

Kristine Alexander

Guiding Modern Girls: Girlhood, Empire and Internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s

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Guiding Modern Girls is a rich and detailed study, which takes a transnational approach to explore the nature of the Girl Guide movement in the interwar period. Drawing upon a close reading of organizational materials from England, Canada and India, Alexander gives significant insight into the ways Guiding principles and training translated in different cultural contexts, and highlights the nuanced interactions that took place between the different national branches of the organization. This transnational comparison allows Alexander to build a complex picture of the way in which the Guiding agenda was understood, implemented, and challenged in different social and political environments. The book thus makes an important contribution to the existing scholarship on Guiding, which has, until now, largely considered the movement exclusively in national terms. At the heart of this study is an impressive attempt to identify the responses of the members themselves, whose opinions of, contributions to and attempts to subvert Guiding activities are told through the analysis of logbooks, scrapbooks and photographs. Together this transnational and 'bottom up' approach allows Alexander to highlight the contradictions and tensions at the heart of the organization's attempt to build an 'international sisterhood,' which adopted 'modern' attitudes towards gender and international relations, while at the same time reinforcing traditional gender, class and racial hierarchies.

The book takes a thematic structure exploring the different elements of the education and training provided by the movement: domestic training; preparation for participation in civil society; the religious and national underpinning of camping activities; the role of Guiding rallies and pageants; and internationalism. One of the most prominent themes of these chapters is the way that the activities of the organization reflected an increasingly modernized Guiding agenda, which challenged traditional expectations of girls' roles and behaviour and embraced inclusivity. Notably, the book highlights the complex ways that girls' roles were conceptualized beyond the domestic sphere, with the organization emphasizing the importance of girls' participation in social service, reflecting "new public possibilities for girls and women" (84). This was evident in Guide activities, which included preparation for political participation, training in personal and emotional attributes required for social service, and an emphasis on voluntarism. Alongside this, the organization allowed girls the space in which to subvert traditional gendered behaviours. Alexander's investigation of Guiding rallies is revealing here, highlighting the ways that military drills and marching "blurred the lines between military and civilian, masculine and feminine" (155).

Of course, these attributes differed across the geographical regions, and the book is particularly insightful when considering how Guiding traditions translated in different cultural contexts. For example, Alexander highlights that Guides in India were restrained in the types of physical activities they could participate in, due to the

distinctive nature and parameters of girls' physical culture in Southern Asia. Despite such differences, through a transnational comparison, this study reveals the way that Guiding conceptualized their members as an international, co-operative community of girls and attempted to develop this through organizational structures and cross-cultural communication, including international camps, films and radio broadcasts, and an international pen-pal system, with the hopes of highlighting the similarities between members and encouraging them to "disregard differences of culture, geography, religion and race" (166).

However, ultimately the organization served to strengthen traditional discourses and reinforce racial hierarchies. The transnational comparison serves to highlight these tensions beautifully, as Alexander convincingly argues, despite attempts to build an international movement Guiding was ultimately given different meanings for working-class and colonial girls. Indeed, while the movement espoused inclusion, ultimately discussions of Guiding in India were framed by a discourse which 'othered' non-white members and their cultures. For example, Alexander notes that British members were encouraged to mimic non-white cultures when exploring the outdoors, while Canadian Guiding reinforced "national myth-making" through the imitation of Indigenous lifestyles such as "Indian play" (131–2). Alexander's consideration of the politics of the different national landscapes reveals the juxtaposition between the healthy, nurturing landscapes of Britain and Canada (each with their own historical connotations and national meaning) and the representation of South Asian landscapes, which were positioned as dangerous and unfamiliar. Ideas about the peculiarity of non-white societies were also reinforced through pageantry and rallies, with historical pageants in Britain and Canada celebrating the colonial legacy and civilizing impact of the British Empire.

These representations also reinforced the importance of traditional, domestic femininity, which Alexander notes remained prominent in the organization, despite an increased emphasis on the public role of girls. This "modern gender conservatism" (47) was reflected in the domestic training provided by the movement, which although shaped by cultural and class-based assumptions, served to reinforce the importance of home making in the lives of female members. Additionally, traditional beliefs about girls' innate personality traits and accepted feminine behaviour could frame and shape the opportunities that were given to them.

Alexander skilfully indicates the ways in which contradictions within Guiding were often acknowledged by the members themselves, who openly challenged and subverted Guiding activities, asserting new meanings for themselves. The ability of members to challenge, or even ignore, Guiding rules and doctrine is evidenced by the 'wild nights' camping (including all-night talking and pillow fights) of Canadian Guides or the prank-filled camps of London Guides, uncovered by Alexander, and suggests that Guiding activities could allow members a modicum of autonomy. In Alexander's words: girls "used some aspects of Guiding for their own purposes, while laughing at or rejecting others" (201). Indeed, such disobedience could go beyond 'trivial' acts of resistance against Guiding authority. For example, Alexander notes the existence of seemingly "troublesome and disobedient" (86) Guide groups in India

and French Canada, who challenged the imperial agenda of the organization. This work thus encourages us to think more closely about the way that the discourses and agendas of the organization were responded to and lived-out by members themselves.

Guiding Modern Girls does raise some interesting and important additional questions. Alexander's study is largely focused on discourses around, education for, and responses of girls. However, the role of adult women in both reinforcing and challenging the conservative agenda of the organization is considered more briefly. Further reflection on the lifecycle in relation to Guiding could allow us to understand the longer-term impact of Guiding on members beyond adolescence and could provide an illuminating case study of the ways that Guiding discourse reflected, shaped and even challenged wider public discourse around the role of women in these different societies. Beyond this, more could have been said about the way paid work was positioned and understood by the movement, which perhaps might have further illuminated the role of class as a shaping factor in discourses surrounding femininity within the organization.

Nonetheless, Alexander paints a complex image of the organization, which was the epitome of the simultaneously dynamic and traditional nature of British society in the interwar period, and makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the Girl Guides through this thought-provoking transnational study. In doing so, this work challenges historians of the organization to go beyond national boundaries and think inventively about the source bases available to us. This book also invites a readership from historians interested in the wider history of gender and colonialism, as it illuminates the tensions at play within modern discourses of citizenship and highlights the ways that girls navigated and responded to contradictory messages regarding their role in the British Empire.

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Derrick Darby and John L. Rury

The Color of Mind: Why the Origins of the Achievement Gap Matter for Justice

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The achievement gap between white and black students in the United States continues to be a major area of concern for school leaders and educational policy makers. In *The Color of Mind: Why the Origins of the Achievement Gap Matter for Justice*, Derrick Darby and John L. Rury trace the origins and history of research documenting the alleged mental and physical differences between white and black students to argue that “the Color of Mind has served to rationalize racially exclusionary school practices and unequal educational opportunities, and the effects of these, in turn have worked to sustain this racial ideology” (2). The authors define the “Color of Mind” broadly as the historical idea that “blacks were not equals to whites in intelligence, character,