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978-1-108-48329-2 — The Falklands War
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Introduction

The Falklands and the Legacies of Empire

On a cool July afternoon in 1982, a group of Conservative Party faithful gathered at Cheltenham racecourse to listen to Mrs Thatcher. Britain had just recovered the Falklands Islands, and it was as though success in the wintry archipelago had had a refreshing effect on the Prime Minister. The crippling domestic battles that had hitherto beset her premiership no longer seemed to faze her. Emboldened, she now hailed a historic victory:

> We have ceased to be a nation in retreat. We have instead a newfound confidence – born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true 8,000 miles away. That confidence comes from the re-discovery of ourselves, and grows with the recovery of our self-respect.[1]

Her mood was defiant. She scolded the 'waverers' and the 'fainthearts', who feared 'that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world'. They were simply 'wrong'. Victory in the South Atlantic had proven that 'Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history'. Britain, she concluded, 'found herself again in the South Atlantic and will not look back from the victory she has won'.[2]

Her reference to empire caught the attention of more than a few – maybe because it was so rare coming from her. Yet it also chimed with a certain pattern that had emerged over the previous three months. The Falklands War had been suffused with imperial metaphors and tropes in parliament and in the media – British, Argentine and international. It was widely perceived as a bizarre conflict, not least on account of the setting: two nations fighting over an unprofitable colony; the British Fleet sailing off to the South Atlantic as crowds cheered them from the docks; political speeches charged with references to the past, to old wars, to Britain's decline.[3]

How Britain and Argentina ended up going to war over the Falklands continues to perplex many, and the conflict's imperial mystique persists to this day. The extent to which the Falklands War represented a revival

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of the imperial past is, in fact, a question that has generated much conjecture, but little in the way of detailed scholarly analysis. This book sets out to address precisely this, by looking at the conflict through the transnational lens of Greater Britain – a perception of a shared identity, worldview and set of values that united Britons in all corners of the globe for over a century, since its inception in Victorian times. It shows how this mentality played out in the context of the Falklands War, stressing the defence of kith and kin, the connections between the British world and devolution, and also its interplay with issues of race and immigration in metropolitan culture. It also explores how the constituents of Greater Britain saw themselves, focusing in particular on the Anglo-Argentines and the Falkland Islanders, where rival conceptions of the British world they claimed to inhabit not only pitted them against each other, but also opened a rift within those communities themselves. Finally, it shows that the notions, assumptions and beliefs once encapsulated in the idea of Greater Britain were becoming increasingly irrelevant in British metropolitan culture, due to the changing British state, Britain's decreasing global influence and the changing status of immigration from the Commonwealth and British Overseas Territories.

Not only does looking at the Falklands through this prism go beyond mere academic interest, but it also sheds light on our understanding of the ongoing Falklands dispute, of the British world and of Thatcher's Britain. The evidence suggests that neither the dispute, nor the war – nor indeed its aftermath – can be entirely divorced from the legacies of empire, as illuminated by three key findings of this book. First, a lingering attachment to Greater Britain played a very significant role in perpetuating the dispute between Argentina and Britain from the 1960s until the eve of war. Second, the conflict and its aftermath revealed how – contrary to prevalent scholarly opinion – Britishness remained intertwined with the concept of Greater Britain well into the 1980s. And third, Greater Britain continues to be the Falklands' deepest and most enduring imperial dimension, manifested most clearly in the realms of rhetoric, collective memory and political culture – indeed, its assumptions and twitching nerves persist to this day. Thus Greater Britain is a key concept to unlock the full significance of the legacies of empire in the Falklands dispute. This book, therefore, sheds new light not only on the Falklands War itself, but also on the abiding hold of the idea of Greater Britain into the post-imperial era, replete with its multiple contradictions. That the Falklands/Malvinas dispute is still framed in terms of national identity – while accusations of imperialism and neo-colonialism persist – is only further evidence of the enduring relevance of this question.

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Recent years have seen concerted efforts from Falkland Islanders to shake off the reputation of being a 'relic of empire'. On 10–11 March 2013, they went to the polls to determine whether they wished the Islands 'to retain their current political status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom'. The atmosphere was festive: 4 × 4 Jeeps draped in Union Jacks and covered in stickers with messages such as 'British to the core' or 'Forever British', rallied into Stanley, led by horse riders holding British and Falkland flags. The more daring wore Union Jack suits, or painted their faces with the British colours. Land Rovers were arranged on a hillside (emblazoned in red, white and blue) in the shape of a giant 'YES'. Some danced over to the ballot box to cast their vote. As the Islanders celebrated expectantly at the iconic Whale Bone Arch beside Christchurch Cathedral, the predictable result was announced: an overwhelming 99.8 per cent 'Yes' vote, with only three people voting 'No'.[4] The Kelpers (as they are colloquially known) were determined to convey the message that the referendum was about self-determination, not about maintaining a colonial enclave in the South Atlantic – as the then-President of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and UK Ambassador Alicia Castro, frequently claimed. After the decisive 'Yes', a member of the Falklands' Legislative Assembly, Gavin Short, explained how the relationship between the Islands and Britain had 'evolved over centuries'. 'We have moved far beyond our colonial past', he said. 'Ours is a modern relationship, based on mutual respect and democratic values'. The referendum result had 'dispelled the myths that Argentina tries to cultivate: we do not exist under the yoke of a colonial power, neither are we held here against our wishes, nor are we an implanted population illegally occupying these Islands'.[5]

Yet, despite the Falklanders' efforts, voices of dissent in Britain argued that the status quo in the South Atlantic was an anachronism and that the referendum was 'meaningless'.[6] Although by no means the majority view, a tendency to align the Falklands with futile imperial endeavours of the past was very much in evidence – a recurring feature of the last three decades. Anniversaries of the war, for instance, have provided a major source for such commentary. In 2002, twenty years after Britain's victory, Hugo Young argued in the *Guardian* that the war 'proved that the days of imperial duty were not entirely gone', while Andrew Billen referred to it in the *New Statesman* as 'a closing chapter in our imperial history'.[7] Five years later, Mick Hume's *Guardian* column tagged the conflict as 'a last gasp of imperial grandeur', while Mary Riddell wrote sardonically about 'the last hurrah of a nation intent on ruling the waves', in which 'a non-existent empire was striking back . . . to recapture British turf and glory'.[8] In 2012, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of

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Figure I.1 Islanders take part in the 'Proud to be British' parade along Ross Road, Stanley, during the referendum over the Falklands' future, 10 March 2013.
© Tony Chater/AFP/Getty Images.

the conflict, Richard Norton-Taylor claimed that the UK government should 'abandon anachronistic notions of status or false pride' and 'cut the umbilical cords which still connects [*sic*]' the Falklands to Britain; while on the occasion of Margaret Thatcher's funeral in April 2013,

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the *Guardian*'s Martin Kettle decried the whole affair as 'an imperial state funeral in every essential respect', made possible only by her victory in 1982: 'take the Falklands war out of Thatcher's record', he declared, 'and yesterday's imperial funeral would have been inconceivable'.[9]

This sense that the Falklands conflict was a species of 'imperial atavism', the revival of a dormant imperialism that had never fully disappeared, also permeates the scholarly literature dealing with the war. Yet the issue is rarely afforded much careful analysis. Often, 'imperial atavism', 'imperial hangover', the 'last war of an imperial past' and a whole host of similar tags are appended to the Falklands conflict, without investigating what those categories might actually mean. Nor is there any broad scholarly consensus about the imperial dimensions of the conflict. At one end of the spectrum are those who identify the resurgence of an imperialistic streak in the British people or government, and for whom the war represented the last gasp of empire in British political culture. At the other end are the sceptics, who generally view any imperial resonances of the war as superficial and ephemeral, arguing, to differing degrees, that the conflict was not principally about empire and in no way signalled its reawakening.

In one sense, the debate dates back to the early stages of the war itself, where the memories and legacies of empire highlighted by the confrontation in the South Atlantic were invoked both by critics and advocates of the British military intervention. This rift in the British national conversation continued to widen in the aftermath of the conflict and still animates rival historical perspectives. Yet in another sense the historical controversy is an extension of more wide-ranging debates about empire and metropolitan culture, which question the extent to which the British Empire played into the dynamics of historical change in the United Kingdom. These debates revolve around the material agency and causality of empire, exploring the scope and significance of the empire's resonances in Britain itself, with positions again polarised between so-called maximalist and minimalist views.[10] In a discussion where much is implicit and intrinsic rather than overt, establishing a clear dichotomy between rival standpoints in the context of the Falklands conflict can pose some challenges. Yet it is crucial to consider more closely the diverse range of interpretation in order to discern the roots of the disagreement and propose a more fruitful analysis of the imperial dimensions of the Falklands War.

Imperial Atavism: The Historical Controversy

One of the earliest attempts to present the Falklands conflict as an imperial atavism came in the immediate aftermath of the war, from the writer Anthony Barnett, who deployed the term 'Churchillism' to

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describe the multiparty consensus during the South Atlantic conflict. This, he argued, was engendered by an 'irrational' passion for sovereignty and national pride, inherited from Britain's imperial past.[11] In the years after the conflict, several other British and imperial historians came to see the Falklands through a similar lens. Eric Hobsbawm sought to explain the resurgence of jingoism as a response to decades of imperial decline; Stephen Howe decried the Falklands campaign as 'the nadir of the imperial atavism'; and John M. MacKenzie saw in the war 'the old nineteenth-century magic still at work'.[12] Many of these early assessments quite explicitly attributed an imperial undertow, even if they stressed different imperial dimensions of the war. Whether they focused on the awakening of a dormant imperial ideology and values (as in the case of MacKenzie), or on the resurfacing of an imperial undercurrent that formed the basis of British government policies (Barnett), or indeed whether the emphasis was on the belated reaction to imperial decline (Hobsbawm), in all cases the Falklands War was seen to be heavily influenced by imperial legacies.

This interpretation has been echoed in a variety of ways in more recent times, with a significant number of historians regarding the South Atlantic war as a 'quasi-imperial' adventure, in David Powell's turn of phrase.[13] Although in one sense these are often superficial, unelaborated assessments, they nevertheless reflect certain attitudes and assumptions embedded in the broader research culture. Not unlike MacKenzie, most of these authors stress that the Falklands stirred a dormant imperial spirit in the British people, shown in the enduring image of empire as the paragon of British power and in social responses to the conflict, be it in a revival of belligerent sentiments or in a lingering attachment to empire.[14]

Other authors are less explicit or emphatic in their assessment, but nevertheless tacitly presume that the dynamics of the Falklands War were shaped by the legacies of empire. James Aulich, Kevin Foster, David Monaghan and Klaus Dodds, for example, all add different nuances and angles, which suggest that the 'maximalist' view is far from a monolithic theory, but rather a conglomerate of views and perspectives that converge on one main point: the imperial past was intrinsic to the prosecution of the war and the public response to it.[15] Yet it becomes easier to identify their common ground when contrasting their views with those of their detractors.

Among these, we find experts on British, imperial and Falkland history. Here there is also an assortment of opinions, ranging from those who are merely sceptical of the imperial atavism to those who confront the notion head-on. The sceptics would reason that, while it is not wholly implausible that the imperial past may have shaped the course of the war

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both in terms of perceptions and material realities, there is not enough evidence to prove it. If anything, the evidence shows that the legacies of empire mattered very little, if at all. D. George Boyce, Andrew Thompson and Richard Vinen in various ways warn against viewing the entire Falklands campaign as an example of 'imperial reassertion' or 'atavistic imperialism' due to what they perceive as the Falklands' superficial imperial mystique.[16] Others express their scepticism in more trenchant terms, such as G. M. Dillon, David Reynolds and Bernard Porter.[17] The latter is arguably the leading sceptic in the broader debate about empire and metropolitan culture. He contends that there was 'no imperial *rationale*' to the Falklands War – since Britain fought to resist aggression, out of wounded pride and 'possibly for electoral profit' – and concludes that the South Atlantic conflict 'did not indicate in the least that "imperialism" proper was about to be resurrected, even if that had been practicable; or that anyone intended it should be'.[18]

Others derive their scepticism from looking at the wider context of Thatcherite politics, such as Philip Lynch and Richard Whiting. The real principle at stake in the Falklands, argues Whiting, was the anti-imperial notion of self-determination, which leads him to infer that, in the 1982 conflict, 'the achievement of a national purpose had been shorn of imperial significance'.[19] Most recently of all, John Darwin has lent considerable weight to the view that people should not see in the decision to send the Task Force to the South Atlantic, and the public response to it, 'the stirring memories of imperial greatness', nor indeed should they interpret them as 'a throwback to an "imperial" mentality'. He instead highlights other key factors, such as the centrality of the postcolonial principle of self-determination and the careful avoidance of '"imperial" language' by the Prime Minister and her advisers.[20]

Looking at the debate from both sides, we can see that they each marshal compelling arguments; yet it seems equally clear that we have reached a point where the debate has taken on the characteristics of a polemic rather than a research problem capable of empirical verification. There is a tendency to adopt entrenched views, with little reflection over the terms and categories used. It is worth analysing the role of the key concepts deployed in the debate, as they reveal the root causes of the stalemate. After all, it is one key aim of this book to move beyond these fixed positions and attempt a more nuanced reading of the imperial determinants of the Falklands crisis.

A Debate in Need of Reinterpretation

Authors on both sides draw on a wide variety of terms and expressions, ranging from 'Churchillism' and 'British power and glory' to 'imperial

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policing' and an imperial '*casus belli*'; and from 'imperial sentiment' (or habit of mind) to 'nineteenth-century magic' and Victorianism – all of which might fall within the general rubric of 'atavistic imperialism'.[21] It is worth noting, however, that the word 'atavism' is highly problematic, as it is heavily laden with the stigma of retrograde instincts rooted in the past that thwart the natural progress towards a better, more enlightened future. This term harks back to Joseph Schumpeter's declaration of 1919 that imperialism is 'atavistic in character', stemming from 'the living conditions, not of the present, but of the past', and evident in 'the social structure, in individual, psychological habits of emotional reaction'.[22]

With such a vast array of concepts, it is difficult to know to what extent these authors are all addressing the same issues. Rarely do they seek to explain what they mean by the different shorthands they use. Yet if there is a common denominator, it is the association of the term 'empire' with one particular type of imperial experience: memories, emotions and attitudes stemming from political control over colonial possessions around the globe, imperial wars (and two World Wars), the Navy, the celebration of imperial pride and glory and so on. In this perception, empire tends to be framed in terms of what Bernard Porter calls 'dominating imperialism': a self-conscious and deliberate will to rule other parts of the globe.[23] It is, of course, by no means irrelevant to foreground this aspect of empire. In 1982, these tropes circulated widely in the public sphere, which seemed extraordinary coming decades after the empire's formal dissolution. Neither side, however, has looked beyond brief and shallow assumptions about 'dominating imperialism' to consider other, less obvious imperial dimensions at work – an interpretative gap this book sets out to address.

Just as the debate about how much empire 'mattered' in metropolitan Britain has moved away from the notion of 'impact' (acquiring a new emphasis on 'the "sheer porousness" of the divide'),[24] so too the debate on the imperial dimensions of the Falklands War needs to distance itself from a narrow conception of empire recoiling on the home front. It needs to move beyond the stale question of whether the Falklands constituted a revival of 'imperialism' *per se* or indeed whether it revealed a lingering lust for imperial glory in the British people. Even though the Falkland Islands were a colony – and treated and regarded as such by the UK – their population was predominantly made up of descendants of British settlers, who largely considered themselves 'British' and were governed by tacit consent – a point that sits uneasily with claims resting on a 'dominant imperial' streak.[25] Thus I try to cast further light on this debate by focusing on an aspect of the imperial experience that both sides

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seem largely to ignore: the recrudescence of the notion of 'kith and kin', the British family, often referred to as the 'British world', 'British race patriotism' or 'Greater Britain'.[26] Although empire was certainly (indeed, principally) about global dominance, it also gave vent to an expansive Britishness that embraced a global community, serving to unite peoples from the remotest corners of the earth in the belief that they shared a common identity, a common culture and common material interests. While the political semantics of Greater Britain had been out of vogue for decades by 1982, it is argued here that the assumptions and sentiments it embodied survived.

In this context, Stephen Howe's recent contribution may serve to open new avenues. While in some sense he places himself among the sceptics in this debate, his empirically based approach invites further reflection and discussion.[27] His scepticism indeed stems from his doubts as to 'how significant, indeed how clearly identifiable and distinguishable, may be the specifically "post-imperial" aspects' of the Falklands War.[28] He thus leaves the door ajar for other possible interpretations. This book takes up Howe's challenge and sets out to show that the idea of Greater Britain provides a valuable contribution to the academic debate – helping it to move away from the ideological blinkers that have often marred the discussion – and, more generally, to our understanding of the dispute and of British political culture after the end of empire.

The Intellectual Origins of the Idea of Greater Britain

The term 'Greater Britain' was first coined by the Liberal politician and writer Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, who observed in his 1868 travelogue *Greater Britain* that, although 'climate, soil, manners of life [and] mixture with other peoples had modified the blood . . . in essentials the race was always one'.[29] Dilke predicted the global dominance of what he also called 'Saxondom' or the 'English race' – an entity comprising America, Australia and India.[30] His arguments and definitions were not entirely watertight, however (*Greater Britain* was a travelogue, not a political treatise). India's place in Greater Britain thus seems ambiguous, as it did not square with his idea of racial unity as a defining factor, while his thoughts on the inclusion of the United States would later clash with what became the more generalised, empire-wide, understanding of Greater Britain (to which he would ultimately yield).[31]

This concept was further developed in the 1880s by two Regius Professors of Modern History: John Robert Seeley, at Cambridge, and James Anthony Froude, at Oxford. Seeley's *Expansion of England*, an instant bestseller, traced the development of the British Empire in the nineteenth

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century, which had acquired a new vitality through scientific progress.[32] 'When we have accustomed ourselves to contemplate the whole Empire together and call it all England', he declared, 'we shall see that here too is a United States. Here too is a great homogeneous people, one in blood, language, religion and laws, but dispersed over a boundless space'.[33] The geographical scope of his concept of Greater Britain differed significantly from Dilke's: it included the United Kingdom, Canada, the West Indies, Southern Africa and the Australian colonies plus New Zealand – all of them 'inhabited chiefly or to a large extent by Englishmen and subject to the Crown'. India was not sidelined entirely, but it was placed at a lower level, because, he argued, '[they are not] of our own blood'.[34] Homogeneity was crucial, and the three 'ties' that held states together were 'community of race, community of religion, community of interest'.[35] Like Dilke, he did not regard himself as an imperialist, yet he was a fervent advocate of a British world-state. Greater Britain, in his view, was 'in the main of one nation, as much as if it were no Empire but an ordinary state'.[36]

James Anthony Froude's *Oceana or England and Her Colonies*, another travelogue, which was published three years after the appearance of Seeley's *Expansion of England*, vehemently opposed imperial federation. Froude proposed instead 'a "Commonwealth" of Oceana, held together by common blood, common interest, and a common pride in the great position which unity can secure'.[37] Two key drivers in Froude's vision were, first, the moral duty towards those 'men of our own blood and race' who had left Britain 'to form settlements under our flag'; and second, the moral decay of Britain, in part a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, which could be counteracted by the healthier, rugged outdoor life in the colonies.[38]

A key common feature shared by these authors, as Bill Schwarz points out, is that all three 'made the conceptual case, based on their readings of a global Anglo-British ethnic compact, for appreciating the specificity of the settler colonies' – societies that were not regarded as places 'composed of conquered natives but of peoples equivalent to themselves': as white.[39] Yet these ideas were not the exclusive preserve of Dilke, Seeley and Froude. The fact that their writings sold so well speaks volumes about the growing popularity of the concept of Greater Britain in the Victorian era, at a time when both British national identity and national interest were becoming increasingly associated with matters of empire.[40] Their views were echoed (often with very different hues) by other prominent personalities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A keen admirer of Seeley, Joseph Chamberlain believed that the different components of empire 'should all be units of one body,

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