

The Battle of Britishness: migrant journeys, 1685 to the present by Tony Kushner.
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The conceptual fragility of 'Britishness', its paradoxes and aporias, have only forcefully been addressed by academics towards the close of the twentieth century. From Pocock's seminal essays and the framing of the Four Nations model, to more contemporary offerings from historians and social scientists, conversations about the construction of British national identities have been notably magnified over the last few decades.²⁴⁴ However, while these studies probe the complex, overlapping and at times conflicting locations of identity – both domestic and foreign – scholarly analysis of 'Britishness' has yet to enter a convincing dialogue with studies of migration and ethnicity.

Tony Kushner's *The Battle of Britishness* attempts to fill this gap in the existing historiography. In this impressively wide-ranging and profoundly insightful book, Kushner sets out to 'abandon the active amnesia concerning the immigration history of Britain' (p.22). In so doing, Kushner navigates the complexities of various migrant journeys in order to examine how the 'global' and the 'local' connect within the battle of Britishness. This, he explains, is a battle which is 'ultimately about twoness: it is about both famous and obscure journeys; about inclusion and exclusion; and about ambivalence and ambiguity in both migrant stories as well as the making and re-making of national identity over many centuries' (pp.3-4). This 'stark doubleness' is traced throughout the volume by considering not only the migrant journey itself, but also popular responses from the state and public. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, a nuanced history of migration is thus presented in five masterfully crafted sections.

Organized chronologically from the seventeenth century onwards and framed by an introduction and conclusion, each section in the volume has two chapters that in turn explore two contrasting stories of migration. Part one, titled 'Introduction and Contexts', provides an overview of migrant journeys. It grapples with the politics of representation to reveal the fragmented nature of national identity and belonging. Here, popular responses to immigration are used to analyze the significance of memory work. Highlighting the role of diasporic agency, or lack thereof, in the case of Irish and Jewish groups, the section skillfully confronts the problematic interplay between migration narratives and the wider parables of 'our island story'.

Part two further interrogates the construction of migration myths. Using the Huguenots and the temporary transmigrancy of Volga Germans as case studies, Kushner emphasizes the ethnic

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²⁴⁴ See J.G.A. Pocock, 'British History: a plea for a new subject' *The Journal of Modern History*, 47, (1975), pp. 601-602; H. Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: the making and unmaking of British national identity*, (London: Routledge, 1989); R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: past and present in contemporary culture*, (London: Verso, 1994); B. Parekh, 'Defining British National Identity' *The Political Quarterly*, 80, (2009), pp. S251-S262.

heterogeneity of pre-1945 Britain, thus undermining and challenging traditional mono-cultural models. Significantly, the juxtaposition of these case studies exposes how attitudes towards migrant groups help shape the theatre of national identity. As a symptom of anti-alienism in Britain, local responses to the Volga Germans are therefore used to particular effect.

In part three, 'The Nazi Era', the journeys of the *Kindertransport* and *St Louis* are examined to reveal the inner contradictions inherent in memory work. These case studies powerfully emphasize the complexity of British immigration policies, and demonstrate how heritage commemoration has served to transform and evolve the historical reality of Jewish 'refugeedom' to an increasingly 'mythical and celebratory' narrative (p.124). Conveniently forgetting the traumatic legacy of forced displacement, as well as the exclusion, deportation and interment of Jewish refugees, altruistic claims expounding Britain's historic treatment of immigrant populations are carefully re-examined by Kushner in one of the finest sections of the volume.

Similarly, part four explores the ways in which colonial and postcolonial journeys are fashioned to promote a pluralistic account of British history. The iconic myth of the *Empire Windrush* is paired with more obscure stowaway journeys to reveal the marginality of seemingly ill-fitting migration narratives within national histories. Part five, the final section, then follows to neatly conclude on the ambiguities that underlie contemporary notions of Britishness.

In all, *The Battle of Britishness* delivers both an expert guide to migrant journeys, as well as a sophisticated antidote to simplistic versions of Britain's immigration history. Stylishly written, one of its main achievements is its ability to condense an impressively large amount of source material without losing sight of its overall thesis. While this is not a comprehensive history of migration, Kushner's sharp eye for detail ensures that what is presented is a selective, lucid and well-researched set of micro-histories. Moreover, perhaps most remarkable is the volume's careful attention to the negotiations involved in national story telling. This ultimately gives way to an instructive critique of memory work, and is hugely relevant to wider debates concerning British national histories. *The Battle of Britishness* is therefore essential reading for not only students but also anyone interested in the social mechanics concerning the making and re-making of national identities.