

*Routledge Studies in Human Geography*

# **BRITISH MIGRATION**

## **PRIVILEGE, DIVERSITY AND VULNERABILITY**

Edited by  
Pauline Leonard and Katie Walsh



# British Migration

Around 5.6 million British nationals live outside the United Kingdom: the equivalent of one in every ten Britons. However, social science research, as well as public interest, has tended to focus more on the numbers of migrants entering the UK, rather than those leaving.

This book provides an important counterbalance, drawing on the latest empirical research and theoretical developments to offer a fascinating account of the lives, experiences and identities of British migrants living in a wide range of geographic locations across Europe, Asia, Africa and Australasia. This collection asks: What is the shape and significance of contemporary British migration? Who are today's British migrants and how might we understand their everyday lives? Contributions uncover important questions in the context of global and national debates about the nature of citizenships, the 'Brexit' vote, deliberations surrounding mobility and freedom of movement, as well as national, racial and ethnic boundaries.

This book challenges conventional wisdoms about migration and enables new understandings about British migrants, their relations to historical privileges, international relations and sense of national identity. It will be valuable core reading to researchers and students across disciplines such as Geography, Sociology, Politics and International Relations.

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**To Judy Baxter, for all her loving support and inspiration.**  
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# 1 Introduction: British migration

## Privilege, diversity and vulnerability

*Pauline Leonard and Katie Walsh*

### Introduction

Estimates suggest there are currently 5.6 million British nationals resident outside of the United Kingdom (UK), the equivalent of one in every ten Britons, with communities of 1,000 or more in almost every country of the world (Finch, Andrew and Latorre 2010).<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, it is difficult to know precisely how many British nationals leave, return, or continue to reside outside of the UK each year, as collecting accurate figures on British out-migration is notoriously complex. However, in the mid-2000s, British migration drew the attention of the UK's Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the two reports published subsequently (Finch, Andrew, and Latorre 2010; Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006), as the only quantitative attempts to estimate the scale and extent of British migration, remain our source of these figures. Like others before them (e.g. Findlay 1988; O'Reilly 2000), these reports note the difficulties of data collection: British nationals rarely register with a British consulate or local government office, unless advised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel guidance that they are relocating somewhere high-risk. As such, many of the estimates used in the IPPR reports rely on sources that they identify as incomplete – the International Passenger Survey has a very limited sample, passport issue and renewals may take place during visits to the UK, the Department of Work and Pensions records only the number of people who declare their overseas residence in claiming their UK state pension. That reliable estimates from census data are only available for a small number of countries only adds to this sketchiness (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006, 8–9). Nevertheless, working with this range of sources, their estimates provide convincing evidence that the numbers of British nationals resident overseas are undoubtedly significant.

Yet, while British migration is hugely significant in statistical terms, this is the first edited volume that takes British migration as its starting point. This is perhaps surprising, given the real interest in British migration demonstrated over the last 20 years in both academic and cultural arenas, with a proliferation of book chapters, journal articles, as well as television programmes and newspaper articles exploring what it is like to be British and living abroad.

Our aim here is to bring a range of cutting-edge, in-depth qualitative studies together, including side-by-side contributions from established researchers as well as recent doctoral research projects. Doing so allows us to examine some of the diversity and commonalities among British migrants in terms of the routes and rhythms of their international mobilities and residence, lifestyles, practices, experiences, and subjectivities. Ethnographic studies have already established that individual ‘British communities’ in particular locations are internally diverse yet share similarities across the globe, but this collection allows us to deepen this analysis across geographically, politically and socially distinctive research sites. Chapters draw upon theoretically informed empirical research, developed in different international contexts and by researchers with different disciplinary orientations and backgrounds. We ask: What is the shape and significance of contemporary British migration? Who are today’s British migrants? How might we understand their everyday lives? What can we learn about Britishness from examining how it unfolds beyond Britain? And, in the context of global and national debates about the nature of citizenships, the ‘Brexit’ vote<sup>2</sup> and deliberations surrounding mobility and freedom of movement, national, racial and ethnic boundaries, what can we learn about the contemporary British in relation to historical privileges, international relations and senses of national identity?

Our focus here on British out-migration is not only unique in that this is the first collection of this kind, but also a timely corrective to the consistent political and media attention focused on migration *into* Britain. There is intensive interest and debate surrounding people coming to Britain, yet the numbers of Britons who migrate each year, and the reasons for this, remain largely invisible – and unquestioned as a ‘right’ – in popular discourse. Although, as stated above, there has been some public policy focus on British out-migrants and the British ‘diaspora’ (e.g. Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006, Finch et al. 2010), this often tends to be romanticised as progressive: migrants are represented as being highly engaged in the communities they reside in, and as such key partners in UK public diplomacy goals (Finch, Andrew and Latorre 2010). Whether this is the case in practice remains under-examined. Academic scholars have been more critical in their approach to British migration, viewing the routes, practices, and identities of contemporary British migrants as reflecting ongoing traces of Empire (e.g. Benson and O’Reilly 2018; Conway and Leonard 2014; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Higgins 2018; Knowles 2005, 2008; Knowles and Harper 2009; Leonard 2010; Walsh 2018).

Building on existing research, in this volume we identify three significant thematic and conceptual emphases that have broader relevance for understanding British migration, namely: (1) privilege; (2) diversity; and (3) vulnerability. We have loosely organised the discussion of the chapters, in what follows here, on this basis. While it is important to recognise that many chapters speak to more than one section, this structure allows us to make a three-fold argument about contemporary British migration. The first set of chapters (from authors Benson, Abel, Cranston, Kunz) take as their central

focus the critical analysis of *evidence of the race and class-based privilege of British migration and the associated terminology of 'expatriate'*. The second set of chapters (Conway and Leonard, Khambhaita and Willis, and Higgins) examine *the diversity of Britishness and mobile Britons in respect to nationality, ethnicity and race*. Finally, the chapters in the third section (Lloyd, Hall, Walsh) explore *the coexistence of vulnerabilities in accounts of the individual biographies and communities of British migrants*. As such, the volume asserts the heterogeneity and complexity of British migration. As a starting point for this assertion, we present an overview of the range of mobilities involved in contemporary British migration.

### **Routes and rhythms of British migrant mobilities and residence**

To develop conceptual understanding of contemporary British migration, in this section we explore the range of routes and rhythms evident in the flows of today's mobile Britons. Our aim here is not only to introduce contemporary British migration to readers unfamiliar with the field, but also to contribute to research in this area by highlighting some of the connections between currently separate literatures and identifying the gaps in stories told about British migration. Reviewing existing literatures, we can identify at least five categories of British migrant: (1) settler migrants; (2) highly skilled migrants; (3) lifestyle migrants, including retirement migrants; (4) 'middling' transnational migrants; and (5) 'reverse migrants'.

The first category of British migration that we propose in this typology is *British settler migration*. From the 1880s–1960s British migration was primarily in the form of *settler migration*, with British migrants 'reinforcing an existing wider British world' and 'on the whole easily assimilated into it' (Constantine 2003, 19). They were part of a mass movement of the British population to empire destinations, especially Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but also South Africa, India, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore. These colonial societies, where the language of government and trade at least was English-speaking, continued to be among the main destinations for British settlers up until independence and beyond, attracting a range of Britons with varied skill-sets: men and women professionals, tradespersons, state functionaries (in government, the police, railway, education and health sectors) and entrepreneurs (Bickers 2010). Their migration was often heavily subsidised through 'assisted passage' or 'Ten Pound Pom' schemes, which persisted well into the 1970s and 1980s in contexts such as Australia, Canada and South Africa, seeking to shore up white presence (Hammerton and Thomson 2005; Conway and Leonard 2014). Motivations for settler migration were mixed, but were often driven by perceptions of relative poverty and/or lack of economic opportunity at home (Leonard 2013). While forging a new material existence was not necessarily immediately any easier in the new world than the old, many persisted to craft new lives for themselves, frequently framed within a determination that they were leaving behind the



repressive social structures of ‘the mother country’ (Elder 2007). Today these communities of settler migrants remain attractive to Britons seeking to emigrate more permanently, for instance Australia is the top destination for British migrants (Finch, Andrew and Latorre 2010). While more recent British migrants are framed as lifestyle or skilled migrants (see below), there remain in these communities some older Britons who moved themselves as settler migrants, others who were raised as the second-generation in British settler families, as well as many more whose migration is informed by the ‘expatriate’ practices and subjectivities of British settler migration. Sarah Kunz’s chapter focuses on British settler migrants in Kenya now in later life, while Daniel Conway and Pauline Leonard’s chapter draws on the stories of two Britons who attempt to position themselves against the dominant lifestyles and attitudes of British settler migrants in South Africa.

Secondly, *British professional migrants* are variously described in the wider literatures as highly skilled migrants, ‘skilled transients’, global talent, corporate migrants, expatriates, or elite migrants (e.g. Beaverstock et al. 2002, 2005, 2011; Beaverstock and Bordwell 2000; Findlay 1988; Findlay and Garrick 1990; Findlay, et al. 1996; Harvey 2008). Movements of the highly skilled are associated with globalisation as professionals employed in the finance, engineering, science, health, IT, law, and petroleum sectors move within transnational corporations as inter-company transferees. These British migrants have attracted the attention of human resource management studies, as well as social scientists (see Findlay and Cranston 2015 for an overview). Allan Findlay’s (1988) early quantitative study of emigration identified that skilled transient migration of professional British citizens *circulating* at an international level was increasingly important from the 1960s onwards, becoming more dominant than the traditional ‘settler’ migration in the postcolonial period. These British migrants are most often found in global cities and key finance, IT or engineering hubs, but would also include those working for British consular services, the United Nations and other high-profile NGOs. Global flows of *temporary* highly skilled migrants were, and continue to be, dominated by men, although many relocate with their wives and children accompanying them (Coles and Fechter 2008; Findlay 1988; Hardill 1998). They may return to Britain between postings or relocate from one country direct to another, usually every 2–5 years, sometimes feeling little agency in these decisions about their movement made by ‘the company’. In this volume, it is the Britons in Singapore who feature in chapters from Sophie Cranston (Chapter 4) and Jenny Lloyd (Chapter 9) who, collectively, most fit within this category of British migrant.

*Lifestyle migrants, including retirees, are a third category among whom Britons are significant.* For Benson and O’Reilly (2009, 608) ‘lifestyle’ is an analytical tool that can be of use in explaining the relocation of relatively affluent people within the developed world ‘searching for a better way of life’. Most research has focused on British communities in Europe, often dominated by retirees (e.g. Benson 2011; Benson and Osbaldiston 2014; King et al.

2000; Oliver 2008; O'Reilly 2000). As O'Reilly's (2000) ethnographic study made clear, lifestyle migrants have a range of mobility patterns, from seasonal to permanent residence, and vary considerably in terms of economic resource (O'Reilly 2000). Leivestad's (2017) recent research with British residents of a caravan site in Spain certainly brings into question the idea that all lifestyle migrants are relatively privileged since they had been employed in low-paid work prior to their migration as, for instance, cleaners, healthcare assistants, mechanics, and builders. Nevertheless, their move to Spain shares in common with more affluent migrants an understanding of migration as 'a search' for a better way of life, since it is a lifestyle project that is necessarily comparative, revolving around their desire to access a favourable climate and cost of living, stronger sense of community and slower pace of life (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 610). For the *British retirement migrant*, an enormously significant subgroup of lifestyle migrants, this lifestyle migration project is consistently framed as a strategy of active or positive ageing, part of a refashioning of identity in (early) later life (Oliver 2008). However, those researching retirement migration have also focused on the social care implications for those who migrate and the vulnerabilities associated with ageing (e.g. Botterill 2016; Hall and Hardill 2016; Oliver 2008). In this volume, Benson's chapter on Britons in France and Hall's chapter on British retirees in Spain fit most obviously within this vein of literature.

The almost completely distinct debates on settler migrants, highly skilled temporary migrants, and lifestyle migrants that has emerged in literatures on migration is remarkably persistent, yet empirically it is becoming harder to justify. Moreover, British migrants make decisions based simultaneously on multiple factors including both employment/income and lifestyle, something that becomes evident from their accounts in all these literatures. Furthermore, ethnographic studies that have been conducted with British migrants in particular urban sites suggest a more complex picture, with settler, highly skilled migrants and lifestyle migrants in co-residence. For example, existing publications on Hong Kong (Knowles and Harper 2009; Leonard 2010), South Africa (Conway and Leonard 2014) and Katie Higgins' chapter, this volume, on the British community in Auckland, Aotearoa Australia provide evidence of this multiplicity (also Higgins 2018). Abel's chapter on British migration to Perth, Australia, also unsettles the conventional distinctions between the skilled and lifestyle migration literatures. It does so because the lead British migrants in this study are women and, although it is their employment as nurses and midwives that facilitates their emigration (intended by most to be relatively permanent), this also positions them outside the highly skilled labour markets of global cities which are the focus of those concerned with globalisation.

As such, we find it useful to identify here a *fourth category of British migrants*: '*middling transnationals*', to borrow Conradson and Latham's (2005) term. These British migrants are a diverse group in respect to their occupation, resource, and subjectivities (Scott 2006; Lee and Wong 2018;

Leonard 2010; 2018; Walsh 2006). We can observe, however, that their migration is more often self-initiated, in response to international recruitment initiatives, and sometimes speculative, where they might relocate before finding employment or stay on after a contract ends to seek another. These British migrants are skilled migrants too, and may include professionals, but they may also work in either lower-paid graduate sectors, especially education (including English-language tuition) and journalism, or, alternatively, have pursued non-graduate careers in the retail, hospitality, health, and tourism sectors. They may place themselves in global cities living alongside their highly skilled compatriots, but also find opportunities in other (mostly urban) locations beyond these dominant migration hubs. They vary considerably in terms of their length of residence, frequently staying longer than the number of years they initially planned and with no predetermined plan. Chapters by Conway and Leonard on British migrants in South Africa, as well as Walsh on British migrants returning from Dubai, also provide evidence of more diverse communities including this third group of 'middling transnationals'.

*'Reverse migration' is a fifth category of British migration of increasing importance.* This is a term that can be applied to the out-migration of British nationals with diasporic heritage, including first-generation migrants returning to their countries of origin or subsequent generations, born in the UK, reanimating the transnational social fields of their parents and grandparents (e.g. Kea and Maier 2017; Näre 2016; Potter 2005; Ramji 2006; Reynolds 2011). These 'returning' migrants are rarely understood through the framework of British migration at all. Yet, such migrants are likely to become a larger proportion of future movements out of Britain. The resurgence of 'reverse migration' by British-born citizens, moving 'back' to the country their ancestors left, also raises new questions of transnationalism and how migration is enacted 'on the ground', when a migrant may anticipate an inherited familiarity with the customs, tradition and language of the 'homeland' but have no direct experience of living there. In this volume, the chapter by Priya Khambhaita and Rosalind Willis (Chapter 7) explores their preliminary research with British-born Indian second-generation 'reverse migrants' to India, but this is certainly an understudied dimension of British out-migration. It is important to note that where these British migrants with diasporic heritage have a third country as their destination, they are already implicitly located as highly-skilled, lifestyle, or middling transnationals within the typology above. For example, British migrants with parental connections to India and Pakistan reside across the Gulf as part of the highly skilled migration noted earlier, but their migration would not be considered 'reverse migration'. It is worth noting at this point that British migrant communities are almost always theorised and researched as though they are exclusively white communities. Later in this introduction, we develop our argument that more attention should be given to the plurality of British migrants in respect to their cultural, ethnic and religious identities.

While return is implied in the ‘reverse migration’ discussed above, the terminology of *British return migrants* is typically reserved for those who are returning to Britain. Returnees may have left Britain as migrants themselves, perhaps multiple times, or may also be second-generation British citizens, born and/or raised overseas, who have, perhaps, repeatedly travelled ‘home’ with parents or to visit family, but have never lived there long-term prior to returning. Returns may be at any time and for many reasons, but are notably concentrated at some distinctive life stages/events, especially: higher education, retirement, and in the final stages of life when faced with ill health or bereavement associated with ageing (Giner-Montford, Hall and Betty 2016). Return is not positioned here as a separate category of British migrant, since it is part of all these global mobilities albeit it in varied ways. For example, many of the members of the East Africa Women’s League that Sarah Kunz interviews for her chapter have lived in Kenya for most of their adult lives and can be understood as British *settler* migrants (see p. 000), yet most have not acquired citizenship. They may not intend to return, but they live with transnational imaginations sustained by the possibility of return. Some Britons who emigrate with ‘forever’ in mind, end up returning (e.g. Thomson 2011; Giner-Montford, Hall and Betty 2016), while some who move initially for a short period of contracted employment, may settle longer-term in one place and return reluctantly (e.g. Walsh, Chapter 11). Experiences of return are varied, shaped in part by their social status and resource (for example, compare: Knowles 2008; Rogaly and Taylor 2009; Thompson 2011). The location and meaning of home, as well as patterns of dwelling and mobility, settlement and migration, do not appear to map neatly onto different types of British migration or their geographical routes. As the chapters in this volume make evident, British migrants have a range of rhythms to their mobility and residence, the complexity of which is difficult to understand from research conducted at a particular point in their lives.

This typology is offered as a starting point only. Individual chapters in the volume illuminate the way in which communities of British nationals in particular places, as well as individuals themselves, rarely fit neatly into these categories. In time, it may become necessary to further refine the typology we propose here as increasing research illuminates further flows and communities of Britons overseas, and new trends in British migration emerge as important. In the meantime, we note that there are a number of other British global mobilities not captured by the term migration. These include, but are not limited to: the Armed Forces serving overseas; International Student Mobility (ISM) (e.g. Findlay et al. 2012); Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR); those Britons travelling and dwelling as seasonal or year-long working holiday-makers (Clarke 2005), volunteers, and backpackers; and, finally, the population of Britons working on cruise ships and yachts who may be continually on the move outside Britain for long periods. These global mobilities exist in relation to migration as connected processes, both spatially (especially in terms of their concentration in global hubs) and temporally (especially in

terms of the life-course). They are beyond the central remit of this volume, but it is useful to recognise these other British mobilities as operating alongside, and sharing partial meaning with, British migration. In respect to the meaning of British migration, one of the tensions in this typology of British migration that demands our attention is the significance of privilege in how they are framed, and how it might be related to imperial, class, and occupational status. We explore this further in the next section.

### **Privilege and the British ‘expatriate’ migrant**

It is widely established that British migrants are among the most privileged of international migrants. Indeed, this is perhaps part of the reason why there has been such reticence among scholars to recognise the significance of Britons, numerically and qualitatively, within mainstream accounts of global migration. However, many in this field have argued that migration itself can be seen as a strategy for the reproduction of Briton’s middle class social, cultural and economic capital, not least through the mobilisation of nationality and race as resources (Benson 2011; Benson and O’Reilly 2018; Scott 2006; Knowles 2003; Conway and Leonard 2014). While the British have clearly lost some of their political power globally, many British migrants continue to enjoy an enhanced lifestyle and status upon their migration, just as (white) colonialists did in the past. Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between Britishness and privilege directly, something which has previously been under-theorised in studies of British migration.

As such, we start the substantive chapters of the volume with Michaela Benson’s contribution (Chapter 2) in which she revisits research findings from an earlier project on British lifestyle migrants in France (Benson 2011), to propose a conceptual innovation to how we conceive of privilege among Britons living in Europe (pre-Brexit). In her study of the British residents in the Lot department of France, Benson’s focus is on lifestyle migrants (see p. 000). Benson argues that it is constellations of privilege that facilitate their migration, shaping and influencing their patterns of settlement. Crucially, she suggests that privilege should be considered as an inherently and inextricably classed and racialised formation, wherein whiteness intersects with the resources of socio-economic privilege to construct *a sense of entitlement* to mobility and settlement which transcends national boundaries. However, Benson’s emphasis on the *relativity* of British migrants’ affluence and privilege is crucial, since it is important not to make the mistake of early whiteness studies which were somewhat guilty of essentialising and universalising whiteness, misrecognising the instabilities of whiteness as it intersects with class, ethnicity and gender to produce wide discrepancies in meanings and experience.

Gillian Abel’s chapter (Chapter 3) on skilled healthcare workers emigrating to Australia, while ostensibly about a rather differently motivated group, can

also be understood through notions of lifestyle and social mobility connected with the relatively privileged nature of British migration. As one quote in her chapter evokes – ‘It is ours: we’ve got a pool! You couldn’t do that in England!’ For the British women she interviewed, migration brought about a change in lifestyle. Higher house prices in the UK, along with more disposable income from their new Australian employment, afforded them access to property ownership that was central to their lifestyle project. Home ownership, rather than renting, is key, Abel argues, since accessing the ‘Australian Dream’ for these British families, hinges on this performance of middle-class status, but also offers a marker of lifestyle distinct from that back home and a more permanent sense of settlement. As such, privilege is constituted not only in contrast to how other groups might be positioned within Australia, but also in relation to a transnational social field.

The word ‘expatriate’ has often been associated with privilege in both popular usage and academic discussion. It acts as a common nomenclature for (white) ‘Western’ skilled professionals who live abroad for a temporary period of time (Fechter 2007; Knowles and Harper 2009; Kunz 2017; Leonard 2010). Those researching British migration have been among those critically examining the production and function of this terminology, so the volume continues with two chapters that make further contributions to these debates. Sophie Cranston builds on her previous work in which she has demonstrated the key role played by the global mobility industry in producing imaginations and understandings of difference through which Britons *learn* to be an expatriate in relation to a particular location (Cranston 2016a, 2016b). Rather than ‘expatriate’ being a conceptual term to differentiate between different kinds of migrant, Cranston shows how it operates within destination services and intercultural management that prepare the migrant for life in Singapore as ‘a discursively produced object to which individuals can orient themselves’ (Cranston 2016a, 3). In her chapter in this volume, Cranston takes this argument further by shifting the focus away from the *place* of migration, to the *relationships* produced within and between the British migrants who live there. The respondents in her study position themselves very differently in terms of the identity of ‘expatriate’. Since it is a term loaded with cultural baggage, British migrants either gravitate towards it or energetically resist. For those who rejected the label of expatriate, the term was associated with a performance of Britishness which harked back to the worst excesses of colonialism: segregated and privileged Britons who held little interest in engaging with Singaporean culture and politics. In contrast, Cranston describes how an alternative performance of Britishness is demonstrated by the ‘*Ang-Mohporians*’, who attempt to distance themselves from the representations, and practices, associated with the traditional expatriate, and hold a more local type of belonging. Her account is revealing in that it underscores how senses of difference and distinction infuse British national identities: who we *are* being a carefully crafted negation against who we *are not*.