

CHILTON, Lisa — *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s–1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. Pp. 240.

Agents of Empire is a welcome contribution to the rapidly growing field of studies in gender and imperialism. The title aptly conveys the main analytical focus of the book. Lisa Chilton concentrates on the network of women who worked to promote and control female migration from Britain to Canada and Australia between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s. In particular, the British Women's Emigration Society (BWEA), the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), the Colonial Intelligence League (CIL), and their Canadian and Australian associates are the central interest. Chilton perceptively assesses the motivations, strategies, and struggles for power of the women emigrators who asserted their agency in building the empire. The female migrants who were recruited to form living links of empire are marginal figures in the book, appearing mainly in chapter 4, where Chilton explores the significance of their published correspondence with the emigrators.

Throughout the book, Chilton explains clearly how she draws upon and seeks to extend or challenge the literature on gender, culture, and imperialism. Considering the theoretical linking of discourse and power, she shows how reform-minded women emigrators were able to manipulate narratives of sexual danger to claim control for women as protectors of female migrants. Similarly, Chilton applies an understanding of sexually charged discourse regarding space and place to develop how the emigrators wanted to transform "unsafe" public spaces for single female migrants into domesticated safe environments. The threat shifted from initial concerns regarding sailors or fellow passengers to a moral panic concerning an organized white slave trade and subsequently even included the danger posed by polygamous Mormons in Utah. By contrast, the construction of safe passage discourses that emphasized the importance of maternal authority in the close management of vulnerable female migrants remained constant until the 1920s.

Chilton challenges some assumptions in the historiography. Recognizing that emigrant letters were solicited and edited by the publishers for their own purposes, she convincingly claims that the letters nonetheless reveal a more complicated range of relations than has often been assumed. Some emigrants might exert agency through resistance or short-term tolerance, but others sought to benefit emotionally or practically through extended involvement with an imperial family of women.

Chilton herself makes assumptions that need to be queried when she challenges Julia Bush's claim that female imperialism was dominated by a small group of elite women. Highlighting the important work of Ellen Joyce, Adelaide Ross, and Grace Lefroy, Chilton argues that the efforts of such middle-class women were critical to the success of female emigration societies. She observes that Joyce and Ross were the wives, then widows, of Anglican clergymen and that Lefroy, who never married, was a clergyman's daughter. This brief reference is not sufficient to establish the class position of these key women. Anglican clergy might have status above middle class, and women, especially in the higher social echelons, continued to draw

their social standing from their birth families as well as their husbands. Bruce Elliott, who has used genealogical methods to study migration, has noted that Ellen Joyce's appellation "The Hon." indicates she was the daughter of a peer and that her brother, the Sixth Baron Dynevor, lived in a castle on the family's 10,000-acre Welsh estate. He also found that Grace Lefroy was niece to Sir J. H. Lefroy, Governor of Bermuda and administrator of Tasmania, and that Adelaide Ross was descended from a wealthy merchant family and had two sons who were knighted, one of whom, Sir Denison Ross, was the first director of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and head of the British Information Bureau in Istanbul. Thus all three women potentially could derive assurance and recognition from family connections that would place them in a very different social position than the wife or daughter of a local vicar.

Agents of Empire adopts the transnational approach of recent migration studies that use comparative analysis to investigate the complexities of the migration process. Chilton chose to examine Canada and Australia as destinations because these two countries consistently received large numbers of the societies' migrants and also were compared in the literature most frequently. Her study of the emigrants' values is definitely richer because she uses both the Canadian and the Australian experiences to document racial, class, and gender beliefs such as the assumptions of British white racial superiority and the silence regarding Aboriginal women. Explicit comparison that explains similarities and differences between Canada and Australia as receiving countries is more limited. Chilton provides examples of power struggles in both countries regarding the management and control of female migration, but the conflicts involve different interest groups and issues. In Sydney in 1885, GFS efforts to oversee British female migrants were blocked by the government. In Montreal in the latter nineteenth century, the women's emigration network prevailed against religious opposition from Anglican clergymen. In the twentieth century, women emigrants' complaints regarding conditions at the Brisbane depot in Queensland received only a hostile response from government officials. In the final chapter of the book, Chilton develops a case study of the 1926–1927 Canberra domestic-servant project in which questions of national identity were most central to a conflict between male officials and politicians. Such examples definitely illustrate that female migration was contested terrain, but they do not provide an explanation for Chilton's conclusion that the women emigrants enjoyed better relations with government in Canada than in Australia.

Agents of Empire is a very readable book that sustains interest through lucid prose, excellent organization, and a clear exposition of argument. It addresses the theory and concerns of international literature on gender and imperialism more than it develops a comparative study of female migration to Canada and Australia. More context regarding the immigration policies and patterns of Canada and Australia would be needed to compare the successes and difficulties of female emigrants in the two receiving nations.

Marilyn Barber
Carleton University