

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

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establish a women's team.

Earlier this year, *The Creator's Game* was awarded the 2019 Canada Prize in the Humanities and Social Sciences by the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, and rightfully so. In addition to telling important stories about sport, identity, and nationhood, Downey pushes the

conceptual and structural bounds of scholarly publishing with a monograph that at once centres and embodies Indigenous methodologies and knowledges.

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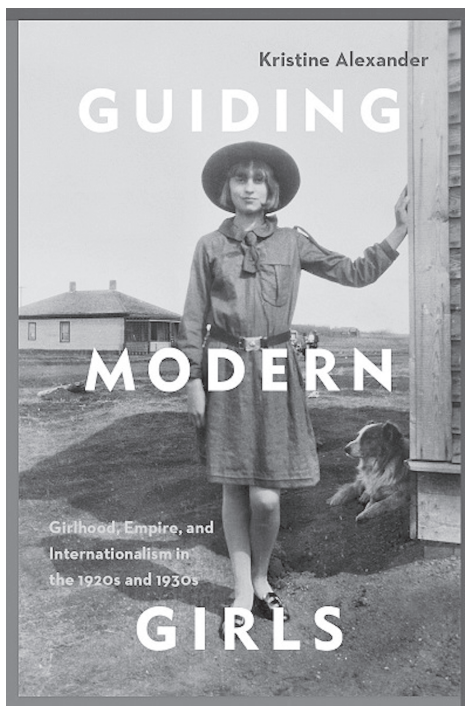
Guiding Modern Girls

Girlhood, Empire, and Internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s

By Kristine Alexander

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017. 283pp. \$34.95
paperback. ISBN 9780774835886. \$85.00
hardcover. ISBN 9780774835879. \$34.95
E.PUB. ISBN 9780774835909. \$34.95 PDF.
ISBN 9780774835893. (www.ubcpress.ca).

While my parents enrolled me in ballet rather than Brownies, Girl Guiding continues to be an important cultural touchstone for children around the world. It is for this reason that Kristine Alexander's new monograph, *Guiding Modern Girls*, is a long-overdue intervention. Alexander's book draws on the fields of ethnography, girlhood studies, the history of children and youth, and imperial/transnational histories, to trace the Girl Guide movement during the interwar period in Britain, Canada, and India. In this text, Alexander argues that the Girl Guides of this era combined older gender, class, and racial hierarchies with a new emphasis on self-sufficiency and capability as part of the larger cultural shift towards conservative modernity. By tracing these threads across the heart of the British Empire, a white settler society, and a British colony, Alexander is able to illustrate how debates about young women reflected, and



were embedded within, larger discussions about race, class, imperialism, and internationalism.

The book itself contains six distinct chapters. Though the first chapter is a detailed history of the Guiding/Scouting movement as a whole, the remaining chapters are organized thematically. Chapters two and three focus on the training that girl guides received both for their future roles as wives and mothers as well as responsible global citizens. Chapters four and five ex-

amine the guides' interactions in the outside world, particularly the camping and woodcraft programs as large-scale public performances. Chapter six concludes with a consideration of the rhetoric and reality of the Guides' emphasis on a universal sisterhood.

Considering the scope of this ambitious text, one could easily assume that it is impossible to deal with the subject in sufficient depth. But this would be a mistaken impression. The book is well researched, and the attention to detail in this text is admirable. I was particularly struck by Alexander's ethnohistorical approach, combining archival research with a consideration of material conditions, and her effective use of postcolonial and girlhood studies theory. For instance, one of Alexander's main arguments is that the experiences of girls and young women must be taken seriously, and that they provide valuable historical information. While accounts like Eileen Knapman's London, UK troupe's "undignified exit and evident relief at the end of their performance" following a Scandinavian Dance in 1929 or of how the forty-five members of a Manitoba Guide camp stayed up all night talking and having a pillow fight, are charming, they also demonstrate the tension between the Guides' expectations and the reality of girls' lived experiences (154, 112).

Of course, the nature of this study is such that local and place-based histories are difficult to access, as Alexander herself admits.¹ While some generalizations are necessary in order for a study of this magnitude to work, I think her argument

would have been enhanced by more engagement with the specific local contexts within which Alexander was working. To her credit, Alexander discusses Canadian guiding groups across the country. But I found myself wondering how the Girl Guides would have been received in Montreal, for example, and how it influenced, and was influenced by, the long-standing linguistic, religious, and ethnic divisions of the city.

What's more, I cannot but consider this text in light of an accompanying blog post that Alexander published on the Wilson Institute's blog, where she argued that disciplinary institutions have set the boundaries of what is considered Canadian history, and how transnational histories can offer important insights for histories of this country.² This post, and the book itself, make a convincing case for the advantages of multi-sited ethnographic studies such as this one. For instance, while camping was important for guides in each location, its significance and approach differed significantly. British literature on camping emphasized how it enabled a connection to an ancient past and as a cure for the negative impact of modern life on the English race. Canadian literature, on the other hand, was embedded in larger national myth-making efforts, extolled the virtue of living in a Northern land, and represented Indigenous peoples as an admirable, but dying race. Finally, Indian literature was preoccupied with anxieties over racial differences and constructing the South Asian landscape as both dangerous and exotic (126-138). In providing these examples,

¹ Kristine Alexander, "Disciplines and Disciplining: Canadian History and/as Transnational History." *Au delà des frontières: La nouvelle histoire du Canada/ Beyond Borders: The New Canadian History*. Blog, November 27, 2018. <https://thenewcanadianhistory.com/2018/11/27/disciplines-and-disciplining-canadian-history-and-as-transnational-history/>

² Alexander, "Disciplines and Disciplining: Canadian History and/as Transnational History."

Alexander makes a powerful argument about the need to consider Canadian history in a larger imperial and global context

Overall, *Guiding Modern Girls* makes an important contribution to the field of Canadian history and is an example of how ethnographic, transnational, and childhood studies allow scholars to consider the

intersections of norms and lived experiences, read into archival silences, and critically consider power structures that continue to hold so much power in our lives.

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Be Wise! Be Healthy!

Morality and Citizenship in Canadian Public Health Campaigns

By Catherine Carstairs, Bethany Philpott, and Sara Wilmshurst

Vancouver & Toronto: UBC Press, 2018. 294 pages. \$89.95 hardcover. ISBN 9780774837187. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN 9780774837194. \$34.95 EPUB. ISBN 9780774837217. \$34.95 PDF. ISBN 9780774837200. (www.ubcpres.ca).

Be *Wise! Be Healthy!* is an exemplary work of collaborative scholarship that traces the history of a single voluntary public health organization from the 1920s to the 1970s. Under the direction of Dr. Gordon Bates, the Health League of Canada aspired to national prominence, although the authors show it to have instead been Toronto-centric with its most significant impact limited to Ontario. The League was smaller and less prominent than other contemporary public health organizations, but authors Catherine Carstairs, Bethany Philpott, and Sara Wilmshurst argue that it punched above its weight, becoming “one of Canada’s leading organizations promoting

public health” (4), and therefore worthy of historical study.

The organization was created in 1919 as the Canadian National Council for Combatting Venereal Disease, its mandate limited to sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). In 1922 it was renamed the Canadian Social Hygiene Council and began to engage in broader health education efforts. The early twentieth-century concept of “social hygiene” most often referred to the mobilization of morality and technical expertise around issues of STIs, prostitution, and sex education, but it could also include interventions in the areas of nutrition, maternal education, alcoholism, and intellectual disabilities (5). By 1935 the

