

GUIDING MODERN GIRLS  
Girlhood, Empire, and Internationalism  
in the 1920s and 1930s

*Kristine Alexander*



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## INTRODUCTION

AS LEADER OF THE “Swallow Patrol” of the 8th (Battersea) Girl Guide Company in south London during the 1920s, Eileen Knapman kept a diary describing her group’s activities.<sup>1</sup> In October 1928, she wrote:

Miss Chalk, who is now our District Commissioner, came to one of our meetings. We had games, tests, Patrol work, and ... INSPECTION!!! We survived, however, and Miss Chalk thought we were smart! The only things which did not come up to scratch, were our ties, which each member of the Company seems to wear at a different length! We have now abandoned knots for signalling, and we do our best to poke one another’s eyes out, in the process of “flag-wagging.” Half of us can’t signal properly, and the other half don’t know the alphabet, so we shall have to buck up! Catherine Skelton “flew up” from Brownies into our Patrol.<sup>2</sup>

Across the Atlantic, Winnifred Thompson, head of the “Nightingale Patrol” of the 21st Guide Company in the Canadian city of Winnipeg, similarly recorded her Guide company’s pursuits – though with far fewer exclamation marks – in a handwritten logbook. At a meeting on 22 October 1928, for instance, she noted that some members of her company practised their “ambulance” skills for an upcoming public display, “while the other Guides present played volleyball.” Thompson recorded that girls from the 21st Guides had recently qualified for badges in Morse flag signalling, bed making, fire making, and “health rules”; she also wrote that the group, which met weekly at St.

Alban's Anglican Church, "reviewed the drill for the display and Mrs. Foster came down and taught us some Brownie songs to sing at the Brownie Flying Up Ceremony to be held November 10."<sup>3</sup>

Three months later, in January 1929, a mixed group of white and Indian girls and women attended the All-India Guide Camp on the grounds of Belvedere, the viceroy's winter residence in Calcutta (now the National Library of India). A scrapbook commemorating the camp, now in the Girl Guiding UK Archives in London, includes a series of black-and-white photographs in which girls and women in saris and British-style Guide uniforms are shown cooking, eating, and playing together in the outdoors.<sup>4</sup> Like their contemporaries in Battersea and Winnipeg, these Guides were divided into small groups named after birds; the scrapbook includes photographs labelled "Sparrow Patrol" and "Pigeon Patrol." Many of these photographs are accompanied by handwritten comments and images, including sketches of tents and a drawing of two girls dancing to music from a gramophone.

These records, proof of Guiding's global reach during the early twentieth century, also illustrate a number of the movement's defining characteristics: wearing uniforms, playing games, and singing songs; earning badges for skills related to health, domesticity, and first aid; engaging in physical activities like hiking and volleyball; practising marching and signalling for public performances; and camping out, tying knots, and practising woodcraft. Created with youthful and adult readers in mind, these diaries and scrapbooks demonstrate individual responses to Guiding's activities while hinting at several aspects of the consumer-minded early twentieth-century modern girlhood that Guide leaders sought to train and contain.

The Girl Guide movement was officially established in England in 1909 by Boy Scout founder and imperial war hero Robert Baden-Powell, in the wake of a wave of popular concern about white racial degeneration, appropriate gender roles, and the future of the British Empire. With its uniforms, badges, and promises of camping and adventure, Guiding offered a combination of freedom and control that appealed to girls and women in a range of contexts, with the result that Guiding spread rapidly across the British Empire and, indeed, the world. During the 1920s and 1930s, over a million girls in more than forty colonies and countries (including British settler societies like Canada and South Africa, colonies like India and Jamaica, as well as a range of countries beyond the British Empire, including the United States, France, Hungary, and Poland) joined the Guides, a single-sex, age-graded organization whose leaders hoped to train girls to successfully navigate the dangers, temptations, and opportunities of modern life.

The fact that Guiding could take root in such different soils was a point of pride for many of the movement's supporters. This was especially so during the 1920s and 1930s, a period marked by the emergence of the figure of the flapper or Modern Girl, attempts to rearticulate the British Empire as a friendly interracial "family," the creation of the League of Nations, rising anticolonial nationalisms, economic contractions, the dawn of European fascism, and the development of a modern consumer-based youth culture. Baden-Powell, for instance, boasted in the British Guide Association's 1934 annual report that the "international aspect" of Guide work held "a wonderful promise of possibilities for the future. In all our British Overseas Dominions, Colonies, and Protectorates," he wrote, "the oncoming generation already shows a considerable leaven of boys and girls linked in this personal tie with their Brother Scouts and Sister Guides in the Old Country. This is not confined to white youth, but includes Indians and the natives of all our African States."<sup>5</sup>

Baden-Powell's words point to a number of themes that I address in this study: they conflate the "imperial" with the "international," for instance, and stress the importance of creating personal ties between young people from different racial categories across national and colonial boundaries. They also, like the Guide and Scout movements more broadly, link children and youth with futurity and hope while describing huge swathes of the earth as Britain's possessions. At the same time, this passage also points towards two of my main research questions: How did the British-based Guide organization deal with both "white" and "Native" girls and young women during the 1920s and 1930s? And how did girls and young women understand and respond to the movement's attempts to guide them towards a service-oriented, "useful" future?

*Guiding Modern Girls* answers these questions by analyzing the Guide movement's ideals and programs in three places: in England, the heart of a vast empire whose urban and industrial problems had inspired a number of social reform efforts; in Canada, a rapidly urbanizing white settler society whose federal government was committed (through a variety of initiatives, including the Scouts and Guides) to the destruction and assimilation of Indigenous cultures; and in India, a British colony with an enormous, varied, and increasingly nationalistic population.

Youth in general, and girls and young women in particular, have often been singled out as "problems" in urban, industrialized societies. By the late nineteenth century, young women's enthusiastic engagement with new leisure, employment, and educational possibilities had begun to lead social commentators to lament the fact that many of them seemed to prefer pleasure and autonomy to domesticity and deference.<sup>6</sup> Adult fears about young women, social norms,

and cultural change were at the heart of a number of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about modernity.<sup>7</sup> These concerns about young women's aesthetic and leisure choices – and their potential political and demographic consequences – intensified during the 1920s and 1930s. This was in large part a response to the global emergence of the Modern Girl, a figure whose cropped hair, short skirts, and active, consumer-oriented lifestyle symbolized all that was exciting, new, and sometimes threatening about life after the First World War.<sup>8</sup> Worries about modern girlhood were also central to the Guide movement's ideals and programs, which variously emphasized domesticity, citizenship, engagement with nature, physical culture, and imperial and international friendship – in ways that often supported class- and race-based hierarchies.

While framing the interwar Guide movement as a response to the possibilities and threats embodied by the imagined figure of the Modern Girl, this book is also concerned with a broader range of youthful feminine subjects: female children and adolescents from a variety of circumstances, subject positions, and settings who came of age in a time generally acknowledged as “modern.” The concept of modernity has been wielded by scholars in ways that often, as Frederick Cooper reminds us, “contribute more to confusion than to clarity.” Historians interested in clarity, Cooper suggests, should listen to their sources: “If modernity is what they hear, they should ask how it is being used and why.”<sup>9</sup> The word “modern” recurs throughout many of the sources on which this book is based, a number of which also explicitly situate the First World War as a turning point in the lives of girls and women. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Guide leaders in England, Canada, and India regularly described girls as “modern” in ways that often combined hope and anxiety. Their writings also stressed the importance of using modern pedagogy and lauded the opportunities created by modern travel and communication technology.

These modern increases in mobility and global interconnectedness, which were also implicated in the construction and maintenance of hierarchies of gender, class, race, and age, took on a new intensity after 1918 as individuals, organizations, and nation-states turned to internationalism and youth to articulate their hopes for a peaceful future. In his study of the relationship between British imperialism and the emergence of international society during the early twentieth century, Daniel Gorman writes, for example, that “internationalism came of age in the 1920s.”<sup>10</sup> References to youth, growing up, and adult hopes for future generations appear regularly in the literature on the history of internationalism – as they did in the words of contemporaries – but

the place of actual young people in early twentieth-century internationalism has been less well studied. This is especially true of girls, and this book makes a girl-focused contribution to what is presently a small group of studies of young people and internationalist thought and organizing.<sup>11</sup> It is also an addition and a response to the historical and literary scholarship on girls and British imperialism as well as the historiography of women's internationalism during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

Internationalism is also, as Manu Goswami has recently written, about imagining potential futures.<sup>13</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the leaders of the global Guide movement promoted a conservative politics of futurity that both privileged and looked beyond the British Empire. Like its masculine counterpart, the Boy Scouts, the postwar Guide organization sought to create a peaceful future shaped by a strong and familial British Empire, stable and often hierarchical social structures, and League of Nations-style international relations. With its emphasis on teaching girls the skills they would need as future mothers, Guiding was also an exercise in what queer theorist Lee Edelman calls reproductive futurism, in which modern girls themselves were often seen as less important than the future children they were expected to bear.<sup>14</sup>

Fiona Paisley rightly notes that historians have shown relatively little interest in the entwined histories of girlhood and imperial/international Guiding, despite the fact that “the rapid growth of Guides and Brownies around the world points to a fascinating history.”<sup>15</sup> While Allen Warren and Tammy Proctor comment on the “imperial and international” nature of the early twentieth-century Scouts and Guides, they do so by using mostly British sources to touch briefly on aspects of both movements in a number of different colonial and national settings.<sup>16</sup> In this book, which is based on archival research in Canada, India, and England, I aim to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of race, gender, class, and imperial/international Girl Guiding in these three specific contexts. I also add a multi-sited dimension to the scholarly literature on the history of youth movements, much of which continues to focus on single regional and national contexts.<sup>17</sup>

*Guiding Modern Girls* uncovers the ideas, activities, and responses of girls like Winnifred Thompson, Eileen Knapman, and the All-India campers in combination with those of the movement's British founders, the elite group of mostly white women who created Guide policy at the national and international levels, and the women who led local Brownie, Guide, and Ranger companies in England, Canada, and India during the years between the two world wars.<sup>18</sup>



Juxtaposing the experiences and voices of these different groups of girls and women reveals that, while the Guide movement's official program was a product of adult anxieties and aspirations, it also reflected ongoing and often unacknowledged negotiations between adults, adolescents, and children as well as between local, national, imperial, and global contexts. Working across different imperial sites in this way also reveals how Guiding's upper-level leaders, like the white women in charge of other imperial and international organizations during the years between the world wars, sought both to encourage global sisterhood and to monitor and control the growth of the movement in different colonial and national contexts.

I use organizational records, periodicals, fiction, press coverage, social surveys, photo albums, prescriptive literature, and individual Guides' diaries and scrapbooks to analyze the ideals and practices of the Girl Guide movement in England, Canada, and India during the 1920s and 1930s. These three locations, while distant and different in many respects, were nonetheless connected in some significant ways by Guiding's imperial and transnational networks. These networks facilitated the circulation of ideas, texts, and goods, gave some women and girls the chance to travel internationally, and offered similar experiences and ideals to members around the world. While emphasizing the universalizing nature of its programs, international and imperial Guiding during these years was also based on notions of status and difference. This tension between the movement's acknowledgment of similarity and its continued dependence on class- and race-based notions of difference is especially evident when one considers the comparative workings of the movement in the metropole, the dependent empire, and a settler colony. This approach, still a relative rarity in imperial history and the history of childhood, highlights points of difference and a surprising number of similarities between sites that have seldom been studied together.

How did so-called "white," "Indian," and "Native" girls and women (to use Baden-Powell's race-based parlance) in different parts of the British Empire understand and engage with the Guide movement's ideals and practices? How did Guiding's expansion into new locations with differently diverse populations affect its ideology and programs? *Guiding Modern Girls* answers these questions by juxtaposing the development and reception of the movement in England, Canada, and India during the interwar years. It explores how ideas about girlhood travelled across borders, and asks how they were complicated and changed by factors like race, class, and religion by tracing the circulation and reshaping of the Guide movement's texts, consumer goods, and ideals across three distant and different parts of the British Empire.

The Guide movement was a response to early twentieth-century struggles over the meanings of girlhood, empire, and internationalism. *Guiding Modern Girls* sheds new light on Guide leaders' attempts, during the interwar years, to create a conservatively modern ideal of imperial and international girlhood. Focusing primarily though not exclusively on England, Canada, and India, I argue that Guide literature and programs both reflected and contributed to this conservative modernity, most notably by combining an older emphasis on maternalism and domesticity with an emphasis on bravery, independence, and female masculinity, and by promoting a friendly familial version of international and imperial relations that was nonetheless still influenced by older ideas about race- and class-based hierarchies and the British "civilizing mission." My second major argument is that, despite its limitations, the Guide movement's structure still allowed some girls and young women in various local contexts to adapt and use it for their own, sometimes subversive, ends. Twentieth-century girls were more than merely disputed symbols and potential problems to be reformed, and their responses to Guide character training reveal that the movement was both contested and flexible.

The 1920s and 1930s were a time when hierarchies of gender, race, class, and age were constructed, undermined, and rebuilt in locations across the world. For this reason, they have been characterized by a number of scholars as a period of conservative modernity. The British historian Alison Light, for example, uses the term to characterize the interwar years as a time marked by tension "between old and new, between past and present, between conserving and moving on."<sup>19</sup> Katie Pickles and Jane Nicholas similarly highlight the confluence of conservatism and change in interwar Canada, while Jon Lawrence uses the concept of conservative modernity to argue that "entrenched ideas about supposedly natural social hierarchies" continued to exert a powerful influence in British culture and politics until at least the 1950s.<sup>20</sup>

Lawrence's argument, which ignores age and gender, applies equally to the powerful desire, visible in social institutions like the Guides, to contain newly assertive modern girls and to shore up established patterns of age- and gender-based hierarchy. To this end, *Guiding Modern Girls* adds an imperial and international dimension to Tammy Proctor's important claim that Guiding and Scouting in interwar Britain were effectively "a mix of modern activities and nineteenth-century values."<sup>21</sup> The Girl Guides' version of conservative modernity promoted a universal ideal of girlhood. It was also a colonial modernity, in which mostly white women used ideas of progress, mobility, and "modern" pedagogical methods in ways that often reified racial hierarchies and promoted unequal power relations between Britain and its dominions and colonies. The

history of Guiding, then, needs to be understood both as a promise of emancipation and change, and as an attempt to hold onto older conventions and maintain hierarchies based on age, gender, race, and class.<sup>22</sup>

How did the tensions between Guiding's conservative and progressive elements play out in different imperial locations? This question first occurred to me when I began to read the periodicals published by Canadian Guide headquarters in the 1920s and 1930s for what I had initially imagined would be a project centred on Canada. I was struck by the regularity with which these publications mentioned the British Empire, internationalism, and the League of Nations, while making links and pointing out similarities between people and places that are usually studied separately. In addition to providing information about uniforms, badges, and goings-on in different parts of Canada, monthly magazines like the *Canadian Guider* featured articles about Guiding across the British Empire and the world, and a number of them singled out Guiding in South Asia for special attention. The articles I encountered in these sources provided proof of the existence of Guide companies in India, and their appearance in English-Canadian magazines was clearly an example of Western imperial and international feminism's long-standing interest in "eastern" women. At the same time, however, I also wondered what had motivated South Asian women and girls to join a British-based organization whose metropolitan leaders promoted both imperialism and internationalism.

My decision to follow this archival trail from Canada to India and England was inspired by several areas of scholarship. These included the new imperial history, many practitioners of which examine the British Empire as a series of networks or webs in which relationships between so-called "peripheral" locations are just as important as those between metropole and colony.<sup>23</sup> In deciding to analyze England, Canada, and India in the same frame, I was also inspired by the transnational turn in historical research – an approach that, in the words of Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, "highlight[s] historical processes and relationships that transcend nation states and that connect apparently separate worlds."<sup>24</sup> This type of scholarship also, as the late C.A. Bayly pointed out, "raise[s] critical issues about transnational flows, but do[es] not claim to embrace the whole world."<sup>25</sup>

While this book contributes to the fields of imperial and transnational history by asking how, through the Guides, thousands of girls and women in three particular locations participated and were represented in activities and discourses that transcended national and imperial boundaries, it is not a conventional comparative study of places with similar demographic and political features. Instead, it examines the circulation and alteration of ideas and practices

across and within multiple *different* locations. This aspect of my work draws on the methods of multi-sited ethnography, an approach that, like imperial and transnational history, aims to understand “social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site” by following and juxtaposing people, relationships, and associations across space.<sup>26</sup> The shape and content of *Guiding Modern Girls*, then, is the result of my decision to follow frequent mentions of three particular different places in the interwar Guide movement’s organizational literature and publications. Instead of isolating each location in separate sections, *Guiding Modern Girls* juxtaposes and analyzes archival findings from England, Canada, and India in thematically organized chapters.

One of the threads running through these thematic chapters is a commitment, inspired by girlhood studies and children’s history, to take girls’ experiences seriously and to give them equal weight to those of adults. This was a challenging undertaking, not least because the voices of the diverse groups of Indian, Canadian, and English girls and young women who donned the Guide movement’s uniforms during the 1920s and 1930s are difficult to find among the copious documentary traces the movement has left behind. This is largely because archives reflect the hierarchies and assumptions of the societies that produce them – and evidence created by girls has seldom been seen as important enough to preserve.<sup>27</sup>

Mary Jo Maynes writes that studying girls reveals “the inadequacy of prevailing notions of historical agency” especially clearly.<sup>28</sup> It also reveals the inadequacy of existing methods of archival collection and categorization, as girls’ actions and choices are generally far less visible in conventional textual sources than are those of boys, women, and men. Some girls’ voices are present in archival scraps and fragments – in marginalia, diaries, logbooks, and other texts that are often not seen as important enough to mention in collection descriptions, catalogues, and finding aids. And just as their experiences were fragmented along the lines of geography, class, race, and politics, so have these factors affected which sources and whose ideas have been seen as important and as worth preserving.

Like a number of other twentieth-century voluntary organizations, the Girl Guides has largely held on to its own records, in collections that often consist of both carefully selected documents and uncatalogued pieces more haphazardly acquired. Many sources related to the history of Guiding in Britain and across its former empire are kept at the Girl Guiding UK Archives, located on one of the upper floors of the movement’s central London headquarters – an imposing building on Buckingham Palace Road that testifies to the movement’s ability to acquire valuable property and align itself with elites. During most of

the time I conducted my research, the British Guide archives were looked after by a single employee whose duties included managing the archival collections, regulating access to documents, and working with volunteers (former Guides and Guide leaders, now mostly in their seventies and eighties) who run smaller local Guide archives, sometimes out of their own homes. This reliance on voluntary labour, a necessity for non-profit organizations with limited funds, means that vast quantities of Guide records face an uncertain future as the movement's elderly unpaid archive workers literally die off.<sup>29</sup>

Concerned with race, gender, class, and young people's responses to Guiding's ideals and practices, I was less interested in photographs of the movement's adult founders or members of the British royal family than I was in scrapbooks and photograph albums created by so-called "unimportant" girls and women. These albums were some of the richest sources I encountered, and I was saddened to learn that a number of similar albums, donated by former Guides from Britain and around the world, had been disposed of simply because the girls and women featured in the photographs could not be identified.

The Girl Guiding UK Archives, like the British suffrage archives that have been studied by Laura E. Nym Mayhall, had clearly been put together and catalogued with the goal of privileging one narrative and "trajectory of experience while devaluing and obliterating any others."<sup>30</sup> This official narrative of Guide history is a story of female emancipation, interracial cooperation, and cheerful heterosexuality. Yet I also found myself unable to ignore the exclusions and silences that characterized this collection, having witnessed firsthand the destruction of documents whose contents were seen as unimportant or threatening to the organization's reputation. This repository, home to a rich collection of textual and visual evidence about the history of girlhood throughout the twentieth century, has now been closed for several years.<sup>31</sup> Its future is uncertain, and I regret that I have been unable to secure permission to publish any parts of its photographic collection, which includes images of Girl Guides from England and across the world.

By contrast, the National Council of the Girl Guides of Canada – Guides du Canada employs a full-time archivist and is open to researchers. As in the UK, this national repository is supplemented by a series of volunteer-run provincial Guide archives. In these archives, as in the Girl Guiding UK collection, the voices of middle-class, urban, and suburban white Protestant girls are easiest to locate – especially in logbooks or diaries describing what took place at various Guide groups' weekly meetings. These documents provide information about individual responses and specific local contexts, which makes them a valuable counterweight to the mountains of prescriptive literature

produced by Guide headquarters. In Canada, I also sought information about Indigenous Girl Guides in the diaries and logbooks of Anglican missionaries, and in the annual reports of the Department of Indian Affairs, which supported Scout and Guide companies in Indigenous residential schools.

Because of the political and organizational changes that affected South Asia and its voluntary organizations in the decades after Independence, Indian Guides from the 1920s and 1930s were more difficult to trace than were their Canadian and British counterparts. In Delhi, I was received warmly at the headquarters of the Bharat Scouts and Guides (a co-educational organization since 1951) but soon learned that they had virtually no documents dating earlier than the 1980s. I had better luck at the Margaret Cousins Memorial Library in Sarojini Naidu House, the headquarters of the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), a voluntary organization established in 1927 to promote female education and social reform. The leaders of this organization described Guiding as a way to modernize Indian girlhood through physical culture and character training, and its annual reports and conference programs include references to Guides as honour guards and volunteer workers at AIWC events and conferences.

In India during the 1920s and 1930s, most Guide companies were attached to schools, such as the Brahma Girls' School in Calcutta (which was attended by middle-class Indian girls sponsored by a Hindu social reform group called the Brahma Somaj) and the Lawrence Royal Military School (an institution for the mostly working-class children of British soldiers).<sup>32</sup> The public and private archives I visited in London and Delhi did not contain any texts created by the girls (Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, British, or Anglo-Indian) who had been Guides in late colonial India. While female literacy was far lower there than in Canada and England, the fact that most Guide companies were based in schools means that this lack of sources is not because the women and girls who belonged to the movement could not read or write. Instead, I suspect that written records of individual groups' activities were simply not preserved for a variety of practical and political reasons, including the changes wrought by Independence and Partition and the amalgamation of the Indian Scouts and Guides into a single co-educational body in 1951 – an organization that, I suspect, was not especially interested in locating and preserving documents produced mainly by white women during the early twentieth century – a period characterized by what Indian Guide leader Lakshmi Mazumdar, writing in the 1960s, called “a bitter struggle” for “national liberation.”<sup>33</sup>

The production and preservation of evidence about girls' responses to Guiding's prescriptions and practices reflects a number of past and present

power imbalances: between English and “other” languages, “white” and “non-white” racial categories, the printed word and non-textual forms of knowledge, and the imperial and organizational centre and peripheries.<sup>34</sup> Age and gender are important here, too, as ideas about what counts as evidence and what is worth preserving continue to reflect gendered power relationships between children, adolescents, and adults. My understanding of how girls made their own meanings and cultural practices out of Guiding is also shaped by the knowledge that many photographs, letters, and other sources have not survived, whether because of decolonization, organizational priorities, or the desire to suppress aspects of the organization’s past that may be seen as embarrassing or unsavoury. Silences and gaps are an important part of the history of girlhood and the Guide organization, and I occasionally interrupt and punctuate my analysis of archival evidence with reminders of the unanswerable questions this research has raised.

Writing a book based on geographically disparate and often incomplete sets of primary sources was a daunting task, for political as well as for practical reasons. Some scholars expressed concern that I, a white woman trained primarily in Canadian and British history, would presume to speak for girls and women of colour, and reminded me that many groups are uncomfortable with outsiders making claims about and basing careers on the history of their communities. However, in a settler society that is clearly not “post” colonial, even historians whose projects remain within the borders of the Canadian nation-state must grapple with these issues. With this in mind, I have sought to produce a self-conscious work of scholarship that draws attention to inequalities while being careful not to silence or speak for its subjects. I take seriously Alison Light’s insistence that “feminist work must deal with the conservative as well as the radical imagination,” and I have tried to proceed with what Ruth Roach Pierson calls “methodological caution” and “epistemic humility.”<sup>35</sup>

The book begins with a descriptive chapter about the movement’s Victorian origins and early twentieth-century growth. Chapter 1 begins in 1857, the year of Baden-Powell’s birth and of the Indian “Mutiny,” an event that hardened British racial thinking and influenced the imperial imagination well into the twentieth century. The first part of this chapter uses Baden-Powell’s education, colonial military career, and late marriage to the much younger Olave St. Clair Soames to outline the metropolitan concerns about gender, race, class, empire, and nation that led to the founding of the Scouts and Guides in the years before the First World War. The second part of the chapter describes Guiding’s organizational structure and traces its growth in England, Canada, and India to 1939.<sup>36</sup>



The rest of the book concentrates on the 1920s and 1930s. It is structured thematically, though I have tried to remain attentive to events and shifts that occurred within this period. Chapter 2, entitled “Guiding Girls toward the Private Sphere: Training for Homekeeping, Mothercraft, and Matrimony,” deals with the Guide movement’s attempts to train modern girls for their expected future roles as domestic managers, mothers, and wives. I argue that the movement’s emphasis on these more conventionally feminine pursuits remained relatively constant during the interwar years and that the movement’s single-sex organizational structure also – ironically – created spaces for some girls and especially women who rejected those roles. This gendered aspect of Guide training was tied to ideas of race, nation, and empire, and I also ask how the movement’s emphases on motherhood and domesticity were used in different national and colonial contexts.

Chapter 3, “‘We Must Give the Modern Girl a Training in Citizenship’: Preparing Girls for Political and Social Service,” analyzes the Guide movement’s attempts to create a generation of “good” responsible citizens by training girls and young women in politics, health and cheerfulness, voluntary service, and emergency preparedness. I argue that, while it promoted new opportunities for women and girls and emphasized international tolerance, Guiding’s citizenship training program was also a conservative undertaking, characterized by telling silences about the groups it excluded. I also highlight several conflicts between metropolitan leaders’ official and implicitly white vision of imperial/international citizenship and the different (and sometimes subversive) loyalties and identities that were promoted in Guide groups across the British Empire.

Chapter 4 places Girl Guide camps within the broader history and historiography of summer camping and outdoor tourism, while also emphasizing the movement’s more specific ties to militarism and colonialism. As Scouting and Guiding spread around the world during the early twentieth century, so did their emphasis on woodcraft, nature study, and camping. By the interwar years, the frontier and woodcraft skills that were so central to Baden-Powell’s original vision were being taught to girls and boys from a wide variety of backgrounds, including young people from some of the same cultures whose “primitive” values and behaviour Guides and Scouts were encouraged to emulate through woodcraft and camping. This chapter examines the complexities and contradictions of Guiding’s camping and woodcraft programs in Canada, India, and England by focusing on questions of religion, gender, national identity, and race.

Chapter 5 analyzes Guide rallies, the large public performances that were regularly staged by the movement’s leaders in England, Canada, and India



throughout the interwar years. By looking closely at historical pageantry, mass exercise, and military drill, I shed new light on Guiding's attempts to mass-produce strong and uniform young female bodies. I also examine the raced and gendered meanings of these public spectacles and comment on the relationship between Guide rallies and the public events staged by fascist youth groups in the 1930s.

Chapter 6 focuses on the Guide movement's attempts to foster friendliness, cooperation, and sisterly goodwill among girls across national and colonial boundaries. I discuss how the movement promoted the idea of a "Guide sisterhood" in the 1920s and 1930s, the bureaucratic and organizational changes that occurred in these years (including the formation of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 1928), international and imperial Guide camps and conferences and the stable of properties in which they were held, as well as the movement's use of periodicals, radio, and the cinema to reach the hundreds of thousands of girls and young women who would never have the chance to attend an international gathering. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how these efforts were hampered by material constraints and the persistence of hierarchical racial thinking. The conclusion of *Guiding Modern Girls* summarizes my findings and traces how Guiding changed in England, Canada, and India during and after the Second World War.

Together, these chapters show how ideas and activities developed in Britain were adopted and adapted in different parts of the world, sometimes by groups of girls and women for whom they had not originally been intended. They highlight the uneven archival landscapes that confront historians of girlhood, imperialism, and voluntary organizations, while tracing the place of age, gender, race, and class in the interwar Guide movement's often contradictory pronouncements about modernity, conservatism, and change. In England, Canada, and India, Guiding was an adult-led attempt to shape girls' lives in ways that would benefit future husbands and children as well as occasionally conflicting national and imperial communities. Yet modern girls and young women in these three different imperial sites responded to and sometimes rejected the movement's program and ideals in a variety of ways.