

Introduction- Locating the British World of Trade

‘We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind. While we were doing it....we did not allow it to affect our imaginations or in any degree to change our way of thinking; nor have we even ceased to think of ourselves as simply a race inhabiting an island off the northern coast of the Continent of Europe’, J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London, 1883), p. 11

‘Here in the United Kingdom, there are some forty millions of us. Outside, there are more than ten millions descended from ancestors who left this country. How long are we going to be four times as many as our kinsfolk abroad?...Do you think it better to cultivate trade with your own people, or let that go in order that you may keep the trade of those who are your competitors and rivals?’, Joseph Chamberlain, Birmingham speech, May 1903.¹

In 1871 Europe accounted for a larger share of UK trade than the Empire-Commonwealth. The same was true for 1901, when Queen Victoria died and Britain was embroiled in the Second Anglo-Boer War, and in 1931, the year before a system of tariff preferences between Empire-Commonwealth countries was cemented at the Ottawa economic conference. In 1961, when the UK made its first application to join the European Economic Community (EEC), its trade with western Europe was about equal with that of the Empire-Commonwealth, and Europe had firmly re-established itself as Britain’s key trade partner by

¹ Cited in C.W. Boyd, ed., *Mr. Chamberlain’s Speeches, Vol. 2* (London, 1914), p. 130.

the time it finally joined the EEC in 1973. It remained so when the UK electorate narrowly voted to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016.

Given this state of affairs it is surprising that leading British politicians have focused so much on the apparent need to enhance ties with the Commonwealth after Brexit, and have talked warmly of the prospect of returning to preferential trade links with these ‘old friends’. Moreover, it may seem odd that the CANZUK countries (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) has featured so prominently in these discussions.² After all, combined these countries accounted for less than 4 percent of UK exports in 2017.³

² See, for example, ‘Boris Johnson: Brexit Will Enable UK to Engage With the World’, *BBC News*, 25 July 2017 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-40715005>; Theresa May, ‘The Government’s Negotiating Objectives for Exiting the EU: PM Speech’, 17 Jan. 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>; Liam Fox, ‘MC11 Commonwealth Reception Speech by the Secretary of State for International Trade’, 13 Dec. 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/mc11-commonwealth-reception-speech-by-the-secretary-of-state-for-international-trade>; For the role of the Commonwealth in manifestos during the 2015 General Election see Philip Murphy, ‘The Curious Case of the Disappearing Commonwealth’, *The Conversation*, 22 Apr. 2015, <https://theconversation.com/the-curious-case-of-the-disappearing-commonwealth-40347> (all accessed 3 Jan. 2018).

³ Office for National Statistics, UK Trade: October 2017 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/bulletins/uktrade/october2017> (accessed 2 Jan. 2018).

However, current debates about trade with the Commonwealth build on an extensive, and complex, historical legacy. When Joseph Chamberlain launched his imperial preference campaign in Birmingham during 1903 many people from London, to Sydney, Auckland, and Toronto considered themselves to belong to culturally British nations. Of course, engagement with empire varied widely based on factors such as social class, occupation, and gender and leading British advocates of further imperial cooperation such as J.R. Seeley often bemoaned their countrymen's apparent indifference to empire.⁴ Chamberlain's plans to develop closer connections between Britain and the Dominions during the 1900s via a system of tariff preferences were thwarted by the UK electorate's ongoing attachment to free trade and cheap food.⁵ However, the Chamberlainite vision was remoulded and lived on. The system of imperial cooperation via tariff preferences cemented in 1932 was only slowly dismantled in the decades after World War II and finally came to an end when Britain joined the EEC in 1973.

⁴ Andrew S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain From the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2005); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006); John M. MacKenzie, 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 4: The Twentieth Century*, edited by Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford, 1999), pp. 212-31.

⁵ Frank Trentmann provides an excellent exploration of the politics of free trade in Edwardian Britain in his *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008), chs. 1-2.

Much historical literature has explored how people in Britain and the Dominions came to think of themselves as sharing common identities and interests in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ This approach has been developed most fully in Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson's *Empire and Globalisation* (2010), which explores the role that networks of investment, communication, and culture played in creating a sense of security and familiarity with intra-imperial trade amongst both businesspeople and consumers across this 'British World'.⁷ However, there are no similarly broad-ranging works which analyse how such ties were alternately consolidated and challenged over the course of the twentieth century.

⁶ The literature on 'British World' networks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is now substantial. For good introductions see Rachel Bright and Andrew Dilley, 'After the British World', *Historical Journal*, 60 (2017), pp. 547-68 at pp. 550-9; Philip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005); Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne, 2007); Saul Dubow, 'How British Was the British world? The Case of South Africa', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37 (2009), pp. 1-27; Zoe Laidlaw, 'Breaking Britannia's Bounds? Law, Settlers, and Space in Britain's Imperial Historiography', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 807-30; Simon Potter, 'Webs, Networks and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century British Empire', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007), pp. 621-46; Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001).

⁷ Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850-1914*, (Cambridge, 2010).

Forging a British World of Trade explores the politics of culture, ethnicity, and market in the Empire-Commonwealth between the 1880s and 1970s, focusing on efforts to promote an economic system centred on trade between the UK and the old Commonwealth, and how such ideas were challenged and contested. In doing so, it explores why many people in the UK and its settler colonies argued that it was vital to invest resources in British World collaboration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though these nations only accounted for a small fraction of UK trade. A key part of the attraction of the settler colonies at this time was that they were seen as great potential markets of the future. British investment and migration would enable them to reach their supposedly vast economic potential. Moreover, as they were viewed as being culturally British these nations were particularly attractive trade partners at a time when the UK's position in foreign markets was becoming increasingly uncertain due to the growth of tariff barriers and competition from industrial rivals.

Historians have argued that the decline of a sense of 'British' loyalism in the old Commonwealth owed much to the growing appeal of alternative regional trade opportunities, cultural change connected to decolonization, and a sense that these countries had been betrayed by Britain's turn towards the EEC from 1961 onwards.⁸ However, this study argues

⁸ Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne, 2001), pp. 4, 24-7, 70-98, 236-55; Neville Meaney, 'In History's Page': Identity and Myth', in *Australia's Empire*, edited by Deryck M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward (Oxford, 2008), pp. 363-87 at pp. 364, 383; A.G. Hopkins, 'Rethinking Decolonization', *Past and Present*, 200 (2008), pp. 211-47 at pp. 228-33, 238; José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet*

that this loss of faith in the value of British World collaboration also owed much to broader changes within the global economy and the governance of the wider Empire-Commonwealth.

As Magee and Thompson note, the development of British World networks before 1914 promoted globalization in a partial and uneven fashion. Imperial globalization ‘focused on particular [white] ethnic groups and exhibited a strong bias towards the empire’s Anglophone societies’.⁹ This legacy of racial division continued to shape the politics of British World collaboration for much of the twentieth century, if not beyond. From the 1920s onwards colonized and decolonizing populations questioned and challenged the bases of British World networks, making use of alternative forms of international collaboration promoted firstly by the League of Nations, and then by the United Nations (UN). Grand schemes for imperial collaboration promoted by Joseph Chamberlain and his followers may have drawn praise from the self-governing empire but they were hollowed out by the actions of a variety of political and business leaders across Asia and Africa who reshaped the functions and identity of the Commonwealth.

Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71 (Vancouver, 2007); Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa Since the Boer War* (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 12; James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world, 1783-1939* (Oxford, 2009), ch. 15; Phillip Buckner, ‘Introduction’, in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver, 2005), pp. 1-14.

⁹ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, p. 61.

Secondly, economic changes, and particularly the development of advertising and marketing, undermined the earlier foundations of British World collaboration. While efforts were made to promote the idea of ‘empire shopping’ in the 1920s and 1930s, they received a lukewarm response in the Dominions, and were countered elsewhere in the empire by the growth of Indian and Chinese patriotic trade campaigns. After 1945 it became increasingly difficult to sell consumers the idea of collaboration between the ‘British’ peoples of the Empire-Commonwealth. Indeed, businesses were now encouraged to study consumers’ specific needs and interests scientifically, thinking in terms of market segments rather than national markets.

I

In recent years studies which have used the British World as a category of analysis have received significant criticism both for the focus of their research and its absences. A key problem with exploring ‘British World’ connections is that there is a lack of consensus about how to define this term.¹⁰ This uncertainty about how to define the ‘British World’ historically mirrors the different ways that the ‘Anglosphere’ concept is being used in discussions of the UK’s post-Brexit trade policy (as either an alliance of English-speaking peoples or a means to revive historic ties with the Commonwealth). Usually, the UK and the colonies of settlement are seen as forming the core of the British World. However, sometimes the United States is included in analyses of British World collaboration. After all, migration is recognized as a key factor in expanding British World connections and it was the United States, rather than any of the settlement colonies, which provided the main destination for

¹⁰ For a good discussion of the varying ways in which the term ‘British World’ has been used see Bright and Dilley, ‘After the British World’.

British migrants for much of the nineteenth century.¹¹ Moreover, some advocates of ‘Greater Britain’ cooperation, such as Charles Dilke, argued that America could play a key role in efforts to promote closer ties between English-speaking countries.¹² However, many of the networks which developed from the 1880s onwards to promote ‘British’ collaboration focused exclusively on Britain’s relations with the colonies of settlement and regarded America as a key rival and competitor in world markets. As such, this book defines the British World exclusively with reference to the UK and the key members of the old Commonwealth (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa).

Uncertainties about how to define the ‘British World’ and dissatisfaction with the ways in which the term has been employed have led some historians to use overlapping but distinct terms to explore the politics of imperial networks. A key problem with existing British World studies is that they tend to view these networks in isolation, rather than considering how their development was connected to wider processes of globalization. By contrast, James Belich’s *Replenishing the Earth* (2009) traces how the massive expansion of migration in the nineteenth century fostered trade connections across the English-speaking world, with the Eastern United States, as well as Britain, playing a central role in these processes. Given the importance of the United States to this ‘settler revolution’, Belich defines his subject of study as the ‘Anglo-World’ rather than the British World. Importantly, Belich’s work considers how the development of British World networks interacted with a wider settler revolution, fostered by the expansion of the American frontier and broader migratory movements in East

¹¹ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, ch. 3.

¹² Charles Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-speaking Countries During 1866 and 1867* (London, 1868).

Asia, Siberia, and the Atlantic World.¹³ This work is representative of a broader strand of literature which has sought to develop interconnected histories of empire, situating the development of the British World within a wider picture of growing global exchange and networking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁴ By focusing on imperial networks in isolation we run the risk of neglecting the importance of regions which contained multiple sovereignties to processes of economic globalization, such as the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.¹⁵

¹³ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, chs. 7, 9-10, 13, 16-17.

¹⁴ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global 1870-1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2014); C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004), chs. 6-9, 12-13; Jurgen Osterhammel (trans. Patrick Camiller), *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2014), chs. 7, 14; Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, From the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-first* (London, 2016), ch. 3; Simon J. Potter and Jonathan Saha, 'Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories of Empire', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16 (2015), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/577738> (last accessed 17 Jan. 2018).

¹⁵ Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: East African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley, CA, 2008); Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley, CA, 2007); Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), ch. 3.

In *The Empire Project* (2009) John Darwin has sought to repackage the ‘British World’ term by referring to his analysis of the role of the empire in the broader political and economic world order between 1830 and 1970 as a study of the ‘British world-system’. Darwin’s chief focus is on the geopolitics of the relationship between the imperial centre (Whitehall and the City of London) with the various core regions of the empire: India, the old Commonwealth, and the colonies, and he explores how these relations were affected by wider changes in global economics and politics.¹⁶ *The Empire Project* is to be applauded for bringing questions of political economy to the forefront of how the empire system functioned. However, some have criticized Darwin’s approach for focusing on elite actors and occluding the fundamental illiberality of imperial power relations and questions of how everyday experiences of empire were shaped by class, gender, and race.¹⁷

By concentrating on how the geopolitics of empire was framed by its constituents’ relationships with the imperial centre we risk privileging the agency of London-based political and economic elites over other actors within imperial networks.¹⁸ Part of the problem with existing economic histories of British World collaboration is that they have tended to focus chiefly on financial services, building on P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins’

¹⁶ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. xi-xii.

¹⁷ ‘Imperial History by the Book: A Roundtable on John Darwin’s *The Empire Project*’, *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), pp. 971-97 at pp. 973, 975, 980-2, 989-91.

¹⁸ Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand’s Colonial Past* (Wellington, 2012), p. 13; Antoinette Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing and Teaching British Imperialism* (Durham, NC, 2011), pp. 279, 287.

magisterial *British Imperialism 1688-2000* (2002), rather than exploring the politics of trade more broadly.¹⁹ London's pre-eminence as the world's financial centre was not seriously challenged until the First World War.²⁰ Moreover, Britain played a key role in establishing global communications networks through the activities of railway-builders, news agencies, cable companies, and steamboat combines.²¹ However, existing studies of the British World too often focus narrowly on the old Commonwealth's relations with the UK (and more specifically the political and economic centre of London).

Thankfully, recent work by scholars based in Australia and New Zealand has demonstrated the value of exploring alternative forms of power relationship within intra-imperial networks. For example, recent work on the 'Tasman World' valuably explores various forms of New

¹⁹ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000* (London, 2nd edition, 2002); for the critical literature which has emerged around this study see for example Raymond E. Dummett, ed., *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire* (Abingdon, 1999); Shigeru Akita, ed., *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History* (Basingstoke, 2002); Andrew Dilley and Bernard Attard, eds., 'Finance, Empire and the British World', special issue of *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41 (2013), pp. 1-103; Andrew Dilley, *Finance, Politics, and Imperialism: Australia, Canada, and the City of London, c.1896-1914* (Basingstoke, 2012); However, Magee and Thompson provide a useful discussion of consumer cultures in *Empire and Globalisation*, ch. 4.

²⁰ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000*, pp. 405-8.

²¹ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, pp. 138-41, 185-98; Potter, 'Webs, Networks and Systems', pp. 621-46; Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge, 2012), particularly chs. 7-8.

Zealand's ongoing 'community of interest' with Australia after the latter federated in 1901.²² Tony Ballantyne's work considers the various 'webs of empire', which have connected New Zealand with South Asia culturally and economically.²³ New Zealand's position as an imperial power has been explored through connecting internal processes of settler colonialism to its territorial control over Pacific nations.²⁴ These various approaches have all influenced the *New Oxford History of New Zealand* (2009), which seeks to offer a new national history, framed within the context of New Zealand's engagement in a wide range of imperial and global networks, and ongoing processes of colonialism and resistance.²⁵

What are we to do with the idea of the British World then? Its geography is contested and existing British World literature engages uncertainly with how this region's economic development was connected to wider processes of globalization. A key part of the problem here is that studies of the British World too often neglect key questions of uneven cultural and power relations. Explorations of 'Britishness' across the globe run the risk of eliding citizens' varied experiences of empire, and particularly the distinct identities of those of English or 'Celtic' descent.²⁶ We still know little about how the vast majority of imperial

²² Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hemenstall and Shaun Goldfinch, *Remaking the Tasman World* (Christchurch, 2008).

²³ Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, particularly chs. 2-5.

²⁴ Katie Pickles and Catharine Coleborne, eds., *New Zealand's Empire* (Manchester, 2016).

²⁵ Giselle Byrnes, 'Introduction: Reframing New Zealand History', in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, edited by Giselle Brynes (Melbourne, 2009), pp. 1-18 at pp. 7-18.

²⁶ John MacKenzie, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? The Historiography of a Four Nations Approach to the History of the British Empire', in *Race, Nation, and Empire:*

citizens who were not ethnically or culturally ‘British’ – be they Chinese, Indian, Afrikaner, or Québécois – responded to the development of efforts to promote trade on the basis of ethnic connections. Understandings of economic identities within the empire were always plural and shaped by the varied relations between peoples overseas and in Britain.²⁷

Given these problems of terminology and the fluid nature of ‘Britishness’, Rachel Bright and Andrew Dilley have recently suggested that alternative terms are more appropriate to describing the key subjects of analysis explored in British World literature, given they often overlap with the broader literatures of settler colonialism and whiteness.²⁸ Accordingly, they claim that ‘Greater Britain, the third British Empire, [and] Empire-Commonwealth better serve to describe the unit of analysis dominating British World literature’.²⁹ The authors offer a valuable critique of the problems of existing British World studies and make a convincing case for connecting this approach with broader fields of study. However, none of the alternative terms suggested seem fully appropriate for the subject of study explored in this book.

Greater Britonism was undoubtedly important in explaining the initial impulse behind the development of economic networks based on collaboration between Britain and the old

Making Histories, 1750 to the Present, edited by Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (Manchester, 2011), pp. 133-53.

²⁷ Tamson Pietsch, ‘Rethinking the British World’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52 (2013), pp. 441-63 at pp. 447-9, 456.

²⁸ Bright and Dilley, ‘After the British World’, p. 547.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

Commonwealth from the 1880s onwards. The settler colonies were seen as British nations and vast untapped markets, these conditions meant they were often viewed as the most promising future markets for the UK. However, Britishness was always a contested identity and projects to promote British World collaboration could be disrupted both from within, and from African and Asian actors on the margins of these networks, who sometimes made their own claims to 'Britishness' in doing so. 'Britishness' was an 'imagined identity' which could be employed by colonial subjects for a variety of reasons: to challenge discrimination, to plead their legal rights to imperial authorities, or to attempt to improve their status.³⁰

Languages of British 'loyalism' were always layered, diffuse, and shaped by national considerations. This was particularly the case in early twentieth century South Africa. Saul Dubow demonstrates that supporters of connections to Britain did not necessarily express loyalty to the crown or British institutions. Afrikaners could connect the upholding of 'British' values with the privileging of white interests, while black South Africans could celebrate 'British' values to express their hostility to Afrikaners.³¹

No one idea about the optimal future of British World collaboration was ever hegemonic, and efforts to promote collaboration between British peoples always had to compete with

³⁰ Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, ch. 1; Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, NC, 2010), pp. 3-4; Chua Ai Lin, 'Nation, Race and Language: Discussing Transnational Identities in Colonial Singapore, Circa 1930', in *Sites of Asian Interaction: Ideas, Networks, and Mobility*, edited by Tim Harper and Sunil Amrith (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 60-78.

³¹ Dubow, 'How British Was the British World?', pp. 1-27.

alternative ideas of national, regional and ethnic trade communities.³² This was most noticeable in the 1930s when the London-based Empire Marketing Board (EMB) attempted to promote the cause of empire shopping to a UK audience. The EMB's activities inspired similar campaigns in the old Commonwealth, albeit with limited success. National governments and manufacturing associations promoted their own patriotic buying campaigns, which offered an alternative vision of imperial trade relations distinct from ideas of 'Greater Britonism'. At the same time, commercial organizations used the language of 'Buy British' to promote their own products in ways which could fit uneasily with the message of government campaigns.

In the 1930s efforts to promote the cause of 'Buying British' had to compete with alternative efforts to encourage consumers to buy goods based on ethnic ties. 'Buy Indian' and 'Buy Chinese' campaigns connected traders and consumers across and beyond imperial spaces. As such, it is useful to think in terms of a series of overlapping and competing worlds which shaped imperial subjects' identities and loyalties. For example, a Malayan Tamil may have worn khadi on special occasions in the 1930s to express pride in their Indian heritage and the strength of India's nationalist movement. However, the gesture did not necessarily have the same anti-colonial meaning that it did in India. Indeed, the 'Buy Indian' cause had limited success in Malaya, in part, as a result of the Indian diaspora's concerns with promoting their interests in the colony as permanently settled, British subjects.

Attempts to promote British World collaboration sat uneasily with both ideas of 'a third

³² The idea of there being overlapping and competing British Worlds is discussed in Pietsch, 'Rethinking the British World', p. 447.

British Empire' and the development of a modern 'Empire-Commonwealth'. Alfred Zimmern's concept of a 'third British Empire', developed in the 1920s, envisaged that the 'British Commonwealth of Nations' would play a leading role on the world stage by promoting collaboration with the League of Nations.³³ However, the development of an international system after 1918 provided new opportunities for politicians and business leaders to challenge aspects of British leadership, beginning with Indian nationalists' efforts to develop a presence at the League of Nations from the late 1920s onwards. Despite the intrusions of Indian nationalists, British World collaboration in the 1920s and 1930s remained rooted in the effective marginalization of African and Asian politicians and businesspeople, it subsequently struggled to adapt to the development of a multi-racial Commonwealth after 1947. In any case, alternative regional and international networks provided more effective means for developing trade partnerships after the Second World War. As such, we should not discard the British World as a category of analysis, but rather explore how British World economic networks competed over time with alternative national, regional, and international ideas of trade community.

II

Forging a British World of Trade explores the interplay between the high political thought of theorists, the activities of officials and businesspeople, and the everyday experience of the

³³ Alfred Zimmern, *The Third British Empire: Being A Course of lectures Delivered at Columbia University, New York* (London, 1926), p. 80.

wider public in shaping understandings of cooperation across imperial markets.³⁴ As the social scientist Craig Calhoun notes: ‘Markets do not precisely coalesce into a single global totality. They link imperfectly and incompletely. We need to see global markets as relationships among people, places and institutions’.³⁵ Despite the aims of existing British World literature to explore connections *across* Britain and the old Commonwealth, to date it has provided surprisingly little discussion of multilateral fora which existed for the discussion of themes connected with imperial trade.

This book brings the politics of such trade networks back to the heart of the story. By studying three interconnected forms of networking: official, business, and public, we explore how attempts to promote a British World community competed with alternative forms of trade collaboration. From the 1880s onwards, leading politicians from Britain and the settler colonies met regularly at Imperial Conferences. However, while these conferences provided significant opportunities for British World collaboration, they were replaced by Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meetings after 1944, with membership extended to leaders from the new Commonwealth. Official efforts to promote British World collaboration interacted with the development of the international system centred firstly on the League of Nations, and then the UN. Some officials’ careers spanned these organizations, such as the Australian diplomat F.L. McDougall, who sat on the boards of the Imperial Economic

³⁴ This approach builds on what Martin Daunton has termed ‘the new history of economic thought’. See his ‘The Future Direction of British History: Thinking About Economic Cultures’, *History Workshop Journal*, 72 (2011), pp. 222-39 at p. 222.

³⁵ Craig Calhoun, ‘Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Social Imaginary’, *Daedalus*, 137 (2008), pp. 105-14 at p. 112.

Committee and Empire Marketing Board and also came to be closely connected with League of Nations bodies which addressed agricultural questions. He ended his career working with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization. Ultimately, for McDougall, like many others, the international system provided a more effective platform for solving economic problems than narrower schemes for British World and empire cooperation.

Secondly, we explore the politics of business networking. From its foundation in 1886 the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire acted as a forum for collaboration between businesspeople across the British World (although British-led chambers from the Indian and colonial empire also participated in this organization's activities). There were later attempts to widen the movement's membership, however, these efforts had little success and the Federation of Commonwealth Chambers of Commerce, as it was now known, declined rapidly in influence from the mid-1960s onwards. Efforts to promote British World collaboration through the Federation's activities had to compete with alternative forms of networking between chambers of commerce. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) was founded in 1919 and became closely connected with the League of Nations. The ICC grew further in influence after 1946 as a consultative organization of the United Nations. While these organizations often cooperated with imperial networks they also provided new opportunities to question British economic leadership. In particular, Indian nationalists used these organizations to promote their cause to a worldwide audience and challenge the authority of British business associations operating in the subcontinent. Membership of regional and international chambers of commerce provided businesspeople with opportunities to develop new forms of trade cooperation, gradually weakening the influence of British World collaboration.

Finally, in seeking to understand the wider popular culture of imperial trade, this book explores the development of patriotic trade campaigns within the British World and beyond, and the changing cultures of the marketing and advertising industries. We should be wary of taking Board of Trade returns as *prima facie* evidence of growing cultural connections between Britain and its overseas markets. Frank Trentmann has cautioned against assuming that a shared ‘British taste’ emerged as a result of expanding trade links between Britain and the Empire-Commonwealth, which need to be understood in the context of wider global processes of growing exchange and improved connections.³⁶ Consumers outside imperial networks drove much of the growth in demand for products such as coffee, chocolate and ‘oriental’ clothing, which were often advertised in a ‘deterritorialized’ fashion overlooking their production in imperial territories. Moreover, many imperial goods imported into the UK were then re-exported to continental Europe.³⁷ Goods are often manufactured from parts produced in multiple countries, they rarely have a stable ‘national’ character. For example, the ‘Modern Girl’ fashions of the 1920s owed much to the ‘flapper’ culture of Hollywood stars and were appropriated globally but with local adaptations such as the addition of the *qipao* dress in China or the sari in India.³⁸

³⁶ Frank Trentmann, ‘Round-table: Empire and Globalisation’, *British Scholar*, 3 (2010), pp. 145-51 at pp. 147-51; These processes are discussed well in Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting: 1870-1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

³⁷ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, ch. 3; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007).

³⁸ Alys Eve Weinbaum (et al.), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC, 2008).

By focusing on a supposedly quintessentially ‘British’ and ‘imperial’ product, Erika Rappaport’s recent history of the global politics of tea production and consumption is instructive for thinking about the contested identity of consumer goods within imperial and global networks. As Rappaport shows, tea was often sold as a ‘British’ and imperial product for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, from the mid-1930s onwards scepticism grew about the value of using imperial themes in tea advertising. Producers sought to rebrand tea further during the era of decolonization, developing ‘national’ branding. Tea’s imperial history became an impediment, making it a less fashionable beverage for young consumers during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁹ ‘Britishness’ was a quality which could be packaged in various guises, being desired by consumers at some times and rejected at others. It is important, therefore, that we explore how business networks promoted particular types of ‘British’ trade identity, and how they were received by consumer groups.

While advertising companies were becoming increasingly global in ambition during the 1920s, they utilized existing British World focused networks. This was the heyday of efforts to promote the cause of ‘Buying British’ after all. And yet, while advocates of ‘empire shopping’ encouraged consumers in Australia, Canada and South Africa to exercise a preference for imperial goods in the 1920s and 1930s they had little success. Instead, the politics of patriotic trade in these countries came to be dominated by campaigns to aid domestic employment and support the development of nascent secondary industries.

³⁹ Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ, 2017), pp. 8, 12, 115, 181-2, 264, 370-409.

Evolving practices in marketing and advertising after 1945 challenged the effectiveness of British World collaboration. With the growth of regional and segmented marketing after 1945, companies came to increasingly focus on appealing to particular socio-economic groups connected across territorial boundaries, challenging the role of imperial connections in commercial culture and increasing the appeal of contiguous markets such as the EEC. Indeed, this was an era when the world economy was increasingly becoming focused on trade in manufactured goods between industrialized countries rather than the north-south exchanges which had been key to the age of high imperialism.

Historians are becoming increasingly attracted to using the study of networks to explore the ‘performativity’ of market relationships, building on the sociological work of Michel Callon. Such work focuses on how networks connect businesspeople, politicians and consumers, and encourage the distribution (and privileging) of certain forms of economic information, thereby shaping attitudes to trade.⁴⁰ Frank Trentmann’s *Free Trade Nation* (2008) demonstrates the value of this approach, convincingly making the case that support for the competing causes of free trade and tariff reform in Edwardian Britain did not straightforwardly correlate with the interests of the dominant industries of particular regions. Rather, we need to pay attention to how the fiscal debate was ‘performed’ by the competing armies of activists mobilized by the opposing sides across the country.⁴¹ Trentmann’s narrative connects consumer activism, high political thought, and British free traders’

⁴⁰ Michel Callon, ‘What Does it Mean to Say That Economics is Performative?’, in *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics*, edited by Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa and Lucia Siu (Princeton, NJ, 2006), pp. 311-56.

⁴¹ Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 13.

relations with wider international cultures of trade activism, demonstrating that free trade was supported by a vibrant popular culture in Edwardian Britain.⁴² *Forging a British World of Trade* adopts a similar approach, exploring how politicians, businesspeople, and consumers came to privilege British World collaboration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and considering why this form of cooperation became less attractive over time as alternative trading opportunities came to be viewed as more appealing.

III

The rise and fall of interest in collaboration to promote a British World of trade between the 1880s and 1970s can ultimately be explained by changing perceptions of the potential future value and coherence of this economic region. The Australian, Canadian and New Zealand economies were hampered by periods of depression and high levels of debt in the late nineteenth century and South Africa was plunged into war between 1899 and 1902.⁴³ However, as James Belich has convincingly demonstrated, a boom mentality was key to the development of ‘Anglo-world’ settler societies, and such booms paid scant regard to the ability of the land to sustain rapidly expanding populations.⁴⁴ Chapter 1 explores how and why businesspeople and politicians devoted a great deal of time to forging British World

⁴² Ibid., chs. 1-2.

⁴³ P.J. Cain, ‘Colonies and Capital: Some Aspects of Anglo-colonial Financial Relations After 1850’, in F.M.L. Thompson ed., *Landowners, Capitalists and Entrepreneurs: Essays for Sir John Habakkuk* (Oxford, 1994), pp.213-33; Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000*, ch. 8.

⁴⁴ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, chs. 11, 13, 15.

trade networks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The appeal of such networks was rooted in assumptions that settler societies would expand rapidly in population in the future as they had in the recent past. Joseph Chamberlain's followers sought to capitalize on this boom mentality, arguing that Britain needed to prioritize trade with the Dominions via a system of tariff preferences. Nonetheless, Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign proved highly divisive. Opponents argued that Britain was chiefly a global, rather than purely imperial, trading nation and the maintenance of free trade was vital to its future prosperity. At the same time, efforts to promote British World collaboration more broadly sharpened divisions between 'British' and Indian and colonial business elites.

As international business scholars have demonstrated, economic imagination is ultimately shaped by the interpretation of past experience, access to information about markets (which can sometimes be faulty), and hopes placed in the future. Perceptions of distance between markets are ultimately culturally constructed. The 'physic distance' between markets perceived by businesspeople, policy makers, and consumers may not correspond to actual measurable differences in institutions, preferences, and values as economic actors may exaggerate or underestimate the cultural distance between two countries involved in a transaction.⁴⁵ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries political and business

⁴⁵ Srilata Zaheer, Margaret Spring Schomaker and Lilach Nachum, 'Distance Without Direction: Restoring Credibility to a Much-loved Construct', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 43 (2012), pp. 18-27; Gönter K. Stahl, Rosalie L. Tung, Tatiana Kostova, Mary Zellmer-Bruhn, 'Widening the Lens: Rethinking Distance, Diversity, and Foreignness in International Business Research Through Positive Organizational Scholarship', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 47 (2016), pp. 621-30.

networks contributed to a sense that there was little difference in trading in British or settler colony markets, given they shared common legal practices and consumer characteristics. So, for example, this mentality meant that many British multinationals premised their operations in Australia and New Zealand on the assumption that these were fundamentally ‘British’ nations or effectively extensions of the British market (and, as such, easier to trade with than ‘foreign’ nations).⁴⁶

Chapter 2 explores how a changing global political and economic context reshaped British World collaboration in the 1920s and 1930s. The inter-war years marked the completion of attempts to establish a system of preferential trade within the empire and the newly formed Imperial Economic Committee sought to present a modern vision of the Commonwealth working in cooperation with the League of Nations. However, these years also witnessed a growing uncertainty regarding the British World’s cohesion and its future economic prospects. Growing awareness of ecological science, agricultural crises in marginal farmlands, and the development of new fora to discuss the science of population challenged earlier, wildly optimistic views of the potential future population capacity of the Dominions. Moreover, the League of Nations provided new opportunities to challenge Britain’s economic leadership.

And yet, earlier efforts to promote British World trade networks were consolidated and expanded upon during the 1920s and 1930s. This owed much to a reshaping of the politics of free trade and protectionism. Before the First World War leading British free traders had

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Jones, ‘Origins, Management and Performance’, in Geoffrey Jones, ed., *British Multinationals: Origins, Management and Performance* (Aldershot, 1986), pp. 1-23 at p. 15.

expressed distrust at the development of efforts to regulate the international economy. However, after 1914 both advocates of freer trade along with supporters of the ‘new protectionism’ sought to utilize the League of Nations to promote international economic cooperation. Earlier protectionist concerns with expanding imperial trade were now coupled with efforts to promote lower tariff barriers with friendly, democratic nations. Although the Ottawa conference of 1932 established a system of intra-imperial tariffs, Britain and the Dominions signed a range of trade treaties with leading foreign trade partners in the years that followed. Rather than being fostered by the ‘boom mentality’ which had propelled the development of British World networks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British World collaboration was now cast as an essentially defensive measure focused on protecting established market relationships in a context of international crisis and high tariff barriers in foreign markets.

The concept of ‘Buying British’ flourished during the inter-war years but how much, and in what ways, did consumers buy into the cause of ‘British’ trade loyalism during the Depression? Chapter 3 seeks to gain a clearer understanding of the language, reach, and limits of competing patriotic trade campaigns in the Empire-Commonwealth during the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on efforts to promote the purchase of ‘British’, Indian, Chinese and products. Civic groups sought to develop trade networks based on ethnic ties which could connect across and beyond imperial spaces. However, the hybridity of colonial subjects’ identities impeded efforts to develop patriotic trade networks and meant that the content, character, and popular appeal of trade campaigns shifted between different regions. While ‘Buying British’ appears to have been a cause which enthused UK consumers in the 1930s, being promoted by a range of government and commercial organizations, Australian, Canadian and South African business groups developed their own patriotic buying campaigns

which promoted alternative ideas of national and imperial loyalties. While such campaigns were not inimical to wider efforts to promote British World collaboration, their primary focus was on supporting national industries.

From the early 1930s onwards, the members of the old Commonwealth, with the key exception of Canada, were members of the Sterling Area, forcing them to peg their currencies to the British pound and hold foreign currency reserves as sterling balances in London. This system was gradually challenged by the development of trade liberalization with the emergence of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, the effects of decolonization, and the declining importance of intra-Commonwealth trade. After 1945 it became increasingly difficult to present British World collaboration as a valuable means of developing trade. The establishment of a multi-racial Commonwealth after 1949 disrupted the politics of British World networks, which had hitherto largely focused on collaboration between white men. Chapter 4 focuses on how existing networks such as the Federation of Commonwealth Chambers of Commerce and Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meetings attempted to move away from their earlier focus on British World collaboration to include Asians and Africans in policy-making. While attempts were made to reform business and political networks to reflect the reality of an expanded Commonwealth, they had limited success. In any case, new regional and international fora were often seen as providing more effective means to promote trade.

Chapter 5 explores the role that national patriotism and British World loyalism played in consumer politics in the UK and the old Commonwealth, exploring developments in the fields of advertising and market research, attempts to promote Empire-Commonwealth collaboration in non-fiction film production and distribution, and post-war patriotic trade

campaigns. The dismantling of import controls in the late 1950s and early 1960s led to a revival in patriotic trade campaigns. However, there was no return to the large-scale, continuous efforts to promote national and imperial goods, which had been a feature of civic life in the 1930s. At a time when the policies of apartheid South Africa were causing an international outcry, patriotic trade campaigns lost their earlier focus on imperial collaboration and 'British' loyalism, focusing instead on encouraging consumers to buy goods made in their own countries. In any case, patriotic trade campaigns increasingly came to be seen as outmoded during these years, jeopardizing trade with growing foreign markets. Moreover, changes in the advertising and marketing industries, and the growth of market research, discouraged businesses from making undifferentiated appeals to national markets. Earlier ideas that consumers across the British World had broadly similar interests and tastes were comprehensively challenged with the expansion of segmented marketing.

Finally, chapter 6 explores the effective collapse of British World trade networks in the 1960s and 1970s and considers the connections between historical efforts to promote these forms of trade cooperation and current day debates about Brexit Britain's future trade policy. The UK's turn towards the EEC in the 1960s can be seen as an effective reversal of the situation facing earlier generations. Whereas many British politicians and business leaders had invested hopes in trade cooperation with the old Commonwealth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, based on the assumption that the settler colonies provided great, untapped markets, by the 1960s many in Britain saw western Europe as a more promising trade partner for the future than the Empire-Commonwealth. At the same time, old Commonwealth countries became increasingly attracted to alternative regional trade opportunities leading to an effective atrophy of British World centred organizations. During the 1960s and 1970s British Eurosceptics claimed that EEC membership involved a

straightforward choice between Europe and the Commonwealth. However, the success of the ‘Yes’ campaign in the 1975 Referendum on EEC membership was due, in part, to their claims that remaining in the Common Market would be the best course of action for Britain’s relations with both the old and new Commonwealth.

Now that the British public has voted to leave the EU we face another turning point in the UK’s identity as a trading nation. Much like the hopes invested in British World collaboration in the early twentieth century, or EEC membership in the 1960s and 1970s, the Leave campaign in 2016 was built around ideas of an alternative future for British trade. Brexiteers claimed that the UK’s trade would be best served by exiting the EU and conducting a series of free trade agreements with key economic partners outside this trade bloc. In making such claims, they could point towards Britain’s increasing reliance on exports to non-EU countries over the last decade. However, debates about trade were marginal to a Leave campaign which focused on the supposed need to restrict immigration (a cause surely at odds with visions of a pioneering, globally-orientated ‘free trade’ Britain). Given the uncertainties about what trade deals Britain can strike after Brexit its economic trading future is highly uncertain, and is likely to remain highly contested, much as it has been since at least the 1880s.

