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What is This?
Geographies of colonial philanthropy

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Abstract: Through an examination of the material and imaginative geographies of colonial philanthropy in parts of the British Empire from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, this paper advocates a more nuanced conception of the heterogeneity of colonial discourse. At the same time, it elaborates a networked conceptualization of empire. Particular attention is paid to the moralities of closeness, distance and connection, the spatial politics of knowledge, and the spatial and temporal translation of the trope of ‘slavery’ within philanthropic discourse. The paper raises colonial philanthropy as an object of inquiry that has relevance for contemporary globalized humanitarianism as well as for cross-cultural tension within former imperial sites.

Key words: colonialism, philanthropy, slavery, networks.

I Introduction

Imperialism was, and is, about far more than simple domination of other people in distant lands. It entails such domination, but it has always also entailed idealist and ‘progressive’ agendas for intervention in the interests of colonized subjects. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put it: ‘[w]e think it important . . . not to forget the utopian tendencies . . . that have always accompanied the progression towards globalization, even if those tendencies have continually been defeated by the powers of modern-sovereignty’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 115). Critical work on imperialism usually emphasizes its deployment of force, its economically exploitative agendas and its accrual of social, cultural and material power to the colonizer and allied metropolitan interests. In so far as idealist and ‘progressive’ imperial agendas are addressed in this critical literature, they are generally accounted for as ideological
legitimation for more acquisitive and blatantly power-laden agendas. Colonial philanthropy is often regarded simply as Eurocentrism masquerading as universalism (see, for example, Mehta, 1999). We would agree that in many respects it was, but its effects and its possibilities cannot be contained within such a formulation. In this paper we want to ask what happens when we take philanthropic colonial interventions and the geographies of their production and consumption seriously, examine them on their own terms and explore the ways in which they conflict, as well as coincide, with the more easily condemned aspects of colonial governance. We see the spatialized projection of philanthropy and more domineering aspects of imperialism as reflexively coconstitutive – antagonistic as often as they are complementary.

One possible outcome of taking colonial philanthropy seriously is that we get recuperative histories (cf. Haggis, 1998) in which certain white figures come to stand for an alternative tradition of colonialism – one with which guilty white Australians, New Zealanders, North Americans and ‘metropolitan’ Britons, among others, can identify in their attempts to disown an apparently more shameful colonial past. Some have accused the historian Henry Reynolds of writing such recuperative histories as he explores the activities and beliefs of missionaries and other agitators on behalf of Aborigines in nineteenth-century Australia (Reynolds, 1998; cf. Ward, 2004), and there is a long tradition, culminating in the 2003 British Channel Four television series on ‘Empire’, presented by Niall Ferguson, of emphasizing British imperial benevolence in comparison with the despotism of other empires.¹ It is by no means our intention in this paper to reproduce such recuperative histories. We do wish, however, to analyse colonial philanthropy, in this case in the British Empire primarily in the first half of the nineteenth century and in the Caribbean and the colonies of settlement in the Southern Hemisphere, in such a way that we differentiate it from a broader bundle of colonial projects, and examine its contestation of, its reflexive definition against and its complicity with those projects.

We wish to argue further that sensitivity to the nuanced differentiation of colonial discourse can be accomplished through an accompanying sensitivity to spatiality. If we are more successfully to examine the tensions as well as the convergences between imperial discourses and projects in the way that a number of broadly post-colonial scholars have recently advocated (Cooper and Stoler, 1997; Thomas, 1994; Sinha, 1995; Hall, 2002), we have to conceive of both colonial philanthropy and its alternative discourses as spatially extensive webs of communication. In other words, we have to be more aware of the ways in which, in this case, British imperial imaginations of the nineteenth century were already unevenly globalized. Debates, actions, beliefs and representations in one part of the imperial world were always, already, coconstituted with those of other places and other peoples. Distanced chains of cause and effect were integral to the philanthropic thoughts, gestures and interventions of Britons across the colonized world, and critical in pitching them against or alongside other kinds of thought and intervention. The broad, shifting geographies of connection between Britain and its colonies, and between those colonies themselves, were a significant part of the constitution of whichever particular imperial site we wish to examine. It is those historical geographies of imaginative and material connection, giving rise to and maintaining colonial philanthropic discourse, that most concern us in this paper.
We do not wish here simply to historicize contemporary humanitarian engagements, but to explore nineteenth-century discursive spatialities in their own right. Nevertheless, we do believe that a more serious investigation of these prior globalized networks of colonial philanthropic intervention could suggest ways towards a more sophisticated understanding of the differentiated agendas currently guiding powerful 'metropolitan' interventions in formerly colonized parts of the world. Global circuits of communication today conjure up domestic support in the West for interference in distant places on philanthropic grounds more readily than in the nineteenth century, when there were extensive timelags involved, and more fractured and fragile circuits of communication. Yet contemporary mobilization in support of such intervention would not be possible without the channels of compassion linking the west and its postcolonial 'periphery' that were instituted above all by colonial philanthropists over the last 200 years or so, and in contestation with more mercenary forms of intervention. To explore the geographies of these philanthropic networks is to explore the historical geography of one of the most salient features of contemporary geopolitics (see Hardt and Negri, 2000).

Nineteenth-century colonial philanthropists and their allies were not only responsible for the spatially extensive chains of a modern humanitarian imagination linking the 'west' to the 'rest'. They have also left a legacy of endeavours to forge transcultural understandings within each colonized space. Such endeavours could result in outcomes as varied as a 'stolen generation' of so-called 'half-caste' Aboriginal and Torres-Straight islander children forcibly assimilated, under missionary guidance, into 'white' Australian society (Read, 2000; see also Gooder and Jacobs, 2002), or they could be manifested in spirited defences of land 'reserves' within which certain aspects of indigenous society could be 'preserved' in British Columbia (Harris, 2002). Most often, they produced compromised projects of culturally prescriptive assimilation and 'conservation' situated somewhere between these two extremes. They have certainly left a legacy of patronizing condescension as well as identification across the cultural boundaries of indigenous and settler society in regions such as Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa and North America. Such complicated outcomes, we would suggest, make the philanthropic endeavours of the nineteenth century worthy of more research in their own right. This research, we believe, has to be both local and transglobal in its frame of reference, and it should examine both the initial and subsequent phases through which colonial philanthropy has been developed. By focusing on British colonial philanthropy in its formative period in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and in its projection across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and then to the new colonies of the Southern Hemisphere, this paper is intended to be a step in that direction.

The paper begins by elaborating our definition of colonial philanthropy and introducing some of the figures that were key to the exercise of that philanthropy 'at home' and overseas during the early nineteenth century. It then addresses two broad issues rather more thematically: the materialities of the colonial philanthropic endeavour, in terms of humanitarian networks and the circulation of reformist agents and texts; and the visions of colonial philanthropy, including of home and away, self and other. In effect, this amounts to a discussion of the 'real' and 'imaginary' geographies of colonial philanthropy, neither of which can be disentangled from the other. The materialities and visions of the anti-philanthropists will also be addressed in the sections dealing with these broad themes, since, in so...
many respects, colonial philanthropy was defined reflexively by its opposition to them. The paper then moves to consider a number of more specific geographies, namely, the moralities of closeness, distance and connection; the spatial politics of philanthropic (and anti-philanthropic) knowledge; and the translation of philanthropic discourse. We do not attempt here to present a seamless narrative of the history and geography of colonial philanthropy through the nineteenth century – to do so would require much more space than we have and would in any case be surplus to our requirement of raising colonial philanthropy as an object of geographical inquiry and providing some examples with which to begin.

II Colonial philanthropists and their enemies

Colonial philanthropists were those people who believed, often passionately, that imperialism was about something more principled than the pursuit of military glory, personal riches or power, and who acted upon that belief in an attempt to influence official policy in the metropole and in the colonies themselves. The best-known colonial interventions in the period with which we are concerned involved the abolition of the slave trade and then of slavery itself in the Caribbean, the Cape Colony and the rest of the British Empire; the ‘opening up’ of India to Christian evangelization; and the appointment of ‘Protectors’ and return or reservation of land to safeguard indigenous peoples from British settlers in the Cape, Australia, New Zealand and British North America.

Much of the time, colonial philanthropists were reacting against what they construed as abuses by other colonial interests, but they were also proactive. Above all they shared a vision of the British Empire acting to effect a mutually beneficial transformation of the world and its peoples. Often, it was a deeply religious conviction that drove them. Not only could British intervention into the lives of indigenous and colonized peoples across the globe make their mortal existence more fulfilling and happy, but it could also secure for them the ultimate prize – redemption in the afterlife. Because of this conviction, missionaries were the most prominent and numerous of philanthropic correspondents. But there were also more secular philanthropic agendas for the empire, bound up with notions of virtuous patriotism as well as an abhorrence of British-enacted violence and disposssession (see, for example, Jenkins, 2003). In the minds of most nineteenth-century colonial philanthropists, the religious and the secular were inextricable.

Colonial philanthropy was intimately associated with domestic concerns. This is not to say that all those men and women who supported abolition and missionary activity abroad would also support metropolitan penal, judicial, educational and parliamentary reform, but many of the figures involved did lend their weight to other campaigns. What could serve to link the slaves of the West Indies, the ‘benighted heathens’ of India and the indigenous peoples of the colonies of settlement to the disenfranchised, brutalized workers and exploited children ‘at home’, was, as Ernest Howse puts it, ‘a new doctrine of responsibility toward the unprivileged, a doctrine which received its chief impulse from the Evangelical emphasis on the value of the human soul, and hence, of the individual’ (Howse, 1953: 7). The intertwining of domestic and overseas philanthropic concerns is exemplified by the campaign to provide a basic education to British children through Sunday schools so that they could read their own Bibles. This, in turn, prompted many
Sunday School teachers to agitate for restrictions on child factory labour. At the same time, the children who attended Sunday school were recruited by missionary propaganda into the anti-slavery campaign (Howse, 1953: 8; Malchow, 1996: 28). While connections between the domestic and the colonial could take a variety of forms, and were often disputed among philanthropists themselves, connections of one kind or another were ever-present in the philanthropic imagination (see also Bradley, 1974).

Philanthropic knowledge, of course, was not some free-floating abstraction. It was articulated and disseminated by certain key figures whose lives were critical to, and moulded by, philanthropic discourse. These included individuals such as Thomas Fowell Buxton. Although an Anglican, Buxton was the son and husband of Quaker women and he became a key supporter of the Bible and Missionary societies as well as a director of the nonconformist London Missionary Society (LMS). In 1823 he agreed to take up the leadership of the anti-slavery struggle where William Wilberforce had left off by becoming president of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions (or Anti-Slavery Society). Then, as the campaign against slavery entered its final stages, he developed an extensive web of contacts with missionaries and others who were protesting at the activities of free emigrant Britons in the new colonies of the Southern Hemisphere (see Laidlaw, 2001). His contacts included Dr John Philip, the LMS Superintendent in the Cape Colony and a Director on the board of the society in Britain. Philip became involved in efforts to protect Khoisan converts from labour bondage to local colonial farmers (Ross, 1986), publicizing their fate in Britain in his *Researches in South Africa* (1828). Philip was not only a localized nodal point for missionary discourse in the Cape and a means of transmitting that discourse to the metropole, though. He also maintained a network of correspondence stretching further afield, communicating regularly with the missionaries of the LMS and other societies in North America and Australia (Porter, 1999a).

A critical, postcolonial reappraisal of figures such as Buxton, Philip and others, including the many women involved, who constituted the nexus of globalized philanthropy in the early nineteenth century is long overdue (although see Laidlaw, 2001; 2002). However, for the purposes of this article it is sufficient to say that such figures played a vital role in connecting the domestic to the colonial in the imaginations of metropolitan Britons as well as those who had settled overseas. As we move into the rather more impersonal account of philanthropic geographies that follows, we must not forget their very active, indeed often tireless presence in their construction.

### III The networks and circulations of colonial philanthropy

Thomas Haskell (1985a; 1985b) has argued that a new sense of responsibility for distant human suffering was created in 'Western Europe, England and North America' only after their societies became entwined within global networks of exchange and exploitation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Haskell, 1985b: 553). By 1800, British colonial and metropolitan sites were already located within intensively developed circuits of capital, commodities and labour (Bowen, 1998; Bayly, 1999; Thorne, 1997). The nodal points holding this expanded imperial web and its extra-imperial trading partners together were ports, and the means of
transmission between them ships. Although they were incomplete and subject to dis-
junctions and delay, the construction of such material networks created 'a new set of
relationships which changed what was grown, made and consumed in each part of
the world' (Feierman, 1995; Ogborn, 2000: 43). Such economic networks and relation-
ships gave rise to 'new habits of causal attribution that set the stage for humanitar-
ianism' (Haskell, 1985b: 548).

Of all the spatially extended transactions in which Britons engaged in the
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the most emotive was the trade in
enslaved people and the chattel slavery that it supplied, although it was not until
the 1760s and 1770s that a 'widespread conviction that New World slavery symbo-
lized all the forces that threatened the true destiny of man (sic)' had emerged
(Davis, 1975: 41; see also Walvin, 1992; Turley, 1991). Through such organizations
as the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Anti-Slavery Society,
campaigners first developed the informational networks that brought instances of
Britons' subjugation and coercion of others to wider notice. Some of this information
was gathered through philanthropic 'fact-finding' missions like that led by
Joseph Sturge to the Caribbean in 1837 to investigate the post-slavery system of
apprenticeship (Sturge and Harvey, 1837). Sympathetic correspondents, including
colonial civil servants, gave further information and more was gleaned from travel
accounts. Missionaries were a particularly important source of local information
for colonial philanthropists, even though their parent organizations were not initially
aligned with the anti-slavery cause (Turner, 1982). Philanthropists located in Britain
used this information from the imperial periphery as propaganda to lobby govern-
ment officials and sway public opinion. They circulated it in the mainstream
and humanitarian press, including The Anti-Slavery Reporter and The Aborigines
Friend, as well as in the periodicals of religious and missionary organizations, such
as the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine. They also published books and pamphlets,
like Thomas Clarkson's Thoughts on the necessity of improving the condition of the
slaves in the British colonies (1823). Sympathetic MPs and official inquiries further
disseminated philanthropic knowledge, as did the missionary society meetings
held at Exeter Hall in London and elsewhere. On occasion, metropolitan philan-
thropists would bring witnesses with first-hand experience of the exploitative
aspects of imperialism to the metropole and take them on lecture tours or bring
them before parliamentary inquiries (Paton, 2001; Lester, 2002b). All this fed the pop-
ular clamour expressed in petitions (Drescher, 1982), and was designed to shape pol-
icy towards British interests in the West Indies and beyond.

These developing philanthropic networks were not confined within the British
empire. The trans-Atlantic networks of the Society of Friends, for instance, were
crucial to the earliest campaigns against slavery in the seventeenth century and
continued to provide an important international framework for later campaigns
after American independence (Davis, 1975: 213–54). There were also links with
French abolitionists (Jennings, 2000). Not only were the Société des Amis des Noirs
(founded in 1788) and the later Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage
(in 1834) modelled on British organizations, but they also received financial support,
advice and information from across the Channel. British campaigners provided
translations of their anti-slavery pamphlets, subsidized the journal L'Abolitioniste
and travelled to France to present evidence against slavery. Clarkson, in particular,
maintained a regular correspondence with French abolitionists and was a frequent
visitor. Such international connections point to the relative weakness of the French anti-slavery cause, but also to the spatially extensive ambitions and resources of the British philanthropists.

The circulation of information between the Caribbean and Britain that had sustained the anti-slavery movement from the 1770s had to be vastly extended from the early nineteenth century as colonization proceeded in new swathes of Asia, Australasia, North America and southern Africa, and as anti-slavery mutated into a more general colonial philanthropy. New organizations had to be created at the ‘centre’ of empire to cope with the flow of reports and letters from philanthropic correspondents – largely nonconformist missionaries spread across this more globally extensive terrain. Buxton, Clarkson, Sturge and others formed new institutions, including The Aborigines Protection Society (in 1837) and the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and British India Society (both in 1839), as hubs of the newly extended philanthropic webs. Such bodies served as metropolitan ‘centres of calculation’ in which data obtained at the peripheries of empire was assimilated, processed into a more seamless philanthropic discourse and disseminated outwards again to the original correspondents (Driver, 2000; Latour, 1987). Thus was a vast and disparate array of fragmentary knowledge and impression moulded into a colonial philanthropic discourse that embraced the entire imperial expanse (Mitcham, 2001). Not only did this discourse challenge other visions of empire; it was also in part responsible for, and in part dependent on, rival channels of transimperial communication. Charles Swaisland, for example, argues that the most valuable service rendered by the Aborigines Protection Society was ‘the provision of a second channel of communication from the colonies to the Colonial Office and, if need be, beyond to Parliament’ (Swaisland, 2000: 277).

These philanthropic informational networks did not go unchallenged. The West Indian planters, for instance, possessed well-developed and formalized webs of support that contested the accounts of anti-slavery campaigners. Although the Caribbean colonies were not represented in the British Parliament, they had a ‘virtual’ representation in the ‘West India Interest’, which included planter and merchant Members of Parliament (Butler, 1995; O’Shaughnessy, 1997). The London-based West India Committee also acted as a conduit for supporters of slavery, receiving despatches from the West Indies and using first-hand accounts to lobby the Colonial Office (Taylor, 1977; Hall, 1971) – a practice that Canadian, Australian and South African colonists attempted to emulate during the succeeding century using colonial agents based in London. British settlers in these colonies also forged other networks of communication, most notably those founded on the circulation of settler-edited newspapers. Through these papers, which were subscribed to in other colonies as well as in Britain itself, and which were extracted by nearly all of the metropolitan national and indeed provincial newspapers, and through their private correspondence with friends and family, settlers communicated their racial imageries and critiques of philanthropic ideas (Lester, 2002a; Potter, 2000). Such representations from the colonies of settlement, we suggest, played a significant but underresearched role in undermining philanthropic faith in the ‘reclaimability’ of colonized peoples during the mid-nineteenth century.

What the existence of rival planter and anti-slavery, settler and philanthropic circuits of communication and imagination denotes is the utility of envisaging
the empire as bundles of networks, often overlapping and intersecting, but never unitary, never stable, always contested. In order to understand the debate over slavery, for instance, we need imaginatively to reconstruct the rival webs of communication forged by anti-slavery campaigners on the one hand, and planters and their allies on the other, each of them allowing action initiated in one part of the globe to result in the activation of people elsewhere. It is a conceptualization very close to one elaborated recently by Tony Ballantyne in his work on transimperial ideas of Aryanism. Preferring the term ‘web’ to ‘network’, he argues that (Ballantyne, 2001: paragraph 39):

The web metaphor has several advantages for the conceptualization of the imperial past. At a general level, it underscores that the empire was a structure, a complex fabrication fashioned out of a great number of disparate parts that were brought together into a variety of new relationships … The web captures the integrative nature of … cultural traffic, the ways imperial institutions and structures connected disparate points in space into a complex mesh of networks. Moreover, the image of the web also conveys something of the double nature of the imperial system. Empires, like webs, were fragile (prone to crises where important threads are broken or structural nodes destroyed), yet also dynamic, being constantly remade and reconfigured through concerted thought and effort: the image of the web reminds us that empires were not just structures, but processes as well.

As Ballantyne continues, the utility of a networked or ‘webbed’ conceptualization goes further: it enables us to think about the ways in which there is more than one nodal point or ‘centre’ within an empire. Beyond simple metropole-colony binaries, places and even people can be ‘nodal’ in relation to their immediate hinterlands or subordinates, and yet simultaneously peripheral in relation to more powerful, more distant ‘centres of calculation’. The notion allows us to consider both the determining power of metropolitan centres and also the ways in which colonial spaces, citizens and subjects could interrelate through circuits that bypassed the metropole. Finally, we must remember that these webs of exchange and communication, although differentiated and often discrete, had the potential to intersect and overlap. While some interests such as the East India Company, for example, developed relatively insulated webs of correspondence and interconnection between well-defined sites (Ogborn, 2002), other lines and modes of transmission, such as the colonial press, were more open to a range of voices and could be utilized, if not hijacked, by disparate interests.

The interpenetration of different webs is particularly evident in the way that many of them shared and contested the same nodal points. Of these, perhaps the Colonial Office in London is the most obvious. Officials here received petitions from settlers, appeals from missionary directors, and complaints and lobbying from merchants, among an enormous range of other correspondence, from every site of colonial governance and through channels of communication peopled by very different, and often opposed, interests. The implication of such an insight is that neither a study of parliamentary debate in Westminster, nor an analysis of settler-philanthropic rivalries in any one colony, can adequately account for the sparks and flickers of philanthropic activity at any one of these sites. So many of the activities of the parties concerned were the result of reflections, deliberations and actions taking place in other contexts.
IV The imaginary geographies of colonial philanthropy

This webbed or networked conceptualization is absolutely critical to our appreciation of the ways that a philanthropic imagination worked across the imperial expanse during the first half of the nineteenth century. When Buxton gazed out of the window of his rural retreat in Norfolk and pondered his next intervention in Parliament, or his next private session with the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, the image that filled his vision was not always the flat, green Norfolk landscape. It might be the arid mountains enveloping the fertile Kat River Valley in the Eastern Cape, where, John Philip told him, reclaimed Khoisan converts were industriously engaged in the construction of a model civilized society that would disprove the local settlers’ assertions of native irreclaimability; or it was, perhaps, one of New South Wales squatters, armed and mounted, bearing down murderously upon a band of sleeping and innocent Aborigines to ‘clear’ them from hunting grounds that correspondents assured him had comprised their world from time immemorial. Buxton’s actions at the ‘heart’ of empire might be prompted by one of a whole package of exotic landscapes summoned up for him in the letters that he received from contacts spread across the globe. His vision was enlarged in some ways, and confined in others, by the unevenly globalized circuits of philanthropic communication in which he played such a central role. He was prompted to speak so eloquently in Parliament and in Glenelg’s rooms by people in wholly different terrains and social contexts. Only a networked conception of empire can enable us to access such a complex cartography of philanthropic connection.

Of course, a transglobal range of reference is much more explicit in the writings of the metropolitan-based humanitarians such as Buxton than it is in the records of the colonial-based missionaries with whom they corresponded, such as those in the Cape Colony (see Lester, 2001). This was largely because these metropolitan activists were the recipients of communications from other colonial and metropolitan spaces, as well as the Cape. The missionaries in the Cape were rather more preoccupied with events on their own particular mission stations and within the colony at large. Nevertheless, there was an awareness even on their part that they were thinking and writing for metropolitan consumption, and that their words would thus be interpreted in the light of a more global range of reference. Furthermore, they knew that missives from the Cape would be collated and disseminated by their home societies to missionaries and their supporters in other colonies. They were also men and women who had volunteered for service in God’s cause regardless of where their society intended to send them, so their imagination, from the outset, ranged across a multitude of potentially fruitful sites for proselytization across the globe. Even once they were preoccupied with relations with the local Xhosa chiefs and commoners, and with fellow missionaries and settlers in the particular spaces in which they dwelt in the Cape, they never lost sight of the fact that their labours were but one tiny component of a phenomenally ambitious enterprise aimed at reforming and redeeming the world at large. They were well aware that the success of their own endeavours would be evaluated in the light of other missions elsewhere, and that their constructions of the Africans or white settlers among whom they lived would be compared with those of indigenous peoples and colonists originating in other, distant and equally particular spaces (see Bayly, 1999). In the vision that bound colonial
and metropolitan philanthropists together, each colonial space and its people were always and inevitably framed in relation to other places and peoples.

Within this global and interconnected vision, colonial philanthropy created new metropolitan imaginations of certain colonial spaces, constructing them as appropriate sites for public concern and imperial intervention. In discussing the shift in British attitudes against slavery in the late eighteenth century, for example, David Brion Davis notes that 'there occurred a profound change in the basic paradigm of social geography – a conceptual differentiation between what can only be termed a “slave world” aberration and the “free world” norm' (Davis, 1984: 81). This 'slave world’/‘free world’ division was predicated upon, and reinforced, a developing metropolitan consensus that colonial slavery was antithetical to ‘human progress’ and that the West Indian slave colonies were ‘un-British’, aberrant spaces (Greene, 1987; Sandiford, 2000; Hall, 2002). This construction of the West Indies as ‘un-British’ was complementary with the role of the anti-slavery campaign as a source of validation for an emergent metropolitan British national identity (Colley, 1992: 350–60; Lambert, 2002; Porter, 1999b; Hall, 1988).

Philanthropists constructed the West Indian colonies as ‘aberrant’ through a number of means. They used the brutal suppression of enslaved uprisings by the planter-dominated authorities and local white militias to portray the region in a negative light (see Lambert, 2004). Anti-slavery campaigners also drew attention to the lack of provision for the religious instruction of colonized people and to the persecution of those missionary bodies that attempted to fulfil this role (Davis, 1975; Turner, 1982). In such ways, philanthropists inscribed the West Indies as an aberrant space requiring intervention by the imperial authorities to ameliorate the condition of, and eventually free, the enslaved populations and to enable missionary work to occur without obstruction. The ‘slave world’/‘free world’ demarcation was also tied to more global philanthropic imaginative geographies. For example, the West Indies was unfavourably compared with the expanding British Empire in the east. For Thomas Clarkson, the ‘East Indies’ was a source of cheaper sugar that was ‘not stained with blood’ because it was produced by free labour. It was also the site of a less costly imperial venture, as no large military presence was needed to protect the colonists from revolt (Clarkson, 1823: 48–50, 60). Clarkson’s work was emblematic of a philanthropic imaginary related to other changing geographies of the British Empire, especially the 'double switch in imperial focus’ (Craton, 1974: 239) from the Americas to Asia, particularly after the American Revolution, and mercantilism to laissez-faire economics. Through their global visions, colonial philanthropists sought to map new geographies of imperial duty and metropolitan responsibility.

By drawing attention to the supposedly ‘un-British’ behaviour of West Indian colonists, colonial philanthropists sought to deny their legitimacy and authority to legislate for themselves by contesting their identity – and rights – as ‘freeborn Englishmen overseas’ (Lambert, 2002). During the late 1830s and early 1840s, humanitarians persisted in rendering the philanthropic impulse inseparable from the notion of Britishness (Porter, 1999b). With the campaign against West Indian slavery apparently won, the struggle to extend a more proper form of Briti'shness across the newly colonized lands of the Southern Hemisphere began. This would be epitomized by the reclamation of souls and the production of civilized and assimilated black Britons. Those who retained control of their land and its resources would
become a happy peasantry in the mould of the mythical English smallholder of old, while those who had already lost their means of independent support would become productive and contented labourers for benevolent employers (Comaroff, 1997). Yet, of course, in elaborating upon the ways that Britons should behave towards their others within the empire, colonial philanthropists were simultaneously cataloguing those actions that would render settlers in these newly colonized spaces no longer entitled to be considered Britons in the full sense of the word. Philanthropic interventions threatened the discursive marginalization of settlers who ignored humanitarian tenets, and this was of no little concern to those settlers, given their political and military dependence on metropolitan support.

These kinds of philanthropic prescription were at their most explicit in the Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), published in 1837 (British Parliamentary Papers, 1836–37). Buxton had established the Committee with prompting above all from Philip in the Cape, after the 1834–35 frontier war against the Xhosa (see Lester, 2001). As its report made clear, British colonialism, as it was currently being practised in Australia, the Pacific islands, New Zealand, the Cape and North America, represented a stain not only on the character of the individuals who committed acts of dispossession and injustice towards indigenous peoples, but also on the name of Britain as a whole. In their defence of indigenous peoples during the late 1830s, philanthropists popularized an image of British settlers across this vast range of colonial sites as acquisitive and brutal, and thus as the inheritors of the West Indian planters’ mantle of ‘aberrant Britons’ (Lester, 2002b; Laidlaw, 2002). In response to patriotic critique of their actions, both from the Aborigines Committee in London and from local missionaries (many of whom had supplied the Committee with evidence), British settlers were forced to define the ways in which they, as respectable Britons, were distinguished from colonized others and to elaborate their own discourse of irreclaimable savagery (see Lester, 2002a).

Transglobal philanthropy, then, was not just about the colonized ‘other’. It was also about the ‘self’, both ‘at home’ in Britain and in the colonies of settlement. It was one among other contested visions of what Britishness was and should be in an era of ‘proto-globalization’, about how Britishness should be defined in relation to those peoples and places with which it interacted in the wider world.

V Establishing responsibility for empire’s others

The version of Britishness that colonial philanthropists promoted was one that entailed responsibility for the distant subjects of colonization, which other empires, in the past and present, apparently sought only to exploit. As we have mentioned, so enduring was this proselytized association between Britishness and benign rather than malignant intervention, that it still characterizes popular and indeed some academic thinking about the distinctions between European empires.

Colonial philanthropists sought to establish that distant sufferings of colonized others were inextricably connected to the everyday lives of Britons. They maintained consistently that Britons could, and should, do something about these sufferings. Humanitarian representations of causality and responsibility were also targeted at the imperial authorities, and were designed to foster a more enlightened governmental surveillance within colonial ‘spaces of terror’ (Taussig, 1992) and develop
‘imperial trusteeship’ as an alternative (Porter, 1999b). The forging of philanthropic
duty over space was achieved, in part, through the networks already discussed.
Metropolitan tours by witnesses, including colonized victims, gave a sense of imme-
diacy, allowing the metropolitan public to see and hear the people the colonial reform-
ners were trying to save, as did the detailed and rapid reporting of revolts,
massacres, land appropriations and instances of religious persecution. Certain tech-
nologies – photography, for example – also facilitated the establishment of this dis-
tanced duty later in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ryan, 1997: 222–24;
Mitcham, 2001).

What such practices did was to bridge the imaginative distance between ‘here’
and ‘there’, transforming the economic and political networks of empire into webs
of moral responsibility. Again, the anti-slavery movement provided a foundation,
with its campaigners being the first to argue explicitly that ‘Great distance makes
nothing in our favour’ (the American Quaker John Woolman, quoted in Haskell,
1985b: 565). The anti-saccharite movement of the late eighteenth century was crucial
in collapsing this distance. Its central contention, in the words of William Fox, was
that ‘with every pound of sugar we may be considered as consuming two ounces
of human flesh’ (quoted in Sandiford, 2000: 124). In campaigning for the boycott
of West Indian sugar, anti-slavery campaigners thus linked the pain and death of
enslaved labour to the intimate pleasures and spaces of the British consumer
(Sussman, 2000; Midgley, 1996). As Mimi Sheller (2003: 73) explains:

The anti-slavery movement latched onto the explosion in consumption of tropical plantation
commodities as a way to personalise responsibility for the enslavement of other human beings. They
used sugar, in particular, as an inroad into people’s hearts and into the ‘privacy’ of their homes,
where much consumption took place.

By politicizing consumption and emphasizing its moral dimensions, the anti-
saccharite movement was an early example of how colonial philanthropy ensured that
‘the conventional limits of moral responsibility observed by an influential
minority in society expanded to encompass evils that previously had fallen outside
anyone’s sphere of responsibility’ (Haskell, 1985a: 359).

At the same time that they sought to forge responsibility over space, colonial
philanthropists had to show that colonized people were appropriate objects for
metropolitan concern. They promoted sympathy, empathy and identification with
colonized others (see Cohen, 2001: 216–18), often through an emphasis on suppos-
edly universal understandings of bodily pain, offended human dignity or tran-
gressed social norms. Thomas Laqueur has drawn particular attention to the
preoccupation with the suffering of individual bodies and the attendant narrative
forms through which the nascent humanitarian sensibility of the late eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries was reproduced. New narrative structures like the
novel, the medical report, even the autopsy, all spoke ‘in extraordinarily detailed
fashion about the pains and deaths of ordinary people in such a way as to make
apparent the causal chains that might connect the actions of . . . readers with the suf-erings of . . . subjects’ (Laqueur, 1989: 177). A humane imperative for intervention to
alleviate their diverse plights was rendered sufficiently ordinary and familiar
through such narratives that, within certain social circles, failure to act ‘would con-
stitute a suspension of routine’ and, thus, in itself be construed as a contributory
cause of suffering (Haskell, 1985a: 358).
In seeking to promote sympathy, empathy and identification, philanthropists had to contend with planter and settler assertions about the absolute racial otherness of colonized people. It was the trope of ‘the family’ that was most often used by nineteenth-century philanthropists and evangelicals to characterize colonized populations (Thomas, 1994), a trope that asserted a common identity, as well as mutual ties of duty and responsibility between its members. The philanthropic use of familial tropes to collapse racial and cultural difference did not guarantee metropolitan identification with the suffering of colonized people, however. Rather, it was the mistreatment of philanthropic agents, especially missionaries, at the hands of the colonial authorities or settler populations that generated the strongest response among the metropolitan public during the campaign against slavery. Instances of persecution, and especially martyrdom, became *causes célèbres* for anti-slavery campaigners and served to turn ‘the vast indignation of English Dissent into channels of protest that won official sanction’ (Davis, 1975: 451; see Lambert, 2002). This displacement of philanthropic feeling on to the suffering of white subjects further indicates the difficulties – even for those committed to a philanthropic agenda – of identifying with those often seen to be, in part, ‘other’.

Despite its potential role in generating identification, ‘the family’ was, of course, a trope with patriarchal and infantilizing connotations that could have deeply disempowering implications for colonized people. Indeed, Laqueur points out that for philanthropists to feel compassion for others they had conceptually to *possess* them in some way. Philanthropic inquiries ‘created a sense of property in the objects of compassion, they appropriated them to the consciousness of would-be benefactors’ (Laqueur, 1989: 179). Philanthropists, in other words, had to imagine themselves able to speak for the wronged (Hall, 2002). Such possessive traits were evident with the emergence of modern colonial philanthropy and, according to Anthony Barker, enslaved people were treated as ‘antislavery property’ (Barker, 1996: 152). The prime icon of anti-slavery – Josiah Wedgwood’s kneeling figure of the enslaved man that accompanied the abolitionist slogan ‘Am I not a man and brother?’ – was a grateful, redeemable, but ultimately passive and silent object, which Catherine Hall terms the ‘good negro’ (Hall, 2002: 19; Grigsby, 2003; Wood, 2000). Most colonial philanthropists believed in racial hierarchy, not equality, although in the first half of the nineteenth century they had faith in the improbability of colonized others. It was for this reason that they made much of any sign of Christianization or ‘civilization’ on the part of those they sought to ‘save’. Evidence of ‘progress’ – that colonized people were ‘orderly, clean, pious, serious, and respectable, identifiable with their British counterparts’ (Turner, 1982: 201) – vindicated philanthropic, and metropolitan public, concern for colonized people.

Philanthropic attempts at generating metropolitan concern by bridging racial and spatial ‘distance’ were, of course, contested. The racially supremacist arguments used to bolster aspects of colonialism, such as West Indian slaveholders’ claims that people of African descent were bestial (e.g., Long, 1774), were only the most obvious example of how the opponents of the philanthropists sought to undermine public support for colonized others. Also important were the colonists’ claims about their political autonomy that challenged the right of philanthropists – and indeed the imperial authorities – to intervene in colonial affairs. During the controversies over slavery, West Indian politicians never grew tired of complaining about the misinformed and tyrannical ‘interference’ of outsiders in ‘their’ affairs (Lambert, 2002).
Later, settlers in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa complained of London and provincial-based metropolitan ‘armchair philanthropists’, who, with enormous credulity, constructed their visions of colonial space around the lies and half-truths of misguided and visionary missionaries (Lester, 2002a).

Anti-philanthropic politics did not revolve solely around assertions of colonial difference and distance. Propaganda about the economic importance of imperial possessions and the desirability of the consumables produced in the colonies did not repudiate the networks of empire, but sought to elevate the importance of commercial connection above that of philanthropic morality. The promotion of consumption in travel writing, artistic representations and displays of wealth served as a form of West Indian ‘boosterism’ that sought to saturate Britain with the ‘epistemologies of colonization’ (Sandiford, 2000: 16) – at least until the anti-saccharite movement had soured the link between West Indian products and consumer desire. Such strategies were soon revived in the Southern Hemisphere, where settlers in the Australian colonies especially stressed the value of their wool to metropolitan industrialization and of their harbours to the security of Britain. If their enterprise was to be fettered by sentimentalist humanitarian appeals to protect the land and resources of ‘Aborigines’, they argued, these vital functions could not be fulfilled, and the very people who supported philanthropic campaigns at home would be the losers (Lester, 2001; 2002a).

In discussing how contemporary humanitarian appeals operate, Stanley Cohen identifies two main strategies: identification and empowerment (Cohen, 2001: 196–221). The former functions when ‘the other’ comes to be seen as part of one’s ‘shared moral universe’, while the latter is based on the recognition that there is something that can be done about the issue of concern. As we have shown, both strategies were at work in the colonial philanthropic campaigns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which sought to bridge the physical and imaginative distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. Philanthropists did so by promoting sympathy for all members of the human ‘family’, especially those who were responding positively to the Christian message, and by showing that the metropolitan public could help colonized others by changing their patterns of consumption or becoming involved in lobbying efforts. Yet, while philanthropists sought to bridge metropole and colony, they were vulnerable to accusations that it was distance itself that fuelled their zeal and that they privileged the subjects of empire over the working classes ‘at home’ (Driver, 2000: 75).

VI The spatial politics of philanthropic knowledge

Colonial philanthropists were involved in an intense ‘war of representation’ over colonial oppression (Hall, 2002: 107; for an example, see pp. 209–29). This involved contests around the meaning of racial difference and the nature of imperial duty, as well as over the details of particular instances of land appropriation, labour subjugation and so on. This ‘war’ was fought out in pamphlets, newspapers and official inquiries, along the spatially articulated networks and over the discursive terrain discussed above. There was also a spatial politics to this ‘war’, much of it bound up with the ‘place’ of philanthropic knowledge within it. Many moments of philanthropic controversy turned on competing claims about the nature of colonialism that did
not rest on truth-claims or notions of racial difference alone, but also on arguments about the spatialities of the competing knowledges. Epistemological authority was intimately linked to location.

In the mid-1810s, for instance, anti-slavery campaigners sought to persuade the British government to introduce a Slave Registry Bill that would acquire accurate data on the size and condition of the enslaved populations of the West Indies. This effort was driven by a belief that a clandestine trade in enslaved people persisted despite its formal abolition in 1807 and that slaveholders continued to mistreat their enslaved workforces, confident that they could acquire replacements (Stephen, 1815). Such views encountered great hostility in the colonies, in part because they were seen to be based on the armchair speculations of metropolitan abolitionists who were prejudiced about the West Indian ‘character’ (Jordan, 1816). Opponents of the Slave Registry Bill emphasized the importance of a contextualized understanding of colonizer/colonized relations, grounded in the lived experience of the imperial periphery. Colonists also used their lived experience of the imperial frontier to make claims about the day-to-day threat posed by indigenous populations and to challenge philanthropic interpretations of seemingly brutal practices, such as the use of the whip, on the basis of a ‘better’ understanding of the cultural and racial difference of colonized peoples in their particular place.

It was also this understanding that knowledge of a place came only with dwelling in it that led settlers in southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada to dispute so vigorously the British Parliament’s decision to hold the hearings for the 1836–37 Aborigines Committee in London. The settler press in each of these colonial sites held that the hearings would be irrevocably prejudiced in favour of critics of colonization because of the influence of the London-based caucus of anti-slavery campaigners and philanthropists who knew nothing about colonial life. Of course, the difficulty that settlers had in articulating the superior knowledge of local/colonial, as opposed to metropolitan, inquirers arose from the fact that metropolitan philanthropists – including those on the Aborigines Committee – gleaned their information from missionaries who, if anything, were closer to ‘native’ cultures and thus more ‘local’ than they were. Hence the importance of dismissing the missionaries’ alternative claim to local knowledge by stressing their naive and delusional nature – an argument that became more compelling as the ‘excesses’ of evangelical ‘Enthusiasm’ were increasingly satirized and generally regretted in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

These moments of conflict, over slavery and post-abolition colonization, point to the broader spatial politics of the authority and credibility of knowledge. Such questions are familiar to historians of science and others, and much has been made of the contrast between ‘the knowledges of the field and of the study’ (Driver, 2000; Outram, 1999). In the realm of humanitarian controversy, philanthropists had to contend with bodies of local knowledge associated with settler interests. They represented themselves asrighteously exposing the abuses that arose from the ingrained intolerance and bigotry of colonists. Their planter and settler opponents, however, drew a contrast between the dangerous prejudices of misinformed outsiders, and the local expertise of those who lived and worked in the colonies, on the imperial ‘front line’. Such a spatial politics of truth structured many of the debates about moments of philanthropic concern.
The preceding discussion has demonstrated the significance of physical and ideological location in determining the credibility of philanthropic knowledge. Another aspect of this spatial politics concerned the circumstances in which philanthropic knowledge could be 'out of place' in the imperial periphery. The diffusion of Christianity itself was often problematic for colonists. West Indian planters, for example, had long opposed proselytization among enslaved people, because it undermined the rationale for slavery and 'the withholding of instruction was a highly symbolic entrenchment of the master-slave relationship' (Malchow, 1996: 29; Beahrs, 1997; Gilmore, 1979). Literacy, too, was seen as dangerous among colonized populations if not accompanied by a sufficient level of 'civilization'.

For planters and settlers, philanthropic knowledge that was out of place could be a dangerous and immediate presence, perhaps capable of inciting unrest. West Indian planters attributed each of the large-scale revolts that affected the region in the early nineteenth century to the enslaved rebels' misinterpretation of anti-slavery campaigning, usually as gleaned from metropolitan newspapers, or from misunderstanding the preaching of missionaries (Craton, 1982; Turner, 1982; Matthews, 2001). Colonial philanthropists rejected such arguments, of course, claiming that it was the colonists who were responsible for any confusion, because their own inflammatory anti-philanthropic propaganda had created false expectations among the enslaved people (Lambert, 2004). For many colonial settlers, missionaries and other philanthropists were also dangerous because they promised to translate indigenous grievances in real, very frightening and very effective ways (Hall, 2002). Settlers in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa found the greater access that humanitarian missionaries had to the deliberations of indigenous groups in each colony, as well as, periodically, to the metropolitan government, deeply unsettling. Settlers feared that the only colonial group that was able, if not necessarily willing, to speak with rather than for or against the 'natives' was that which was most opposed to their colonial projects.

The 'war of representation' between colonial philanthropists and their opponents was, then, fought not only in terms of the content of competing discourses but also of the spatial politics of these discourses. Location was a crucial determinant of the authority of philanthropic and anti-philanthropic claims, though precisely how was an area of controversy. At the same time, philanthropic knowledge could be portrayed as 'out of place' and symptomatic of dangerous humanitarian interference in colonial affairs. The geographies of philanthropic knowledge were highly contentious.

VII The translation of philanthropic discourse

As we have already discussed, the campaign against chattel slavery was a foundational moment for colonial philanthropy, shaping many of its later structural and strategic features. Campaigners in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries strove to establish slavery as an unacceptable form of labour exploitation within the British Empire, something seemingly confirmed by its formal abolition in the 1830s. This did not mark the end of the 'career' of slavery, however, and in a process lasting over three generations, 'the attack upon slavery also set in motion a series of changes that altered the terms of labour in other parts of the globe as well' (Drescher, 2000: 62).
Indeed, the extension of the rhetoric of ‘slavery’ and the associated anti-slavery practices to other contexts is illustrative of the translation of colonial philanthropic discourse over space. Similar arguments could be made about other philanthropic ideas and institutions, but with slavery such a fundamental reference point, its career exemplifies both the globalizing trajectory of colonial philanthropy during the nineteenth century and the tensions and conflicts this involved (for a discussion of a particular instance of this, see Lambert and Howell, 2003).

According to Susan Pedersen, ‘[t]here are many reasons why the metaphor of slavery continued to hold such tremendous power for empire-builders and humanitarians alike, not least among them the ways in which it legitimated benevolent intervention and normalized the ideals of liberal political economy’ (Pedersen, 2001: 163, note 5; see also Prakash, 1990). Slavery was a powerful metaphor with both fixed and flexible qualities. On the one hand, the debate over slavery had already been ‘won’ by the 1830s, with its establishment as a fundamentally ‘un-British’ labour practice (Hall, 2002; Colley, 1992). At the same time, there was fungibility in its definition that allowed it to be used to articulate other forms of subjugation elsewhere in the empire and wider world. From the mid-nineteenth century, the ‘career’ of slavery involved expansion of both spatial scope and application. In part, this reflected a broadening imperial mission. There was a mutual relationship between the resurgence of concern about slavery as Britain's formal and informal imperial presence grew, and the expansion of empire to end slavery, with advocates of the ‘new imperialism’ in the 1880s plagiarizing the earlier philanthropic agenda (Driver, 2000: 76). The widening adoption of ‘slavery’ as a metaphor, and the associated expansion of philanthropic activity, also presaged the globalization of humanitarianism, as institutionalized in the League of Nations, United Nations and Anti-Slavery International, as well as the emergence of a transnational discourse of human rights. At the same time, the types of practice described as ‘slavery’ multiplied, including the transimperial migrations of Indian indentured and Chinese ‘coolie’ labour. Slavery was also used to characterize interracial relations in places where it had been formally abolished, such as the West Indies, but where extreme inequalities persisted (see Lambert and Howell, 2003).

As this suggests, colonial philanthropists often employed ‘slavery’ as a ‘paradigm of social injustice’ (Lott, 1998: xviii). This did not mean, however, that racial oppression was unacceptable, nor was there a consistent or universally recognized definition of ‘slavery’ (Stepan, 1982; Lott, 1998). Even during the original campaign against West Indian slavery, slaveholders and their supporters sought to turn the tables on the philanthropists by using the term to characterize metropolitan labour practices, such as factory work. In this way, they accused the philanthropists of hypocrisy in their chosen cause – or at least of selectivity – and claimed that there was nothing exceptionally bad about the treatment of enslaved people, as compared with conditions in the imperial army or navy, for example. Slavery was also used by radical critics to describe developing capitalist labour practices (as in ‘wage slavery’) and by female activists to define patriarchal dominance (Bronstein, 1999: 88–90; Fladeland, 1982; Ferguson, 1992). While such redeployments of slavery had a very different motivation to those by slaveholders and were not necessarily incompatible with a colonial philanthropic agenda, they might also trouble it by revealing the apparent partiality of some philanthropic concerns.
The globalizing career of 'slavery' was not a straightforward one, then, partly because the practices to which the philanthropists attached the label seemed very different from the chattel slavery abolished in 1834 (Temperley, 2000; Seddon, 2000; Miers, 2000). This pointed, in part, to the 'simplification' of West Indian slavery that had occurred in early nineteenth-century philanthropic discourse. In this process, certain spaces (the ship, the plantation) and practices (especially the use of the whip and treadmill), as well as the juxtaposition of particular racialized bodies (white enslavers/black enslaved), had come to serve as easily identifiable and denunciable metonyms for slavery. When these key features were not present in other contexts, the case for applying the term 'slavery' was more difficult to make.

The application of slavery to other imperial sites and practices was concomitant with the broadening, or one might say, dispersal, of the British colonial philanthropic project in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of the conflict between philanthropic organizations, settler interests and the imperial authorities was concerned with the applicability of 'slavery', and the attendant anti-slavery legislative mechanisms, to forms of labour exploitation beyond the West Indian plantations. Yet, despite the persistence of slavery as a marker of the unacceptable in imperial culture, it remained a contested term. The colonial philanthropic vision could also be contested through the 'mistranslation' of slavery to describe the exploitation of metropolitan subjects, a challenge, from either conservatives or radicals, to the philanthropists' concerns with distant others.

VIII Conclusions

In its personnel, its vision and its political interventions, colonial philanthropy was not simply a veneer for colonial exploitation during the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries. It needs to be considered and deconstructed as a colonial discourse in its own right, as do those other discourses against which philanthropists struggled. This does not mean, of course, that we should elide the patronizing, ethnocentric condescension of the missionaries or their role in attempting to coerce indigenous peoples into 'assimilation' of various kinds in various contexts. Nor does it mean that we have to choose philanthropists as the heroes of our stories of colonialism and settlers as the villains, with colonized people playing walk-on parts as extras. It does mean, however, that, just as we have to be sensitive to the divergences as well as coalescences of different Western agendas for change in other parts of the world today, so we should also understand British and other imperialisms in the past as having been shaped by discourses in tension, and, above all, discourses that were made and remade across and between very different sites within an interconnected world, travelling across globally extensive networks to produce very different knowledges and imaginations of that world.

Of these discourses, colonial philanthropy is perhaps one of the most interesting and one of the most deserving of further critical study. How was it that a set of beliefs and motivations that were so 'progressive' in the context of other contemporaneous beliefs and motivations could translate so readily into a failure to identify and to listen, an insistence on cultural superiority, a determination to prescribe other peoples' behaviour, and a refusal to recognize the legitimacy and value of difference? This paper by no means answers these questions, but it is hoped that at least it brings them to some kind of prominence and provides a framework with which to begin their examination.
Above all, that examination, we would argue, should proceed within a culturally and spatially extensive and sensitive conceptualization of imperialism as a set of discourses and practices both producing, and produced by, bundles of imaginative and material networks connecting people in distant places, always unevenly and always in contested ways. In this paper, we have sketched out some of the most salient features of the philanthropic and anti-philanthropic networks. We have also considered other geographies with which they were associated, such as the claims and counterclaims about distant others articulated through these networks, the politics of locational authority within these networks and the translation of philanthropic discourse across these networks. Postcolonial discourse analysis can be ‘grounded’ and relevant, and can supersede the degree of abstraction for which it is often, justifiably, criticized, only if it recognizes and examines the effects of this interconnectivity between specific people and places.

Notes

1. Exemplary of such thinking was the ‘Black Legend’ that characterized Spanish imperialism solely in terms of pillage, rape and conquest.

2. An earlier example of the consequences of such entwining, which occurred in the context of the Iberian-dominated phase of imperial expansion in the sixteenth century, can be seen in the plea made by Bartolome de Las Casas for the preservation of Amerindian workers. That Las Casas called for their replacement with enslaved African labour also points to the differences between his early modern form of spatially projected concern and that constructed by humanitarians from the late eighteenth century.

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