduction, the authors note that “an overarching methodological concern… is to ask geographic questions of the historical evidence that seeks to situate meaning in context” (p. 2). Any student or professional within historical geography would agree that this work similarly situates meaning in context for the wide-ranging field of historical geography. Both the format and intellectual approach to *Key Concepts in Historical Geography* are quite successful, and this book is a necessary volume for any current or future scholar of historical geography.

Patrick D. Hagge
Arkansas Tech University


As a collection, Observation Points travels a wide and satisfying intellectual path. Across thirteen chapters, editor Thomas Patin pins together themes and contributors from a variety of disciplines including art history, political science, English and literature, geography,
and communication studies that examine how visual rhetoric in and about American national parks have been employed as “discursive apparatuses that have produced, limited, and shaped discourses on nature, including human nature, and have justified particular social policies and cultural preferences as natural and necessary” (p. xiii). Patin draws on the scholarship of W.J.T. Mitchell and asks us to interrogate visual rhetoric in national parks so as to reveal the deliberate and mediated nature of landscape design, display, and presentation. National park material and practices are thereby implicated as agents of social power that naturalize nationalist, environmental, political, and imperial “culturally specific concepts or social arrangements” (p. xv).

Observation Points is bound through the lens of national parks and monuments – and that is part of its genius. The landscapes and material culture presented are all familiar territory and represent the grandest examples of America’s “best idea.” Two essays focus on Yellowstone National Park. Others discuss Zion, Grand Canyon, and Chaco Canyon. Three of the thirteen essays are located in the Black Hills of South Dakota and examine Mt. Rushmore. The omission of less-known parks, including parks and monuments in locations east of the Mississippi River could be a point of criticism. However, as a whole the book is theoretically rich and the variety of mediums explored – including national park landscapes, architecture, film, visitor publications, and landscape paintings associated with national parks and monuments – provides the reader with a framework for extending this analysis to other public landscapes.

The book is loosely organized and following an introductory essay on virtual rhetoric by Patin, the reader is treated to a multiplicity of perspectives. Some of the more satisfying essays are those that address the built environment. Robert Bednar shows how national park managers designed landscape devices – scenic overlooks, visitor center displays, road and boundary signs – to control the vistas, experiences, and meaning imbedded in the landscape. In doing so, these landscapes become the “medium through which the national parks present themselves as natural landscapes” (p. 3). Peter Peters examined how national park roads were redesigned in the 1950s and 1960s to control the onslaught of modernizing American tourists. Road design was standardized so visitors could experience the park through their windshield – thereby imbedding a certain sense of independence and adventure in what was ultimately a highly-controlled circulation system. Patin’s essay on the “ruins” of Chaco Culture National Historical Park provides an enlightening discussion on the museological rhetoric of presentation and reveals why the ruins are continually stabilized and reinforced – just as visitors’ preconceptions and mythologies of Chaco civilization are similarly stabilized and reinforced.

Several of essays explore the legacy of visual rhetoric present in imagery from and about the national parks. Geographer Gareth John implicates Thomas Moran’s sweeping and detailed landscapes of Yellowstone and the photographs of William Henry Jackson as being “formative of what Yellowstone would become and, in part, how it would be understood thereafter” (p. 141). These grand images were utilized by boosters and provided examples of the sublime, powerful, and nationalistic qualities of a post-Civil War America connected by a transcontinental railroad. Teresa Bergman analyzed the effect of patriotic rhetoric presented three orientation films shown at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. She suggests that each of these films naturalize cultural trends in the monument. Themes of heroic endeavors and American exceptionalism run through the first and third film and are representative of early Cold War and Reagan-era sentiment. The second film is subdued in tone and content; Bergman ties this to the doubts and confusion of the Vietnam era. Mark Neumann treats the reader to an interesting discussion on how popular spectacles at the Grand Canyon – most notably attempts to jump the Canyon in cars, skateboards, and motorcycles – served as performances that at once resisted and also reinforced pre-defined rhetoric surrounding Grand Canyon.
Though only one of the book contributors is a geographer, historical geographers will find much worth in Observation Points. Patin and company provide a strong and usable theoretical lens to examine landscape creation and function. It is an approachable volume well-suited for upper division and graduate courses. Furthermore, it is a useful guide for students of public lands, American studies, and landscape.

Matthew Fockler
Augustana College


Sylvia Sumira’s illustrated book of the history of (mostly Western) globes will delight both academic geographers and map enthusiasts, with page after page of glossy images drawn largely from the British Library maps collection. But beyond the beautiful pictures and close-ups of cartographic detail, this book is also an excellent jumping-off point for thinking about the materiality of geographic representations of space and how geographic history operates as public history. To do this, the author illuminates the materiality of globes, their role in developing and reflecting technologies of navigation, and how they changed as material expressions of power over time.

Foremost, Sumira explores globes as physical objects, and offers readers a rich vocabulary for describing their physicality. The unfamiliar words, compiled in a glossary, include the language of craftsmanship as well as globe-reading, and compel us to imagine the extent to which people’s sense of geographical location and located-ness was once accompanied by analog instruments of calculation. For instance, the majority of the globes that the author presents in the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries were made in pairs: the terrestrial globe, with which we remain familiar today, had a—now long lost—counterpart in the celestial globe, for which the user “must imagine the earth at the centre of the sphere and the viewer beyond the heavens, looking down at the universe” (p. 17). These coupled spheres situated the viewer not only in the place where she stood on Earth, but also among the heavens, which were long considered a much more central part of people’s everyday experiences. These paired globes were as common in the standard mounted variety as they were in the many “pocket globes” shown throughout the book, in which the case was lined with images of the constellations, in their various forms.

Yet the details of globe production and use over time are not mere ‘factoids,’ but a source of insight into the work that globes have done in the world over time. As the author points out, for much of its history the “globe which turned in a stand and rotated about its own axis did not represent the rotation of the earth; rather, it allowed computations to be made relating to time and seasonal change. The user could discover, for example, when the sun rises at a particular time of the year, at a given latitude, which was important in daily life” (p. 20).

The author also tells us a great deal about the history of globe production. Most globes are made by first printing a series of gores—citrus peel-shaped pieces of paper with map images printed on them—which are mounted on a sphere made of paper, cardboard, wood and/or plaster. This technology of printing and mounting arose with the printing press and was improved with various advances in engraving, from wood block to copper plate intaglio to color lithography, that occurred in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. While we generally think about the printing press advancing the mass production of books and book literacy, the ability to print maps and globes similarly had a tremendous effect on geographical literacy.
In addition to the vocabulary of the globe as object, Globes offers a discussion of the marks and lines central to understanding navigation. An example of these is rhumb lines or loxodromes, first found on Mercator’s 1541 globe, in which they emanate from 32 points on the globe, these are “lines of constant bearing by which sailors could navigate to their destination. Each rhumb line cuts all meridians at the same angle, so on a globe it gently spirals toward the poles” (p. 54). The vocabulary for thinking about the Earth in these terms helps the uninitiated reader begin to imagine what elements of wayfinding were important to a sailor and how he thought about the physical shape of the planet as he moved across it. The inverse of this is that Sumira also guides us through detailed changes in how globes represent space, as different European explorers’ voyages made the maps of the contours of landforms more accurate, and their names became etched—both figuratively and literally—into the contours of the globe.

This leads us to power—the final word of this book’s title. The subtle but widely distributed changes in globe printing provide an excellent place to begin a discussion among students of geography about the role of the map in systems of imperialism and conquest. These include the funding of explorer missions by monarchs and corporations; the changes in technologies for printing the gores that make up the skin of the globes; the distribution of globes by printing companies; and the change in status of these objects in maintaining empire — from an object of political prestige to an object of classroom learning. In each of these ways, the globes in this book demonstrate the small ways in which cultures of representation change, and change us with them.

In turn, seeing the evolution of these objects might help us understand what role the navigational tools of our own time play in our everyday lives. While globes were designed to be useful, their purpose as objects of beauty and status cannot be underestimated. Like the one-time set of Worldbooks or even the humble bookshelf, globes have long been a prized symbol of learned people and their literal worldliness. Thus, being able to see the material change over time in how people conceived of the spaces of planet Earth may give the reader some ability to analyze—or at least see the complexity—of a world reigned over by digital maps, and new kinds of empire.

Naomi Adiv
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Having spent many summers of my youth in Colorado’s San Juan mountains, published my own research on the proliferation of exurbia in the state’s Front Range, and made additional travels to Arizona, Utah, New Mexico and various cities within the region, I have become quite familiar with the American West’s landscapes. Thus, it was with great anticipation that I received William Wyckoff’s How to Read the American West: A Field Guide and I will not hide my fandom of this book. I initially believed that the term “field guide” in the title would be more metaphoric in its use. It is, and it is not. Take your favorite wildlife guide for birds or mammals and turn it into a how-to book about reading the cultural and natural landscapes of a particular region, and that is what Wyckoff has accomplished here. The text is clear, descriptive, and appropriately analytical for a wide audience, thus making it equally useful in the classroom. The full color pictures are gorgeous. Wyckoff’s scholarly experience, along with his skills behind both the keyboard and the lens, is on display here.
Despite the compliments owed to the book’s meat-and-potatoes investigation of the West, the first major chapter, “Navigating Western Landscapes” perhaps steals the show as a how-to about reading the cultural landscape. Though the chapter is logically directed towards the book’s American West focus, you could apply this guide to nearly any region of North America with few tweaks. It is a primer for human geography that deftly uses both traditional and more modern (read: critical) analytical methods, referencing the works of scholars ranging from Carl Sauer, Wilbur Zelinsky, and Donald Meinig, to Don Mitchell, Steven Pile, and Nigel Thrift.

Also in the front matter is a spot-on foreword by environmental historian William Cronon, who also serves as editor of the Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books series at the University of Washington Press, within which this book is published. Cronon of course praises Wyckoff’s efforts while also displaying his own love of landscape assessment. In doing so he reminds us that scholars and non-scholars of all types and abilities appreciate the very same places and landscapes that we do as geographers. Wyckoff follows through on this promise with the book’s focus: a topic-by-topic exploration of half of the United States, one which only a scholar native to the region could accomplish with such precision.

How to Read the American West is divided into eight sections, I suppose you could call them chapters, covering themes ranging from “Nature’s Fundament” to “Landscapes of Extraction” to “Playgrounds.” Essays start each section and provide a greater historical and national-scale context to the theme being explored. With a bit of expansion, these essays alone would be worthy of their own guide on the geographies of the American West.

The centerpiece of the book, however, is the collection of 100 topical profiles—on topics such as sagebrush, bypassed highways, farmworker settlements, and Spanish colonial revival architecture—covered within each of the eight sections and ranging from two to six pages. Within these topics reside weighty empirical evidence, specific case studies of places, and a lion’s share of Wyckoff’s photography. Flipping pages from one topic to another is easy, and even encouraged by Wyckoff, Cronon, and myself.

There are two potential criticisms one could have with this book. Firstly, its breadth prevents it from having a unifying message or theme, other than the cultural, environmental, and economic diversity of this region, which is a perfectly valid focus considering the book’s goal. But Wyckoff leaves us without any concluding statement that wraps up and binds the pressing topics that this books presents. (Drought and agricultural labor are just two.) Consequently, there is no discussion of how geographers or others with the ability to read the landscape can help bring about a better sense of environmental and social justice in this region, that in many ways is coming to a tipping point.

Second is this book’s definition of where the American West exists. It is unfortunate that the portion of the eastern Great Plains in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, are not included in this analysis. It would not require many additional case studies, but would treat the Plains in a more holistic way. It would have required more travel and photography for Wyckoff. But, as we all know, spatial phenomena of any type—cultural or natural—have little regard for political boundaries. For example, seeing the Permian Basin oil field in New Mexico stop suddenly at that state’s border with Texas (p. 155) is odd at best and misleading at worst. However, having covered this question before in my own classroom—Where are the Great Plains?—I appreciate that trying to explain that eastern line of division can become a fool’s errand. (The 20-inch isohyet? 100 degrees West? 98 degrees West?) For a book of this type that maintains a streamlined organization which allows the empirical information to take flight, getting bogged down in such a rhetorical debate would likely be worse than excluding the eastern plains. C’est la vie.
As for purpose, and to conclude, this book is clearly directed toward a general audience. However this would also make the perfect textbook to accompany a series of academic articles in a class about the American West. In fact, this book, in addition to my affinity for the region, makes me want to teach a course on the region. Any book that can do that certainly belongs on the shelf of any scholar, amateur or professional, with interests in the western half of this country.

Chris W. Post
Kent State University


This book is an exciting addition to the literature on the modernization of world cities. It investigates Izmir by privileging the space and spatial relationships of this multicultural port. To achieve such a privileging is no easy task, but Zandi-Sayek convincingly exposes the highly complex processes of urban change and development that were at work in Izmir during an era when cities around the world were engaged in similar modernization projects.

Situated in western Anatolia on the Mediterranean Sea, Izmir had long been a key trading city. After the Crimean War (1853-1856), a combination of Ottoman decline and competitive European advances effectively brought the Ottoman empire into the Western system of nation-states. Izmir, suddenly at the center of these global dynamics, witnessed a doubling of its multiethnic, multinational population and its volume of trade. As a focal point of rapid change, Izmir lends itself well to an exploration of how local and state responses to new pressures played out in the city’s physical spaces.

The overarching story presented here confirms that the Ottoman government tactically standardized what had been a pluralistic and permeable set of laws and practices in order to integrate more fully with the emerging order of nation-states and the global economy. Yet the details reveal how the fluid identity politics and negotiated power of a multitude of interests were inherently part and parcel of the city itself. The process of modernization was manifest in Izmir’s real estate, streets, waterfront, and architecture. By fixing each chapter directly to this built environment, Zandi-Sayek is able to demonstrate how the city’s form both reflected and shaped Ottoman society and politics.

Chapters are arranged topically and might be read as a series of independent studies rather than a single narrative that builds from one moment to another. But what Zandi-Sayek gives up in chronological flow she gains in spatial framing and thematic continuity. She is also able, then, to emphasize the fluid and contingent nature of historical change. Additionally, the large number of maps and photos of the city help the reader to visualize the spatial dynamics of nineteenth-century Izmir.

Each chapter focuses on one characteristic of the city to reveal the tangled set of local, national, and international circumstances that influenced the everyday identities and practices of various stakeholders. Broader tensions between belonging and exclusion, the public good and private rights, secular and religious authority, as well as institutionalized power and fluctuating allegiances, constitute some of the major themes that run through the book.

Chapter one deftly locates questions of citizenship within the physical world of real estate. Using sources like court cases, legislation, consular reports, and newspapers, Zandi-Sayek examines property ownership, land use, and taxation to assess how the city was modernized.
She highlights the mixed judicial system (where older Islamic courts operated alongside newer secular ones and foreign consular courts) to demonstrate ways that those with vested interests (including Ottoman subjects, foreigners, and bureaucrats) used property as a means to negotiate their rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Since identities remained ill-defined and malleable at this juncture, the author is able to connect the ambiguous parameters of national sovereignty and citizenship to Izmir’s evolving urban form.

Chapter two encompasses the same four-decade temporal range but maps Izmir at a larger scale to focus on the streets that made up the city’s main corridors and public spaces. Here Zandi-Sayek provides a corporeal sense of Izmir’s sights, sounds, smells, and dangers. The rapid increase in population and commercial activity at midcentury prompted greater scrutiny of city streets. Flooding, disease, sewage, street lights, crime, and traffic flow were urgent problems that focused attention on the need to improve municipal infrastructure and management. As the author intends, this multifaceted account transcends a simple dichotomizing of tradition and modernity or Islamic and Western practices (p. 111). Instead, she follows a sinuous path through ethnic, religious, and economic divisions to reveal how public spaces created and reflected political interests as increasingly rationalized governing bodies were established.

The building of a modern waterfront, which was not universally perceived as a desirable endeavor, is the main subject of the third chapter. In all stages of the Quay Project, competing perceptions over what constituted the public good animated a succession of compromises as this prime section of the city was re-spatialized. Delineating the various groups involved—foreign companies, the Ministry of Public Works, local merchants, and property owners—and the concerns of each, which ranged from taxation and property rights to public health and monetary gain, exposes the politics of place and place-making as these competing interests shaped the structure and priorities of urban reform.

The fourth chapter centers on the Catholic Church’s 1842 Corpus Christi procession through Izmir. Here the author elucidates how pageantry and ritual mobilized ordinary citizens and elite decision makers to accommodate diverse needs, even if only temporarily. By analyzing the route of the procession in relation to key landmarks as well as the spatial choreography of participants and spectators, Zandi-Sayek shows the extraordinary diligence planners paid to social and political hierarchies. Importantly, she makes plain that such public spectacles were “space contingent” (p. 153), meaning that one’s understanding and remembrance of such events cannot be divorced from the physical locations in which they were experienced.

By keeping the evolving form of the city at the forefront of the discussion, *Ottoman Izmir* demonstrates the mutually constitutive nature of physical space and everyday life—whether the latter is framed in terms of legal plurality, political contention, or social accommodation. Zandi-Sayek’s methodological strategy also successfully positions Izmir for comparison to other modernizing cities. In thinking about other sites also experiencing uneven processes of global integration where such comparison would prove useful, the port cities of China and Japan immediately come to mind.

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