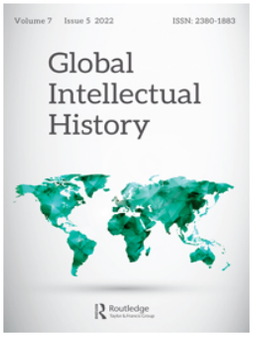

Global Intellectual History

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rgih20

Humanity on the move in the era of Enlightenment and colonisation

Bruce Buchan, Linda Andersson Burnett & Ingeborg Høvik

To cite this article: Bruce Buchan, Linda Andersson Burnett & Ingeborg Høvik (2022): Humanity on the move in the era of Enlightenment and colonisation, Global Intellectual History, DOI: 10.1080/23801883.2022.2074500

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2022.2074500

Published online: 14 Jun 2022.

GLOBAL INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2022.2074500

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

HUMANITY ON THE MOVE IN THE ERA OF COLONISATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Humanity on the move in the era of Enlightenment and colonisation

Bruce Buchan [a], Linda Andersson Burnett [b] and Ingeborg Høvik [c]

[a]School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia; [b]Department of History of Science, Ideas Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden; [c]Department of Language and Culture, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway

KEYWORDS Historians; colonial; transformed; communicated

> In modern times, since commerce is so much extended, that people in very distant parts of the world, have an almost constant communication with one another, we have much better access to know the different circumstances which can affect men in different situations … [and] has produced a very considerable effect in enlarging our ideas on this subject.
>
> James Buchan, 'Whether Moral and Physical Causes are Sufficient to Account for the Varieties which Occur in the Human Species', (1790–1791): 303.

In recent years intellectual historians have expanded the purview of Enlightenment scholarship by exploring the global, oceanic, and colonial spaces in which European ideas were applied, communicated, and transformed. The current special issue contributes to this development by considering the dimensions of mobility across the era as fruitful sources for the study of intellectual transformation. Study of mobility has become a hallmark of recent scholarship across the humanities and social sciences. Following Sheller and Urry's critique of the 'sedentarist' failure to analyse the shaping of modernity by increased mobility of people, finance, and goods, the 'new mobilities paradigm' has drawn greater attention to the spatial dimensions of the unprecedented scale of human mobility unleashed by globalisation, environmental degradation, and forced displacement.[1] While these studies have sought to uncover the world-shaping effects of mobility in our own age, world historians were pioneers in uncovering the multiple passages of human mobility in shaping earlier perceptions of a world of persistent movement and change.[2] In recent decades, this scholarship has been decisively shaped by the rapid growth in studies of global history, colonisation and empire, and the related development of oceanic perspectives from the Atlantic to the Pacific.[3] This scholarship has drawn attention to the vast range of mobilities unleashed in Europe's era of empire-building in the eighteenth century, from voluntary migration, to the compulsions involved in trade and warfare, the transportation of convicts, the coerced and violent removal of settler and Indigenous populations, to the 'radical mobility' of the slave

CONTACT Bruce Buchan b.buchan@griffith.edu.au

trade, forced migration, exile and the search for refuge.[4] The intellectual consequences of what has recently been called the 'deployment of population as a tool of empire' by European states throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were by no means straightforward.[5] After a relatively slow start, over the last decade intellectual historians have sought to engage with this scholarship very actively by illustrating how and why the mobility of groups and individuals that came into contact, engaged with, or confronted one another in the course of colonial travel, commerce, and warfare, became a catalyst for intellectual development.[6] Yet, uncertainty persists on precisely how to conceptualise the global movement of ideas, especially in regard to the era of Enlightenment and European empire-building between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

Until comparatively recently, intellectual histories of Enlightenment reflected a model of knowledge diffusion from Europe outward.[7] The idea of Enlightened knowledge diffusion may be described as among those 'worn-out inheritances' that Jim Secord called upon historians of science to leave behind.[8] Secord's influential essay 'Knowledge in Transit' published in *Isis* (2004) posed the problem that intellectual historians have been grappling with ever since of how to conceptualise the geographical spaces in which interactions between speakers, thinkers, translators, and brokers of information took place, without reverting to a 'parochial antiquarianism' that localises and limits knowledge formation.[9] In recent years intellectual historians have responded to that challenge by expanding the global scales of Enlightenment.[10] They have explored the ebbs and flows of knowledge across a much wider variety of locales and spatial domains, from oceanic crossings to colonial frontiers, in crowded classrooms and in fleeting encounters on distant shores.[11] In doing so, intellectual historians have successfully overcome the older models that prioritise Europe as the seat of knowledge, but they have struggled to make the movement of knowledge through different global locations and scales visible. Some scholars have focussed on the transmission and consolidation of knowledge in 'centres of calculation'.[12] Others have traced the formation of scientific authority through epistolary and patronage networks, while related studies have explored the materiality of knowledge formation across the globe.[13] Among the most influential models currently employed by intellectual historians centres on the circulation of ideas and texts between a much wider variety of interlocutors involved in a variety of roles in commerce, missions, and warfare mobilised by empire and colonisation.[14]

By broadening their focus beyond the origin of knowledge to its communication and translation, processes of knowledge-formation beyond moments of publication come into view. This includes the work of historians of science and historical geographers in exploring 'geographies of knowledge' that demonstrate 'knowledge is not the same everywhere … something which floats above the locative context in which it occurs, spreads and is received.'[15] This work has enabled intellectual history to be brought to bear more readily alongside art history, cross-cultural, colonial and postcolonial histories, and with the work of non-Western and First Nations scholars who have emphasised the uncertainties of colonial encounter and asymmetric opportunities for agency.[16] This emerging work has highlighted the materiality of intellectual encounter and exchange in texts, artefacts, and images that were produced and shared in global circuits of knowledge.[17] As the category of knowledge has expanded beyond published texts or schools of thought (which prioritised a Eurocentric view), to encompass images and artefacts, encounters and translations, as well as fictions and fabrications, intellectual

historians have become more responsive to the varied contexts of mobility underlying that expansion. Historians of science have been at the forefront of this innovative scholarship by showing how knowledge was shaped in communicative processes; from the planning of new work, to their transit across the globe, and to audience reception. Pratik Chakrabarti's scholarship on imperial medicine has, for example, shown that science was not simply diffused from European centres but was altered by movement and local translation.[18] Our aim in curating this special issue was to return to one of Secord's suggestions that we 'give interaction between agents a central role in epistemology.'[19] His objective was to urge greater attention to the ways in which knowledge is always mobile, transiting in speech or sign between agents who actively impart and imprint it in unexpected ways. By 'eradicating the distinction between the making and the communicating of knowledge' intellectual agency can be traced in a wider range of communicative interactions.

This special issue has been compiled to explore the intellectual history of Enlightenment beyond the self-conscious transmission of ideas and the seamless circulation of texts. Our terrain lies in the uncertainties and ambiguities inherent in the communicative settings entailed by mobilities of commerce and colonisation. As agents navigated the geographic and oceanic spaces encompassed by empires, their communicative possibilities were at different times opened up or constrained by cross-cultural tensions, gendered identities, and linguistic divides.[20] Mobile communicative encounters were by necessity tentative, halting, uneven, and fragmentary. Knowledge was not simply a triumph of singular meaning, but a patchwork of partial views, incomplete conclusions, or mistaken assertions that each became the substance of communication. Indeed, the communication made possible by mobility was routinely characterised not simply by a quest for understanding, but by the friction of defiance, contest, disgust, and ridicule.[21] Bronwen Douglas has read these moments of laughter or silence as 'Indigenous countersigns' that can be used to unbalance and contest colonial assumptions that knowledge was coextensive with colonial ambition.[22] Being attuned to these moments of friction means that intellectual history can incorporate study of both who has authority to narrate new lands or peoples, and the ranges of people excluded from communication, or trapped in their own circuits of enforced mobility, of removal or 'dispeopling' of lands brought about by slavery, colonial warfare, or dispossession.[23]

A key aim of our issue is to illustrate the ways in which European knowledge formation drew enslaved or First Nations peoples into circuits of communication. They were often important interlocutors, sometimes named but frequently not, whose status as brokers of information signified their own intellectual mobility in becoming conversant with different worlds of knowledge. The tension and ambivalence inherent in this encounter were characteristic of what Mary Louise Pratt called 'the contact zone', those uneasy spaces wherein non-Western, First Nations and enslaved peoples were able to influence European knowledge formation to varying degrees and in different ways.[24] Although it is crucial to study the agency of Indigenous and marginalised people in colonial encounters, it is equally important as Pratik Chakrabarty argues, not to romanticatise agency. He calls for scholars to investigate why colonised people 'were or became subaltern' in the first place in order not to erase unequal colonial power relations and the suffering they imposed.[25]

Our special issue brings together intellectual historians with specialisations in art history, colonial history, the history of medicine and science, and the history of political and economic ideas to consider how late Enlightenment perceptions of humanity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were framed by new forms of mobility.[26] We do not only mean the obvious kinds of mobility implied by physical movement through space (entailed by intensifying colonial travel and expanding global commerce), but along with it the often volatile trade and exchange of ideas, knowledge, artefacts, and images. The mobilities of colonisation and empire were often forced, and the communication that took place in these contexts was inscribed with violence, slavery or theft.[27]

Above all, our essays illuminate the manifold ways in which Enlightenment knowledge of humanity was inscribed by the physical and intellectual traces of mobility. The editors would like to express their gratitude to Professors Secord and Chakrabarti, whose work has contributed so incisively to the intellectual and scientific history of 'knowledge in transit', for contributing a foreword and afterword to this special issue. Following in their footsteps, our contributors explore some of the multiple dimensions of mobility in the period. This includes studies of the impact of mobility in the development of medical knowledge (Suman Seth), and the scientific and pseudo-scientific studies of race (Andrew Wells). Our contibutors grapple with the (im)mobility of people in the slave trade and slavery, as well as their escape from it (Charmaine Nelson), and assess how the medium of empire shaped the development of European knowledge by means of encounters between resident, Indigenous populations and European travellers (Ingeborg Høvik), and the circulation of both artefacts and texts (Linda Andersson Burnett). Other contributors trace the imprint of mobility in the right to colonise (Matthew Birchall), which was itself based in large part on Enlightenment presumptions that travelling across European empires and their colonies involved journeys in both space and time (Bruce Buchan). Together, our contributors illustrate how the perception of humanity bears the indelible imprint of multiple mobilities that remind us of the importance of empire, colonisation and slavery in shaping the intellectual history of Enlightenment.

Notes

1. Sheller, and Urry, "New Mobilities Paradigm," 2017–226; Faist, "The Mobility Turn," 1637–46; Merriman and Pearce, eds., *Mobility and the Humanities*.
2. See for example, Braudel, *The Mediterranean*. See also, Kelley, "Intellectual History in A Global Age," 155–67; Armitage, "The International Turn in Intellectual History," 232–52.
3. For instance, Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South*; Fullagar, *The Warrior, the Voyage*; Armitage and Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories*.
4. McCormick, *Human Empire*, 155; Jansen, "Aliens in a Revolutionary World". See also MacKillop, *Human Capital and Empire*.
5. Sussman, *Peopling the Earth*, 4.
6. For example, Lopez, "The Quest for the Global," 155–6; Haakonssen and Whatmore, "Global Possibilities", 18–29.
7. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
8. Secord. "Knowledge in Transit," 655.
9. Ibid, 656, 659. See also, Roberts, "Situating Science," 9–30.
10. Mayhew, and Withers, eds., *Geographies of Knowledge*.

11. Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique," 999–1027. By contrast, it has been argued, 'the global' dimension does not provide a context specific enough in which discrete repertoires of meaning and argument can be precisely located. The contexts studied by intellectual historians must thus be considered as spatially confined, matched by the narrowness of its typical choice of subjects for study – published texts. This approach to intellectual history has been extremely fruitful, but it treats its subject as an existential whole that tends to erase the fissures and fractures marking the seams of friction between communicators and translators. Intellectual history is thus imprinted with an implicit teleology that regards texts as finished products, allowing sources of influence to be traced in directional histories of development toward that finality. Pocock, "On the Unglobality of Contexts," 1–14.
12. Inspired by the work of Bruno Latour, such as *Science in Action*. See also, Cook "Closed Circles or Open Networks," 179–211; Findlen, ed., *Empires of Knowledge*.
13. For example, Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment*.
14. See for example, Markovits, Pouchepadass, & Subrahmanyam, eds., *Society and Circulation*; Raj, "Beyond Postcolonialism," 337–47. Romano, Kontler, Sebastiani, and Török, *Negotiating Knowledge*.
15. Mayhew, "Geography as the Eye of Enlightenment Historiography", 622.
16. Mar and Rhook, "Counter Networks of Empires,": doi:10.1353/cch.2018.0009; Fullagar and McDonnell eds., *Facing Empire*. See also, Lafont, "How Skin Colour Became a Racial Marker," 89–113.
17. See essays in: Nyberg, Hodacs, and Van Damme, eds., *System of Nature*.
18. Chakrabarti, *Western Science in Modern India* and *Medicine and Empire: 1600–1960*.
19. Secord, "Knowledge in Transit", 661 (the following quotation from this page also). See also, Schafer, Roberts and Raj, eds., *The Brokered World*.
20. Ballantyne and Burton, *Gender, Mobility and Intimacy*.
21. Tsing, *Friction*.
22. Douglas, "Philosophers, Naturalists, and Antipodean Encounters," 387–409.
23. Vartija, *The Color of Equality*; Seth, *Difference and Disease*; Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves*; Sussman, *Peopling the Earth*, 17.
24. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.
25. Chakrabarti, *Medicine and Empire*, xxviii. See also Seth, *Difference of Disease*, 12.
26. Buchan and Andersson Burnett, "Knowing Savagery," 115–34.
27. See for example: Delbourgo, "The Newtonian Slave Body," 185–207.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Linda Andersson Burnett and Bruce Buchan's work was supported by the Swedish Research Council under the grant 'Collecting Humanity: Prehistory, Race and Instructions for Scientific Travel, c. 1750–1850' [2019–03358] and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond for the Advancement of the Humanities and Social Sciences under the grant 'The Borders of Humanity: Linnaean Natural Historians and the Colonial Legacies of the Enlightenment' (P15–0423:1). Andersson Burnett's work was also supported by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation under the grant 'Early Citizen Science: How the Public Used Linnaean Instructions to Collect the World c. 1750–1850' [2019.0252]. Ingeborg Høvik's work was supported by the Research Council of Norway under the grant 'Arctic Voices in Art and Literature in the Long 19th Century' [301340].

ORCID

Bruce Buchan http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3984-5540
Linda Andersson Burnett http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9288-0954
Ingeborg Høvik http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3997-422X

Bibliography

Armitage, David. "The International Turn in Intellectual History." In *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, edited by D. M. McMahon, and S. Moyn, 232–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Armitage, David, and Bashford, Alison, eds. *Pacific Histories. Ocean, Land, People*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2014.

Ballantyne, Tony, and Antoinette Burton. *Gender, Mobility and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Belich, James. *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Braudel, F. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Translated by S. Reynolds. London: Harper Collins, 1972.

Buchan, James. "Whether Moral and Physical Causes are Sufficient to Account for the Varieties which Occur in the Human Species", Student Dissertation, *Royal Medical Society* (Edinburgh), 26 (1790–1791): 302–322.

Buchan, Bruce, and Linda Andersson Burnett. "Knowing Savagery: Australia and the Anatomy of Race." *History of the Human Sciences* 32, no. 4 (2019): 115–34.

Chakrabarti, Pratik. *Western Science in Modern India: Metropolitan Methods, Colonial Practices*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

Chakrabarti, Pratik. *Medicine and Empire: 1600–1960*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Conrad, Sebastian. "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique." *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 999–1027.

Delbourgo, James. "The Newtonian Slave Body: Racial Enlightenment in the Atlantic World." *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 185–207.

Douglas, Bronwen. "Philosophers, Naturalists, and Antipodean Encounters." *Intellectual History Review* 23, no. 3 (2013): 387–409.

Faist, T. "The Mobility Turn: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 11 (2013): 1637–46.

Findlen, Paula, ed. *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.

Fullagar, Kate. *The Warrior, the Voyager, and the Artist: Three Lives in an Age of Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Fullagar, Kate and McDonnell, Michael A., eds. *Facing Empire: Indigenous Experiences in a Revolutionary Age*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.

Gascoigne, John. *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment: Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994.

Haakonssen, K., and R. Whatmore. "Global Possibilities in Intellectual History: A Note on Practice." *Global Intellectual History* 2, no. 1 (2017): 18–29.

Jansen, Jan. "Aliens in a Revolutionary World: Refugees, Migration Control and Subjecthood in the British Atlantic, 1790's-1820's," *Past & Present*, 2021. Accessed March 19 2022. https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtab022.

Kelley, Donald R. "Intellectual History in A Global Age." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 2 (2005): 155–167.

Lafont, Anne. "How Skin Colour Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 89–113.

Latour, Bruno. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U.P., 1987.
Lopez, R. "The Quest for the Global: Remapping Intellectual History." *History of European Ideas* 42 (2016): 155–6.
Lux, David S., and Harold J Cook. "Closed Circles or Open Networks? Communicating at a Distance During the Scientific Revolution." *History of Science* 36 (1998): 179–211.
MacKillop, Andrew. *Human Capital and Empire: Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British Imperialism in Asia, c. 1690-c.1820*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.
Mar, T. B., and N. Rhook. "Counter Networks of Empires: Reading Unexpected People in Unexpected Places." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 19, no. 2 (2018. doi:10.1353/cch.2018.0009.
Markovits, Claude, Pouchepadass, Jacques, and Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, eds. *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950*. London: Anthem, 2006.
Mayhew, R. J. "Geography as the Eye of Enlightenment Historiography." *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 611–27.
Mayhew, R. J. and Withers, C.W.J., eds. *Geographies of Knowledge: Science, Scale, and Spatiality in the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 2020.
McCormick, Ted. *Human Empire: Mobility and Demographic Thought in the British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
Merriman, P. and Pearce, L. eds. *Mobility and the Humanities*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.
Nyberg, Kenneth, Hodacs, Hanna, and Van Damme, Stéphane, eds. *System of Nature: A Global History of Linnaean Science in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2018.
Pocock, John G.A. "On the Unglobality of Contexts: Cambridge Methods and the History of Political Thought." *Global Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.
Pratt, M. L. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2008.
Raj, Kapil. "Beyond Postcolonialism … and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science." *Isis* 104, no. 2 (2013): 337–47.
Roberts, Lissa. "Situating Science in Global History: Local Exchanges and Networks of Circulation." *Itinerario* 33, no. 1 (2009): 9–30.
Romano, Antonella, László Kontler, Silvia Sebastiani, and Borbála Z Török. *Negotiating Knowledge in Early Modern Empires: A Decentred View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014.
Schafer, Simon, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj, and James Delbourgo, eds. *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1850*. Sagamore Beach: Science History, 2009.
Schiebinger, Londa. *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plant, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017.
Secord, Jim. "Knowledge in Transit." *Isis* 95, no. 4 (2004): 654–72.
Seth, Suman. *Difference and Disease: Medicine, race, and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2018.
Sheller, M., and J. Urry. "New Mobilities Paradigm." *Environment and Planning* 38, no. 2 (2006): 2017–226.
Sivasundaram, Sujit. *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.
Sussmann, Charlotte. *Peopling the World: Representing Human Mobility From Milton to Malthus*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
Tsing, A. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
Vartija, D. J. *The Color of Equality: Race and Common Humanity in Enlightenment Thought*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.