

Furthermore...

*Celebrating 10 years
of the British Academy
Book Prize*

 **The
British
Academy**

Essays by

Sujit Sivasundaram
Cal Flynn
Priyamvada Gopal
Toby Green
Aanchal Malhotra
Ed Morales
Kapka Kassabova

Cover image:

The photograph is of a trunk and a set of keys belonging to V.P. Sondhi, who joined the Geological Survey of India in 1926 and was its Director General from 1955-58. The objects travelled with him on his postings through the subcontinent and Britain and were bequeathed to his daughter, Uma in 1945 in Lahore. The objects now live in Calcutta. Photograph by Aanchal Malhotra.

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Introduction

*Professor Patrick Wright FBA
Chair of the judging panel*

2022 is the 10th year of the British Academy Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding. In order to mark the occasion, and to celebrate the many memorable books to which we have been introduced through the annual Prize, we have invited seven authors of winning and shortlisted titles to contribute to this anthology.

‘Globalisation’ may have seemed more confident in its grip on the future when the Prize was first launched. Even in 2012, however, the idea was attended by an urgent sense of foreboding and injustice as well as of promise. The Prize’s founder, Prof. Nayef Al-Rhodan, emphasised the need to address certain perennial problems regarding the relation between different cultures, as well as the importance of highlighting ‘the many ways in which apparently distinct cultures in fact overlap at numerous points’.

Given the Prize’s potentially enormous theme, its judges may be asked to consider studies of decolonisation and the present situation of indigenous peoples; on climate change and the power of stories in the age of social media; on aspects of diplomacy, psychology, architecture and the politics of religion; on diverse aspects of economics, the law, the history of trade and settlement, prehistoric culture and the ways in which sports like football and cricket may have shaped understanding around the world. Fortunately, some working principles have emerged to help the changing panel of judges as they set out each year to select a shortlist from such a wide range of submitted titles.

While we have been looking for books that demonstrate the value of original research in illuminating some of the outstanding issues of our time, we also recognise that ‘research’ doesn’t have to be conventionally academic. Alongside

investigations that may, quite properly, have been carried out in archives and libraries, we have also welcomed enquiries emerging from the more searching and informed kind of journalism. While the books selected onto our shortlists may well draw on specialist knowledge, we are looking for authors who are also imaginative when it comes to making their work engaging to non-specialists. To be 'global', in the Prize's terms, may sometimes involve creating an overview of patterns that have unfolded across large geographical areas, but we have learned that it can also be achieved through more localised or personal investigations in which wider dynamics are addressed from the ground.

While we are only able to reward a single winner each year, the British Academy works to promote our shortlists as evidence of the wide range of excellent writing going on in the year in question. We try to include books by writers of various backgrounds and present situations, and to consider titles submitted by independent presses as well as the more mainstream academic and trade publishers.

The writers whose reflections follow are:

Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire*, published by William Collins (winner, 2021)

Cal Flynn, *Islands of Abandonment: Life in the Post-Human Landscape*, published by William Collins (shortlisted in 2021)

Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire – Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, published by Verso (shortlisted in 2020)

Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution*, published by Allen Lane (winner, 2019)

Aanchal Malhotra, *Remnants of Partition: 21 Objects from a Continent Divided*, published by Hurst (shortlisted in 2019)

Ed Morales, *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture*, published by Verso (shortlisted in 2019)

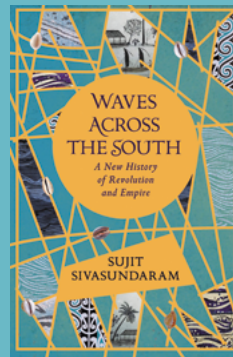
Kapka Kassabova, *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe*, published by Granta Books (winner, 2018).

We would like to thank each of these authors for submitting such interesting contributions to this publication. Meanwhile, if you've enjoyed reading their essays, and would like to learn more about the books and the Prize, please feel free to visit thebritishacademy.ac.uk/prizes-medals/british-academy-book-prize-global-cultural-understanding

Sujit Sivasundaram

Winner in 2021 for *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire*

Published by William Collins



Sujit Sivasundaram is Professor of World History at the University of Cambridge and Fellow in History at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He was born and educated in Sri Lanka and has degrees in History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Cambridge. He is a leading historian specialising in world history, especially the Pacific and Indian oceans and their islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and also environmental history, the history of race, imperial history and history of science. He has taught at the LSE and held visiting positions in Paris, Singapore, Sydney and Munich. He was awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize for History in 2012. *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* is his third book. It was awarded the British Academy Book Prize in 2021. He has also served as Sackler Caird Fellow at the National Maritime Museum and is currently President of the Pacific Circle, a group of scholars devoted to the study of knowledge and environment across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. He was editor of *The Historical Journal* and serves on various editorial boards, including for 'Past and Present'.

Seals in the Waves Across the South

Waves Across the South was written over a series of years, and in that period two things became much clearer. First, the need to transform our institutions, our ideas and our contexts of intellectual work to contest and reverse the racial and imperial violence of the past. In keeping with that critical spirit, I begin this short essay by advising Aboriginal readers that it contains information about deceased ancestors. Second, is the need to respond to the climate emergency. This essay is written in the midst of a pandemic which itself as I have argued elsewhere is related to the environmental crisis and to colonial human–animal relations.¹ It is with such a footing too that I return to *Waves Across the South*.

What does the age of revolutions mean for a seal in southern waters? This may seem a bizarre question: the age of revolutions is usually cast as a pivotal moment in human history. On some tellings, it saw the consolidation of modern human rights, a system of nation states and even new modes of human subjectivity. The story of this age, as told to schoolchildren, runs across the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and only sometimes the Haitian Revolution and the Latin American independence movements. *Waves Across the South* aimed to recentre the Indian and Pacific Oceans and Indigenous peoples and their waters in the Euro-Atlantic narrative of the age of revolutions. Yet this era, given its dramatic conflicts and their associated modes of surveillance, plunder, commercialisation and war, also saw profound changes in how humans and nature engaged with each other.² Swimming with the agile and amphibian seal takes us on yet new itineraries which lead into our present.

Take the Bass Strait for instance. It is the stretch of sea between mainland Australia and Tasmania. Fur seals predominate here. Their dexterity is

1 Sujit Sivasundaram, 'The Human, The Animal and the Prehistory of COVID-19' in *Past & Present*, Volume 249, Issue 1, November 2020, 295–316, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa024>, accessed 4 May 2022.

2 For the status of nature and science in the age of revolutions, see P. Manning and D. Rood (eds) *Global Scientific Practice in an Age of Revolutions* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2016).

particularly evident in how they move between land and water for food and also to cool themselves.³ This is one reason why the islands and rocky outcrops of this coastline make such a perfect habitat. The way seals live in a specific ecology is well illustrated in an image from the 1840s, likely from Australia and New Zealand, 'Seal on rocks'. Seals depend on fish and molluscs for sustenance. Sharks count as predators. Despite the image's romanticism, it dates from the era just after horrific over-exploitation in the Bass Strait. For instance, between 1780 and 1830, according to one estimate, seven million seals were killed across the globe.⁴ Despite this violence, seal populations did not disappear. In the Bass Strait itself, populations eventually recovered. Seal traders shifted the frontier of human/seal conflict to new islands across the Tasman World. The seal rush began in the Bass Strait from the 1790s, moved to Foveaux Strait, south of the South Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand, around 1810; it then shifted to various sub-Antarctic islands and back again to Foveaux Strait in the 1820s before declining.⁵ It is only possible to speculate on how seals responded to this shifting complex by migration. The men involved, by the way, included agents shaped by the age of revolutions: for instance, there is the account of Amasa Delano's sealing in the Bass Strait in *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817). He fought in the American Revolution and has been described as embodying 'all the possibilities and limits of that revolution'.⁶

This ecology is now vulnerable to rising sea levels and storm surges. These risks create problems for seal pups at a critical moment of maturation, when they can be washed away from the shore. This is compounded by the constrained habitat patterns: the Bass Strait now hosts thirteen breeding sites, of which two account for more than half of the new seal pups in a given year. Thinking back to the age of revolutions, that period's interest in knowledge and data gathering created new understandings of creatures like seals far from Europe. Popular understandings of settlement colonisation in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand usually feature sheep and cows. But a fuller genealogy runs from seals and whales, and from dogs, who were vital to the colonisation of Tasmania, to sheep and cows. Plundering the creatures of the sea, in an age linked with

3 Comments on contemporary scientific understandings of the Australian Seal draw from Roger Kirkwood and John P.Y.A. Arnould, 'Foraging Trip Strategies and Habitat Use During Late Pup Rearing by Lactating Australian Fur Seals' in *Australian Journal of Zoology*, 2011, Vol.59, 216–226 and L.J. McLean et al. 'Impact of rising sea levels on Australian fur seals' in *PeerJ* 6: e5786, 2018.

4 Rhys Richards, *Sealing in the Southern Oceans, 1788–1833* (Paramatta, Australia, 2010).

5 See for instance Tony Ballantyne, 'Sealers, Whalers and the Entanglements of Empire' in Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Wellington, 2012), 124–136.

6 Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity* (London, 2015), 9.

‘pirates’, set a template for land-based agronomy. The seal trade, as others have argued, was perhaps an early vector of modern European capitalism in the Tasman World. One might add that it was an early vector of an oil economy too which had plural origins in various places of the world.⁷

Yet even if the transformations in capitalist, frontier-driven and militarised exploitation of nature by Europeans need stressing, this is not simply a story of the rolling out of European understandings of seals, born out of the new disciplines of science around 1800. As *Waves Across the South* documented, building on the insights of other scholars, Aboriginal women lived with sealers and sealers relied on their skills of hunting seals in extraordinary ways in the Bass Strait.⁸ James Kelly of Hobart, sealer, sandalwood trader and whaler, gave a first-hand account of what he saw. Aboriginal women imitated seals and lay alongside them, then attacked and killed them and swam with the dead weight of the creatures. Indeed, it is now understood that Aboriginal Tasmanian women were expert divers and swimmers; biographies of Indigenous women who conducted incredible work at sea are now emerging.⁹ It has recently been noted that for Aboriginal Tasmanians, ‘so direct was the link between seals and homes that women placed seals’ flippers in hollows beneath their huts’.¹⁰ The origins of colonial sealing must include these prior ways of engaging nature which were gendered differently. European and specifically British imperialists in this space, enacted a counter-revolution. They took Indigenous peoples captive and also took hold of their understandings and skills, by muting their voices and by unleashing a horrific genocide on Tasmania directed towards human beings who were cast as animals, ‘hunted’ and ‘rounded up’. Human remains were collected for science. In this way, new scientific understandings of the South in the age of revolutions led into the opposite of what they promised to achieve.

Newspapers of the era provide detailed descriptions of the ways in which the European project of classifying, demarcating and scaling up the use of nature was distinct from how Aboriginal women operated. Seals were turned into numbers of skins and numbers of caskets of oil in ships arriving from the

7 See Sujit Sivasundaram, ‘The oils of empire’ in Helen Curry et al. (eds) *Worlds of Natural History* (Cambridge, 2018), 379–398.

8 See Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (London, 2020), Chapter 5.

9 See for instance Lynette Russell, *Roving Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790–1870* (New York, 2013), and Megan Stronach and Daryl Adair, ‘Hidden Women of History’, <https://theconversation.com/hidden-women-of-history-wauba-debar-an-indigenous-swimmer-from-tasmania-who-saved-her-captors-126487>, accessed 13 April 2022.

10 Cited from Philippa Mein Smith, ‘The Sealing Industry and the Architecture of the Tasman World’ in *Fabrications*, 2019, vol. 29, 317–337.

Bass Strait and New Zealand in today's Sydney. If Tasmania saw an animalisation of humans, its north shore in particular, saw the seal disaggregated into brute supply. Compare these two extracts from the *Sydney Gazette*, first, from the early seal rush, and second, from the later era which saw the trade decline:

1803:

From the advantageous situation of Port Jackson [Sydney], there can be little doubt that the Islands in Bass' Strait might have been a constant source of enterprise and emolument, properly managed... there are now a number of parties constantly kept upon the different islands, skinning and boiling; they mostly, if not altogether upon shares, are anxious to procure as many furs as possible; to do which, they indiscriminately hunt down all ages and sexes...¹¹

Also in 1803, the newspaper reported on the arrival of '307 Bengal cows in excellent condition' in Sydney on 'the largest ship that has ever entered this port'.¹²

1831:

The numerous islands of these seas abound in an eminent degree with seals, and it has hitherto been the usual custom with our seals, just to knock the animal on the head, and remove the skin, leaving the flesh behind as useless, but they should remember that the oil which may be with very little labour, expressed therefrom, is superior in quality to that of the black whale, and fetches from £5 to £8 a ton more in the London market than that commodity.¹³

These extracts speak of the desire over time, in keeping with the winds of political change, to reform and govern a trade which was out of control. But they also speak to how plunder set the context for capitalism and how plunder as undertaken by groups of Europeans was not constrained by geography. Seal oil from the Bass Strait flowed into London.

To find our way out of the climate emergency, it is vital to think with creatures like seals and to understand the environmental dynamics of a period such as the age of revolutions. Warfare was directed to nature too and human/human and human/nature conflicts happened side by side. Scientific

11 *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Sunday 29 May 1803.

12 *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Saturday 5 March 1803.

13 *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Tuesday 5 April 1831.

reason, one of the supposed triumphs of the age of revolutions, could be used by imperialists. They adopted existent practices, skills and ways of thought within their science. Capitalist expansion was not simply about the dispersal and settlement of traders or the new market in land or land-based patriotism in this era; it was also about the conversion of marine creatures to tradable and globalised numbers. In the waves across the south, animals persevered through and resisted the onslaught.

To challenge this historically dramatic but never fully fatal reconfiguration of nature and what it means to be human, it is vital to know more about Aboriginal and Indigenous understandings of nature. The romanticism of the period's artists hides the violence directed to humans as well as seals. We need to reanimate nature and bridge the gap between humans and other creatures. This would be fitting as a way of following Aboriginal peoples' ways of thought. It would ensure that the violence against Indigenous peoples is not lost even as seals become terraqueous players rather than fur and oil in history.

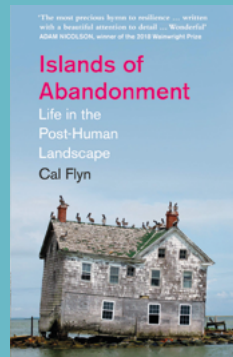


Conrad Martens, *Head of a Seal*, (183?), National Library of Australia, 473272. Martens was an artist who accompanied Charles Darwin for part of the voyage of the *Beagle* and later settled in Sydney.

Cal Flynn

Shortlisted in 2021 for *Islands of Abandonment:
Life in the Post-Human Landscape*

Published by William Collins



Cal Flynn is an author and journalist from the Highlands of Scotland. Previously she has been a reporter for both *The Sunday Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and a contributing editor at *The Week* magazine. Cal holds a MA in Experimental Psychology from Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Her first book, *Thicker Than Water*, was a Times Book of the Year and dealt with the colonisation of Australia and questions of inherited guilt. Her second book *Islands of Abandonment: Life in the Post-Human Landscape* won the 2021 *Sunday Times* Charlotte Aitken Trust Young Writer of the Year Award and was shortlisted for a number of prizes including the Wainwright Prize for writing on global conservation, the British Academy Book Prize and the Baillie Gifford Prize for nonfiction.

Islands of Abandonment

As part of the research for my book *Islands of Abandonment: Life in the Post-Human Landscape*, I travelled to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone to get a sense of the abandoned city of Pripyat and of the natural recovery in the zone more generally. At 1,600 square miles, it represents an area larger than Cornwall.

What I found there gave me a great deal of hope. Since 1986, there has been a huge amount of regeneration: 70 per cent of the zone is now forest; within a decade of the disaster, every animal population in the zone had at least doubled in number. Lynx, boar, deer, elk, beavers, eagle owls were all known to be regularly haunting the zone. Wolf numbers increased sevenfold. Brown bears were spotted there for the first time in more than a century.

This was the section of my book that people tended to respond to most strongly: there was something particularly emotive in the combination of horror and human tragedy, with the sense of almost divine forgiveness – a region where the worst had already happened had been transformed into a place of rare natural wonder.

Already, however, this chapter feels like a bittersweet souvenir from a more peaceful time. Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022; during the early hours of the invasion, thousands of Russian tanks and troops entered the exclusion zone from Belarus. Key safety personnel at the decommissioned nuclear plant spent the next week in frantic negotiations with Russian officers over maintaining safety procedures. One engineer said he had been forced to steal fuel for the back-up generators powering the cooling system after three days without electricity. ('If we had lost power, it could have been catastrophic', he later told the BBC.)

Russian troops left the zone a week later, but not before attracting heavy criticism for their recklessness in disturbing the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster during their military incursion. The Ukrainians have released footage of trenches dug within the 'Red Forest', one of the most contaminated regions of the zone, and it is alleged that Russian troops suffered from radiation sickness

after their heavy machinery churned up radioactive dust.

After initial spikes, the International Atomic Energy Agency has now confirmed that radioactivity levels in the zone have returned to normal. However, the Director General, Rafael Mariano Grossi, noted that '[he didn't] know if we were very close to disaster, but the situation was absolutely abnormal and very, very dangerous'.

In terms of contamination, it seems we have avoided the worst-case scenario, but what this has demonstrated is how fragile some of these recoveries might be. So much of the remarkable flourishing we have seen in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone has been dependent on Ukraine's good management and stability in the region – a lack of disturbance allowing the radioactive particles to remain sealed up (relatively) safely under a mantle of vegetation.

Recovery can take hold, in other words, but when we are dealing with forms of pollution that will decay over a timescale of decades (or centuries, or thousands, or millions of years), human society is a remarkably unstable presence that cannot be relied upon to act, always, with responsible management at the forefront. Think of how much has changed in Britain – or in Europe – or the rest of the world – in only the last three centuries alone.

This is what we have to consider when we deal with legacy contamination like nuclear waste or persistent organic pollutants (like dioxins and PCBs) that will last, effectively, for ever; we have to learn not only to live alongside them, safely, but to transmit the message to those of future generations. If nuclear material remains harmful to humans for upwards of 100,000 years, for example, how can we ensure its security? The Pyramids at Giza, for comparison, are only 4,500 years old.

There are a number of philosophies around how best to approach this problem. In Finland, a 'nuclear necropolis' is being built to secrete away spent nuclear fuel rods far below the surface of the Earth. The Onkalo 'spent nuclear fuel repository' is expected to accept canisters of nuclear waste for around a century before the entire facility is sealed and backfilled before its former entrance is disguised – the idea being that future generations will simply never realise it is there.

Some have taken a much more high-concept approach. In the USA, the semiotician Thomas Sebeok proposed the creation of an 'Atomic Priesthood' modelled on the Roman Catholic church, whose members would pass down knowledge of the danger via ceremonies, oral tradition and written (even sacred) documents. And still others have focused on the question of communication;

how might we post warning signs that will outlast our constantly evolving languages? Think how difficult it is to understand Old English, for example – Beowulf is only 1000 years old, but already offers major comprehension issues to the reader. Nuclear semioticians are working hard on the dilemma – and must work on the assumption that our existing symbol for radiation danger (the nuclear trefoil) will fall from common usage within a blink of an eye, in comparison to the near-everlasting danger.

Sites like Chernobyl force us to consider such questions of the deep future. For, as we have seen, so much can change in the world in only a few short months.

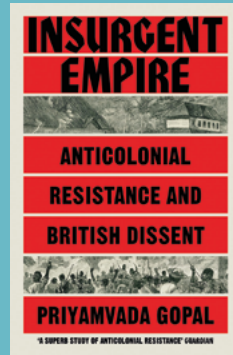


Ionizing radiation sign, Red Forest in Chernobyl Zone of Alienation. Getty Images.

Priyamvada Gopal

Shortlisted in 2020 for *Insurgent Empire – Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*

Published by Verso



Priyamvada Gopal is Professor of Postcolonial Studies at the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge. She is the author of *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*; *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* and *Insurgent Empire – Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*. She was shortlisted for the British Academy Book Prize in 2020 for *Insurgent Empire – Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*.

Insurgent Empire

Insurgent Empire interrogated the familiar claim that criticism of the British Empire was anachronistic by tracking some dissident strands on the question of colonialism in Britain through the latter half of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. It aimed also to think about the quite varied definitions of freedom that constituted the content of anticolonial struggles. In outlining the agency of the colonised in resisting the incursions of imperialism and the influence this resistance had on British dissidents, the book hoped to enable present-day descendants of the colonised, Britain's Black and Asian denizens, to find a way to reposition themselves as contributors to the making of Britain and not simply as beneficiaries of historical white benevolence who must learn to 'integrate' with an unchanging British 'norm'. Equally, young white Britons could draw on a history that was largely lost to them, one in which British dissidents and working-class Britons were inspired by anticolonial resistance and sought to actively create solidarities and links with the subjects of British rule in various corners of the Empire.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that *Insurgent Empire* has been a part of recent discussions of decolonisation, a term that is at once a flashpoint in concocted 'culture wars' in Britain today and the necessary subject of serious research. Decolonisation – the horizon of anticolonialism – is also an intrinsically shared global and transcultural project – of relevance across boundaries while interrogating those boundaries. Often treated as either a matter of diversified curricula or felled statues, decolonisation actually enjoins us all to think about our relationship to history very fundamentally, to explore the precise nature of our entanglement, as peoples and as communities, with empire and colonialism. Rather than a necessarily divisive process (although it is always a demanding one), decolonisation requires, precisely, 'understanding' – historical and cultural – in a global frame. This includes self-understanding where individuals and communities think about their own historical relationship to the world-shaping legacies and afterlife of empire.

My students and I often discuss Jamaica Kincaid's extended polemic, *A Small Place*, precisely such a reckoning with colonialism: ferocious in its criticism of the coloniser and his advantaged descendants but also a call for all parties with links to that history to assess the ways in which it has shaped them and their present. Although the book is deeply critical of the white supremacy that was one of the most consequential historical legacies of colonialism, it also requires the descendants of the enslaved and the colonised to reflect on their own relationship to history, to ask 'why they are the way they are, why they do the things they do, why they live the way they live' and in doing so, to develop a different and 'more demanding relationship' with the world. Today, as many postcolonial societies struggle not just with deep inequality but also intensifying authoritarianism and lethal ethnonationalism, they must examine not only those historical forces in their midst that abetted colonial subjugation but also contemporary tendencies to act much as the coloniser once did. An assessment of 'their' colonialism must go hand-in-hand with an unflinching scrutiny of 'our' own tyrannies. While formerly colonial societies have to reckon with the ways in which they continue to benefit from the spoils of enslavement and colonisation, 'decolonisation' should not become an excuse for postcolonial states to enact their own forms of oppression. Religious majoritarianism in an independent nation in the name of decolonisation is no better than white superiority as the basis for colonisation.

Nowhere in the world has decolonisation come to fruition: instead, it is often found in an 'arrested' condition, a process that was initiated but then diverted, hijacked, or morphed into something else entirely. That is a reality that our discussions of decolonisation have to take account of. Yet, for a great many people, decolonisation still remains nothing short of a vision of radical social emancipation and economic justice, either inspiring or threatening as such. At a historical moment when 'freedom' is used in an incantatory fashion by billionaires buying up social media platforms and by groups resistant to public health measures, or to justify the spread of violent hate speech, it is worth asking if the annals of anticolonialism might offer us more substantial and nuanced visions of a properly decolonised 'freedom'. Anticolonialism put a range of issues on the table that were not reducible to national sovereignty, important as that concept was for self-determination in the face of colonial rule. These include land use, economic redistribution, the meaning of human rights, the undoing of race thinking and racism, ecological and resource protections, the expansion of knowledge bases and traditions of inquiry, the meanings of 'development', and

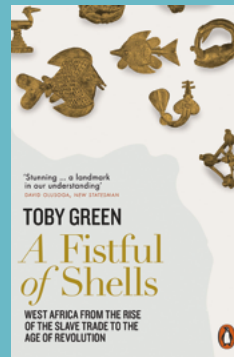
justice for minoritised groups.

Our considerations of 'decolonisation' today must go beyond the fabricated polarities of so-called 'culture wars' in Western polities as well as the mythologies frequently generated by nationalism and nation states, including postcolonial nation states. Decolonisation really invites us to think hard about what work, imaginative and material, it will take to arrive at a global order with very different priorities from those of the racial-colonial-capitalist ones which still shape human lives nearly everywhere today. Putting dissident emancipatory traditions across contexts into dialogue is vital in generating such visions. Distinctive voices have risen out of anticolonial struggles to speak eloquently and variously of what a decolonised society and world might look like, what work it will take to get there, and what pitfalls lie in wait along the way. *Insurgent Empire* amplified some of those voices and ideas but there is much more work to be done building an archive of anticolonialism and decolonisation that we can draw on in thinking about decolonisation today on a global scale.

Toby Green

Winner in 2019 for *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution*

Published by Allen Lane



Toby Green has worked widely with academics, musicians and writers across Africa, organising events in collaboration with institutions in Angola, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. He has written a number of books, and his work has been translated into fourteen languages. Awarded a 2017 Philip Leverhulme Prize in History, he is Professor in Precolonial and Lusophone African History and Culture at King's College London. His book, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution*, won the British Academy Book Prize in 2019.

A Fistful of Shells: Structural Inequalities in an Era of Crisis

I discovered that *A Fistful of Shells* had been awarded the British Academy book prize on 31 October 2019, when I was in the northern Mozambican city of Nampula. Appropriately enough, I was there as the recipient of funds from the British Academy Global South Writing Workshop scheme, having co-organised an event for early career scholars with colleagues from Universidade Lúrio, due to start the following day. Within four months, such an event would have been cancelled.

The two years since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic have certainly put the book in a stark context. *A Fistful of Shells* treats early modern globalisation from a West African perspective, and it is no coincidence that it was researched at the zenith of early twenty-first-century globalisation. This was a time when travel for those with resources had never been easier or quicker, and when new technologies connected scholars all over the world. It was a book made possible by the opportunity all this gave to engage globally with multiple perspectives. In other words, it is a book which was produced by as multi-sited an engagement as possible with its West African and global themes – but it is also a book that emerged from the breakdown of environmental and capital regulation which facilitated that research process, and that also then helped to produce the seeds of the pandemic which has since shattered that world.

In terms of thematic, *A Fistful of Shells* seems even more relevant now than when published in 2019. Shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd in the US led to the Black Lives Matter protests, and the open discussion in Western public fora of themes that were central to the book: the systematic inequality and racism faced by those of African descent in Western societies, and the failure to address the significance of African histories in any way in public discourse.

Beyond the growing public awareness of the importance of African history, I will focus here on two key elements which the last two years have brought into

sharp focus: the question of inequalities of capital, and that of inequalities of power. While the core arguments of *A Fistful of Shells* relate to what we may call ‘the old politics of global inequality’, what we have seen in the past two years, writ large as never before, is the radical intensification of what we may call ‘the new politics of global inequality’ – and this has indeed become a major element of my current research.¹⁴

The enormous increases in inequality that have accompanied the response to the Coronavirus pandemic have been widely documented, and there is no need to expand on that here. What is significant is rather the structural connection between a moment of global crisis on the one hand, and the rapid expansion of global inequalities on the other. We have observed in real time how the emergence of a structural crisis is attended by certain tendencies in terms of political choices and outcomes: these have tended to safeguard the economic and physical health of the wealthier members of global societies, at the expense of the poorest.

In short, crisis favours inequality of outcomes and an accentuation of these inequalities. This has made me reflect on the period of time encompassed by *A Fistful of Shells*. While the early modern era is not usually framed as one of crisis, that is certainly what it was for the bulk of the world’s population, among those many who lived in West Africa. It was an era of climatic instability, political flux, the concentration of state power, and increasingly powerful military technologies used in proto-colonial wars linked to imperial campaigns. Living through one era of crisis helps to reflect on another – and on the nature of the inequalities produced by crises. In some ways, it helps to understand that every history of the past is also an analysis of the present.

Of course, these inequalities of capital are also related to inequalities of power. The way in which a gathering inequality of power took shape during the early modern period in West Africa was one of the major thematics of *A Fistful of Shells*. And again, we have seen over the past two years this thematic writ large, as the public health priorities of the world’s richest countries, with the longest life expectancies, have ridden roughshod over the world’s poor.

It has indeed been chastening to live through one period of the intensification of mass inequality, having spent over a decade researching a history that deals with precisely this thematic several centuries earlier in time. The structural frameworks which connect the two periods of history are as clear as never before – while also, perhaps, reminding us that there is nothing new under the sun.

14 As discussed in my book, *The Covid Consensus: The New Politics of Global Inequality* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2021).



Boy sitting on a traditional African fishing boat. Getty Images.

Aanchal Malhotra

Shortlisted in 2019 for *Remnants of Partition:
21 Objects from a Continent Divided*

Published by Hurst



Aanchal Malhotra is an oral historian and writer from New Delhi, India. She is the co-founder of the Museum of Material Memory, and writes extensively on the 1947 Partition and its related topics. Her first book, *Remnants of Partition: 21 Objects from a Continent Divided*, was shortlisted for the British Academy Book Prize in 2019. Her second book, *In the Language of Remembering*, focuses on the long lasting, generational impact of Partition.

The inheritance of Partition

The year 2022 marks the 75th anniversary of the withdrawal of the British Empire from undivided India in August 1947, leading to the drawing of the Radcliffe Line between the now independent nations of India and Pakistan (which was further bifurcated into East and West, with East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh in 1971). This partition line resulted in the largest mass-migration of refugees across a man-made border, forcing Hindus and Sikhs to migrate to India and Muslims to Pakistan. Official numbers reported the displacement of approximately 14 million people and the death of a million more.

The origin of all four of my grandparents can be traced back to what is now Pakistan, and nearly a decade ago, I began speaking with eye-witnesses to know what had happened during Partition. Like many South Asians, I had inherited a history that had defined the generation of my ancestors, but for too long the politics of partitioning a subcontinent had overshadowed the individuality of the survivors, and their experiences went mostly unrecorded. In an effort to preserve the memories of a homeland left behind using the aid of migratory objects that refugees had carried with them across the border, my first book *Remnants of a Separation*, was published in South Asia to mark the 70th anniversary of Partition, and internationally as *Remnants of Partition: 21 Objects from a Continent Divided* (2019).

In the years after the book's publication, there felt a resurgence of interest in Partition stories, particularly amongst generations untouched by its trauma. During this time, I began creating an archive of second-hand or 'post-memory' views of Partition, interviewing children, grandchildren and sometimes even great-grandchildren of survivors, to understand if one could feel a link to a tragedy they had not witnessed. There were numerous testimony projects working to preserve eyewitness memory, but hardly any that shed light on the descendants of Partition survivors. Yet it was important for this archive to grow as well, to understand the ways in which the consequences of Partition were disseminated and manifested. What interested me further was the passage of memory

between generations – how and why were stories of an aged trauma transmitted and received? Were they offered with intention, or needed to be exhumed? Had they always been present and gone unnoticed? Did they cause pain in their retelling – both to the ancestor and the descendant? Was there any point at all in resuscitating this part of the past? This notion of historical inheritance became the heart of my second book, *In the Language of Remembering* (2022).

Through this research, what came to light quite naturally was that the memory of Partition was bound to nation-state and post-Partition identities defined by which side of the border people found themselves on. For India, Partition had meant a loss of land; for Pakistan, it was the gaining of nationhood; and for Bangladesh, the year of their independence, 1971, held far more significance in popular memory than 1947. Since Partition, generations of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have grown up largely in isolation from one another with little opportunity for interaction, their understanding of ‘the other side’ perpetuated by state-controlled histories, popular media and the



The plaques from Justice Bakhshi Tek Chand's home on No. 6 Fane Road, Lahore, returned to the family decades after Partition. Photograph by Aanchal Malhotra.

many wars fought since independence. But as my conversations touched on the history they had once shared, and the cultural and linguistic similarities that still persisted, the ghostly outline of an unpartitioned land began to take shape. Propelled by the creation of this man-made, highly militarised border, many descendants told stories about the violence their families had witnessed in 1947 and thereafter, and the anger, confusion or bitterness that still remained. But many more touched on the pain and longing that had become silent companions, on the relationships that were severed due to violent migrations, and the often unattainable desire of one day visiting the land of their ancestors – the land across the border. Through these conversations, the very word ‘Partition’ came to feel like history, memory, burden, wound, war, all at once.

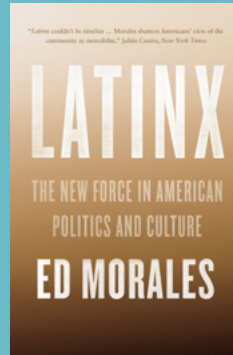
For seventy-five years, we South Asians have endlessly concerned ourselves with the geopolitical consequences of this historical event, and not nearly enough with how it has registered – through remembering or forgetting – in public memory and consciousness. Partition has defined the lives of entire generations, yet we have no memorials to it, and neither do the nations impacted by it – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh – collectively observe one single day dedicated to its memory. The physical and psychological impact of Partition does not end with the generation that witnessed it – it extends into the present – but it is a subject hardly discussed outside of academia.

An interviewee once spoke to me about Truth and Reconciliation, emphasising how it is impossible to attain any sense of reconciliation without some measure of truth. But in this context, when even truth is manifold, often contradictory, and established by allegiance to nation, perhaps reconciliation must begin with the acceptance of multiple truths. The various experiences of survivors and descendants need to be heard and recognized, acknowledged and honoured – not only by their own countrymen but also their neighbours. Listening to others is perhaps the first step to building empathy towards them. And if my conversations across the subcontinent have revealed anything, it is to remember that we originated from a shared history, and we once experienced a shared pain, and thereby carry through our generations a shared loss. Knowledge of this shared past can change how we live in the present and what we hope for the future.

Ed Morales

Shortlisted in 2019 for *Latinx*:
The New Force in American Politics and Culture

Published by Verso



Ed Morales is an author, journalist, filmmaker, and poet who teaches at Columbia University. He is the author of *The Latin Beat* and *Living in Spanglish and Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture*. He has written for *the New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Rolling Stone*, *Village Voice*, and other publications and is a regular commentator on National Public Radio. His film *Whose Barrio?* premiered at the New York Latino International Film Festival. He lives in New York City.

What happened after I published *Latinx*

When I set out to write my book *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture*, I was trying to write about what unites Latin American descendants who live in the USA. My primary thesis was that what gives us the most political power and cultural presence lies in a non-binary view of race. Sometimes that racial difference is expressed through ‘mixedness’, at other times through blackness and indigenoussness, and because of the migration of primarily Chinese laborers in the nineteenth century many of us are of Asian descent. It was an attempt to map out an identity that thrived in contradiction, that was defined by difference.

The original title I proposed for the book was ‘*Raza Matters*’, a play on *Race Matters*, the landmark 1993 book by Cornell West. ‘Raza’ is the Spanish word for race, and early in the book I write about how the modern idea of race was formed during the period of Iberian colonisation of the Americas, long before the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century race science. But soon after I began writing, my editors felt that the title should be changed to include something that alluded to ‘Latino’, a label used to designate Latin American descendants living in the USA. Eventually we agreed to change the title to *Latinx*, a new term that I had picked up from my students at Columbia University’s Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race.

In my seminars at Columbia, my students and I began to see a parallel between the Latino fluid relationship to the US racial binary and the Western gender binary. Going back to the 1990s, a discourse had emerged, particularly among Chicano/a (Mexican-American) scholars that alluded to the letter ‘x’ as a marker of intersections between the Western, indigenous and black cultures. Feminists like Cherrie Moraga saw the ‘x’ as a symbol of queerness and indigeneity, reflecting identities ‘robbed from us through colonisation,’ akin to Malcolm X’s use of the letter in place of his slave name.

For me, ‘Latinx’ had a futuristic aspect, a way to imagine a world when marginalised people are finally free, much like Afro-futurism’s intersection

between science fiction, funk, poetry, and jazz. I embraced its playfulness, and the idea that, by at least debating the revision of its identifying label, US Latinos were the first racial or ethnic group to include the LGBTQ community. Even though the book itself was more focused on racial difference and intersectionality, as originally conceived, I hoped the new title would spur new conversations.

But soon after the book came out, perhaps because Latinx's use had organically begun to spread in mainstream and social media, an enormous controversy broke out. Conservatives said the label was not fitting because it violated the rules of Spanish, and that it represented an imposition of US culture, an 'Americanisation' of being Latino. This criticism ignores the permeation of English words in casual conversation all over Latin America, while also missing the point of how US Latino culture has always been a rebellious hybrid of Latin and Anglo- America. I appeared on a National Public Radio program debating this issue with a conservative writer who eventually joined the Trump campaign's Spanish-language arm in Florida.

After Trump's surprisingly good draw of Latino voters in the 2020 election, even moderate Democrats joined the anti-Latinx bandwagon, claiming that the use of Latinx by liberal Senators like Dianne Warren was a marker of elitism that was driving US Latinos away from the Party and towards the Republicans. They continually cited an early set of polls that found few used or embraced the term, while newer studies reflected its growing use among young people.

There has also been understandable criticism from younger people of Latin American descent who find any variation of 'Latin' part of a colonial project, one that reinforces the largely unrecognised racism that still exists in Latin America. Before some of my students at Columbia began using 'Latinx', there was a widespread sentiment that 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' served to erase individual national identities like 'Mexican', 'Puerto Rican', 'Colombian', 'Dominican', etc. A growing effort among Afro- and indigenous Latinos to expose the fallacy of racial democracy among Latin Americans and the diaspora in the USA has been an important part of this pushback.

Making the case for a broader, intersectional group identity is difficult, particularly during a period of increased economic inequality that makes inequities between races even more apparent. Drawing on my studies of the political vanguardism of the 1970s, I still see the potential of Latinx as an internationalist, anti-racist, and anti-colonialist identification, and through its intention to include LGBTQ people, a crucial step forward.

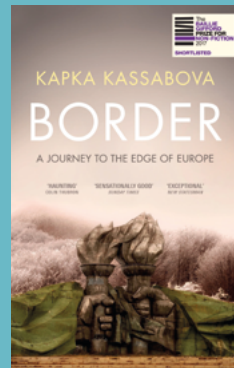
Even during my 2019 visit to London, I saw how Latinos were coming

together and developing a sense of Latinx identity, sometimes citing what they had seen in the USA as a model. While it is true that Latinx has its contradictions and needs to strongly centre the needs of its black, indigenous, and queer members, it can be a safe space to protect against the increasing intolerance that has invaded our political life. It can be the base of a politics of marginalisation aware of its intersections, what the late scholar José Muñoz described as ‘feeling together in difference’.

Kapka Kassabova

Winner in 2018 for *Border:
A Journey to the Edge of Europe*

Published by Granta Books



Kapka Kassabova is the author of the multi-award winning *Border* (Granta 2017) and *To the Lake* (Granta 2020) which won France's Best Foreign Book of the Year. Her next book is *Elixir* (Cape 2023). She grew up in Sofia and lives in the highlands of Scotland.

Boundless

To see both lakes, you must climb the mountain that separates them – but only on the surface. Lakes Ohrid and Prespa are connected by underground rivers in a lacustrine system unique to Eurasia. They are Europe’s oldest lakes.

You scale Mean Valley, passing bear-dung and wild thyme. Across Mean Valley – an abandoned Albanian border station. For fifty years, the Albanian and Yugoslav sides faced off. The people of the lakes could see each other across the water, but the iron curtain kept them in parallel realities. Today, once you pass the sleepy lakeside checkpoint by Saint Naum Monastery, and walk into Albanian territory, all you see from that era are bunkers – monuments to despotic insanity.

At 2200 metres, the lakes appear as eyes in an ancient face. Ohrid is an oval. Prespa is a tear. Prespa above feeds Ohrid below, and the water is filtered by the limestone mountain. This is why Ohrid, thirty kilometres long and almost three hundred metres deep, was once called *Lacus Lihnitis*, lake of light.

These lakes are earth’s hermitages. The founder of the eponymous monastery, the monk Naum, was a healer of the insane and the melancholy. For a millennium, pilgrims have been coming to his grave to make wishes. The shores of both lakes are full of cave churches and dwellings, with frescoes so life-like they almost walk and talk. Until the 1940s, monks and nuns lived here and practised unconditional peace.

It’s the hardest thing, to practise unconditional peace.

I looked for a map that showed the entire lake ecosystem, but couldn’t find one in any of the three countries that share the two lakes. I found myopic maps where ‘our’ slice of the lake stops at the border. ‘Our’ side is blue, ‘their’ side is blank. Their side barely has the cartographic right to exist. On the ground, of course, people mingle in marriage, business, suffering and hope – when the border allows it. And for much of the last seventy years, it hasn’t.

Boats are still prohibited from crossing into neighbouring lake territory,

and they know exactly where in the water the invisible lines run and when to turn back. In North Macedonia, you hear the Italian pop-music of Albanian restaurants and smell the fish. But to get there, you must use the land checkpoint. It's the dementia of hard borders. They forget why they were there, but they also forget to leave.

During the First World War, the Macedonian Front passed through here. It was the main Balkan front and the site of tens of thousands of multi-national deaths, including British. A generation after, the Italian front in Albania stretched west of here. When Mussolini withdrew, his soldiers were left to starve or shelter with locals. Mountains unfold to the Aegean and to the Adriatic. From here, you see that to treat an ecosystem like geopolitical pie is insanity. That insanity breeds melancholy for generations. And here I am.

Prespa is as vast as Ohrid and even has a companion lakelet, Mikri Prespa – home to Europe's largest colony of Dalmatian pelicans. But the two Prespas are separated by the post-WWI border, drawn quickly across the map in straight lines. The mother lake is split among North Macedonia, Albania, and Greece. The little one is in Greece but with its tail end in Albania.

On Lake Prespa is a checkpoint that was closed by the Greek military junta in 1967 and not reopened since. People are desperate for contact. Because of the closed checkpoint, their villages are dying. For half a century now, they have been banned from walking down the lakeside road into the first village on the other side. You must spend half a day crossing mountains to an inland checkpoint. After one hundred and seventy kilometres, driving through the ruined highland villages of the Greek Civil War, you return to the same lakeside. At dusk, you walk along the reedbeds of no man's land, and you see the starting point of your journey. You salute the tatty Greek flag and spot the lonely Macedonian border guard who smokes in a halo of butterflies.

You watch your journey eat its tail. You have tracked the zero-sum achievement of hard borders. Hard borders are the manifestation of war that doesn't end. Even a short war has a long aftermath. Our whole lives can feel like the aftermath of war, until suddenly there is war again and we're in the centre of it. I am the fourth generation of lake women to emigrate and leave family behind, because of war and its aftermath: hard borders on the ground, in the family, in the body. I came to my maternal lakes to seek the source of the pain I inherited. After *Border*, I yearned to experience boundlessness. I came to my grandmother's lake in search of connection. But I found another triple border. And in that border, I found the source of the pain.

My great-grandfather fought in the First World War. My grandfather fought in the next war. My father spent the first two years of my life on compulsory army service. My cousins in Ohrid have children who may live a life of peace or may not. Our Bulgarian-Macedonian family has been scattered across the world for four generations, because of war. The systemic disease called 'balkanisation' doesn't belong to the Balkans. It moves virulently across the globe, splitting ecosystems, families, nations, and our psyches.

From here, the lakes and their hinterland are boundless. Families, nations, empires all come to an end. The lakes have survived for a million years in symbiosis. Peace comes off the water like a hum. Your nervous system rests. Your pain subsides. The lakes enter you and you remember that you are ninety per cent water. You are born boundless, and boundlessness is your destination. The Sufi dervishes who lived alongside the nuns and monks knew it. They whirled towards boundlessness. A tiny community of whirling Sufis still lives by the lake.

You walk down Mean Valley and lose Prespa from view. One day, there will be no borders to cross. Two recent peace pacts were signed here: the Ohrid Agreement in 2001 which ended the post-Kosovo conflict in Macedonia, and the Prespa Agreement in 2018 between Greece and North Macedonia which ended nothing, but changed Macedonia's name.

Peace is a lake, and all roads end at the lakes, like the grand Via Egnatia that carried armies, caravans, messengers and false messiahs from west to east and east to west for centuries, and is now seamlessly reclaimed by the lakes.



British Academy Book Prize

The £25,000 British Academy Book Prize is awarded annually for a non-fiction book, written in English (books in translation are also welcome), that has made an outstanding contribution to global cultural understanding.

Since launching in 2013, the international Prize has recognised a distinguished array of shortlisted authors and eventual winners. Their work explores many different aspects of global cultural understanding and combines original academic enquiry with engaging story-telling to reach the broadest possible public audience.

In this 10th celebratory year, the Prize continues to provide a platform for discussion and debate on which to promote dialogue around the important global issues of the day, through a programme of events and media and partnerships.

A shortlist of up to six books, selected by an independent jury, is announced in September, and the winner in October.

Professor Patrick Wright FBA, Chair of the judging panel, is Emeritus Professor of Literature and History at King's College London. His books include: *The Sea View Has Me Again: Uwe Johnson in Sheerness*; *On Living in an Old Country*, *The Village that Died for England*, and *Iron Curtain: from Stage to Cold War*.

Former winners and shortlisted authors



All the books are available via the London Review Bookshop
londonreviewbookshop.co.uk

2021 Winner

Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (William Collins)

Shortlist

Cal Flynn, *Islands of Abandonment: Life in the Post-Human Landscape* (William Collins)
Eddie S. Glaude Jr, *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and its Urgent Lessons for Today* (Chatto & Windus, Vintage)
Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press)

2020 Winner

Hazel V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (Verso)

Shortlist

Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire – Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (Verso)
Pekka Hämäläinen, *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power* (Yale University Press)
Charles King, *The Reinvention of Humanity: A Story of Race, Sex, Gender and the Discovery of Culture* (The Bodley Head)
Tanya Talaga, *All Our Relations: Indigenous trauma in the shadow of colonialism* (Scribe)

2019 Winner

Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Allen Lane)

Shortlist	<p>Kwame Anthony Appiah, <i>The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity</i> (Profile)</p> <p>Julian Baggini, <i>How the World Thinks: A Global History of Philosophy</i> (Granta Books)</p> <p>Julia Lovell, <i>Maoism: A Global History</i> (The Bodley Head)</p> <p>Aanchal Malhotra, <i>Remnants of Partition: 21 Objects from a Continent Divided</i> (Hurst)</p> <p>Ed Morales, <i>Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture</i> (Verso)</p>
2018 Winner	Kapka Kassabova , <i>Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe</i> (Granta Books)
Shortlist	<p>Christopher de Bellaigue, <i>The Islamic Enlightenment: The Modern Struggle Between Faith and Reason</i> (The Bodley Head)</p> <p>James Fergusson, <i>Al-Britannia: A Journey Through Muslim Britain</i> (Bantam Press)</p> <p>Miranda Kaufmann, <i>Black Tudors: The Untold Story</i> (Oneworld)</p> <p>Souad Mekhennet, <i>I Was Told to Come Alone: My Journey Behind the Lines of Jihad</i> (Virago)</p> <p>Dame Anne Salmond, <i>Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds</i> (Auckland University Press)</p>
2017 Winner	Timothy Garton Ash , <i>Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World</i> (Atlantic Books)
2016 Winner	Carole Hillenbrand , <i>Islam: A New Historical Introduction</i> (Thames & Hudson)
2015 Winner	Neil MacGregor , <i>A History of the World in 100 Objects (Penguin) and Germany: Memories of a Nation</i> (Allen Lane)
2014 Winner	Jonathan Jansen , <i>Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past</i> (Stanford University Press)
2013 Winner	Karen Armstrong , for her wide-ranging, highly accessible books on comparative religion

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