Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire

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When in the years following its first publication Robert Baden-Powell’s primer *Scouting for Boys* (1908) generated the soon-to-be global Scout movement, intended in part to secure the empire, it also disseminated principles of brotherhood and fellowship around the world.¹ These principles, which the empire-backing Father of Scouting had derived from like-minded imperialists such as Cecil John Rhodes and Rudyard Kipling, he alchemized through the medium of his charismatic text. The core ideas that animated the handbook therefore not only were borrowed from elsewhere, hence in a sense already networked, but also, more interesting, were, like the book, planetary and leveling, both in the outreach they implied and in the democratizing influence they in fact had. Moreover, while Scouting’s sources and appeal were on one level gendered male, its generic forms—the value placed on survival and endurance, the importance of team building—bore a distinct feminine imprint, and this ensured a significant outreach to girls and young women.

*Scouting for Boys* was published only a decade before the conflagration of empires that was World War I. The vision of global friendship the handbook expressed went on to ramify along diverse surprising routes, stimulating
anti-imperial and internationalist responses across the British Empire and beyond. So Rabindranath Tagore in his 1917 indictment of Western imperialism, the essay “Nationalism,” looked forward, not unlike Baden-Powell, to the bonds of amity that he believed alone might save the nations of the world from waging war on one another.

In Téa Obreht’s 2011 Orange Prize–winning novel The Tiger’s Wife, set in the aftermath of the Bosnian war of the early 1990s, Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book figures as an important talisman. The narrator’s grandfather, who has always taken her to see the tigers at the Belgrade zoo, across his life carries a yellowed copy of The Jungle Book in his breast pocket. It is to the granddaughter irrefutable proof that he has died, rather than gone missing, when his copy of the book disappears, though his other personal effects are rescued. In the course of the novel we learn that Kipling’s text bears a profound significance for him because it harks back to an important period in his childhood, when he joined forces with a dumb pariah girl in his village, the so-called tiger’s wife, in befriending an escaped tiger. In an unlettered community with no knowledge of tigers, the grandfather’s copy of The Jungle Book, with its illustrations of Shere Khan, allowed him to identify the tiger when it first arrived in the area. Thereafter, he forms common cause with the girl as she is able to “read” the illustrations and recognize, as he does, that the tiger is not a devil, as the community thinks, and therefore that the tiger’s friends, like the girl, should not be considered pariahs either. The recessive if insistent presence of the female in the tale is noteworthy, and will crop up again in interesting ways in this only-on-one-level masculine history of the worldwide reception and influence of Scouting for Boys.

As a colonial-era collection of tales for British children, The Jungle Book (1894) has no meaning for Obreht’s grandfather. Its effect on him, sharpened by his youthful acquaintance with the girl, is to teach respect for the wild and compassion for the underdog. Subsequently, as he grows up, the book turns into a constant, indestructible presence in his life, almost a superhandbook, or a spiritual companion. After any crisis he brings it out as a touchstone of what’s important and what endures; even in extremity he refuses to give it up. The Jungle Book lies in more ways than one close to his hand and his heart.

The concept of the book that operates in transformative if unpredictable ways both as a physical presence and as a set of ideas, which is dramatized in Obreht’s novel, resonates throughout my account of Robert Baden-Powell’s influential Scouting for Boys. (The template book in this case was
also, not insignificantly, a book by the empire laureate, Rudyard Kipling. In spite of its overt imperialist message and the jingoist context out of which it emerged, Baden-Powell’s primer had far-reaching leveling effects, moving colonial relations along less hierarchical axes. Moreover, as an affordable handbook, carried in Scouts’ pockets or backpacks and literally passed from hand to hand between them (as captured in the wear and tear of the Parts edition cover shown in figure 6.1), these youth-to-youth leveling effects were physically expressed—in how the book was shared, jointly used, collectively pored over, bandied about, passed around and on. This concept of the book as an effective object and hence as object agent connects with Carol Gluck’s notion that words—and books—do work in the world, “organizing, mobilizing, inspiring, excluding.”4 A book, as both Obreht and Gluck acknowledge, can come to stand for a single popular and reproducible idea—in respect to Baden-Powell’s handbook, friendship regardless of cultural, racial, or social divides. Taking Obreht’s grandfather’s experience as an illustrative lesson, this essay will consider how a principle, here of scouting as same-sex, not exclusively fraternal, bonding, encapsulated for

Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* • 133
Baden-Powell in the figure of Kipling’s eponymous character Kim, “friend of all the world,” could be serialized and creatively expanded within a cultural text, notably Baden-Powell’s Scouting primer. It will also consider how this serialization and expansion produced changed social structures and cultural perceptions—for women as well as for men, for Indians and Africans as well as for Europeans and people of European descent.

_A Brotherly Book_

Scouting for Boys (1908), the handbook that generated a worldwide youth movement, persuasively disseminated an ideal of brotherly fellowship around the British Empire—something that till then had been concentrated largely in elite political circles in Britain and among some white men in the colonies. Through the democratizing medium of cheap, accessible print, first, and through its explicit citation of national and international circuits and their mobilizing ideas, second, as will be seen, the handbook quickly mobilized local, regional, national, and global readerships. The text, almost in spite of itself, or its author’s ideological make-up, cast the hierarchical vision of imperial bonding between strong men, which the chief scout had derived from imperialist thinkers like Rudyard Kipling and Cecil John Rhodes (who in turn had it from Charles Dilke and J. R. Seeley), onto a horizontal axis. Its direct mode of address to boys (though not always explicitly excluding girls) invited the wide world of Baden-Powell’s experience and adventure reading into the text, and in consequence the text, galvanized, rapidly began to move out into that wider world. In effect, the book generated a worldwide network by animating and promoting the idea of networks and networking.

By 1909, one year on from first publication, Scouting had been adopted in New Zealand, in Australia’s New South Wales and Victoria, and by British boys in India, and by 1910 it had successfully taken off in the United States, the year that the Girl Guide movement was also formed, widening the Scouting network still further. Headed up first by Baden-Powell’s sister Agnes, and then by his wife, Olave, the Girl Guide movement was inaugurated in response to popular appeal from the sisters and friends of the first Boy Scouts, who did not necessarily feel themselves shut out of the broad and seemingly inclusive landscape that the handbook’s democratic terms of address appeared to sketch. The female version of the Scout handbook, _Girl Guiding_ (1918), though it paid lip service to the importance for
girls of fulfilling domestic duties, also addressed the interests of these new recruits, encouraging them to show self-reliance and to be prepared to defend the empire alongside its frontiersmen. Emerging in more or less the same period as the movement for women’s suffrage (from 1903), not coincidentally, the appeal of Scouting ideas to girls and young women was such that in 1913 Annie Besant, the social reformer and early feminist, started up Scouting among native Indians in India. Besant found no contradiction in seeing Scouting as a realization of her ideal commonwealth of nations, to the extent that she took the Scouting oath of loyalty before Baden-Powell in Madras on the occasion of his first visit to the subcontinent. However, already some years before this time, in 1917, at the height of World War I, when Besant herself was president of the Indian National Congress, the 1913 Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had outlined in his influential essay on nationalism an internationalist approach not markedly different from the crossregional and transnational interchange that Baden-Powell saw expressed in Scouting.

Baden-Powell began to write *Scouting for Boys* in about 1904 in the heady aftermath of his endeavors at the Second Anglo-Boer War siege of Mafeking (1899–1900), and in quest of a new leadership role with which he might capitalize on this success. By this stage he had talked to both Rudyard Kipling and Cecil John Rhodes about the importance for the empire of Anglo-Saxon brotherhood and of fostering a sense of duty and honor in its citizens. Along with many other military and civilian leaders at the time, including Lord Frederick Roberts and William Smith, the founder of the militaristic and Christian Boys’ Brigade (1883), Baden-Powell was convinced of the need in Britain for military preparedness training, British troops in South Africa having been found to be severely lacking as physical specimens. Himself a product of the British public school Charterhouse and of the British army, the future chief scout was firmly of the opinion that the virtues of physical and moral discipline and character-building offered by the school playing field should be made available further down the social hierarchy, in order that Britain’s grip on its empire might be maintained. In a characteristically ad hoc, haphazard way, he addressed these conjoined personal and national anxieties by cobbling together on bits of notepaper and the backs of menus and invitation cards a “self-instructor” for boys, filled with stories and illustrations. His intention was for this crafted and collage-like handbook to demonstrate in an informal, down-home style how Britain’s young men might achieve moral improvement through tracking
and scouting exercises, while at the same time safeguarding the nation and securing the empire. (Baden-Powell’s paratactic, “add-on” mode of composition bears some similarity with the way other authors examined in these pages, most obviously M. K. Gandhi, but also Wakefield, first assembled or cobbled together their works literally out of bits and pieces—letters, separately published newspaper articles, interviews, and other pieces of journalism.)

Scouting for Boys was eventually published in 1908, first in six fortnightly parts, then as a book. Although it emerged in a time of growing imperial disaffection not entirely propitious for the making of child imperialists, as was reflected for example in J. A. Hobson’s excoriating critique Imperialism (1902) and in the 1906 Liberal landslide, the handbook with its digressive anecdotal style was a wildfire popular success. By the time the sixth and final issue was published in April 1908, jam-packed with fun but instructive games and practical tips, boys as well as girls across Britain were writing to Baden-Powell about how to start Scouting—though he in fact had no formal program or structures yet in place to cater to their enthusiasm. This haphazardness is clearly on show at the level of the book’s inadvertent yet strongly felt appeal to early twentieth-century modern girls, the self-aware daughters of the 1890s New Woman, who, despite the book’s title and the overriding accent on fostering masculinity, did not feel themselves excluded from the book’s recommendations on fitness, well-being, and survival in the wild. To the contrary, many of the ideal Scout’s salient features were traits to which these modern girls also aspired: independence, self-reliance, pragmatism, social service.

Several interrelated explanations can be offered for the immediate popularity of this on one level derivative and partly plagiarized mishmash text. Few of its more successful popular elements had been planned with any kind of foresight by Baden-Powell or his advisors, so it was the felicitous, pick-and-mix combination of these aspects perhaps, more than anything else, that accounted for the rocketing dissemination of Scouting ideas. A key internal feature was the book’s direct, no-nonsense address to its young readers, coupled with its collage-like structure, broken up into bite-sized chunks of information such as suited a young person’s attention span, as Baden-Powell himself opined. The book, he believed, appealed not only to the power but also the structure of its target reader’s imagination; its physical look invited involvement, it welcomed wear and tear. Its model was the Boy’s Own journal, which used short articles interspersed with bold
section headings, wide margins, and illustrations. Transposed to *Scouting for Boys*, this eye-catching layout (nicely supplemented by Baden-Powell’s charming line drawings) invited young readers in, encouraging them to explore Scouting rules, tips, and ruses on their own or with friends, to fill the gaps in the text with activity.

On advice from Pearson, Baden-Powell’s handbook had been shaped throughout, both in its internal, seemingly homespun makeup and in its external “easy to use” aspect, by the mass-circulation print technology that produced it, probably as much as by the pell-mell process of its creation, as will be seen in more detail. Therefore, it actively responded to and played back into the popular print culture out of which it had emerged.\(^\text{13}\) Affordable and widely available, in both serial and book form, the text worked hard at every level as a self-help primer, showing through the medium of accessible concrete explanation how its readers might act on its advice, with a minimum of outlay, no matter what their social status or geographical position. As long as they could read (and after the 1870 Education Act many more could now do so, including young women), most boys (and some girls) could become Scouts (or Guides) simply by acting on Baden-Powell’s no-fuss guidelines and low-tech exercises, transmitted in the shape of a hospitable “fireside” story, or what I will term a charismatic form.

Complementing its physical aspects, another key feature of the primer was the shaping force of its ideas. Scouting was based, in essence, on an interconnected cluster of durable core values—self-regulation, social responsibility, conservation, a sense of personal integrity—which were to be put into practice through a range of attractive, universally realizable group activities. At the same time, as noted, both the handbook and Baden-Powell’s new movement tapped into still widely dominant imperialist and racial thinking: the belief in white male superiority, the rightness of British civilization, and the importance of that civilization’s implantation across the world.\(^\text{14}\) Read against the background of the colonialist and frontier settings from which the text effectively emerged (Baden-Powell having seen action on various contested colonial borderlines—Afghanistan, Asante-land, Mashonaland, Mafeking), *Scouting for Boys* can be viewed as in this sense a textual “speaking tube.” It transmitted such “pro-consular” thinking, in the words of historian Bill Schwarz, first to the British masses in danger of regression, and then to Britain’s settler children around the world. The handbook’s prominent ideological values and assumptions in effect cooperated with Pearson’s print mechanisms to persuade its young audiences

Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* • 137
that anyone with the proper conviction, combined with common sense, energy, and an imagination, could go out and become a Scout. Indeed, so current and popular were Scouting’s central concepts (also including self-help and child-centered learning, as well as the importance of physical fitness and cleanliness) that Baden-Powell could as author get away without much acknowledgment of his sources. What chiefly concerned him was the pertinence of his social message and the importance of communicating it in the most vivid way possible, not shoring it up with a scholarly apparatus. As this suggests, in Scouting for Boys, from the get-go, the concepts of the book as accessible printed text, and as a vehicle for the mobilizing of influential ideas, were dynamically conjoined.

One of the more durable and potent of Scouting’s core ideas was its vision of world fraternity and friendship across national borders, something that the handbook advocated from its opening pages. Indeed, it must count as the book’s—as much as the author’s—lasting achievement to have gradually converted this at first hierarchical if already influential vision into a democratizing force. Ideas of a linked Greater Britain beyond the seas that animated both metropolitan and settler cultures in the final decades of the nineteenth century had first developed in the midcentury period as a means of consolidating the white empire. The planet-spanning, “railway-girt” entity presciently conjured in Charles Dilke’s travelogue Greater Britain of 1868 was also propagated in the writing of imperial historians both Tory and Liberal, including J. A. Froude and J. R. Seeley. For these opinion makers, empire essentially involved the propagation of English ethnicity, conceived as a brotherhood, around the world. In mobilizing that brotherhood, Scouting for Boys therefore joined forces with works like Dilke’s or Seeley’s The Expansion of England (1883), building on the ideological foundations that these earlier books had laid down. Inculcating the “racial” values of self-discipline and service, Baden-Powell’s book on one level effectively set out to expand and reinforce white Greater Britain beyond the seas. Yet even as it galvanized these at once brotherly and ethnic links, Scouting for Boys also propagated to audiences other than the English abroad (and also, arguably, lower middle and working classes at home) the powerful idea of a brotherly network, and in particular the way a network might inculcate a sense of identity.

Toward the century’s end, from the mid-1890s up to 1906, in the years that Baden-Powell was composing his primer, the ambitious colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain gave the idea of Greater Britain, or worldwide Englishness, a predominantly economic interpretation when he campaigned
for the empire to become a *zollverein* or free trade area, an economic consolidation of the idealized network of English-speaking peoples. Chamberlain’s initiatives failed, but the idea of an “English” fraternity across the seas bracketed together under one imperial government continued to underpin ideologies of Englishness and to animate the popular media as well as social and cultural policy throughout the Dominions. It was now widely believed that it was in the domain of culture, where it had first emerged, rather than in the economic or political sphere, that the Greater Britain idea might best thrive, drawing the Anglo-Saxon nations closer together in mutually beneficial ways. Very much in this spirit, *Scouting for Boys* opens with a direct appeal to “Scouts of the [British] nation” and to their interconnectedness through shared values and loyalties. At the same time, the Scouting activities that are recommended clearly aim to introduce such ideals of transnational amity into the everyday lives of all young people, at first within the empire, but then, at least implicitly, far beyond. (“Greater Britain” did not necessarily exclude the United States. Moreover, Zulus and Native Americans, too, at least in Baden-Powell’s estimation, as will be seen, had Scouting potential.)

Despite his carelessness about sources, Baden-Powell references Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Arthur Conan Doyle at the end of the very first section of the first part of *Scouting for Boys*, suggesting that to him, imaginings of world brotherhood and imperial federation bore the unmistakable imprimatur of storytellers and parable makers rather than of politicians. There is little doubt that it was his citation of these popular and well-known cultural narratives that massively facilitated the dissemination and democratization of Scouting as concept and as movement. In relation to Kipling, at the time the most prominent of these literary influences, Baden-Powell clearly intuited something of the extent to which the poet was plugged into, and himself was seen to electrify, the central ideals that animated the empire at its height. Therefore, by including “Kim’s story” at the very head of his handbook, Baden-Powell not only cannily added the authority of this “master work of imperialism” to the Scout’s work of special observation and collaboration in groups. He also enlisted the figure of Kipling’s already widely beloved boy hero Kim to serve as itself a channel for the transmission of fraternal ideas. The eponymous novel had been published three years before Baden-Powell began writing, in 1901.

The focus on Kipling as a key source for Scouting’s charismatic handbook should not, however, obscure the force of other more recessive yet
still powerful cultural narratives operating within the text—narratives that, moreover, manifest something of empire’s material histories of dispossession and appropriation as these were expressed on the ground, across different geographies, and then distilled into Baden-Powell’s handbook. For example, Scouting for Boys is full of Native American knowledge about how to survive in the wild using tracking and scouting skills, which Baden-Powell derived in the first instance from the work of Ernest Thompson Seton and James Fenimore Cooper, among others, but which white settlers in the Americas had long since taken over, if not forcibly extracted, from native cultures in order to survive in that unfamiliar environment. The “Scout’s Play” titled “Pocahontas” in part 1, in which “the Princess” intercedes for John Smith with her father, encapsulates (while simultaneously sanitizing) this history of appropriation. The uneasy makeshift compromise that the playlet represents is also curiously exposed, however, in the concluding scene, when the defeated native scouts bizarrely break into a Zulu praise song. Elsewhere in Scouting for Boys, Zulu culture as Baden-Powell understood it provides models for Scouts’ exercises, “war dances,” and terms of address. Even the wood badge, an important feature of a Scout leader’s uniform, was reputedly copied from the iziqu, or wooden beads, of the Zulu king Dinizulu’s ceremonial necklace, or one like it, a copy of which Baden-Powell is said to have removed from the body of a dead Zulu woman after being involved in an 1888 skirmish against a Zulu village in Natal. The buried minihistory offers a telling instance of how a repressed female tradition could be transformed by appropriation and then incorporated into official Scouting practice.

On the subject of recessive narratives in Scouting for Boys, its dominant concern with the fit male body, as well as brotherly friendship between boys and men, raised questions across the course of the twentieth century as to whether one of its encoded discourses was not homosocial—and therefore whether Scouting as a practice carried the potential to foster homophilic or male-loving links. Under the possible double entendre of its title, commentators in this vein have noted, among other topics, the muted homosexual associations of some Scouting exercises, the explicit exclusion of girls from camping activities, and the seemingly ambiguous sexuality of the founder of Scouting himself. In respect of such questions, it must at once be acknowledged that Scouting’s brotherly dynamics very obviously took on the imprint of the male-male bonding that the relative freedoms of late Victorian and Edwardian imperial service made available—freedoms that were, however, disallowed at home. Baden-Powell’s biography sug-
gests that he generally preferred male company, a preoccupation that is reflected in the bodily aesthetic of his text. Yet it is also clear that the text’s male-male imagery is not necessarily hostile to the participation of women or of men less comfortable with homoerotic play. Ultimately, the predominant preoccupation of Scouting for Boys is with manliness, over and above the ambiguities of sexuality—and manliness is something that can be fostered both by way of the lone survival exercises it recommends and through bonding in the bush or on the school playing field. In effect, Baden-Powell “transmutes the problem of sexuality into the process of formulating a robust if defensive manliness.”

Scouting for Boys in Mass Circulation

Though its initial address to its target audience of British boys was based on hierarchical lines, aimed at “scouts of the empire” and national hero figures, the print channels through which Scouting for Boys disseminated that message were, from the beginning, democratizing: the handbook did not discriminate as to who felt they might be scouts. It was this leveling impact on its audience, which underwrote the handbook’s paratactic and charismatic makeup, and was reinforced by its message of friendship, that communicated powerfully across national, racial, and class boundaries. The Fourth Scout Law was, indicatively, the Kim-esque, and seemingly gender-neutral, asseveration “A Scout is a Friend to All.”

Scouting for Boys was published in six fortnightly parts, from 15 January 1908, by Horace Cox, a printer owned by the newspaper magnate C. Arthur Pearson, proprietor of such popular papers as the Daily Express, Pearson’s Weekly, and Tit-bits. Having personally encouraged Baden-Powell to channel his scouting and tracking experiences into a training program for urban boys, Pearson was happy to grant him this access to a guaranteed nationwide audience. He also had no objection to the book’s ramshackle, thrown-together aspect; on the contrary, he seemed to appreciate that it was in this form that it would most strongly appeal to its youthful readers. On 1 May 1908 Pearson published the clothbound complete edition, and for the rest of the year the fortnightly parts and the book version reappeared as if in tandem, the parts reprinting four times, the book five. The cheap edition of the book, priced at 1 shilling, that Pearson then produced sold at a rate of about five thousand copies a month in the United Kingdom alone. In 1948, fifty years and two world wars later, about fifty thousand copies of the book
were still being sold annually in Britain alone. Figures for the rest of the world are significantly greater.

To this day, *Scouting for Boys* continues to rank as one of the best-selling Anglophone works of the twentieth century and has been translated into most of the world’s major languages. Until after World War II, around 1950, its publishing figures were exceeded only by those of the Bible. As this suggests, Scouting has, since its inauguration, involved nearly 350 million people across the globe and exists in virtually all the world’s countries. Across the twentieth century, enduring the rise and fall of nations and empires, there has been no secular movement with a greater global reach. Moreover, while Scouting’s success in Britain’s former white colonies was, relatively speaking, something of a matter of course, it is significant that the movement also enjoyed prestige and success in areas far outside Greater Britain. In British colonial Africa, for example, though the colonial authorities were keen to foster Scouting in order to inculcate loyalty to the empire, African boys and girls embraced the movement on their own initiative, “because they considered it entertaining, progressive and useful”: “African Scouts had little difficulty separating their commitment to the movement with their distaste for the discriminatory realities of colonialism.”26 Not only Scouting the idea but also the charismatic Scouting handbook was instrumental in achieving this success.

Considering the speed with which Baden-Powell generated the primer, it perhaps stood to reason that he cannibalized his own as well as others’ work in putting it together.27 As the fragmentary aspect of the manuscript suggests, he seems to have jotted down notes whenever an idea struck him, and possibly, being ambidextrous, using now one hand, now the other. These haphazard notes, sketches, and useful quotations Baden-Powell’s assistant, Mr. Cavan, then sorted into sections and typed up, feeding the typescript back to Baden-Powell for proofing and some expansion, in an ongoing process. On 28 February 1908, for example, four weeks after the publication of part 1, Baden-Powell sent off the proofs of part 5 of “S for B” for printing. At the same time, even while finishing the text, he was involved in a program of promotional lectures that Pearson had organized for the run-up to the 15 January launch date.

Throughout the writing, Pearson also supplied advice on this as it were interactive and “hands-on” process of composition. The text’s division into six parts, ten chapters, and twenty-eight yarns harmonized with the entertainment formulae of *Pearson’s Weekly* and, importantly, was seen as not
talking down to its young readers. Baden-Powell’s own account of this approach was several times repeated in so many words across the six parts of *Scouting for Boys*: “The best way of imparting theoretical instruction [is] to give it out in short instalments with ample illustrative examples when sitting round the camp fire or otherwise resting, and with demonstrations” (303). In August 2007 Baden-Powell tested out his methods in an experimental camp at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, concerned to make sure that his “‘scouts’ training” would work in practice, with “boys of all classes,” the Brownsea group having been specially selected from both Eton College and Boys Brigade youth. The mix was intended to embody the need to bring different social levels and classes together in a common national purpose. As he wrote in his report on Brownsea, included in part 6: “One wants to bring all classes more in touch with each other, to break down the existing barriers, which are only artificial after all, and to teach them to give and take in the common cause instead of being at snarls of class against class, which is snobbery all round and a danger to the state” (302). He might have added “and to the empire.” The message of breaking down barriers would be taken by the book’s generations of readers to refer also to the snarls of nation against nation, and race against race, in far-reaching ways that Baden-Powell himself could not have anticipated and certainly had not planned for, but that both nationalist and internationalist thinkers in places distant from Baden-Powell’s Edwardian Britain were to find congenial in mounting their own cases for a future beyond empire (and ultimately beyond nationalism). Tim Parsons indicatively observes that even fervently anticolonial Mau Mau fighters in Kenya “appreciated Scouting for its prestige and discipline,” as did Irish nationalists in the 1910s and 1920s.28 As for other books with a strong local and community appeal that are covered in this volume, the text was in this sense more farsighted and radical than its author, though its leveling, bridge-building effects were significantly enhanced by Pearson’s canny publicity and marketing strategies.

So it was—in this micromanaged yet hodgepodge form—that B-P’s idea of global interconnection fostered through scouting in teams was launched upon the humming communications networks of the wider British world. Yet Baden-Powell’s close involvement with the text—as with the emerging movement the text now triggered—did not end there. Until 1922, the year the tenth edition was published, he modified and adapted *Scouting for Boys* between every edition, not to correct it so much as to broaden and globalize its social and cultural references, in order that England and Britain no longer
be placed so firmly at the turning axis of the Scouting world. The hand-
book’s more egregious imperialistic effusions, too, were bit by bit removed.
Though the text in its first incarnation was watermarked with imperialist
and eugenicist assumptions, as noted, it became increasingly more directed
toward practical Scouting exercises, games, and badges. By 1910, two years
after the book’s first publication, Baden-Powell recognized, Scouting was
effectively going global. Its economies of feeling and allegiance were being
transnationalized, and its terminologies had to reflect the fact. This is a
key point for any analysis of Scouting for Boys (and of Scouting) as a world
form: the book’s fluidity as a text meant that its mode of address and system
of transnational allusion kept being widened, not least by Baden-Powell him-
self. It also meant, concomitantly, that Scouting’s appeal to other movements
committed to social widening, such as the women’s suffrage movement, kept
being strengthened. As Baden-Powell wrote in a highly symptomatic March
1925 letter in which he commented on the Scouts’ increasingly difficult rela-
tionship with the emergent militaristic youth movement in Germany:

The Boy Scout and the Girl Guide movement, which has now spread
itself to Germany as well as to all other civilized countries, is bringing
a considerable number—about two million active members of the
oncoming generation into closer touch and personal acquaintance in
comradeship which has its aim the single ideal of good citizenship
and friendliness. Its open air attractions appeal alike to boys and girls
of all nations. It is not unreasonable to hope that with the growth of
this movement and the promotion of its ideals a notable change may
be brought about a few years’ time in the relationship between the
peoples of the different nationalities, in the direction of peace and
goodwill in place of jealousies and hostility.29

*Imperial Networking: Tracking Kipling’s Kim in Scouting for Boys*

What shape did Scouting’s ideal of friendship and brotherhood take that
so correlated with conceptions of a globalized empire, and played out with
such effectiveness within that empire’s interconnected communications
networks? The ideal was molded through and through, like a piece of Brigh-
ton rock, by the vision of England-beyond-the-seas of Rudyard Kipling, the
bard of empire, as is evoked in several of his turn-of-the-century poems,
most notably perhaps “A Song of the English” (1893). An intuitive popular-
izer, B-P was unembarrassed about siphoning some of the Anglo-Boer War glamour attached to Kipling’s name into his yet-to-be-constituted movement, joining that glamour to his own already burnished reputation following the siege of Mafeking. In political terms, too, he was keen to nail his colors to the mast of imperial solidarity with which Kipling’s rhetoric at this time was associated. Toward the rousing end of part 5, for example, Baden-Powell wrote in terms that Kipling would warmly have endorsed: “We must all be bricks in the wall of that great edifice—the British Empire—and . . . stick shoulder to shoulder as Britons if we want to keep our position among the nations” (292). Knowing well that the citation of the poet and storyteller on how to be an effective imperial operator would help to win him Scouts, B-P set out proactively to bring those audiences around by encapsulating Kipling’s watchwords on honor, duty, and loyalty in some of the Scout Laws.

The notion of cross-empire interconnection that Baden-Powell cherished, therefore, not only was borrowed from a highly networked writer and hence always already “networked” but also was planetary in the outreach it signified—an impact further reinforced by the planetary reputation of Kipling. If the British Empire at its height around 1897, Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee year, is viewed as a vast circulation of commodities, money, and technology, Baden-Powell’s book can be seen in part as having risen out of that circulation and then, in its turn, as having inspired other networks to emerge and to ramify. It is this amplification of imperial interconnection between classes and nations, along a predominantly horizontal axis, that lies at the heart of the empire-transforming effects of Scouting for Boys. With its call to brotherhood, reinforced by its accessible makeup, the primer acted as both a powerful catalyst and a conduit for feelings of cross-empire solidarity, carrying British nationalist yet also transnationalist sentiments onto a global stage.

But the influence of Kipling on Scouting for Boys was not only ideological and overtly imperialist; it was also strategic and imaginative. This is clearly demonstrated in the story of “Kim,” a reductive précis of Kipling’s novel presented by Baden-Powell as an iconic Scouting tale immediately following the short account, with which the handbook opens, of how he himself led a corps of boys in the defense of Mafeking. As this incorporation shows, a charismatic text like Scouting for Boys operates through drawing into its orbit universal stories, including popular tales and catchy anecdotes. In the handbook, with Kim’s distinguishing characteristics of individualism, “strong-mindedness,” and resourcefulness instrumentalized into prototypical Scouting traits, the literary boy hero of the Indian empire is decisively
raised up as both a historical precursor to the Scout, and a model to be emulated.32 The complexity of his native Indian and Irish identity and his ambivalent and divided allegiances—for example, to Colonel Creighton on the one hand and the Tibetan lama on the other—are completely erased from Baden-Powell’s picture. Kim, the précis concludes, shows “what valuable work a boy scout could do for his country if he were sufficiently trained and sufficiently intelligent” (18).

The same work of observation—of being aware of one’s surroundings and able to read terrain in order to move safely through it—is also explored in Kipling’s Boer War stories, based on his “on-the-ground” experiences as a war reporter. Most noteworthy perhaps is “The Way That He Took,” written around the same time as Kim, in which military preparedness and national security are again matters of concern.33 However, Kim, the tale of a charismatic, pathfinding youth with remarkable powers of observation, is for the specific purposes of Scouts’ training the more powerful and salutary tale. It provided an excellent way, for Baden-Powell, not only of bringing some of his high-minded scouting principles down to earth but also of simplifying his vision of the Greater British world to a manageable human scale. At a different but equally important interpretative level, Kim’s story is also a persuasive demonstration of the principle that imperial power is expressed and wielded through the operation of systems of knowledge, as Edward Said influentially expressed it in Orientalism.34 The self-made amateur spy B-P must have been in some sense aware that Kim dramatizes first how an empire is run on the basis of knowledge gathering, and then how that control over knowledge is wielded through a control over networks. Kim himself, the “Government Intelligence agent” in training, is an amateur ethnographer, preternaturally able to negotiate his way around the Indian rail network, as well as to read “secret signs” and decode their significance. Added to these qualities, he is also a gifted social and ethnic chameleon, speaking different vernacular languages flawlessly, passing as a native, and welcoming identification from all quarters, not excluding most Indians.

Along with the underlying keynote of vigilance, this is perhaps the most important thread from Kipling that B-P picks up in “Kim’s Story,” and then weaves right through Scouting for Boys, to the plea for imperial solidarity at the end of part 5 and the pageants of colonial brotherhood recommended in part 6: the crucial significance of networks for both imperial control and cross-empire interaction. Although Scouting’s imperialist frame of reference was replaced by 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, to some ex-
tent, by B-P’s new sense of the importance of world peace, his accent on networks as such remained strong. A decade or so after its inauguration, he was well aware, the Scout movement had caught on across cultural and national boundaries, precisely through the operation of different international bonds and ties. Keen that Scouting prosper wherever possible, he further recognized that such crosscultural interconnection conferred benefits in excess of the good of empire as such, and should therefore be encouraged, in an ecumenical way. In this respect the farsighted Fourth Scout Law as it appeared in the first edition is worth repeating in full: “A Scout is a Friend to All, and a Brother to Every Other Scout, no matter to what Social Class the Other belongs.” Interestingly, at the point in the text where this law is first laid down, Kim’s example is again cited, in a slightly different guise from before: “‘Kim,’ the boy scout, was called by the Indians ‘Little friend of all the world,’” Baden-Powell writes, “and this is the name that every scout should earn for himself” (45). As this implies, the figure of the boy adventurer worked as something of a valve within the Scouting text, drawing in from the novel Kipling’s own advocacy for imperial networks and then, in its turn, advocating for and promoting networks not only imperial but also transnational and intercultural.

In “Scout’s Work,” a short section sandwiched between the Mafeking and Kim stories in the opening pages of Scouting for Boys (1908), the Chief Scout attempts to define “scouts of the nation” avant la lettre, whom he finds embedded in what is essentially an Anglo-Saxon genealogical network, the “History of the Empire . . . made by British adventurers and explorers,” extending from Canada through West Africa to the South Pacific (13–14). In part 6 he again seeks examples of “peace scouts” in “frontiersmen of our Empire in every corner of the world,” ticking off in schoolbook fashion “men” in the different regions of the Anglophone globe: “the ranchmen, cowboys and trappers of the West; the drovers and bushmen of Australia,” and so on (300), though once again not entirely excluding girls (Mary Kingsley, Grace Darling). Insofar as Scouting exemplars were thus found in all parts of Greater Britain, Scouting as life-lesson can be seen as repeating right across the empire, hence as binding more tightly together the ties of white imperial interconnection. As also for Kipling, “Faith” in the empire was to be maintained not only via its world-embracing communications networks and blood ties but also through the “words of [English] men,” not excepting the precepts of Scouting for Boys, that “flicker and flutter and beat” across the “deserts of the deep.”35
In Imagined Communities and the later Spectres of Comparison, his well-known analyses of modern nationalism, Benedict Anderson discusses the ways nationalist ideas are serialized or copied from one nationalist context to another. Serialization occurs where networks of capitalist reproduction in general, and print cultures in particular, order the recurrence of certain commodities and meanings across spaces and regions far apart from one another. Scouting for Boys the handbook, itself serialized, mass-produced and mass-marketed, worked as a particularly effective vehicle of such serialization, that is, as a powerful charismatic text. It did so because it grafted Kim’s story of individualist self-assertion onto a culture of teamwork, and animated and reanimated it via the stories, exercises, games, performances, and pageantry that Scouting for Boys recommended. It was in this form, of the Kim-like Scout figure, and of his female counterpart, the short-haired modern Girl Guide, each a synecdoche of an interconnected if still imperial world, that the Scouting ideal traveled across continents, resonating along the ganglia-like networks of the empire through which it had itself first been constituted. From this, it is not too great a stretch to claim that where once the Scout movement had been based on the crossborder workings of imperial and then international networks, some two or three decades later it was those same networks that were in part sustained via the worldwide serialization of Scouting ideas.

Tagore’s Inter-“Nationalism”

As the generative intertextual links between Kim and Scouting for Boys indicate, within only a few years of its first publication the primer was instrumental in disseminating worldwide a strong and for the time radical sense of the importance of social and cultural interaction between peoples and nations. Both the book’s message of fellowship and the boundary-crossing mechanisms of mass reproduction and circulation through which that message traveled recognized that such transimperial and transnational connection took place over and above—and even beyond—empire. By the end of World War I, certainly by the time of the last edition he revised himself, in 1922, the still-imperialist yet world-oriented Baden-Powell himself acknowledged as much, struggling as ever to keep pace with the widely ramifying youth movement his primer had inaugurated.

Suggestive evidence for the global circulation of Scouting-type principles of international brotherhood—and perhaps also sisterhood—comes from
the collaborations that developed between anti-imperial and nationalist groupings in different parts of the empire around the time of World War I—developments that in effect unfolded in parallel with Scouting’s worldwide dissemination. Indian and Irish nationalists in cities across Europe and North America, for example, maintained close contact with one another in forging their campaigns for self-determination. Women’s movements and campaigns for the vote in various different countries, spurred by the common purpose of female self-representation, often shared techniques and strategies (such as symbolic protest and the hunger strike). With specific reference to Scouting history, African Scouts in Britain’s various colonies across the continent mutually encouraged one another to take up Scouting despite official resistance from some quarters. Irish nationalists in the buildup to the formation of the Irish Free State embraced Scouting and are said to have used their reconnaissance skills against the British military.

An even more marked instance of message sharing, however, can be found in Tagore’s 1917 essay “Nationalism,” which he presented as a series of three lectures in Japan within a decade of Scouting for Boys, by which time the Scout movement had reached Indian shores. Although Tagore would not have found Scouting in its form of organized youth movement congenial, his meditation on the youthful Asian nations and their response to modernization in his tripartite essay is characterized by its warm endorsement of nation-to-nation friendship, something with which B-P would have found it hard to disagree. Throughout, the Bengali author is concerned to indict Europe’s “cannibalistic” (or imperialist) political civilization, which, “overrunning the whole world like some prolific weed, is based upon exclusiveness.” To avoid the West’s “wholesale feeding of nation upon nation,” Japan and India, he urges, should strive to express their true selves via bonds of amity and inclusiveness. The close tie of friendship, he insists, “is the only natural tie that can exist between nations” in order to combat nationalist selfishness. Two options confront the age, therefore: that of “interminable competition” between peoples, as under Western imperialism, or that of constructive cooperation.

Like Tagore’s Nationalism, like the women’s campaign for the vote, Baden-Powell’s Scouting for Boys had already some years before promoted a mentality that favored modes of transnational and intercultural attachment other than the reductively hierarchical and imperial, attachment that went well beyond Britain’s borders. Just as Tagore signed up to an ideal of global community undivided by nationalist feelings, so B-P saw Scouts as belonging to a
worldwide interconnected community that was not split up by national borders. It is in this sense that the League of Nations, founded in 1919, can be seen as, to a degree, a grownup version of Scouting, propagating as it did, and as did Tagore, principles of lateral connection between the nations.

From the time of its first publication in serial form, Baden-Powell’s Scouting handbook incrementally transformed the British Empire by shaping the way individuals related to each other in groups, especially groups bridging social and cultural differences. In addition to the immense popular appeal of scouting activities, the powerful worldwide attractiveness and hence influence of Scouting for Boys lay in how it took imperial preconceptions of vertical social organization and translated them, inadvertently in part, onto a horizontal plane of international exchange. Within only a few years of the handbook’s publication, Scouting was the channel through which young people not only in the empire, or the Commonwealth that succeeded it, but far further afield, could reach out to each other and forge international connections, though without compromising their nationalist feelings.

Scouting for Boys is that highly anomalous “world form” that was born out of a nation and an empire in crisis, and that came to stimulate international solidarities and anti-imperial sentiments. Indeed, it stimulated those solidarities and sentiments in part through its anomalies as a world form: it was born out of one kind of global vision (exclusive, vertical) and ended up generating another (more inclusive, more horizontal). Shaped by the fluid and even chaotic conditions of its production, it became itself highly mobile and adapted to travel. Through the handbook’s worldwide circulation, the democratizing aspects of Baden-Powell’s message became detached from the imperial hierarchies he believed in, convincing even those whom Scouting would otherwise not have attracted of the boons and benefits of worldwide fellowship.

NOTES


Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* • 151
28. Parsons, Race, 4–5.
32. Hugh Brogan, Mowgli’s Sons: Kipling and Baden-Powell’s Scouts (London: Cape, 1987), records B-P’s extensive borrowing from the animal culture of the Jungle Books for the 1910s elaboration of his Scouting method in the Cubs, designed for younger boys who, too, had been clamoring to scout. No doubt aware that his influence on Scouting and Scouting’s creator had been laid down some time before, Kipling was happy to authorize the borrowing.
38. Padraig Pearce, one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, is said to have formed a Scout troop at the school where he taught. Daniel Scott-Davis, personal email communication, 4–5 October 2012.