



**Alison Games.** *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. xii + 368 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-57381-9; \$26.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-00702-4.



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## Heavy Traffic on the Atlantic Bridge

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Alison Games's *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* is very much like the "Atlantic bridge" that historians in the field are fond of discussing. Games's work affords the reader the opportunity to travel with English migrants leaving their troubled homeland to diverse colonies during Stuart rule. While many readers will be familiar with the exodus of the ambitious and displeased (such as Nonconformists) out of England in the seventeenth century, we are less accustomed to hearing about those who returned to England temporarily or permanently. Certainly, the traffic went both ways on this bridge and many of the migrants were the early modern equivalent to "frequent flyers." Some made journeys to England for business, others visited loved ones while some returned permanently when the New World did not meet their expectations. Additionally, a sizeable portion of migrants exhibited a pattern of repeat moves within England's overseas possessions. Thus, the English Atlantic world that Games paints is one where nothing is static and everyone seems to be on the go. Early modern historians have come to ap-

preciate the high degree of geographic mobility within England and Games's work argues persuasively that this mobility extended into England's Atlantic possessions as well. This book will provide historians with a greater understanding of the brave, enterprising, and/or desperate individuals who chanced the dangers and discomforts of seventeenth-century travel and resettlement, in many cases, repeatedly.

Those who are not specialists in the field of migration might think that such a study, bolstered by tables and figures, would run the risk of being dry reading. Yet Games has a gift for bringing out the human dimension to balance the charts and statistics. After obtaining their names and destinations from London's port records in 1635, she tried to "reach out and grab these people as they assembled" in their port of disembarkation so that she could "chase them down" (p. 7). Of the 7,507 persons who left the port of London in 1635, she has tracked down 1,360 (or about 27 percent) of the nearly 5,000 who sailed westward to England's nascent empire. She has plumbed the usual sorts of primary documents that social historians rely on—wills, letters, parish registers and

such—and has tried to reconstruct something of the lives of these peripatetic individuals. Her subjects are more than mere data to her: Games gives ample room for the complexity of personal reasons that caused them to make their way to London and board ships bound for the New World (and sometimes back again). We learn of families and neighbors who migrated as a group, of individuals who imagined (often wrongly) that they could make their fortune in the colonies, of the faithful who longed to practice their religion freely, and of expectant mothers who returned to the security of England for their confinements: “Like old Englanders, New Englanders transplanted themselves throughout their life cycles for any number of reasons, although they clearly tended to move greater distances and to undertake gruelling and dangerous journeys” (p. 189). While we “meet” a significant number of the individuals in Games’s study, she asserts that, as a group, their role in England’s expansion was pivotal. She postulates that the 1620s and the 1630s witnessed the second phase of a tripartite process of empire-building which she refers to as an “age of creation and elaboration” (p. 5). Although this phase was slow and painful, “this westward migration, primarily composed of young male labourers, secured England’s Atlantic world” (p. 4).

Although the book makes for interesting reading, there are obvious limitations to such a study. In most respects, Games acknowledges these weaknesses, or potential weaknesses, and tries to compensate for them. In the Introduction, she concedes that her “focus on this single cohort of travellers ... gives this study a static air.” It is, as she claims, “only a slice of society at one moment in time” (p. 8). In order to broaden her study, she tries to use geography to compensate for a limited sample. She acknowledges the problematic nature of drawing generalizations about such diverse colonies as Providence Island, Barbados, Bermuda, the Chesapeake region, and New England. While she does deal specifically with these different colonies in some instances, she also delves into the common processes of community-building: her emphasis in most chapters is on the “convergences and on the primacy of the Atlantic world over the localism of individual colonial communities” (p. 10). She does not, however, ignore these distinctions but rather attempts to deal with them in terms of the larger picture. This thread is sometimes difficult to follow as we move through her topical landscape; while we applaud her goal of studying these divergent colonies together in order to illuminate something of the English Atlantic world in general, the work is somewhat disjointed at times as a result. Yet

one must admire Games for eschewing the tendency of many historians to retreat into a narrow study which offers few glimpses of the “bigger picture” we so desperately need in order to understand the past. Although we are treated to many illuminating anecdotes about the Stuart migrants, we are also shown the broad strokes: the “chaotic process” by which they sought to “render familiar the exotic” (p. 10). We come to appreciate how the Atlantic travellers imposed their template of community and government on a new land where circumstances forbade most attempts to replicate the institutions of the mother country. It is precisely these attempts, the circumstances which foiled their efforts to recreate their homeland, and the ties which bound the people together that gave the unique character to the English Atlantic world: “The seventeenth-century English Atlantic world, created and sustained by migration, was as chaotic and disconnected as the distracted nation that spawned it” (p. 6). This aspect of Games’s work illuminates much about the nature of “community” in the English Atlantic world in particular, and in the early modern period in general.

It could reveal more, however. There are a number of places where she could have placed her findings in a larger context. For instance, there is an existing literature on such things as early-modern will-making; morbidity and mortality on shipboard as well as in land communities; and, the system of debts and loans among community members (to name a few topics) which she could have consulted. Greater context would widen the scope of her study and help the reader gauge the typicality of these communities within the English Atlantic world.

One might also argue that the Puritans loom too large upon her landscape and are over-represented as a group. We would benefit from hearing more about other migrants who clung to the Established Church or perhaps more on Catholic migrants (such as Lord Baltimore’s efforts in Maryland). Neither receive more than a few mentions. Games is obviously knowledgeable about colonial Puritans and we are brought into the minutiae of their seemingly endless doctrinal quarrels. Her familiarity allows her to throw about terms like “Antinomian controversy” (first mentioned, p. 133) which she does not explain until later on (p. 145). Also, Games only offers the vaguest of definitions of Puritanism, which is that it was “defined only in opposition to Church of England policies”; this is in keeping with her understanding of the amorphous nature of Puritanism which was full of “tensions and ambiguity” (p. 133). While this hesitancy to define the term reflects some of the latest scholarship, which often seems reluctant to even use the term, Games

might have been more forthcoming, particularly since she maintains that the Puritan impact on the English Atlantic World was so important.

Arguably the greatest weakness of Games' work is its final chapter. Throughout the vast majority of the book she remains cautious to ensure that her conclusions are well supported by her findings. It is only when she tries to draw more far-reaching conclusions about the Atlantic world in chapter 7 that she ventures into shaky territory. She tantalizes us with provocative comments such as "frequent movement did enable colonial residents and visitors to retain contact with old England ... [and] this

contact enabled them to remain a part of England even as England itself was ultimately altered by its colonial holdings" (p. 191). However, she gives the reader no indication how old England was transformed by the larger English Atlantic world.

These are minor criticisms of a book that is both well-researched and well-written: it contains a thorough index, meticulous documentation, and useful charts and tables. Overall her work provides an engaging and edifying read. It is to be hoped that Games's future work will expand upon these findings and further our understanding of the English Atlantic world.

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