How British was the British Empire? How German was it? Or, to put it in less politically volatile terms, to what extent and in what sense was the colonial structure built up and controlled by England/Britain a shared European undertaking? Setting the indigenous populations aside, it is obvious that with individuals and groups from all over Europe as well as other parts of the world in a more or less constant flow of migration and transmigration, colonialism was more than just the relationship between one ‘metropolis’ and the periphery on which it acted. How did migrants from different countries and backgrounds act and connect? How and why did they introduce or influence what was at work in various geographical settings over two centuries? This is the issue at the heart of this collection of essays, which singles out the German minority and their relevance for British imperialism. The more recent concepts of networking and transnational entanglements offer an inroad into the as yet largely uncharted territory of the role played by non-British subjects within the British Empire.

To explore empire as a multifaceted, multicultural, multidimensional undertaking, a process of interaction and exchange of individuals rooted in diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, is not new. Nevertheless, interactions between individuals, groups, and institutions beyond national or cultural boundaries, the effects of stage migration and seeing an empire work, and the repercussions of these on more than one metropolis have not yet been studied systematically. This is surprising in the light of the fundamental nature of colonialism and the function of empire, especially the British Empire, as a facilitator of migration, which is, after all, the basis of all—direct—interaction and exchange. It is this shortcoming that this collection of essays on networks and entanglements, a follow-up to an earlier volume by the same group of authors on migration, seeks to redress.

In fact, the eight case studies aim high. Their intention is to show ‘the contribution of immigrants to making the Empire work’ and, in so doing, to ‘shed new light on the dynamics which made Britain a world power’ (p. 5). It is always difficult to create a narrative out of a
few case studies, even more so in the case of a group of actors whose numbers might have been ‘substantial’ (p. 17), a rather vague description, but whose relevance can only be properly assessed in light of a similar evaluation of contributions by other groups. A more modest goal is to offer a ‘repository of information and argument calling into question preconceived notions’ (p. 17). It is more easily achieved since by looking at the activities of non-British individuals within the British Empire each essay in itself succeeds in exposing the diversity of backgrounds, motives, and actions of those involved. It is in showing how these factors were interlinked and affected the already heterogeneous expansion process that the essays come into their own. However, the articles vary in respect to the depth of entanglement they present.

Germans moved to the British Empire and within it for various reasons. The main one was the economic motive or pull factor of an Empire providing the infrastructure for trade or jobs inaccessible to inhabitants of city-states, princedoms, duchies, or kingdoms on the European Continent without possessions overseas. Four essays in this collection focus on the Germans who migrated to the British Empire and transmigrated within it primarily for economic reasons. One of them describes four types of merchants emerging from the business activities of German-speaking migrants in the eighteenth century: investors in land developments and settlement projects and entrepreneurs enticing German craftsmen from the iron- and glass-making trades to transplant their trade and knowledge to workshops across the Atlantic. They assumed the role of transatlantic travellers or ‘newlanders’, whose more or less regular journeys established a specific kind of link. Or, like the Herrnhuter (Moravians), they acted as Protestant businessmen, using their denominational ties for commercial networking. Individuals of these four types played an interesting part in bringing the Atlantic world closer together, creating ties not only between German-speaking countries and Britain and its overseas colonies, but also between these and other colonial powers, such as Spain, France, the Netherlands, and their possessions. The essay identifies these groups and indicates the great variety of their activities and the existence of a lively transfer. What is absent, however, is the actual transfer, the entanglement beyond the fact of individuals or goods moving to, and perhaps from, the British Empire. The same applies to the overview of the commercial activities of
German merchants in the transatlantic textile, tobacco, and fur trades. The immediate influence of networks becomes more tangible in the biographies of chain migrants who moved to London as sugarbakers and ended up as farmers in New Zealand, and in the collective biography of five immigration agents in Canada, who wanted to promote German immigration to the country. Even here, however, one senses that there is much more to the story.

Two case studies are based on just one individual, a potentially easier approach to the workings of transnational networks in practice. Both individuals left their mark on Britain and the Empire as knowledge-producers, that is, as a scientist and explorer respectively. One deals with Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig Leichhardt, the Prussian explorer who went to Australia, and his most cherished project, through transnational networks of scientists. His greatest ambition was to cross the Australian continent from east to west. His expeditions to achieve this goal and their media resonance have made him a prominent figure in the Australian collective memory to the present day. The essay unexpectedly devotes a great deal of space to Leichhardt’s reception in the twentieth century, for example, in Patrick White’s novel *Voss*. The other case study is of Friedrich Max Müller, German philologist and Professor of Modern Languages at Oxford, who went a long way in raising the appreciation of ancient Indian culture in Britain, Europe, and America. The embodiment of the stereotypical absent-minded, metaphysical German professor, he advanced to the position of a full professor at Oxford through the mediation of the Prussian Ambassador to London, Baron von Bunsen, another key promoter of Anglo-German intellectual entanglement. As well as Müller’s contribution and postcolonial criticism of his idealized description of Indian culture, it would have been interesting to learn about how contemporaries received his ideas, to what extent they actually integrated his teachings into their own views, or how and why they modified them.

Two more essays address potential links between British and German imperialism. In the context of the impact of transatlantic networks, it is highly relevant to investigate how the experiences of Germans in Britain and the British Empire in the nineteenth century might have impinged upon the development of a specifically German type of expansionism. The cursory glance at the Central League for German Navy Clubs Abroad that carried tensions
between Britain and Germany overseas, and the overview of interests of Germans in Britain in the mid nineteenth century both only offer the basic facts of this story. A total of 30,000 Germans in London and Liverpool were strongly influenced by transmigration. How exactly? Germans in Anglo-German business partnerships adapted to British patterns to facilitate business. How did they achieve and assess the steps they took to blend in? Explorers such as Heinrich Barth and August Petermann provided expertise useful for British expansionism. Did the British undertaking acquire new facets in the process or was knowledge free of bias—which, as the sociology of science tells us, it is not? Both essays and the overviews they offer demonstrate once again that ‘refer only to the vaguely defined category of the network’ does not suffice. Nor does a mere glance at ‘the large variety of forms of interactions and adaptation’ (p. 78). These forms deserve systematic and in-depth analysis.

The activities of migrants in the British Empire and beyond were indeed multifarious. So were the links, transfers, and levels of entanglement created in the process. The essays take an important first step in pointing this out. Very often, though, they do not go further than stating ways in which Germans appeared within the context of expansionism. Since this has not yet been done systematically, this first step is to be welcomed and appreciated. But more is to follow, very likely in a larger and considerably more comprehensive study that will focus less on migration itself than on its effects, transnational interactions, and exchanges at the level of values, assessments, ideas, and mentalities. Then we may be closer to finding an answer to the question of the Britishness or Europeanness of the British Empire.

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