

# Introduction

‘The world is governed by go-betweens.’ Thus wrote Edmund Burke in 1791. The term ‘go-between’ had until then most commonly been used for those employed to mediate between the sexes: messengers or matchmakers, procurers or pimps. Go-betweens appeared as characters in conduct manuals and select letters, in salon comedies and witty gossip.<sup>1</sup> Burke now stretched the concept from privy to public affairs. He used it to make sense of the British response to the turmoil of revolutionary France. The Anglo-Irish statesman sought to explain how some of his former political allies had been seduced into what he judged foreign sedition. He alleged that backstairs go-betweens had cunningly exploited relations between party elites and their supporters. There were good political, financial and colonial reasons to extend this notion globally. Burke was already familiar with government by go-betweens through his extensive experience of the business of the East India Company, especially in the wake of its seizure in the 1760s of military and fiscal power in Bengal. For more than fifteen years he had been involved in scrutiny of the Company’s administration, culminating with the impeachment of its governor-general Warren Hastings.

One of Hastings’ defenders, a maritime trader and pamphleteer Joseph Price, sought to show why go-betweens were unobjectionable, indeed virtuous and indispensable. When he answered an earlier report attributed to Burke on the mismanagement of justice in Bengal, Price invited his readers

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<sup>1</sup> Go-betweens have been widely studied in Romance literature as messengers and matchmakers in amorous encounters: Leyla Rouhi, *Mediation and love: a study of the medieval go-between in key Romance and Near Eastern texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Diana O’Hara, *Courtship and constraint: rethinking the making of marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000), chapter 3; Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval go-betweens and Chaucer’s Pandarus* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Their crucial role is emphasised even in the earliest manuals on the conduct and management of amorous encounters: see for example Vatsayana, *Kamasutra*, tr. Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 115–121.

to imagine how, in Calcutta, Hastings negotiated with Indian rulers: the term 'go-between' played a crucial role. 'Used to the manners and customs of the natives and by long habit easy in admitting and bearing his part in them', the British governor would of course use 'go-between' for carrying on the current affairs of the government.' Price explained how 'a confidential officer of the country government' and other 'trustworthy messengers' were essential. Officials relied on interpreters 'in the Persian language, couched in the most elegant terms of compliment used in Asia.' Practices of gift-giving, graceful translation and covert negotiation were 'honest not crooked policy.' Those such as Burke and his bloody-minded metropolitan friends who wrongly saw go-betweens as agents of corruption allegedly failed to understand oriental life. Drawing boundaries and crossing them were not simple matters. Ingenious mediation would only seem distasteful to one 'who knows no distinction of character, between Europeans and Asiatics, except that of a black man and a white man, or as the common people of that country have it, a Turban wearer, or a hat wearer.'<sup>2</sup>

This book sets itself the task of exploring how such agents, whatever their headgear, made and changed the contents and the paths of knowledge. These were the people whom late eighteenth century commentators such as Burke and Price then identified as crucial for regimes of politics, commerce and empire: brokers and spies, messengers and translators. Price, the East Indian sea captain trading between Muscat, Calcutta and Canton, was right to reject simple-minded categorical distinctions in these intriguing worlds of trade and power. Burke, the Westminster orator, self-declared prophet and victim of the

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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, *An appeal from the new to the old Whigs* (London, 1791), pp. 96–7; Joseph Price, *A letter to Edmund Burke, esq., on the latter part of the late report of the Select Committee on the state of justice in Bengal* (London, 1782), pp. 84–6. See Sara Suleri, *The rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), chapter 2; Nicholas Dirks, *The scandal of empire: India and the creation of imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), chapter 2. Europeans have traditionally been referred to as 'hat wearers' (in contrast to Asian 'turban wearers') in most South Asian languages: see John Ovington, *A voyage to Suratt in the year 1689* (London, 1696), p. 411. The distinction between 'hat wearers' and 'turban wearers' was also made in 1770 by the ruler of Arcot in conversation with a Dutch trader; and in 1781 by the scholarly diplomatic agent Tafazzul Husain Khān during negotiations between British and Maratha commanders: see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Turbans and hats: South Asia between two regimes,' *Penumbra visions: making politics in early modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1–21 on p. 6; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 97. For its aftermath see Bernard S. Cohn, 'Cloth, clothes, and colonialism: India in the nineteenth century,' Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 106–62.

subversion of domestic virtue by alien wheeler-dealers and speculators, was right that these agents were pervasively at work in transgressing and questioning the borders that supposedly hedged round European milieux.

## GOVERNMENT BY GO-BETWEENS

The studies gathered here are peculiarly concerned with the mobile lives led by such agents and with the relation between their strikingly improvised activities and the robust institutions that they helped produce. This focus is particularly important in the light of the widely held belief in the social sciences that although go-betweens played a crucial role in making sustained encounter and interaction across different cultures possible throughout history, the 'rise of the West' at the turn of the nineteenth century resulted in the homogenisation of the modern world and their eventual disappearance. The essays in this collection take seriously the prominence that the controversy between Burke and Price gave to go-betweens during the fraught period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a conjuncture of global revolutions and massive economic transformations. They are thus peculiarly concerned with the lessons to be drawn from the largely ignored role of go-betweens in the very construction of this modern world, notably in the domain of knowledge and sciences. This collection thus forms part of, and is inspired by, a growing body of recent historiographical work that seeks to remap the emergence of modernity as a global phenomenon, not one simply conceived of in western Europe and subsequently diffused to the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The geographical scope of the essays collected in this book, focusing on Atlantic, South Asian and Pacific regions, is designed to illuminate the principal features of this dynamic economic landscape. The period saw the culmination of a world pattern of trade marked by the export of bullion from South America and opium and specie from India to China to fund high-price tea imports into Britain and its colonies. During the eighteenth century more than 150 million Spanish dollars were absorbed by the Qing empire. This was a world governed by go-betweens through set-ups such as the notorious 'agency system' for opium: in the two decades following 1798 profits from the English East India Company's monopoly in opium to China more than trebled. The Company reported that 'to keep the preparation of the Opium perfect & uniform for public sale the whole provision of it must be given by Agency or Contract to Special Managers or to a Society of Merchants contracting the whole.' While playing a key role in the development of the emerging European imperialist economies, the opium trade was equally crucial in the forma-

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

tion of indigenous and regional capital networks in South and East Asia. The major European trading companies both in South Asia and in the Antilles, and the system of slave economies and plantations for sugar, cotton and tobacco, were also enormously affected by these trade flows. In the eighteenth century more than six million people were forcibly taken from Africa across the Atlantic as slaves, principally by British, French and Portuguese agents. In Britain at this period, about 5% of merchant shipping was engaged in the slave trade while more than 150 thousand tons of British shipping was involved in West Indian and American commerce. In the final decades of the eighteenth century the Canton system also motivated exploitation of such commodities as north Pacific furs and south Pacific sandalwood: an interwoven pattern of exchange, exploitation and extraction was driven by these demands for goods with which the China trade could be funded. As Daniel Clayton has taught us about the north Pacific fur trade, these systems involved 'itinerate geographies' of transient trade locations implicated in very long-range projects on all sides of the exchange, through which networks of value and use were established.<sup>4</sup> These commercial networks provided much of the capital for western European industrial investment and enterprise. Robin Blackburn, among others, has convincingly reasserted the economic significance within Europe of the new wealth of Caribbean plantation systems under French rule, and the major importance of the 'super-exploitation' of the slave plantations for British capitalist industrialisation. These were some of the global forces that linked the Atlantic revolutions of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries both in Europe and in the Americas with the no less momentous upheavals in Asia and the Pacific often referred to by contemporaries as revolutionary.<sup>5</sup> In these patterns, as we shall see, the work of brokers and intermediaries proved crucial.

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<sup>4</sup> For opium contracts in 1785 see Hunt Janin, *The India-China opium trade in the nineteenth century* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1999), p. 37; compare Amar Farooqui, *Smuggling as subversion: colonialism, Indian merchants and the politics of opium 1790-1843* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 13-16. See also Carl A. Trocki, *Opium, empire and the global economy: a study of the Asian opium trade, 1750-1950* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999). For itinerate geographies and the fur trade see Daniel Clayton, *Islands of truth: the imperial fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 76-81; for a comparative argument about the China trade and the Pacific systems see Marshall Sahlins, 'Cosmologies of capitalism: the trans-Pacific sector of the 'the World System'', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 1-51.

<sup>5</sup> For the economies of Atlantic slavery and plantations, see Philip D. Curtin, *The rise and fall of the plantation complex: essays in Atlantic history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Robin Blackburn, *The making of New World slavery: from the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997), chapter 9.

**CHANGING PLACES**

The movements recounted in this book involve many of the pathways along the long-range networks of the decades around 1800 that go-betweens were instrumental in constructing between many entrepôts, including La Plata, Philadelphia and Lisbon, Nagasaki, Amsterdam and Madrid, Calcutta, London and Benares, Guayaquil, Paris and Tahiti. Several sites in the Asia-Pacific region play decisive roles in these analyses as in Robert Liss's account of the hybrid forms of translation, trade and technique that emerged around the Dutch base in Tokugawa Japan at Dejima in the harbour of Nagasaki, or David Turnbull's delineation of the major roles as mediators and tricksters played by several Aboriginal agents in the early years of the British penal colony in New South Wales. Simon Schaffer traces the ways in which British and South Asian savant elites in the employ of the East India Company sought enlightenment and authority by relating, yet also contrasting, each other's astronomical knowledge, in a context of intermediation more broadly laid out in Kapil Raj's essay on early colonial Calcutta. Emma Spary's essay signals the decisive role of late eighteenth century maritime transportation and its material accompaniments—ships, supplies and survival between Europe and the Pacific. In his essay, Juan Pimentel invokes the 'second globalisation' associated with the political revolutions of the Americas and tells of the economic and maritime significance of the Pacific port city of Guayaquil in the Vice-royalty of Peru, while in comparable terms Margaret Meredith describes how the complex, often fragile, correspondence networks between Europe and north America sustained a range of different forms of mediation and exchange in natural history, and in the process were vital in defining the seemingly contrasted natures of the Old and New Worlds. Neil Safier follows the career of a Luso-Brazilian agent concerned with economic botany and political reform in the context of transatlantic trade, government and commerce. Lissa Roberts shows how entrepreneurial steam engineers across western Europe and the Atlantic artfully wove networks of patronage and investment in a range of new commercial schemes. James Delbourgo's story of Guiana, the American colonies and the transatlantic networks of commerce and intelligence describes a range of plans for novel exports of dyestuffs and related commodities from the New World. As historians of knowledge, of commodities and of techniques, the authors are drawn specifically to the forms of intelligence, expertise and mediation that these go-betweens developed and manipulated. Enjoying somewhat uncertain social standing, often masters of a range of different skills, disciplines and languages, the subjects of these essays make the hard work of developing reliable knowledge and robust techniques much more visible.

The essays in this volume deal with mobility, so have much in common with studies of scientific travel literature. Yet they differ from the latter genre in significant ways. Scholarship on travel literature has until recently focused

on accounts by European travellers and has concerned itself mainly with the way these travellers connect the world by reporting and representing the 'other'. Even as a growing number of scholars have started showing interest in non-European travel accounts, the perspectives from which these 'other' narratives are analysed share the same general assumptions as for their European counterparts. Received approaches to travel literature are more preoccupied with physical mobility, on going out and reporting back, while the emphasis here is on the *interaction* between mobile figures—taken in a broad sense to cover cultural, intellectual and disciplinary displacement as well—and 'other' cultures, in order to examine the types of knowledge or inflections in accepted knowledge practices that result from this process. Indeed, the contributions to this book stress the historical contingency and mutation of these practices introduced by movement itself. The go-between in this sense is thus not just a passer-by or a simple agent of cross-cultural diffusion, but someone who articulates relationships between disparate worlds or cultures by being able to translate between them. There is a parallel between this distinction and that made by Georg Simmel between the wanderer and the stranger in his well-known essay 'The stranger', written a century ago. Simmel writes: 'The stranger is thus being discussed here, not ... as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow.' Through this experience of being *between* worlds it becomes possible for the stranger to acquire 'the specific attitude of 'objectivity' ... a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The conquest of America: The question of the other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous possessions: the wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), chapter 5. Over the past decade a small but growing body of scholarship has begun studying non-European travel accounts, but less commonly the knowledges involved in such projects. Exceptions include Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim perceptions of the West during the eighteenth century* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: orientalism, occidentalism and historiography* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), chapter 3; Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to colonialism: Indian travellers and settlers in Britain 1600–1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian travels in the age of discoveries 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Kumkum Chatterjee and Clement Hawes, eds., *Europe observed: multiple gazes in early modern encounters* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008). For a synthesis of early-modern South Asian xenological accounts and historiographical reflections on them see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Taking stock of the Franks: South Asian views of Europeans and Europe, 1500–1800,' *Indian economic and social history review* 42 (2005): 69–100. The citations are from Georg Simmel, 'The stranger,' Kurt H. Wolf, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 402–8, on pp. 402, 404. For an interesting instantiation of the Simmelian 'stranger', although without any reference to it, see Christian Topalov, 'Maurice Halbwachs: l'expérience de Chicago (automne 1930),' *Annales, HSS* 61 (2006): 555–81.

This book therefore offers a possible remapping of the notorious ‘view from nowhere’ that philosophers often associate with the position of the objective knowledge-bearer. Its essays examine the historically situated work of mediation and also the ways in which that work has become strangely obscured. It attends to agents whose mediations gave rise to new intellectual, material and technical practices that were instrumental in inventing, reinforcing or reconfiguring connections between different parts of a globalised world. In situating their movements within empires of trade, dominion and knowledge, one of its main themes is the construction of power. So it shares a good deal with much current social science research. However, it contrasts sharply with a highly influential body of scholarship on intercultural encounter that has tended to assume an *essentially* confrontational relation between disparate peoples or communities, especially between the West and the Rest in the course of European expansion. Such scholarship proposes that the right unit of analysis is that of the somewhat autonomous region and holds that its analysis will explain an allegedly self-evident secular divergence between zones of economic success and failure. To be preferred is the argument of historians such as Maxine Berg that simple models of European domination and industrialisation ‘leave unexplored the stimulation of learning and knowledge offered by global interconnections’.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the sciences has not been exempt from the distortions of a bipolar vision, given the simple differentiation it often assumes between ‘western science’ and ‘non-western knowledge’. Because of the domination of the latter by the former and the resulting profound and vicious global conflicts that have characterised world history in the early modern and modern periods, it may make sense to conceptualise encounters between European and other peoples as dualistic and agonistic. However, it is also useful to remember that third parties have invariably been present in all encounters, ‘holding the whole together’ and influencing long-term interactions in new and fundamental ways. Indeed, go-betweens have often been instrumental in defining, objectifying and maintaining the purported boundaries between cultures, in influencing the power dynamics at play and sometimes exploiting their position for their own benefit.<sup>8</sup> Again, Simmel’s insightful reflections on what he

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<sup>7</sup> Ken Pomeranz, *The great divergence: China, Europe and the making of the modern world economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Joel Mokyr, *The gifts of Athena: historical origins of the knowledge economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jack Goldstone, *Why Europe? The rise of the West in world history 1500–1850* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008); Maxine Berg, ‘In pursuit of luxury: global history and British consumer goods in the eighteenth century,’ *Past and present* 182 (2004): 85–142, on p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Simmel, ‘The triad,’ Wolf, *Sociology* (cit. n. 6), pp. 145–69, on p. 146. On boundary definition see Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969). On geographies of objectivity see Steven Shapin, ‘Placing the view from nowhere: historical and sociological problems

calls the 'third element' are useful. In addition to the *ideal* impartial mediator (rarely, of course, found in real situations) who reduces conflicts 'to the objective spirit of each partial standpoint', thereby 'produc[ing] the concord of two colliding parties,' Simmel identifies other forms of intermediation that bestow power on the go-between: the arbitrator who, having been vested by both parties, 'gains a special impressiveness and power over the antagonistic forces;' the *tertius gaudens* who as the third party draws advantage from the antagonism between the two sides; and the third element who 'intentionally produces the conflict in order to gain a dominating position.'<sup>9</sup> This is especially relevant to the go-betweens dealt with in this book, since many of them were instrumental in articulating the new racial, imperial, geographical and disciplinary boundaries that mark the turn of the nineteenth century.

This exploration draws directly or indirectly on several other bodies of existing scholarship that have also taken the roles of intermediaries and go-betweens seriously. One such enterprise involves socio-economic and cultural historians' writings on mediation in the world of cross-cultural trade, providing the general context within which our studies are set. They helpfully point out that mediation constitutes an integral part of material exchange among societies in history and has been extensively commented on in manuals of trade for at least a thousand years. They remind us also that go-betweens could make themselves indispensable precisely because of ingenious manipulation and fraught acts of balance and translation and were not, therefore, treated as entirely trustworthy nor always reliable. These studies have mainly focused on the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean spaces in the medieval and early modern worlds and have drawn attention to the immensely complex and varied worlds of the go-between. As part of the early modern *oekumene*, these spaces have provided some especially telling cases of these processes of intermediation and performance. There was always a fundamental relationship between models of long-range knowledge and intelligence, on the one hand, and the physical and material capacity to travel and settle on the other. These encounters counted within the European cultures too, prompting innovative reflections on the reliability of agents' testimony, the status of cultural and intellectual variation, and the very question of the definition of culture.<sup>10</sup>

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in the location of science,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23 (1998): 5–12.

<sup>9</sup> Simmel, 'The triad,' Wolf, *Sociology* (cit. n. 6), pp. 145–69, on pp. 146, 151, 162. Other notable sociological writings on cultural intermediaries include those of the 'Chicago School,' for examples of which see Robert E. Park, 'Human migration and the marginal man,' *The American journal of sociology* 33 (1928): 881–93; Everett V. Stonequist, *The marginal man: a study in personality and culture conflict* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937); Arnold W. Green, 'A re-examination of the marginal man concept,' *Social forces* 26 (1947): 167–71.

<sup>10</sup> For mediation studies in the Mediterranean see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The corrupting sea: a study of Mediterranean history* (Oxford: Blackwell,

Historians of the early modern period of European navigation and the settlement of the Americas in regions such as Mexico and Brazil have found rich materials for the analysis of the work of such agents. Much of this analysis has focused on processes of hybridisation and creolisation in colonies of settlement. The studies of Serge Gruzinski and his colleagues have highlighted the ways in which *mestizaje* involved the entanglement of very different forms of culture and society to forge new and robust systems of expression and knowledge of world-wide scope, extending their powers to include eastern Asia and the Pacific as well as South Asia and the African shores. Elsewhere, whether in the Portuguese encounters in Brazil, or French and British projects along the western Atlantic coasts, historians have sought to classify the various processes of translation, settlement, mediation and intercourse that dominated new kinds of knowledge spaces. They have argued that the go-betweenes involved in these projects often adopted experimental and improvised strategies. A host of new agents emerged in the borderlands between different traditional regimes. Historians have thus been keen to trace the pathways of those tricky and often elusive characters who seemed newly important in networks linking cultures and, as often, confusing their boundaries.<sup>11</sup> However, with a few notable exceptions the Atlantic world and those of the Mediterranean and

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2000), section 3; Ella-Natalie Rothman, *Between Venice and Istanbul: trans-imperial subjects and cultural mediation in the early modern Mediterranean*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2006 [<http://www.uts.utoronto.ca/~rothman/RothmanDiss.pdf>]. For knowledge and brokerage in this space see Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance bazaar: from the silk road to Michelangelo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 6; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster travels: a sixteenth-century Muslim between worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006). For the Indian Ocean world see John Sydenham Furnivall, *Netherlands India: a study of plural economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939); Ahsan Jan Qaisar, 'The role of brokers in medieval India,' *Indian historical review* 1 (1974): 220–46; Michael Naylor Pearson, 'Brokers in western Indian port cities: their role in servicing foreign merchants,' *Modern Asian studies* 22 (1988): 455–72; Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund, eds., *Emporia, commodities and entrepreneurs in Asian maritime trade, c. 1400–1750* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991). For the European space see [Michel Vovelle, ed.,] *Les intermédiaires culturels* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications Université de Provence, 1981); Andreas Höfele and Werner von Koppenfels, eds., *Renaissance go-betweens: cultural exchange in early modern Europe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). More generally, see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-cultural trade in world history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For travel and trust at this period, see Steven Shapin, *A social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapter 6.

<sup>11</sup> Serge Gruzinski, *The mestizo mind: the intellectual dynamics of colonization and globalization* (1999; New York and London: Routledge, 2002); Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d'une mondialisation* (Paris: Éditions de la Martinière, 2005); Alida Metcalf, *Go-betweens and the colonization of Brazil 1500–1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

Indian Ocean have been dealt with as distinct, generally unconnected, historical specialities.<sup>12</sup> By presenting material from all of these regions as well as from the Pacific, this book seeks to restore, or even bring to light, some of the articulations between these spaces in the context of the globalised world of the late eighteenth century.

A further group of studies has examined the borderlands of encounter between settlers and Native Americans in north America of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially those agents variously identified as cultural brokers, intermediaries and translators. Particular attention has been paid to the powers vested in such brokers, who often shifted position from mediation to arbitration, from easing and enabling interchange to directing and sometimes even dominating such relationships. Richard White's very influential account of eighteenth-century relations between Algonquian and other peoples in the region south of the Great Lakes brings out the ways in which novel practices and meanings, specific to the spaces of encounter and negotiation, emerged during this period of shifting power relations and often ill-understood brokerage. Other scholars have rightly stressed the performative character of these brokers' projects, and brought out the clear advantages of subjecting these agents to detailed and careful biographic scrutiny, since their performances offer unusually clear case-studies for the complexities of cultural negotiation and mediation.<sup>13</sup>

In looking at processes of integration and change in contemporary post-colonial African, Asian and Latin-American societies, anthropologists have for their part focused on the unique role played by go-betweens, notably teachers, preachers, curers and community chiefs. They have examined in detail the eventual effects of mediation upon local or national cultures, as well as the relations between the two. They have thus helped open up new lines of questioning concerning the mediator's search for an identity which can accommodate the expectations of what anthropologists call the 'great' tradition of more national groups and the 'little' tradition of the local community. One of these lines concerns the uneasy cultural or social identification, or 'role ambiguity', crucial to the mobility and innovative behaviour associated with

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<sup>12</sup> One notable attempt to connect the histories of these spaces took the form of a pluriannual research seminar 'De l'Asie à l'Amérique et de l'Amérique à l'Asie: circuits, échanges, représentations (XVIe–XIXe siècle)' co-organised some years ago by Serge Gruzinski, Kapil Raj, Carmen Salazar-Soler, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Nathan Wachtel at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

<sup>13</sup> Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Margaret Connell Szasz, ed., *Between Indian and white worlds: the cultural broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); James H. Merrell, *Into the American woods: negotiators on the Pennsylvania frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999); Eric Hinderaker, 'Translation and cultural brokerage,' Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury, eds., *A companion to American Indian history* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 357–75.

the go-between and discussed in many of the essays in this volume.<sup>14</sup> Equally importantly, they also indicate a way of circumventing the prickly problem of changes of social, historical and geographical scale that has so preoccupied the social sciences. As one specialist of mobility studies notes, these mediators ‘cross scales, places, territories, venture out into spaces with uncertain or moving boundaries, create or use networks. Nomadic experts are neither ‘local’, nor ‘regional’, nor ‘global’. They cross ‘classical’ territorial formations by juggling with possibilities and constraints, construct spaces tailored to their own activity, cultivate solutions of continuity [and] function through networks.’<sup>15</sup> Many essays here provide remarkable illustrations of this fluid crossing of scales in the making of a planetary modernity.

An historiographical project close to the concerns of this collection is to be found in recent work that analyses the roles of such brokers—entrepreneurs, technicians, engineers and scholars—in processes of scientific, technical and industrial innovation and circulation. Less concerned, characteristically, with symmetrical approaches to the development of European and non-European forms of expertise and technique, this corpus of work has nevertheless increasingly stressed the decisive role played by the networks of travel, inquiry, exchange and espionage in making sense of changes in the distribution and adoption of novel practices and devices in Europe and north America. This approach is salutary, precisely because it rejects the assumptions of a rather static and cloistered milieu of craft skill in contrast to an allegedly open, frictionless pattern of sophisticated knowledge flow within the sciences. Material production and knowledge production were, in fact, intimately connected processes in both the recognised fields of natural philosophy and technological development.<sup>16</sup> Retracing the trajectories of production originally traversed

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<sup>14</sup> Lloyd Fallers, ‘The predicament of the modern African chief,’ *American Anthropologist* 57 (1955): 290–305; Eric R. Wolf, ‘Aspects of group relations in a complex society: Mexico,’ *American anthropologist* 58 (1956): 1065–78; Clifford Geertz, ‘The Javanese Kijaji: the changing role of a cultural broker,’ *Comparative studies in society and history* 2 (1959): 228–49; Irwin Press, ‘Ambiguity and innovation: implications for the genesis of the culture broker,’ *American anthropologist* 71 (1969): 205–17; David Landy, ‘Role adaptation: traditional curers under the impact of western medicine,’ *American ethnologist* 1 (1974): 103–27.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre-Yves Saunier, ‘Épilogue: à l’assaut de l’espace transnational de l’urbain, ou la piste des mobilités,’ *Géocarrefour* 80 (2005): 249–53, on p. 251. Compare Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel, ‘Penser par cas. Raisonner à partir de singularités,’ Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel, eds., *Penser par cas* (Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 2005), pp. 9–44.

<sup>16</sup> Yves Cohen, ‘Une histoire aussi technique,’ *Annales HSS* 50 (1995): 537–40; H. Otto Sibum, ‘Les gestes de la mesure. Joule, les pratiques de la brasserie et la science,’ *Annales HSS* 53 (1998): 745–74; Idem, ‘Exploring the margins of precision,’ Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, Christian Licoppe and H. Otto Sibum, *Instruments, travel and science: itineraries of precision from the seventeenth to the twentieth century* (London and

by various actors whose stories are recounted here emphasises the practical intelligence that guided go-betweens as they fashioned and refashioned connections between disparate communities of specialist practitioners or the products of their innovative efforts for public presentation in the form of a translation, a theory, a learned text, a machine or an industrial procedure. Navigational success, for example, required adaptability to constantly changing seas and weather conditions as much as knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. It also stood behind success in the markets where entrepreneurial go-betweens pitched their wares. Hence we find characters such as Edward Bancroft, the protagonist of James Delbourgo's essay, offering the public both dyeing techniques of his own invention and reflection on them in a philosophical treatise. Hiraga Gennai, the go-between described by Robert Liss, promoted both asbestos—the product of his prospecting skills and his manufacturing prowess—and a natural history text that situated the substance that he mined and wove in the world of natural knowledge. If this packaging of abilities were not enough, both men entered the world of cultural production, Bancroft as the author of a controversial novel that married drama to natural knowledge, Hiraga Gennai as a highly successful author of various literary genres in which knowledge of nature, society and human emotion were combined and served on a platter of sharp wit.

Practical intelligence was a pervasive feature of go-betweens as they traversed economic worlds and knowledge spaces. It was often difficult to replicate and distribute skills and information required for the projects of experimental philosophers and naturalists. Forms of creative imitation and adaptive appropriation were common in the technical networks of commerce, engineering and artisan mobility. It is true that technically proficient and mobile go-betweens often committed their newly established enterprises to ambitiously vertical integration, as Peter Mathias once argued, relying on highly developed forms of autonomy in the new sites where they sought to set up and

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New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 216–42; Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, 'Pratiques inventives, cheminements innovants, credits et légitimations,' Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Anne-Françoise Garçon, eds., *Les chemins de la nouveauté: inventer, innover au regard de l'histoire* (Paris: CTHS, 2003), pp. 9–38; Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, 'Dissemination of technical knowledge in the Middle ages and the early modern era: new approaches and methodological issues,' *Technology and culture* 47 (2006): 536–65; Liliane Pérez, 'Savoirs techniques, identities et migrations: l'histoire face aux mythes,' *Documents pour l'histoire des techniques* 15 (2008): 3–9. A fascinating case of early modern creative imitation of Indian dye techniques through Armenian go-betweens is described in Olivier Raveux, 'Espaces et technologies dans la France méridionale d'Ancien Régime: l'exemple de l'indiennage marseillais,' *Annales du Midi* 116 (2004): 155–70. The historiography is set out in Lissa Roberts and Simon Schaffer, 'Preface,' Lissa Roberts, Simon Schaffer and Peter Dear, eds., *The mindful hand: inquiry and invention from the late Renaissance to early industrialization* (Amsterdam: Edita KNAW, 2007), pp. xiii–xxvii.

develop their projects. But this form of integration can easily distract attention from the multiple ways in which local adaptation and makeshift enterprises characterised much of the pattern of technical development in the period that concerns us here. Neither of the stereotypes of easy knowledge flows and secluded technique withstands detailed historical examination for early modern European systems.<sup>17</sup> Historians such as Liliane Pérez have convincingly urged that mobile technicians mattered not only because they helped techniques travel but because they were often masters of local adaptation. In just this sense they emerge as translators and improvisers whose work was decisive for long-range networks of commerce and knowledge. Lissa Roberts' prosopography here of a correspondence network of entrepreneurial engineers demonstrates clearly the importance of such crafty manipulations that sought to marry locale, profit and effectiveness. Studies of sixteenth and seventeenth century textile printing and dyeing, of medical botany and chemical hardware, have shown clearly how the received geographies of technical diffusion must be redrawn, with renewed emphasis on Asian economic dynamism and on the crucial significance of regions such as the Mediterranean and the Atlantic networks wrongly judged either marginal to, or entirely dependent upon, a supposedly dominant north-western European centre. One of the important consequences of detailed study of go-betweens' pathways is this change to the map of knowledge and technique in the period of the Industrial Revolution.

### VANISHING ACTS

For historians of the sciences, the decades around 1800 have also been seen as a period of dynamic change, witnessing a so-called 'second scientific revolution' that involved the appearance of new disciplines and techniques, new forms of state, economic and military articulation of the sciences and new forms of public engagement and training. Established orders of natural philosophy and natural history gave way to different forms of inquiry, new modes of scientific analysis, communication and accumulation. The scale and scope of these changes has warranted the claim that this was the conjuncture in which the modern sciences appeared.<sup>18</sup> Several issues that bear directly on this book's

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Mathias, 'Skills and the diffusion of innovations from Britain in the eighteenth century,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1975): 93–113.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase 'second scientific revolution' appeared in 1961 in Thomas S. Kuhn, 'The function of measurement in modern physical science,' *The essential tension: selected studies in scientific tradition and change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 178–224 on pp. 218–22. For the relation between modern sciences' emergence and the Age of Revolutions see Andrew Cunningham and Perry Williams, 'De-centring the 'big picture': the *Origins of Modern Science* and the modern origins of science,' *British journal for the history of science* 26 (1993): 407–32.

concerns emerge from this account of the sciences in the Age of Revolutions: the appearance of a new disciplinary division of the sciences with sharper distinctions from what would be called the 'social sciences', their entanglement with the innovations in technique and commodity production associated with large-scale and intensive industrialisation, and their dependence upon, and application to, long-range networks of imperial and commercial power and global loot legitimised by new racial theories and maps of mankind. Crucial to this economic and imperial dynamic was the capacity of practitioners to make what worked in select carefully organised sites work elsewhere and in principle everywhere. This capacity certainly came to be taken as the sign of these sciences' authority. But it cannot be used historically to explain their efficacy. The new sciences began notoriously to imagine their ability to act immediately at a distance through spaces emptied of all other agents. Historians of their emergence should instead appeal to the dynamics of the fields in which these agents were always at work. This is why a study of the fieldwork of go-betweens and other ingenious delegates can address fundamental questions of the scientific transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including the strange obscurity of the many mediators on whom these transformations depended.

The social history and sociology of knowledge tell us of the importance of embodied competences, difficult to specify and capricious in transmission, decisive for the development of the tangled, delicate and long-range networks through which scientific communication and commerce could proceed. Training and replication demanded highly local encounters in adroitly organised settings, certainly not the easy application of seemingly abstract and universal sets of rules. Go-betweens' careers show how such apparently fixed paths could be creatively disrupted, manipulated, adapted and rendered effective elsewhere. Robert Liss's description of the creative fate of mobile (and sometimes immured) Japanese castaways in mediations between St. Petersburg and Edo is a striking case of this process. The work of such ingenious agents helped forge transient but indispensable spaces of knowledge production and exchange where distributed resources could be temporarily assembled in practical and pragmatic ways.<sup>19</sup> Several historians have shown us that the trading corporations and long-range commercial networks of the early modern world were entirely indispensable for the accumulation in cabinets and courts, shops and studios, of the commodities and resources upon which

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<sup>19</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Comment redistribuer le grand partage?' *Revue de synthèse* 104 (1988): 203–36; David Turnbull, *Masons, tricksters and cartographers: comparative studies in the sociology of scientific and indigenous knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000); Jim Secord, 'Knowledge in transit,' *Isis* 95 (2004): 654–72; Steven Shapin, 'Here and everywhere: sociology of scientific knowledge,' *Annual review of sociology* 21 (1995): 289–321.

new forms of knowledge then worked.<sup>20</sup> The process accelerated and intensified in the period of the late eighteenth century discussed here. The ‘learned empires’ were focused on the great warehouses, gardens, museums and observatories of Europe that stashed vast accumulations of booty: specimens, hardware and data with imperial and commercial provenances that depended on and cultivated these encounters and these intermediaries. But such empires also worked hard to represent themselves as loftily independent from the mundane messiness of locally tortuous wheeling and dealing. Simon Schaffer’s account in this book of the project of the Shi’ite scholar and diplomat Tafazzul Ḥusain Khān to turn Isaac Newton’s *Principia* into Arabic in 1789 in Calcutta is designed partly to emphasise the point. An artful balance was struck between emphasis on local knowledge, the idiosyncratic expertise of indigenous scholarship, and the claims of seemingly abstract and universal learning. Tafazzul Ḥusain’s translation project was transformed under artful British reinterpretation from a form of dialogic partnership among a group of collaborative scholars into an instance of rational acquiescence by primitive culture to evidently superior truth. Consider, too, Robert Liss’s analysis here of the remarkable process through which the decisive role of translators and other intermediaries was somehow written out of the historical memory of Japanese responses to, and exploitation of, Dutch studies (*Rangaku*). It later might falsely come to seem that these active responses were entirely the province of disinterested and innovative Edo elites. Similarly, in the new sciences mundane brokerage and tradecraft was indispensable yet distrusted. To become a scientific object, commodities had somehow to be shifted from the many settings of their origin and use and settled, permanently so some historians of the sciences have claimed, in the empires’ showrooms and workshops. The careers of the go-betweens of the second scientific revolution help us understand, simultaneously, the remarkable epistemological role of these intimate and ingenious negotiations and their equally remarkable disappearance from mainstream histories of science.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Steven J. Harris, ‘Long-distance corporations, big sciences, and the geography of knowledge,’ *Configurations* 6 (1998): 269–304; Pamela Smith and Paula Findlen, eds., *Merchants and marvels: commerce, science and art in early modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2002); Kapil Raj, *Relocating modern science: circulation and the construction of knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, eds., *Science and empire in the Atlantic world* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> David Philip Miller, ‘Joseph Banks, empire, and ‘centers of calculation’ in late Hanoverian London,’ David Philip Miller and Peter Hans Reill, eds., *Visions of empire: voyages, botany and representations of nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 21–37; Larry Stewart, ‘Global pillage: science, commerce, and empire,’ Roy Porter, ed., *The Cambridge history of science, vol. 4: eighteenth-century science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 825–44; Emma Spary, *Utopia’s*

Go-betweeners' work was vital for the creative imitation and adaptation of technique in economic and commercial innovation. It also mattered a great deal for the establishment of the matters of fact in which the new sciences traded. Without well-institutionalised prior agreement on criteria and standards of judgement, practitioners could not easily ascertain the status and value of the novelties and commodities they sought and treasured. So networks of shared assumptions, fostered by the work of mediation and commerce, provided important resources for the practitioners of chemistry and astronomy, engineering and natural history. Margaret Meredith explains that curious facts reported from a distance required prior mediation to judge their trustworthiness. Her essay shows that the very integrity of the correspondence networks along which go-betweeners operated often required a robust sense of appropriate standards of behaviour first established by personal acquaintance and face-to-face encounter. In her study of Dutch steam engineering, Lissa Roberts shows how challenging was the task of ascertaining in advance the plausible worth of any business scheme and she indicates the vital role played by go-betweeners' correspondence networks and back-street confabulations in getting provisional agreement about what counted as technical success. James Delbourgo indicates how an American creole go-between tried desperately to manipulate the received tenets of chemical theory, his track record in Guiana plantations and his transatlantic trade networks to make up some kind of authority over the reliability and efficacy of newfangled dyestuffs. It seemed important but extraordinarily challenging for intermediaries to establish provisional but effective initial agreement on standards of exchange. Robert Liss's essay offers cases where secure agreement was not an absolute precondition of exchange: matters that are exchanged and translated shift in surprising and fluid ways. Sociologists of scientific knowledge have studied the puzzles that arise for experimental practice in these relatively open settings, where such advance agreement is weak or absent. The studies presented here indicate why go-betweeners' capacity to set up shared values, even temporarily, aided commercial and scientific projects across the globe. There is a deliberate resonance with recent studies of technological change and transformation in the period, such as the analysis of olive oil milling in the later eighteenth century Mediterranean recently offered by Massimo Mazzotti: different measures of a technology's effectiveness depended on contrasts in social and economic interests and patterns of labour. Go-betweeners were crucial agents in an environment of conflicting and contentious schemes of labour and exploitation.<sup>22</sup>

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*garden: French natural history from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Massimo Mazzotti, 'Enlightened mills: mechanizing olive oil production in Mediterranean Europe,' *Technology and culture* 45 (2004): 277–304. Compare Carlo Poni, 'The circular silk mill: a factory before the industrial revolution in early modern Europe,' *History of technology* 21 (1999): 65–85. Compare Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduc-

In all these cases, go-betweens could encompass the materials and the objects in transit, whether as tokens, specimens, samples, representations, skills or models. Both Margaret Meredith and Juan Pimentel describe the patterns of mediation through which fossil bones travelled from the Americas to Europe in the later eighteenth century. While practical reasoning about the character of these remnants had to exploit proxies and inscriptions that could in principle be mobilised elsewhere and subjected to expert interpretation, it is at least as important to understand all the ways in which hardware and material objects themselves moved along the networks that go-betweens exploited. Most of the celebrated collections and capitals of eighteenth century natural knowledge represented the results of large-scale programmes of *secondary appropriation*, somehow acquired from other agents, collectors and travellers, artfully reorganised, restaged and manipulated.<sup>23</sup> This process therefore requires attention to the work of inventory investment, to the practices of preservation and storage, shipment and despatch. Packets, barrels, boxes, glass-covered crates and jars thus often appear as agents in the stories collected here. Recent studies of these translation techniques, whether stashed in ships' holds, greenhouses, cabinets or pharmacists' shops, provide indispensable resources for our understanding of how these go-betweens could work at all.<sup>24</sup> In her study here of French maritime provisions, Emma Spary argues that preserved foods and distilled spirits, narcotics and exotic foodstuffs must all be included within our catalogues of the decisive go-betweens of a world that was fast being brought under the ambit of European imperialism. The embodiment of travellers can be rendered apparent and granted its proper significance by tracing the pathways of these mobile goods. As Marshall Sahlins has pointed out in his survey of the Asia-Pacific economy in the later eighteenth century and its trade in tea and opium, spices and sandalwood,

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tion: commodities and politics of value,' Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3–63.

<sup>23</sup> Mary W. Helms, 'Essay on objects: interpretations of distance made tangible,' Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit understandings: observing, reporting, and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other peoples in the early modern era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 355–77; Krysztof Pomian, *Collectors and curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For comparative accounts of European and Asian processes of secondary appropriation see the essays in Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, eds., *Encounters: the meeting of Asia and Europe 1500–1800* (London: V&A Publications, 2004), part 3.

<sup>24</sup> Anke te Heesen, 'Boxes in nature', *Studies in history and philosophy of science* 31 (2000): 381–403; Neil Safier, 'Crochets et serres chaudes: les enjeux de l'histoire naturelle américaine au Jardin du Roi,' Charlotte de Castelneau-L'Estoile and François Regourd, eds., *Connaissances et pouvoirs: les espaces impériaux (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles), France, Espagne, Portugal* (Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2005), pp. 321–34; Harold J. Cook, *Matters of exchange: commerce, medicine and science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 268–76, 325–29.

European capitalist commodity production relied on the production of needs as forms of bodily affliction, while 'Asia in the eighteenth century entered into the consciousness of Europe as a cure.' This is why it was necessary yet difficult to work out systems of translation that could make such therapeutic commodities mobile.<sup>25</sup> None of these itinerant commodities, however fetishised, was powerful enough to dictate the same practices everywhere they went; but none was so weak that the setting of their consumption entirely determined their sense.

To define the powers which nature could plausibly exert, it was necessary somehow to manage the processes by which samples, stories and agents all moved across the globe, between forests, courts, academies, gardens and printshops. The histories of early modern botany and of natural resource imperialism have helped make sense of the construction of those knowledge spaces in which such components of go-betweens' worlds were extracted, negotiated and assayed. These were projects of cure and commerce where indigenous expertise played decisive roles. Local authorities made themselves into vital intermediaries for the accumulation of indispensable natural knowledge. These go-betweens often worked outside European hegemony, while their projects and strategies were by no means always directed towards European interests. Essays by James Delbourgo and by Neil Safier on the entrepreneurial networks of the Americas in this period remind us that it is wrong to draw a simplistic contrast between these agents' global orientations (misleadingly assumed to be entirely dominated by powerful European purposes) and irretrievably local purposes (misleadingly assumed to be characterised by merely parochial self-interest). Rather, as Kapil Raj's essay on the dynamics of south Asian networks indicates, the careers of go-betweens help histories of manifold and heterogeneous orientation in the formation of commercial and knowledge spaces. In the sixteenth century Antilles the expertise of the Taino leader Catalina de Ayahibex was crucial in establishing the fabulous worth of Hispaniola balsam. In the later seventeenth century Malabar physicians helped produce the *Hor-tus Malabaricus*, a vast catalogue of almost 800 local plants, their types and uses, that would subsequently become staple data for many naturalists world wide, including Linnaean botany. Throughout this period hosts of enslaved West African women brought their skills in the growing and preparation of mangrove rice from the Guinea coast across the Middle Passage to the tidal plantations of the Americas. It was a nice matter to balance the sense that indigenous experts possessed unusually immediate experience of wondrous plants with other ways of establishing the matter of fact, whether dependent on religious confession, professional expertise or tacit skill. Long-range networks stocked by middlemen and other experts were always entangled with these projects. Historians have shown simultaneously the fundamental role of indigenous experts and the processes by which that role has been effaced or

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<sup>25</sup> Sahlins, 'Cosmologies of capitalism,' (cit. n. 4), p. 44.

bypassed. Only recently have historians begun to recognise that American rice cultivation depended crucially on the knowledge systems of hosts of African slave cultivators, not solely on the skills of a few British and Huguenot planters in the Carolinas. The Taino chief whose account of the balsam's powers mattered so much to its fate in the European pharmacopeia was a Christian convert, married to a Spanish settler and entrepreneur, who shipped samples to Europe and there debated and tried its virtues with rival authorities. As Kapil Raj has pointed out, projects such as the Malabar herbal demanded the assemblage of a knowledge space occupied by many heterogeneous groups of specialists: tree-climbers, botanists, translators, draftsmen, physicians, administrators and merchants.<sup>26</sup>

This book presents cases of comparable forms of mediation and attempts to secure reliable knowledge spaces where local forms of expertise could become commodity resources. The global dye trades stimulated projects to extract and market the bark of American black oak discussed in James Delbourgo's essay. Other essays map long-range commercial networks dominated by shipments of foodstuffs, textile plants, timbers and minerals. In these enterprises, go-betweens helped processes in which social order and natural knowledge were produced and changed together. To know nature's capacities in these knowledge systems mediators had to manage and transform these worlds, then somehow naturalise them. This was the principal project of what C. A. Bayly has importantly identified in the 'agrarian imperialism' of this conjuncture.<sup>27</sup> Indispensable mediators and their vital agencies were often forcibly made invisible, as though the world could be emptied of strangers and wanderers. As David Turnbull points out in his essay on mediations in the world between Aborigine and settler communities, the many deep assumptions about settlement, nature and law involved in such encounters were

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<sup>26</sup> Antonio Barrera, 'Local herbs, global medicines: commerce, knowledge and commodities in Spanish America,' Smith and Findlen, eds., *Merchants and marvels* (cit. n. 20), pp. 163–81; Judith Carney, 'Out of Africa: colonial rice history in the Black Atlantic,' Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., *Colonial botany: science, commerce and politics in the early modern world* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2005), pp. 204–20; Richard Grove, *Green imperialism: colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 84–90; Raj, *Relocating modern science* (cit. n. 20), pp. 44–48; Cook, *Matters of exchange* (cit. n. 24), pp. 310–17.

<sup>27</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial meridian: the British empire and the world 1780–1820* (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 155–60; compare John Gascoigne, *Science in the service of empire: Joseph Banks, the British state and the uses of science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 169–78; Richard Drayton, *Nature's government: science, imperial Britain and the 'improvement' of the world* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 106–28; Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee and Peter J. Kitson, *Literature, science and exploration in the Romantic era: bodies of knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 108–26.

entwined with institutionalised notions of reason and knowledge. Appalling denials of others' agency and existence, often expressed in the language of natural kinds, helped reinforce belief in fundamental human difference. Proclamations on behalf of aggressive imperial powers reassuringly suppressed the dangers of government by go-betweens and the threat of intellectual and biological miscegenation such mediations palpably implied. It was as if indigenous 'bárbaros' could be contained by locating them somewhere outside the polity and emphasising their spontaneous 'vanishing.' As several essays in this book show, many agents capitalised on the fact of their mediating abilities to earn themselves a place in the world of the sciences. In other cases, histories of go-betweens can and must be used to help make sense of the largely un-mapped relations between such pronouncements about the fading or extinct role of indigenous go-betweens and the thick history of cultural mediations that made them work.

Scholars have long identified the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the emergence of what has been called 'scientific racism.' New racial classifications of humans had major consequences for many groups across the globe who in turn would mobilise such typologies to build their own racial maps and construct their own social hierarchies. From the Americas and Africa to southern Asia and Oceania, what the historian Elizabeth Elbourne describes as 'transimperial networks' of knowledge could be exploited to assert political rights, reorganise models of land tenure, and develop subtle models of racial class and origin.<sup>28</sup> One of the most insistent of such narratives sees the intensified articulation of accounts of fixed racial difference as a reaction to natural rights talk and abolitionist campaigning, as the pronouncements of anxious slaveocrats from Edward Long in Jamaica to Thomas Jefferson in Virginia surely confirm. Pacific voyagers sought to amass not only indigenous guides, artefacts and vocabularies but also specimens of skulls for the programmes of comparative human anatomy proposed by Johann Blumenbach in Göttingen and Petrus Camper in Amsterdam. This is part of the enterprise that the essays by Margaret Meredith and Juan Pimentel on aspects of the transatlantic bone trade help us understand: projects like those of Blumenbach

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Elbourne, 'Indigenous peoples and imperial networks in the early nineteenth century: the politics of knowledge,' Philip Alfred Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British world* (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 2005), pp. 59–86 on p. 80. For questions of race in this period, see Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the enlightenment: a reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). For striking cases of indigenous debates around racial classification, see William G. McLoughlin and Walter H. Conser, jr., 'The first man was red'—Cherokee responses to the debate over Indian origins, 1760–1860,' *American quarterly* 41 (1989): 243–64; Colin Kidd, *British identities before nationalism: ethnicity and nationhood in the Atlantic world 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 10.

were clearly dependent on the work of many different and widely-distributed brokers, informants and experts.

While these widely disparate agents and mediators were at work along these networks, their projects often disturbed and redirected global pathways. Significant disruptions of such systems of trade and governance were not limited to the demands and petitions of Company agents, nor of Creole subjects. Colonisers might indulge in the powerful fantasy that enslaved Africans combined the virtues of political docility and productive labour. In fact, such people resisted, re-directed and severely challenged the workings of these systems. Individual slaves could sometimes gain recognition by brokering knowledge, as shown by the extraordinary cunning of the slave known as Kwasi, or Quacy. Born in Guinea, Quacy was skilled in the medico-spiritual arts of *óbia* (protective charms) and won his freedom by trading his botanical expertise to Surinam's Dutch settlers, while exploiting his position as negotiator with the local Maroon (escaped African slaves) population to hunt down runaway slaves. To the Dutch, he was 'Quassie, faithful to the whites'—the legend on the breastplate given him by one of the Surinam council. The great Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus named the medicinal commodity *Quassia amara* for him, and he was presented to Prince Willem V of Orange in The Hague in 1776. 'On his hat he wore a white feather,' reported the Scottish mercenary and traveller John Gabriel Stedman, 'and looked upon the whole not unlike one of the Dutch generals; which goodness made this king of the negroes, however, very proud and even frequently very saucy.' Quacy certainly felt he had good reasons to be so: savants from The Hague and Uppsala addressed him as 'the Most Honourable and the Most Learned Gentleman, Master Phillipus of Quassie, Professor of Herbology in Surinam.' As a free man, he established himself as a planter—with his own three slaves. To the Saramaka Maroons, however, Kwasimukámba, as they called him, was understandably a conjurer, profiteer and traitor who is remembered in their oral history for paying dearly for his treachery, suffering the supreme humiliation of losing an ear to them in the course of an armed encounter—a dramatic reminder of the inherently ambiguous situation of go-betweens. By the second half of the eighteenth century, organised slave resistance intensified, making such border-crossings both more important and more difficult.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a five years' expedition against the revolted negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the wild coast of South America, from the year 1772, to 1777*, 2 vols. (London, 1796), vol. 2, p. 302; Susan Scott Parrish, *American curiosity: cultures of natural history in the colonial British Atlantic world* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 1–7. Quasy was not alone in paying dearly for straddling two cultures. Sanjay Subrahmanyam tells of the tragic fate of Sidi Yahya-u-Ta'fuft who acted as mediator between his Berber compatriots and the Portuguese in early sixteenth century Morocco: see his 'Variable geometries: between micro-history and world-history in early modern Eurasia,' Keynote address to the conference: 'Empires

Go-betweeners therefore joined in and worked at an economy of rare curiosity: in Java or Tahiti, Hispaniola or Brazil, so one was informed, nature's powers produced marvels not otherwise known to the world, and uniquely privileged experts *in situ* were strikingly familiar with the ways of these wonders. But they also depended on an economy of commodity formation. Ingenious mediators, at least the ones who survived, could somehow identify, translate and exploit these wonders for profit and glory, so move and accumulate them across the globe. To judge the worth of a fruit, a balsam, an insect, a bark or a bone, it was thus necessary simultaneously to manage specificity and mobility. In his challenging discussion of the long history of Euro-Creole sciences of bio-distribution, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra cites a 1792 encomium published in Lima by the eminent medical professor, journalist, and reformer Hipólito Unanue: 'God made an effort to bring together in Peru all the productions he has dispersed in the other three continents,' thus guaranteeing its future as the central commercial and scientific entrepôt of the planet.<sup>30</sup> This is why a history of late eighteenth century go-betweeners highlights the tortuous processes through which the properties of nature and of commodities were dependent on each other.

### CURIOUS PERFORMANCES

So an historical exploration of go-betweeners' pathways offers the chance to remap the networks of knowledge circulation and exchange at this key period of global commerce and conflict. Government by go-betweeners thus tended to be situated and specific, its local and tacit quality bewailed by late eighteenth century observers such as Burke and his allies. A central theme of this book's concerns is therefore the relation between individual, improvised agency and the systematic, institutional quality of these performances. Their work was very often a collective enterprise. It bound together several mediators in highly sophisticated collective action. The essays by Kapil Raj and by Lissa Roberts on the entangled co-ordination of translators and entrepreneurs in south Asian and north Atlantic milieux clearly demonstrate these processes of collective action. One of the principal concerns of this book is the process through which the work of go-betweeners could simultaneously seem locally adaptive and robustly socialised, generating vital new social roles in the global economies of knowledge. These essays thus feature characters often absent from official histories of enlightenment. When they do appear, they are typically treated either as marginal or resistant to the principal lines of reasoned progress. Some

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and emporia: the Orient in world-historical space and time,' Leiden, 29–30 August 2008, to appear in the *Journal for the economic and social history of the Orient*.

<sup>30</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, empire and nation: explorations of the history of science in the Iberian world* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 125.

late eighteenth century go-betweens have indeed become celebrated figures in stories of travel, trade and take-over. Emma Spary's essay clearly reminds us of the exemplary character of successive European encounters with Polynesians in the eighteenth century Pacific and of the fraught quality of judgements of savagery and civility in that region.<sup>31</sup> Stories of encounter and expedition were stocked with tales of impressive and 'curious' go-betweens. To use the late Greg Denning's eloquent image, movingly invoked here in David Turnbull's essay, historians need to attend to who and what moved across these islands' beaches, and to the lives of those who combed the beaches, making up cultural connexions and improvising startling performances of mediation and translation.<sup>32</sup>

David Turnbull recalls for us that the eminent Raiatea priest and navigator Tupaia, who joined James Cook's *Endeavour* at Tahiti in 1769, proved indispensable as mediator and voluntary hostage there and as pilot and translator elsewhere in Oceania before his death from malaria on Java. When Cook returned to Aotearoa / New Zealand on his third voyage in 1777, it seemed that *Endeavour* was remembered principally as Tupaia's ship. The navigator-priest's astonishing images of episodes in the voyage represent an impressive record of the go-between's skills and energies. When Tupaia had first come on board with the intention of voyaging to England, the gentleman-naturalist Joseph Banks notoriously observed that 'the government will never in all human probability take any notice of him; I therefore have resolved to take him. Thank heaven I have a sufficiency and I do not know why I may not keep him as a curiosity, as well as some of my neighbours do lions and tygers at a larger expence than he will probably ever put me to.' Commenting on Banks' condescension, Nicholas Thomas rightly points out that this go-between was by no means 'collected' by the British voyagers. It was, instead, his decision to perform his role on shipboard and on land. The capacity to move between worlds could be both vital and fatal. In the process of movement, important new forms of knowledge and new kinds of performance began to emerge.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Greg Denning, *Performances* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), pp. 128–67; Alex Calder, Jonathan Lamb and Bridget Orr, eds., *Voyages and beaches: Pacific encounters, 1769–1840* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Greg Denning, *Beach crossings: voyaging across times, cultures and self* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2004), pp. 271–315.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Discoveries: the voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 80–81. Compare David Turnbull, 'Cook and Tupaia, a tale of cartographic méconnaissance?,' Margarette Lincoln, ed., *Science and exploration in the Pacific: European voyages to the southern oceans in the eighteenth century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 117–31; Anne Salmond, *The trial of the cannibal dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 94–96; Glyndwr Williams, 'Tupaia: Polynesian warrior, navigator, high priest—and artist,' Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed., *The global eighteenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 38–51.

The work of mediation and exchange demanded the transient stabilisation of received customs, spaces and practices that functioned as improvised occasions for performance and knowledge making. In the 1770s and 1780s, for example, the Tlingit people of the north-east Pacific coast had a developed means of managing clan conflicts by the exchange of hostages, *kuwakan* ('deer'), who would then be subject to taboos against performing work, eating certain foods, or engaging in sex. The 'deer' would be deliberately tested by his hosts, with dances, songs and strict surveillance, to verify the goodwill of the exchange. This performative institution was creatively adapted by Tlingit leaders to manage their relations with the many European mariners who visited their shores during the boom in sea-otter fur trade of the final decades of the eighteenth century. In July 1791 at Yakutat Bay the Spanish artist Tomas de Suría, who had joined the Malaspina expedition after residence in Mexico, was taken as a deer by the Tlingit. 'I resolved to carry out their mood and began to dance with them ... I was able with my industry to gain their good will with a figure that I sketched for them with a coat and dressed like ourselves.' Earlier historians assumed that this practice was in fact adopted by the Tlingit from their often violent contacts with Russian forces, who did indeed take native hostages. Much more convincingly, as the anthropologist Frederica de Laguna has suggested, this was the creative adaptation of local institutions to new purposes of intermediation and negotiation.<sup>34</sup>

Such attention to the culture of culture contact, as Ian Campbell describes it, usefully directs attention towards the various local senses of what kinds of performances and roles go-betweens should discharge; and thus enables a constructive history of such institutions.<sup>35</sup> Several essays in this book orient attention not only to the significance of the performance of mediation but also past actors' own account of mediators' significance. Simon Schaffer's account of the relations between the several different astronomical traditions at work in northern India in the last decades of the eighteenth century shows, for example, that British Newtonians had their own stories of the significant role

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<sup>34</sup> Frederica de Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias: the history and culture of the Yakutat Tlingit*, 3 vols. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 116–117, 150; Stephen J. Langdon, 'Efforts at humane engagement: Indian-Spanish encounters in Bucareli Bay 1779,' Stephen Haycox, James Barnett and Caedmon Liburd, eds., *Enlightenment and exploration in the north Pacific 1741–1805* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 187–97; Julie Cruikshank, *Do glaciers listen? Local knowledge, colonial encounters and social imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), pp. 127–53. For similar negotiations further south, see Clayton, *Islands of truth* (cit. n. 4), chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Campbell, 'The culture of culture contact: refractions from Polynesia,' *Journal of world history* 14 (2003): 63–86, p. 65, contrasts the innovative practices developed in European-Polynesian encounters with the use of rather traditional resources in settings such as late eighteenth century South Asia where 'foreigners were already part of the cultural landscape.'

that privileged go-betweens had once played in the diffusion of true sciences world-wide. They were then able ingeniously to identify their participation in the violent exploitation of north Indian resources and populations instead as a continuation of this benevolent and enlightening enterprise of intellectual diffusionism. The case indicates the importance of creative, fictive, accounts of the work of go-betweens: essays in this book describe the intricate relation between romances of travel and the practical demands of trade, between the back-street deals of entrepreneurial engineers and fantasies of wealth and power, and often indicate just how important was the imaginative dimension of go-betweens' pathways.

In certain cases, so our authors indicate, one cannot be sure of these go-betweens' precise itineraries. There are major doubts about the exact character of visits to Mexico or Cuba in Neil Safier's attempt to track his Luso-Brazilian voyager, while Lissa Roberts tries to follow the routes of a number of shady, sometimes violent, often chameleonesque, travellers in the regions between Jamaica, Amsterdam, London street fights, Flemish yards, Paris embassies and St. Petersburg courts. Margaret Meredith's attention to the sense that writers themselves devoted to the construction of correspondence networks confirms this argument. To make sense of how go-betweens worked, it is crucial to recognise how their own cultures described and stipulated the right way to move between worlds. No doubt an anachronistic and ethnocentric bias explains the common historical habit of ignoring these local explanatory resources. Just as learned empires often sought to efface others' agency in the provenance and production of their hardware and data, so historians have often assumed that indigenous agents learnt practices of mediation entirely from the resources Europeans brought them. The assertion that Tlingit hostage-taking was but an adaptation of Russian practice is a case in point.

Elsewhere, the most sophisticated and long-range enterprises of mediation and accumulation have too often been understood merely as the indigenisation of European modernity. The remarkable collections of naturalia, scientific instrumentation, printed works and curiosities accumulated by the Raja of Tanjore, Serfoji II, in south India from 1798 have sometimes been read simply as the result of his early contacts with pietist German missionaries at nearby Tranquebar, who indeed cultivated practices of collection and museological learning. However, as Savithri Preetha Nair argues, a better account would see the Raja's programme as an endeavour to forge a distinct centre of cultural accumulation, exploiting networks of priests, officials, physicians, gardeners, hunters and publishers distributed across India and Europe. Significantly for our concerns in this book, this project reveals the crucial role of local experts in Tamil and Marathi traditions in recording and distributing medical, botanical and experimental knowledges: materials developed in south India were then linked in detail via the robust Tanjore networks with enterprises of London surgeons and naturalists. These linkages are hard to re-

cover unless and until historians do justice to the variable institutional forms in which the work of go-betweens could be performed.<sup>36</sup>

These forms were peculiarly developed and robust precisely where cross-cultural, intense and widespread relations had long existed and fostered well-entrenched social systems of translation and exchange. Kapil Raj's essay brings out the range of such institutional forms around the Calcutta networks of the period. These were social roles, often of great antiquity and robust authority, which in novel moments of encounter then could be redirected and changed. In the process new and specific knowledge forms could be generated. The debates in which Burke, Price and their colleagues were involved precisely reflected the contemporary sense of a host of such agents already in place in South Asia and thus indispensable for any commerce or government there.<sup>37</sup> The best-known case of such agents were the *banyāns* who acted as brokers and intermediaries for the East India Company, their name early applied to western Indian merchants and, more specifically, to agents who managed much of the credit system linking different trading communities in Bengal in the later eighteenth century. They managed a geography of credit lines that stretched across northern India and helped fund the China trade and ensure the fragile survival of several trading companies' bases. Historians have appealed to *banyāns*' role to query the extent to which any of the 'European' trade networks of this period could be seen as purely or even mainly European in character. Peter Marshall points out that 'they have been seen both as the filter through which western knowledge was to reach the Bengali intelligentsia of the nineteenth century and as the creators of the wealth that enabled an elite to cultivate such knowledge.'<sup>38</sup> In the late eighteenth century, *banyāns*'

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<sup>36</sup> Savithri Preetha Nair, 'Native collecting and natural knowledge (1798–1832): Raja Serfoji II of Tanjore as a 'centre of calculation', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society series 3*, 3 (2005): 279–302; compare Indira Viswanathan Peterson, 'The cabinet of King Serfoji of Tanjore: a European collection in early nineteenth-century India,' *Journal of the history of collections* 11 (1999): 71–93, on the 'European' character of the Tanjore materials.

<sup>37</sup> Compare Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The making of a munshi,' *Comparative studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004), pp. 61–72; Raj, *Relocating modern science* (cit. n. 20), pp. 107–114, 217–221; Bayly, *Empire and information* (cit. n. 2), chapter 2. Compare the work of the *gosains*, an order of Shaivite mendicants whose Himalayan pilgrimage routes proved vital in diplomatic and commercial relations between British, Tibetan and Chinese communities: Bernard S. Cohn, 'The role of the *gosains* in the economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth century upper India,' *Indian economic and social history review* 1 (1964): 175–82; Kate Teltscher, *The high road to China: George Bogle, the Panchen Lama and the first British expedition to Tibet* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), pp. 181, 267.

<sup>38</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, 'Banians and the British: the role of indigenous credit in the process of imperial expansion in western India in the second half of the eighteenth century,' *Modern Asian studies* 21 (1987): 473–510; Peter Marshall, 'Masters and

indispensability was also taken to be a sign of the dangers of their power. Here is a characteristic and well-known account of banyāns as go-betweeners, written in London in 1772:

Those Banyans have in fact a principal share, as deputies and interpreters, in every department of the government, as well as of the commercial concerns of the English East India Company in Bengal. ... He is interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash-keeper, and in general also secret-keeper. He puts in the under-clerks, the porter or door keeper, stewards, bearers of the silver wands, running footmen, torch and branch light carriers, palanqueen bearers, and all the long tribe of under servants for whose honesty he is deemed answerable; and he conducts all the trade of his master, to whom, unless pretty well acquainted with the country languages, it is difficult for any of the natives to obtain access. In short, he possesses singly many more powers over his master, than can in this country [i.e. Britain] be assumed by any young spendthrift's steward, money-lender, and mistress all together; and farther serves, very conveniently sometimes, on a public discussion, to father such acts or proceedings as his master dares not avow ... there have been few instances of any European acquiring such a knowledge in speaking, reading and writing the Bengal language (which is absolutely necessary for a real merchant) as to be able to do without a Head-banyan.<sup>39</sup>

This admirably detailed and politically astute account of go-betweeners' operations, with its references to economies of trust, secrecy and (above all) plausible deniability, became part of Burke's allies' fierce metropolitan campaign around the operations of the East India Company. The resonance of the text is considerably amplified because its author, William Bolts, was himself an exemplary go-between of the later eighteenth century global trade system, entirely cognate with many of the other dubious agents who feature in this book. Described variously as interloper, adventurer and 'German nabob,' Bolts hailed from Amsterdam (or possibly the Palatinate) and worked successively from the 1760s as a diamond dealer in Lisbon, a Calcutta book-keeper, an opium trader in Benares and, after peremptory expulsion from Bengal by the East India Company's officials, a Grub Street hack in London. In partnership with Antwerp bankers and Habsburg officials in Ostend, Vienna, Trieste

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banyans in eighteenth-century Calcutta,' Blair B. King and Michael Naylor Pearson, eds., *The age of partnership: Europeans in Asia before dominion* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), pp. 191–213, on p. 208.

<sup>39</sup> William Bolts, *Considerations on Indian affairs* (London, 1772), pp. 83–84.

and Livorno, he launched a series of vast commercial projects linking the Low Countries and the Mediterranean through bases in the south Atlantic and east Africa to the Malabar coast, thence to the Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal and the Canton trade. The threads of Bolts' web involved, *inter alia*, ingenious deals with the Mysore ruler Hyder Ali in 1781 for commercial concessions and also rather early attempts to transfer from Rio de Janeiro to the East Indies the precious cochineal beetles to which so much economic and natural historical attention was devoted in these decades. In the wake of the revelations by Cook's voyages of the potential advantage of the Pacific fur trade in Canton, Bolts then sought patronage from Russian, Spanish and French courts for exploratory commercial and natural historical projects along the north-west American coast: barely any of his own schemes in these regions came to fruition but Bolts' campaign directly prompted both the La Pérouse (1785) and Malaspina (1789) expeditions into the northern Pacific. By the mid-1780s, he was lobbying the Swedish state for a remarkable project to settle what the adventurer named 'Boltsholm', a paradisiac territory whose exact Indian Ocean location he kept secret, but is plausibly to be identified with fabulous accounts of what is now western Australia. Continuing to warn other European powers of the economic, military and political strength the British would garner from their new settlement at Port Jackson, Bolts died a pauper back in Lisbon in 1808.<sup>40</sup> His global career illuminates the landscape of cunning mediations, strenuous patronage, long-range trade and visionary projects that this book explores.

The aim of this work is certainly not to replace the hagiographic anti-conquest narratives that Mary Louise Pratt locates in the self-serving reports of European travellers, the 'seeing men' of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with a range of simplistic and celebratory accounts of cunning mediators and ingenious agents who triumphed over the odds to usher in modernity.<sup>41</sup> During the period treated here, our authors register a distinctive set of shifts, through which certain powerful agencies of capital and war began to claim a monopoly over the very ability to move between worlds. Rather gradually but decisively, so it was proposed, *banyāns* and *gosains* would allegedly be replaced by district administrators and engineers, health officials and anthropologists. The number and

<sup>40</sup> Norman Leslie Hallward, *William Bolts: a Dutch adventurer under John Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920); Holden Furber, 'In the footsteps of a German 'nabob': William Bolts in the Swedish archives', *Indian archives* 12 (1958): 7–18; Willem G. J. Kuipers, *The British in Bengal, 1756–1773. A society in transition seen through the eyes of a rebel: William Bolts (1739–1808)* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2002); Barry M. Gough and Robert J. King, 'William Bolts: an eighteenth century merchant adventurer,' *Archives: journal of the British Records Association* 31 (2005): 8–28.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 7, 39.

intensity of mediations and systems of exchange increased in secular terms between 1770 and 1820 to such an extent that new kinds of institution emerged, aiming to render permanent and powerful the work of translation, accumulation and analysis: these were the large-scale surveys, the international trading firms, the outfits of tropical medicine and plantation sciences, and the new military forces that sought to dominate the age of empire. In an examination of these processes in north America of the later eighteenth century, Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron explored the telling processes of intercultural mediation, the 'diplomacy of the middle ground,' that characterised relations between native American groups and settlers in the period. They trace the transformations from fluid borderlands to somewhat more rigid borders, constrictions on the milieux of mediation, as costs of such relations seemed to outweigh their benefits. Richard White, historian of the 'middle ground' around the Great Lakes, observes that in the early nineteenth century 'this world ... withered and died' as white settlers 'arrived and dictated.' The claim is that new power relations and forms of knowledge produced the very notions of savagery and civilisation then used retrospectively to make sense of what had taken place in the borderlands.<sup>42</sup>

This book is also concerned with the fate of the borderlands around 1800. Their changes are only partly captured by accounts of imperial meridian, global economy and the scientific revolutions. A vital aspect of this process of monopolistic institutionalisation was the aim of making local intermediaries redundant, obscure or subservient. Many essays in this book show that the aim of expropriating the intermediary was completely impossible to fulfil; but they also show why it was an aim nonetheless. To count as natural knowledge, claims often had to cut their ties with their provenance. Translators were often also traitors. Their activities too easily produced failure, infection and leakage. As urged by David Turnbull's accounts of boundary crossings and translations in the early years of the British settlement of Australia, the figure of the go-between can be tricky, subversive, dangerous and transgressive. Stories of go-betweens' work can show that neither easy extension of global networks, nor total subjugation of local knowledges, are images that work well for historical analysis of the major transformations of the period. Details of go-betweens' lives help illuminate much more general systems of social and

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<sup>42</sup> Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, 'From borderlands to borders: empires, nation states and the peoples in between in north American history,' *American historical review* 104 (1999), pp. 814–41; White, *The middle ground* (cit. n. 13), p. 523. Compare Jackson and Jaffer, eds., *Encounters* (cit. n. 23), p. 11, on 'a solidifying of hitherto fluid boundaries between different cultures' after the British destruction of Mysore in 1799.

economic transformation.<sup>43</sup> By forging a kind of collective xenobiography of rather outlandish late eighteenth and early nineteenth century careers, this book hopes also to show the extent to which 'government by go-betweens' always relied on these kinds of strangers and the knowledge they were instrumental in providing.

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<sup>43</sup> This point is very well made in Cassandra Pybus, 'Billy Blue, an African-American journey through empire in the long eighteenth century,' *Early American studies* 5 (2007): 252–87.