In his influential book, which appeared in 1970, *The Old World and the New*, John H. Elliott traced the origins and development of European’s perception of the New World since 1492. Elliott emphasized how nineteenth-century historiography set the standards of interpretation for this event, creating a “Europocentric conception of history” that celebrated, in a somewhat optimistic fashion, the pursuits and the impact of European nations in faraway lands.[1] That conception of history was based on a liberal interpretation of history as a linear and uninterrupted path of progress. According to Elliott, twentieth-century historiography maintained the interpretation of European’s conquest of the New World. The difference was that twentieth-century scholars wrote about “European superiority” “burdened with the consciousness of European guilt.”[2] Although Elliott’s historiographic analysis only covered books published until 1970, his conclusions remained valid until recent times. This book has had a long-lasting influence on scholars working on the relationship between the New World and Old; two congresses, later published in books, even sprang from that influence.[3] Elliott’s own chapter in one of these books qualified as “blunted” the impact between Renaissance Europe and America, and declared that, in the moment of the first contact a linear advance did not start; instead “we find ourselves at the beginning of a winding road which twists back on itself, and involves retreats, advances, and more than one false start.”[4] That very spirit moved Elliott’s own research on a comparative history of Spanish and British Empires in the New World to a very well-built monographic study of the conquest and colonization of America by the two nations. Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (2006), although deepened by his analysis, was constructed with a parallel structure that compared two empires chronologically and thematically. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra’s *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1830* moves away from that framework to construct an entangled history into an equally entangled volume. In this volume, the histories of the Iberian and English Empires appear no longer separated but are now part of the same historical unit in which the interconnections, withdrawals, and relations on every level are more important than disconnections and differences. This collective work connects with recent historiographical tendencies that aim at offering a revision of traditional assumptions about the construction, functioning, and interpretation of empires. Recent works have already highlighted, for instance, the main role of Africans in the construction of both Atlantic and Caribbean societies; the importance of republican traditions in Catholic European monarchies; and the role played by indigenous populations in the construction of empires and modern states, not as passive actors but as active and influential ones.[5] In a recent article, Alejandra B. Osorio even argued for a radical revision of the concepts, languages, and categories that historians have been using to describe, analyze, and narrate the Spanish Empire.[6] “Entangled” is, probably, along with “hybrid,” one of the words historians should start to use in the future to define, beyond traditional nation-centered categories, the societies and cultures of Atlantic empires.[7]

*Entangled Empires*, thus, has the objective of chal-
challenging different aspects of the history of empires’ great narratives. The introduction begins by setting clear that the book is not just another compilation of texts loosely connected to certain aspects of the relations between the Iberian and British Empires. Instead, it ‘seeks to make explicit what remains implicit …: the entangled histories of Iberian and British ‘Atlantics’ and the archival processes that rendered those interconnected and common histories invisible’ (p. 3). Thus, one of the main subtleties of the book is already made clear: this is as much a book on history as it is one on memory. Throughout all the chapters there is a marked tendency not just to tell a story but to make sense of the path followed by the author to tell it. This approach devolves into a reflection on the role played by big historical narratives into the general comprehension of the past. In this sense, already in the introduction the editor makes clear that the history of the Iberian and British Empires cannot be explained by the assumption of the existence of an official or hegemonic narrative to which other alternative narratives are added. Instead, the aim of this book is to explain how traditionally considered “minorities”—particularly in this case the “Latino” minorities—were part of the big pictures right from the beginning of “entanglements.” The editor also argues that “Amerindians, Blacks, and Latinos ought not to be considered minorities to be incorporated into a larger narrative canvas,” and concludes that “without ‘Latinos’ there is no canvas” (p. 4). Thus, the hybridization of the Atlantic started right from the beginning of the contact and expansion of European empires. The book seeks both to reconstruct the process that created the hegemonic narrative of the Atlantic and to build an alternative to that narrative in which all the actors are equally represented and appraised in context.

The first section, “Severed Histories,” is devoted to the role played by the circulation of information in the early construction of empires. Mark Sheaves argues that Iberian merchants acted as traders of information who played a significant role in the construction of an English identity in the second half of the sixteenth century. The author shows, by analyzing the link between individual histories and the construction of national discourses, that there were no unsurmountable boundaries between England and Spain and that identities were fluid. The second chapter shows how English, following Spanish and Portuguese models, relied on Africans not just as slaves but also as cultural mediators. Africans, according to Michael Guasco, aspired to take advantage of their position as cultural mediators by adapting to circumstances using the colonial institutions to their favor. The author, by focusing on the period 1550-1650, challenges traditional narratives “designed to chart the development of an emerging English racial ideology and/or the development of England’s involvement in slavery and slave trade” and substitutes them by creating a scenario of cultural interactions in which the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English, and Africans had an agenda of their own (p. 60). Chapter 3 approaches the issue of information transfer by analyzing knowledge about drugs in a transcultural context. Benjamin Breen makes an interesting point in trying to figure out connections between dynastic politics of the English and Portuguese crowns and trade and commerce on the ground. The result is a complex amalgam of influences which proves that the connections between the Portuguese and English Empires were deeper and more entangled with global trade than was previously understood by historians.

The second section, “Brokers and Translators,” is devoted to the role played by individuals, both famous and less well known, in the construction of inter-imperial entanglements. The construction of a common Christian discourse on America is the main argument of chapter 4, by Christopher Heaney. His main source is the adaptation made by Richard Eden, a Protestant, of the Decades of the New World of Peter Martyr d’Anghiera, a Catholic, published in Latin for the first time in 1530 and translated into English in 1555. Beyond their religious affiliations, Heaney argues, lies an interest to show Peru as a utopia whose richness could become a part, after the marriage of Mary and Philip, of a “Christian empire” and, indirectly, would benefit Richard Eden’s business (p. 87). Discourse building through adaptation became a tool to converge different stories within a common framework marked by religious interests. Also religious is the main characteristic of the protagonists of chapter 5, by Holly Snyder. This chapter makes sense of the Iberian influence in the construction of English identity through the Sephardic diaspora following the 1492 expulsion from Spain. Jews’ influence in England was based not just on commerce but, Snyder argues, also on politics and culture. The long history of Irish-Spanish convergence is recalled in chapter 6, by the late Christopher Schmidt-Nowara (to whom, by the way, the whole book is dedicated). The chapter tells the story of some British cul-
tural brokers, like George Dawson Flinter and Jose Maria Blanco White, who tried to make sense of English debates on religion and nationhood to the Spanish public at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “not only entangling them but also attempting to make meaningful and sympathetic that which might appear alien and repulsive” (p. 139). The position of the “elite powerbrokers” during the revolutionary era in Florida is the subject of chapter 7. The author, Cameron B. Strang, offers a very appealing approach from below to the construction of political loyalty and inter-imperial alliances. His argument lies in the assumption that “patriotism began at the local and intimate levels and was often defined in terms of love” (p. 144). Therefore, he traces the stories of individuals whose interracial marriages or love stories shaped political and economic decisions in a context of political turmoil.

The third section, “Possession, Sovereignty and Legitimacy,” deals with the ideological entanglement between English and Spanish discourses on legitimation. Chapter 8, by Cañizares-Esguerra, makes a point on the “extraordinary” similarities between sixteenth-century Hispanic and seventeenth-century Puritan discourses on sovereignty in America (p. 177). Despite their superficial rhetoric differences, the author claims, both discourses used the argument of indigenous conversion to legitimize their presence, sovereignty, and dominion of the New World. Chapter 9, written by Bradly Dixon, analyzes the attempt in early eighteenth-century Carolina to create a social system emulating the Spanish strategies toward the indigenous populations. The idea was to incorporate the indigenous populations into a Republic of Indians, following the system implemented in Florida. The Yamasee War put an end to the experiment, mainly because, according to Dixon, the Carolinian reformers lacked the institutional and juridical background that shaped the Spanish system from the beginning.

The final section, “Trade and War,” focuses on the movements, below and over the surface, that were in the core of inter-imperial relationships and shows how entanglements were allowed by political and economic circumstances. April Lee Hatfield focuses in chapter 10 on the negotiation and implementation of the Treaty of Madrid in 1670 and beyond. Following the idea that “treaties generated conflicting interpretations and ongoing negotiations, not only in European metropoles but also in the locales affected by them” (p. 200), she builds the argument that actors on the ground acted according to their interests and even against royal orders, to the point of almost defending free trade in a context of mercantilist thought. Chapter 11 is closely connected to chapter 10 because it deals with how commerce, even illegal commerce, was a constant of inter-imperial relationships and shaped alliances and long-lasting trans-imperial networks. Ernesto Bassi traces the lives and stories of those agents (English and Spanish, but also indigenous peoples like the Cuna and the Wayuu) who, beyond legal obstacles, made free trade possible in the late eighteenth century. The last chapter, by Kristie Patricia Flannery, switches from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean to enlarge the scope and open the way for further interpretation of entanglement in different contexts. This chapter, like the one before, emphasizes how war—in this case, the Seven Years’ War—became an opportunity for traders and brokers to enlarge their opportunities of commercial interaction, therefore making the frontiers more porous. It also deals with how war affected and made more fluid previous identities, political, ethnic, or national.

The afterword by Eliga H. Would makes sense of some of the central topics of the book, some of them already mentioned above. *Entangled Empires* is a book that goes beyond comparative history since its very point of departure, following Would’s expression, is “asymmetric” and “multicentered” (p. 256). The main strength of the book lies in its capacity to make sense of all the connections between empires and different layers below the surface. It succeeds in telling a story that clearly moves from the “national histories” paradigm. The concept of entanglement might be very fruitful in analytical terms because it allows historians to deal with frontiers, religions, peoples, identities, or ideas without the restraint of national boundaries or some of the traditional narratives about modernity and backwardness. The concept of entanglement, therefore, offers a refreshing flexibility to the historian of empires and, in general, of global interactions.

From the methodological point of view, the book also offers a wide array of possibilities to approach entanglement. Over its chapters we can follow the development of court politics and inter-imperial connections—thus, a “from above” approach—but also the importance of intimate connections from below, which is a potentially rich ground for historical analysis. Following Strang in chapter 7, "historians would do better to reconsider international entanglements as emerging from an array of place-specific intimacies” (p. 158). In addition, all the chapters are well knitted together with constant references to each other. Therefore, despite being a collective volume, it can be read almost as a monograph with a common
The book, however, also has some limitations. Although it is a book on Anglo-Iberian entanglements, the space devoted to Spain is much bigger than that of Portugal. It seems that Iberia has lately become overused in order to avoid being caught using nation-centered language. The book also fails to engage with current debates on Spanish and Portuguese historiographies.[8] The bibliographies are mainly in English and the works listed are basically by English and US American authors, which is shocking considering that the above mentioned aims of the book are to break with traditional narratives and revindicate other backgrounds in the construction of American discourses. It is true that, while in Spain historians are still debating about the survival of the Black Legend in quite nationalistic (or nineteenth-century) terms, other historiographies are doing more than them to face and substitute the Black Legend narrative for other discourses.[9] That being said, it is expected that a book on connections between the Iberian and English Empires ought to pay attention to public debates on both sides of the entanglement.

The book has, in conclusion, a final and much-appreciated subtext that can be read in light of current international events. It offers an alternative to narratives of nation building to incorporate other histories into the “big canvas.” For example, the influence of black populations in the construction of the United States through the participation and cooperation of Iberians is well described in chapter 3. Therefore, the creation of the United States appears no longer as a unilateral and linear enterprise carried out by northern Europeans but as a complex and multifaceted process involving peoples with different backgrounds and interests. As Cañizares-Esguerra points out in his chapter, “an overhaul of the continued compartmentalization of American history is well overdue” (p. 177). I believe this book is a big step toward the end of that compartmentalization.

Notes

[8]. For example, Bartolomé Yun, ed., Las redes del imperio: Elites sociales en la articulación de la Monarquía Hispánica, 1492-1714 (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009); José Javier Ruiz Ibañez and Oscar Mazín, eds., “Las indias occidentales: Procesos de incorporación territorial a las monarquías ibéricas (siglos XVI a XVII) (Mexico DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012); David Martín Marcos, José María Inurritesui, and Pedro Cardim, eds., Repensar a identidade: O mundo ibérico nas margens da crise da consciência europeia (Lisbon: Centro de História d’Aquém e d’Além AMar, 2015); João Fragoso and Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, eds., Um reino e suas repúblicas no Atlântico: Comunicações políticas entre Portugal, Brasil e Angola nos séculos XVII e XVIII (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2017); and Pedro Cardim, Portugal y la Monarquía Hispánica (ca. 1550-ca. 1715) (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017).

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