Migrants of the British Diaspora Since the 1960s. Stories From Modern Nomads

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After Emigrant gentlewomen: Genteel poverty and female emigration, 1830-1914, Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life, and *Ten Pound Poms: A life history of British postwar emigration to Australia* with Alistair Thomson, A. James Hammerton revisits post-war Britain's diaspora through the prism of oral history in *Migrants of the British Diaspora since the 1960s: Stories from Modern Nomads*. This focus on oral history was also present in *Speaking to Immigrants: Oral Testimony and the History of Australian Immigration*, edited with Eric Richards in 2002.⁽¹⁾

The British diaspora is still one of the largest in the world with about 6.5 per cent of its population living overseas in according to figures from 2010–11, the result of decades of continuing settlement abroad rather than a recent development. Hammerton thus offers a compelling and highly timely study of what he terms the 'modern drive to emigrate'. His book includes a wide variety of themes that have left an imprint on British society and marked the post-war period, such as the ethnic relations with the Windrush generation, the swinging sixties, and decolonization, among others. Based on 121 interviews (from 200 original contributors) including 14 couples, thus amounting to 135 interviewees' stories, these testimonies are blended in naturally with acute analyses of post-war British migration and social history.

Mass travel, the democratization of mobility, and 'serial migration practices' have marked the second half of the 20th century, as modern global conditions have given birth to generations of nomadic migrants attracted by the spirit of adventure a life of mobility offered them. Backpackers and return migrants, also called 'boomerang migrants' by Australians, have been important features of these continuing patterns of mobility as they contributed to consolidate transnational bonds that encouraged the development of chain migration. More importantly, English being a global language was an undeniable facilitator in the British post-war diaspora. These motivations also blend in with more traditional migration patterns such as labour and family-oriented migration. Modern serial migrants were eager to see the world and sometimes became what the author calls 'citizens of the world', thus emphasizing newly-acquired international identities, homeland orientations blending in with global aspirations. Yet these modern migration practices may also introduce identity fractures and sometimes alienation from the homeland, or even identity crises when national identities erode under the influence of travels.

Hammerton thus brings in a fresh perspective to migration studies by revealing his interviewees' personal motives, as well as environmental ones, often linked to structural changes in British society. This is a clear example of history from below, the migrants' voices representing the cornerstone of the book. As the author discusses, a criticism of oral history has been that the interviewees' potential interpretation and reconstruction of past evidence may hinder the historian's research. This, as he convincingly argues, can be avoided by setting testimonies in the background of the historical events that marked the period, which is exactly the objective of this monograph on post-war British migration.

The book is divided into two parts, comprising four chapters each. One part is chronological and reveals the decadal evolution of migration patterns after the Second World War, while part two is thematic and encompasses themes such as career, family, lifestyle migration and environmental issues. The first chapter is devoted to the pioneers who migrated right after the war, mostly in search of a better life and self-improvement. These migrants were also eager to live a life of adventure and thus paved the way for more modern migration patterns. Some migrants expected to leave post-war Britain, reconstruction and austerity, but they were also keen to seize the opportunities offered overseas and they took advantage of the growing transformation of travel as a new consumer commodity. This study reveals the wider variety of migration processes and strategies that were opening up to British people after the war, with return and re-migration being more accessible than ever, thus initiating patterns of serial migration and introducing new migrant habits of continuing mobility. These were indeed facilitated by the consolidation of transnational networks and connections throughout the English-speaking world as well as continuing chain migration patterns. British migration was then no longer austerity mobility, but the adventure theme did prevail.

The shadow of the British Empire and decolonisation looms in the post-war period, necessitating an assessment of non-white migration in this book. Indeed, if old imperial images, as well as fantasies and tales about the British world abroad acted as pull factors to the British diaspora, the virtues of life in the motherland also brought Commonwealth migrants to Britain. This influx of migrants, symbolically remembered by the arrival of the Windrush in 1948, led to xenophobic reactions and racial conflicts, which in some cases acted as push factors in the decision to migrate. Hammerton's interviews reveal that some working-class migrants left to escape multi-racial environments in Britain in the 1970s, although they are somewhat reluctant to admit it. Yet the decade was also marked by family mobility and increasing career opportunities. According to Hammerton, the 1970s constituted a transition between post-war austerity migration and modern patterns of mobility. At the end of the 1970s, British migrants also had to abide by mobility restrictions imposed on Commonwealth migration and emigration figures temporarily dropped.

The author also explores migration during the Thatcher years, with some interviewees admitting that their decision to leave was prompted by austerity, rising unemployment, and the changes introduced by the Thatcher government in the 1980s. These motivations easily recall the post-war austerity mobility period. This led to a generation of self-described 'Thatcher's refugees' whose motivations to migrate were generally political, grounded on revulsion for the regime and ideological hostility to the Conservative government's

restructuration of the country. Indeed, Thatcher's nomination as Prime Minister in 1979 marked the end of the post-war consensus, the beginning of large-scale privatisation programmes, the closing down of unprofitable industries and a focus on economic growth rather than social reforms, which was both resented and acclaimed in Britain. Hammerton thus describes a more professional, managerial or tertiary-educated (10.8 per cent of British migrants in 2000–7) urban and politically-conscious middle-class migrant population from the 1980s. The Thatcher regime was of course only one side of the story, and decisions to migrate were also prompted by ambition, self-improvement and sometimes consumerism. Hammerton notes that the late 1980s migration required more planning and was less impulsive because career and educational demands mattered more. Migration often went along with qualification seeking.

The author questions the birth of cosmopolitanism in the closing years of the 20th century. Indeed, the 1990s experienced a surge in migrant outflow of self-identified 'citizens of the world' whose identity bore the mark of transnationalism. The decade also witnessed the growth of consumerism and globalisation, which shifted the range of migrants' motivations at the end of the 20th century. Short and longer-term aspirations were regularly defined by the desire to get an education abroad, and thus make migration worthwhile. Above patriotism and national belonging, serial migrants' identities were generally shaped by cosmopolitanism and the ideal of global citizenship.

The second part of this book starts with a chapter on careers and skilled migrants. Indeed, the desires for new lifestyles, adventure and global experiences, as well as dissatisfaction with Britain's social and political condition often justified serial migrants' restlessness and quest for global identities. Yet Hammerton contends that rising opportunity and the quest for financial security were the major motivations of these modern migrants. Disillusion with trade and industrial relations, notably during the Thatcher years, led some to seek career advancement elsewhere. Some serial migrants took advantage of the developed countries' economic expansion as a 'passport to greater career success', especially when receiving countries encouraged skilled and professional in-migration. As a matter of fact, academic employment, just like multinational corporations, offered such opportunities of mobility and career advancement through migration. Prompted by both cooperation and competition between universities, student and academic mobility and circulation were indeed boosted by the expansion of higher education in the last decades of the 20th century, thus contributing to the development of multiculturalism in the welcoming institutions.

The career theme is regularly interwoven with family migration patterns, and as divorce rates rose from the 1960s, family relationships, dysfunctions and marriages have shaped serial migrants' experiences. 'Emigration for love', as Hammerton puts it, introduces a strong emotional motive to migration narratives. Starting with divorce and family separation, the hardships undergone by divided family members when one parent migrates raise the issue of adjustment to new environments as well as modern family and social structures. In their wide diversity, migration stories are complex. They may escape the trope of misery and binary oppositions between drama and happiness, though the family migration theme is always charged with emotion. These testimonies show that migration may become a challenge in disrupted families, but it can also bring closeness. Migration for love has become a motivation even if migrant lovers sometimes face the emotional struggle between homesickness and closeness with the loved one. Interestingly, women seem to have been more visible in this migration pattern. Private life, often combined with economic motivations, gave birth to what Hammerton calls 'the new age of discretionary migration'.

Intrinsically linked to family migration is lifestyle migration, which includes motivating factors such as weather preoccupation – as in the case of Australia for instance – or anti-urbanism. Whether driven by the need to break away from gloomy prospects at home, political aspirations, family concerns or career opportunities, mobility undeniably transforms migrants' lifestyles. This has been a major motivation for some migrants, as in the case of retirement migration. The 'grey nomads', as Hammerton calls them, are serial migrants with prosperous retirement incomes willing to engage in exciting travel adventures and restless mobility, opportunities for which are regularly offered by the tourism industry. Some even choose lives of permanent itinerancy against sedentary options. The interviews of lifestyle migrants generally reveal the need to retreat from urban life and retire away from the stresses of the city. Yet, this migration pattern

regularly comes second following first a change of country, when migrants already exposed to international mobility decide to settle away from urban life in small towns and rural environments, and thus may adopt the welcoming country as their own. These lifestyle ambitions are often environmentally-based and mainly carried out by prosperous migrants attracted by a country experience and alternative lifestyles. These testimonies account for emerging trends in modern migration.

The book concludes on an assessment of continuity and change in British migration patterns, accounting for rising awareness of cosmopolitanism and the power of migration to shape identities. Stemming from post-war austerity mobility, Hammerton's study of the British diaspora shows that migrants' have experienced greater freedom through rising prosperity and have been motivated by increasing economic as well as career opportunities abroad, the potential of transformed lifestyles as well as quests for love. Undeniably, migration patterns have evolved with the development of serial migration. For instance, a recent change in destination can be identified with continental Europe attracting more and more British migrants, when Commonwealth destinations used to be the first choice of destination. This trend has opened up new perspectives of integration and bilingualism in non-English speaking territories. Yet, continuities can be located as one-way migration remains the most developed model, and lifestyle migration may be linked to earlier drives for a better climate and backpacking experiences. Re-migration is not new either, but this tendency has undeniably been eased by technological advances. Another remarkable evolution concerns female migration, which has been facilitated by changes in family relationships, education and career opportunities. Women have increasingly endorsed migrant identities, and have become more visible. Although ties with national identities have loosened up, homesickness remains a central theme. *Migrants of the British Diaspora since the 1960s* ends with a note on migrants of colour within the British diaspora, with the case study of Anglo-Indian migrants whose racial identity was often affected by cultural divide, alienation and identity fracture, sometimes resolved by experiences of global migration.

Drawing on an impressive and compelling body of primary sources, Hammerton's most important contribution is the unveiling of new trends of migration with the emergence of transnational 'citizens of the world' who make the choice for globalised identities that transcend traditional national boundaries. The interviewees were indeed selected to represent a wide variety of life migration experiences. The author thus invalidates criticisms of oral history by bringing to the fore the essential quality of migrant memory and individualised reflexions on migration experiences. The plurality of case studies and analyses masterfully challenges long-held pessimistic assumptions on migration that generate binary oppositions between forced and voluntary migration. Hammerton thus shows that there is a measure of individual volition and of coercive force in all migratory movements. These stories recall the personal experiences of all those who have migrated, and thus skilfully creates a sense of intimacy with these modern nomads.

Notes

1. A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel poverty and Female Emigration, 1830–1914* (London, 1979, republished 2016); A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life* (London, 1992); A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms: A Life History of British Postwar Emigration to Australia* (Manchester, 2005); *Speaking to Immigrants: Oral Testimony and the History of Australian Immigration*, ed. A. James Hammerton and Eric Richards (Canberra, 2002). [Back to \(1\)](#)

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