

**The British Public in a Shrinking World: Civic
Engagement with the Declining Empire, 1960-1970**

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Abstract

This thesis analyses how the British public's interactions with the peoples and places of the empire and Commonwealth changed as a result of decolonization. Its central concern is to determine how issues relating to the empire and its decline became part of everyday 'local' experiences within British associational life between 1960 and 1970. It links a rich scholarly tradition of research on the domestic experience of Britain's empire to a new and emerging field of research that seeks to understand the institutional and associational makeup of the interconnected postwar world.

Chapter One looks at the activities of the Royal Commonwealth Society to assess the afterlife of empire as it was lived by those who had been the most involved. Chapter Two looks at the international work of the Women's Institute in order to consider how groups without a specific Commonwealth remit engaged with the spaces of the declining empire. Chapter Three focuses on an individual enthusiast, Charles Chislett, assessing how the personal experiences of one man might resonate across local networks of sociability and public service. Chapters Four and Five on the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign and Christian Aid consider humanitarian engagements with the decolonizing empire, analysing how international and imperial frameworks overlapped in religious and secular practices of aid and development.

Using these case studies, the thesis questions the extent to which the impact of decolonization was necessarily traumatic for the British public by considering alternate, optimistic experiences of international friendship, philanthropy and education taking place within civil society. It argues that we must be wary of overstating the importance of empire and decolonization in the lives of the British public and therefore situates its analysis of civil society firmly within the context of globalization and the sense of living in a 'shrinking world' that characterized many engagements with foreign peoples and places.

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Author's Declaration

Versions of sections of this thesis have been presented at a number of conferences. A section of Chapter Three has been published as 'Ghost Hunting: Amateur Film and Travel at the End of Empire' in *Experiencing Imperialism: Interdisciplinary and Transnational Perspectives of the British Abroad Since the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan. Palgrave. (Forthcoming 2013). A version of Chapter Four has been published as 'Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses: British Involvement in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign, 1960-1970'. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. Special Issue: Empire and Humanitarianism. (Forthcoming December 2012).

Introduction

Anecdotes and Associations

For many of those who have written about domestic experiences of the British Empire, the years of its decline are in the recent enough past to form a part of their living memory. Growing up in the postwar period, personal experiences of the declining empire shaped the interests of many of the key scholars who have developed and contributed to the ‘New Imperial History’. Indeed it has become common practice to introduce works on the domestic or metropolitan experience of British imperialism with some form of autobiographical account. In her introduction to *Civilising Subjects*, Catherine Hall describes how international and imperial networks shaped her childhood in Kettering and Birmingham in the 1950s:

At home the sense of a Baptist family stretching across the globe was always part of domestic life: missionaries from ‘the field’, on ‘furlough’, bringing me stamps for my collection; African students studying at the university who were invited for Christmas or Sunday tea; the small concerns we held to raise money for ‘good causes’ both near and far. My mother’s involvement in the United Nations Association meant that some of the specifically Christian dimensions of a connection with other parts of the world could be displaced by a focus on internationalism.¹

In a similar vein, John M. MacKenzie, editor of the influential Manchester University Press series ‘Studies in Imperialism’, begins a response piece to Bernard Porter published in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* with a ‘little autobiography’:

My family, in common with many others, had close connections with the British Empire. Uncles and aunts emigrated to Canada and Australia. My father, a Highland stonemason, worked in Africa, off and on, from the 1920s to 1960, first in Kenya, then in Southern and Northern Rhodesia, as they were then. I spent some early years in the latter (Zambia) myself and when I returned to Scotland for an education I felt empire to be all around me. Glasgow, that ‘imperial city’ seemed redolent of empire; it was certainly discussed in my school, although internationalism was taking over. Most importantly, my then adherence to the Church of Scotland led to my witnessing a

¹ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 3.

fairly consistent parade of ‘missionaries’ on furlough come to talk to us about their work in imperial territories. Although decolonization was upon us in my university years, 1960–68, no one seemed to predict its remarkable speed and near-completeness.²

MacKenzie used this personal narrative in part to explain his own interest in the field, but also as a piece of evidence to support his argument in favour of the presence of a broad imperial culture in Britain. In stark contrast, Porter, the author of *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, remembered very few direct or vicarious experiences of empire from his own childhood—no family migration to the colonies or service in the armed forces, no imperial novels on the bookshelf, and little enthusiasm for missionary work in his Methodist church—citing his own experiences as evidence of the shallowness of the impact of empire on domestic British culture.³

In *Ornamentalism*, David Cannadine reflects on his own experience as a ‘Coronation Child’, growing up in the 1950s surrounded by ‘Empire Made’ consumerism and the material evidence of empire in postcards, souvenirs, and rugs.⁴ Bill Schwarz begins *White Man’s World* with a prologue detailing his own experiences of racial politics in the 1980s, describing an interview he conducted with Enoch Powell in 1988, replete with cumbersome tape recorder and painful rubbing shoes.⁵ Even Niall Ferguson, a generation younger than Hall and MacKenzie, credits family experiences for his own more positive understanding of the British Empire: a grandfather who served in the RAF in India and Burma, an uncle who worked as an architect in Calcutta, a great aunt sending photos home from rural Canada, and Ferguson’s own early childhood in Kenya (an experience that turned his Glasgow home into a ‘little postcolonial museum’ full of memorabilia) all fostered an awareness of and interest in Britain’s imperial past.⁶

As Bernard Porter observes, such vignettes, anecdotes and reminiscences serve to explain these authors’ choice of subjects and the emphases that they bring to them.⁷ Excepting Porter’s own experiences, these examples point to the influence that

² John M. MacKenzie, ‘“Comfort” and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 4 (2008): 660-61.

³ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, x-xi.

⁴ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2001), 184-191

⁵ Bill Schwarz, *The White Man’s World (Memories of Empire)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁷ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), x.

personal, familial and religious networks stretching across the British Empire had on many aspects of 1960s associational life. This social world of organisations, institutions and enthusiastic individuals, which existed beyond the immediate reach of the state and was based on friendships, common interests and familial responsibilities, offered members of the British public diverse opportunities to engage with the declining empire. Despite the fact that such imperial experiences were clearly formative for many key scholars—even for scholars such as Hall and Cannadine who otherwise have very little in common—the role of the empire in 1960s associational life has received no systematic scholarly attention. This thesis offers the first detailed analysis of the role of empire within this social world. It asks how members of British civil society engaged with the spaces, peoples and ideas of empire, and studies the impact of decolonization on these engagements.

Until relatively recently, most scholarship on British imperialism assumed that ‘empire’ was something that happened overseas.⁸ Drawing on governmental archives and the personal papers of political figures, scholarship sought to account for the ‘official mind’ of the British Empire in relation to the practicalities of ruling, influencing and then dismantling colonial peripheries. The traditional historiography reflects very little, therefore, on the ways in which the empire might have been experienced *within* Britain. As Andrew Thompson observes, until at least the mid-1980s, imperialism—whether thriving or declining—was understood to be marginal to the lives of most British people.⁹ Over the last two decades, however, the focus of imperial history has shifted and efforts to assess the impact of imperialism on metropolitan societies have moved to the centre of an ever-expanding field.¹⁰ Empire is no longer treated as just a phenomenon ‘out there’, but, as Benita Parry put it, as a fact that registered in ‘the social fabric, the intellectual discourse, and the life of the imagination.’¹¹ Embracing sources ranging from canonical literature to unpublished travel diaries, from official documents to empire-sourced consumables, and from church and missionary records to music hall performances, this scholarship makes clear that colonialism ‘has been an interconstitutive process that shaped British

⁸ Andrew Thompson, ed., *Britain’s Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

⁹ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 2.

¹⁰ Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

¹¹ Benita Parry cited in Antoinette Burton, ‘Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating “British” History,’ *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, 3 (1997): 232.

society and culture.’¹² Yet, as Thompson observes, scholarship on Britain’s imperial experience deals mainly with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹³ Volumes within the ‘Studies in Imperialism’ series, launched in 1986, provide wide-ranging coverage of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, but rarely venture beyond 1950 to consider experiences of the end of empire.

This thesis contends that the comparatively under-studied ‘twilight years’ of imperial decline in the 1960s also raise important—and as yet unanswered—questions about Britain’s imperial experience. With more than twenty-five British colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean gaining independence, the 1960s were the most intense period of decolonization. A steady stream of newspaper articles and television documentaries charted this process, repeatedly placing these events in the public eye. The complexities of decolonization have been well accounted for in political, economic and diplomatic histories, which make clear that the end of empire was not a singular moment. The pace of decolonization ebbed and flowed, while periods of apparent decline in one part of the empire overlapped with efforts at renewal and reinvestment in another.¹⁴ What we do not yet fully understand is how these complexities were experienced or understood *within* Britain.

In 1996 Bill Schwarz published a rallying call, pointing out that the conventional historiography of decolonization dealt ‘very little with cultural relations’ and presented ‘a stunning lack of curiosity about the impact of decolonization within [...] the heartland of England itself.’¹⁵ While recent work has begun to question the domestic impact of decolonization, this remains a young field with much ground still to be covered.¹⁶ Existing scholarship has tended to focus either on issues of racial

¹² Angela Woollacott, cited in Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1. For examples of work on culture and empire see Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *At Home with Empire: Metropolitan Cultures and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*; Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992); Edward Said, *Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995); Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow: Longman, 2005).

¹³ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 2.

¹⁴ See, for example, John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonization: the Retreat from Empire in the Postwar World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1988); Wm Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: the Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonisation; Collected Essays* (London: I B Tauris, 2006).

¹⁵ Bill Schwarz, ‘“The Only White Man in There”: the Re-Racialisation of England, 1956-1968,’ *Race & Class* 38, 1(1996): 65.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 2.

identity and immigration or on representations of empire within cultural products. Stuart Ward's edited collection *British Culture and the End of Empire* includes considerations of satire, children's popular literature, commercial films, and travel writing and television programming.¹⁷ Wendy Webster's work builds upon this endeavour to uncover the effect of decolonization on British 'narratives of nation' through a study of film and other mainstream British media, while others consider the ways in which decolonization has registered in James Bond films, heritage films and 'nostalgic screen fictions'.¹⁸

Yet without looking outside of this body of sources it is difficult—if not impossible—to offer an analysis of decolonization that goes beyond merely accounting for *what* representations of empire were available to the British public to ask *how* the public made sense of this potential 'cacophony of sounds'.¹⁹ As Antoinette Burton reminds us, it is notoriously difficult to evaluate audience response.²⁰ If we are to fully describe the plurality of Britain's postcolonial experiences we must move beyond the 'media archive' to consider the experiences and agency of the public themselves. This thesis seeks to complicate existing histories of decolonization by introducing a new cast of actors and new set of spaces in order to analyze some of the diverse civic forms of engagement with the declining empire described above. Andrew Thompson's work has been instrumental in showing that the empire was far from the exclusive domain of the privileged few who ran it.²¹ Most recently, he has called attention to the degree to which 'people in Britain continued, even after the so-called "high noon of empire", to be involved in a wider

¹⁷ Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of the Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*; Webster, "'There'll Always be an England": Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948-1969,' *Journal of British Studies* 40, 4 (2001): 557-84; Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-1964* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1998). For work on empire and film see Cynthia Baron, 'Doctor No: Bonding Britishness to Racial Sovereignty,' *Spectator: The University of Southern California Journal of Film and Television Criticism*, 14, 2, (1994); David Cannadine, 'James Bond and the Decline of England,' *Encounter* 53, 3, (1979): 46-66; Andrew Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film', in Lester Friedman, ed., *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 109-129; John Hill, 'Films and Empire', in *British Cinema in the 1980s* (London: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp.99-123; Tara Wollen, 'Over Our Shoulders: Nostalgic Screen Fictions for the 1980s,' in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, eds., *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 178-93.

¹⁹ I borrow the term 'cacophony of sounds' from Catherine Hall where she uses it to refer to the plethora of representations of empire circulating in nineteenth century Birmingham: Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 274.

²⁰ Burton, 'India Inc.? Nostalgia, Memory and the Empire of Things,' in Ward, ed. *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 226.

²¹ Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back*.

British world to which they often had a direct functional connection.²² Thompson identifies multiple ways in which members of the population might have had links to the empire: postwar National Service in colonial territories; connections to family and friends who emigrated to the Commonwealth as part of schemes that continued into second half of twentieth century; tourism; and business.²³

This thesis intends to build on this claim to explore in more detail the conduits through which urban and rural members of associational life gained access to the empire. It links a rich scholarly tradition of research on the domestic experience of Britain's empire to a new and emerging field of research that seeks to understand the institutional and associational makeup of the interconnected postwar world. To do this it introduces spaces and networks that are understudied in relation to the postwar period. It thinks about the English village hall, the clubhouse, the local church, and the small-town assembly room, and the associational and organisational links that connected these spaces to the outside world. It asks what factors determined whether a community, a club, or an individual engaged with issues of empire. What accounted for different levels of engagement in different areas? And who were the key actors in shaping wider engagement with empire? By de-centring the traditional focus on the media archive this project accounts for the agency of individuals and communities in shaping their own understanding of Britain's relationship to the wider world.

In introducing new networks and actors to our understanding of British decolonization, this thesis addresses three key issues that it sees emerging from existing scholarship. First, it questions the extent to which the impact of decolonization and imprint of the empire on post-imperial Britain were necessarily traumatic for the British public by considering alternate, optimistic experiences that took place within civil society. Second, it acknowledges that we must be wary of overstating the importance of empire and decolonization in the lives of the British public and therefore situates its analysis of civil society firmly within the context of globalization, increasing mobility and the sense of living in a 'shrinking world' that characterized many engagements with foreign peoples and places, whether they fell within or outside the empire/Commonwealth. Third, it is sympathetic towards the warnings of scholars such as Antoinette Burton who have criticized the ways in

²² Thompson, *Britain's Experience of Empire*, 5.

²³ Andrew Thompson with Meaghan Kowalsky, 'Social Life and Cultural Representation: Empire in the Public Imagination,' in Thompson, ed., *Britain's Experience of Empire*, 251-297.

which work on domestic imperialism tends to shore up the nation.²⁴ This thesis uses local spaces and global networks in order to avoid over-emphasising the national paradigm. Each of these issues is discussed in further detail below.

Impact, Imprint and Trauma: the Mark of a Declining Empire

To write about the relationship between domestic Britain and the end of empire is to grapple with two important and interrelated questions: what enduring *imprint* did the empire leave on postcolonial Britain and what were the short- and long-term *impacts* of decolonization itself? The empire certainly left physical markers of itself scattered across the country. Schwarz describes how the imperial past is ‘memorialised in the built environment,’²⁵ while ‘imperial debris’ are visible in the collections of the British Museum and display cases of local museums, not to mention the living room mantelpieces of families such as Niall Ferguson’s.²⁶ Julia Bush suggests that these remnants served as ‘inconvenient, uncomfortable reminders of past imperial glories which have lost their aura.’²⁷ But were these physical markers also representative of a deeper psychological imprint left on the British nation by centuries of imperial rule? As Wendy Webster asks, were ‘habits of mind associated with colonialism dismantled as rapidly or as extensively as British colonial rule, or did they outlast the end of empire?’²⁸ Implicit within this question is another: *when*, if at all, did habits of mind change?

Bill Schwarz argues convincingly that the domestic ‘time’ of decolonization is radically distinct from that of the transfers of power in the colonies themselves.²⁹ While some individuals did react to specific events of decolonization—such as Indian independence in 1947, the Suez crisis in 1956 or the Rhodesian Unilateral

²⁴ Burton, ‘Who needs the Nation?’ 229-232.

²⁵ Bill Schwarz, ‘Afterword: Postcolonial Times: the Visible and the Invisible,’ in F. Driver and D. Gilbert, eds., *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 272.

²⁶ Mark Crinson, ‘Imperial Story-Lands: Architecture and Display at the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes,’ *Art History* 22 (1999): 99-123; Ruth Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies of the Modern Commonwealth from 1947 to 1973’ (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2009). For a discussion of ‘imperial debris’ see Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruin and Ruination,’ *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (2008): 1-34.

²⁷ Julia Bush, ‘Moving On: And Looking Back,’ *History Workshop Journal* 36 (1993): 190.

²⁸ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 3.

²⁹ Bill Schwarz, ‘Claudia Jones and the *West Indian Gazette*,’ *Twentieth Century British History* 14 (2003): 264-285.

Declaration of Independence in 1965—most responded instead to a broader sense of Britain’s changing global position.³⁰ John Mackenzie outlines how an illusion of imperial power persisted throughout the 1950s and until the rapid decolonizations of the 1960s, by which point it became ‘cruelly apparent that the British could no longer trade off (in both literal and metaphorical terms) on a richly powerful and imperial past.’³¹ Offering an alternate (though not wholly incompatible) timescale, Stuart Hall argues that the period of actual decolonization was characterized by widespread amnesia about empire—a selective forgetting—that endured until the late 1970s and early 1980s when, in the context of the Falklands War, blinkered and jingoistic nostalgia for the golden days of the British Empire boomed.³² Describing her experience living in Birmingham in the 1960s, Catherine Hall writes that the empire was ‘a source of embarrassment and guilt, or, alternately, a site of nostalgia’³³ Paul Gilroy draws further attention to the selectiveness of this remembering/forgetting, arguing that the ‘unsettling history’ of Britain’s empire was ‘diminished, denied, and then if possible, actively forgotten.’³⁴ These observations emphasize the interwoven nature of imprint and impact: the lesser the immediate *impact* of decolonization on the public, it seems, the greater the lingering *imprint* of empire on the national psyche.

As Bill Schwarz’s recent first volume of his series on the ‘Memories of Empire’, *The White Man’s World*, makes clear, the shifting conjunctions of remembering/forgetting and the silences that they create ought to be central to any study of post-imperial Britain.³⁵ This thesis certainly aims to be attentive to the partial and selective ways in which members of civil society engaged with Britain’s imperial past, present and future. That said, it also intends to show that there was more to 1960s imperial engagements than amnesia, nostalgia and guilt. Scholars have commonly imagined the enduring legacies of imperialism as an inescapable physical weight—as a burden that still needs to be processed. Bush paints a vivid picture of a

³⁰ Thompson, ‘Social Life,’ 258.

³¹ John M. MacKenzie, ‘The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture,’ in Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 21-36.

³² Stuart Hall, ‘Racism and Reaction,’ in *Five Views of Multiracial Britain*, Commission for Racial Equality, (1978). This argument has been supported by W. Bissel, ‘Engaging Colonial Nostalgia,’ *Cultural Anthropology* 20 (2005): 216 and Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, eds., *At Home with Empire*, 4-5.

³³ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 5.

³⁴ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 98.

³⁵ Schwarz, *White Man’s World*.

Britain ‘stagger[ing] towards the end of the twentieth century under a mountain-load of imperial pride, imperial guilt and accumulated imperial history.’³⁶ Simon Gikandi describes how ‘imperial legacies’ come to ‘haunt’ English identities.³⁷ Shula Marks warns of the ‘vein of jingoism’ that, without deconstruction, ‘remains to be tapped with remarkable facility.’³⁸ As Emilie Cameron observes, ‘ghosts have increasingly occupied the imagination of those who aim to trouble, uncover, and interrogate the play of the colonial past in the ongoing colonial present.’³⁹

In many of these works, both the *imprint* of empire and *impact* of decolonization are conceptualized as a trauma wrought on the British nation. The term ‘impact’ brings to mind a shock or collision. The tongue-in-cheek title of Andrew Thompson’s *The Empire Strikes Back?* taps into a vocabulary of violence that can also be read in the common terminology of ‘after effects’ and ‘repercussions’ of empire.⁴⁰ This vocabulary of violence and trauma is shared by work on postwar immigration, much of which brings together issues of race, decolonization and national identity.⁴¹ Webster shows how white opponents of black immigration in the metropolis identified themselves as beleaguered, vulnerable, and embattled, while Schwarz ties postwar immigration to Britain’s imperial past by conceiving it as a restaging of the primal colonial encounter in reverse. With immigration, he argues, the colonial frontier came ‘home’.⁴²

Such projects are a crucial part of how we can think about moving on (or moving through) this past, and they continue to call attention to the ongoing problems that these legacies have fostered in contemporary British society. For all their contemporary relevance, however, they have not yet fully captured the diversity with which members of the British public responded to decolonization at the moment of imperial decline. Stephen Howe has argued that ‘asserting the enduring centrality of

³⁶ Bush, ‘Moving On,’ 192.

³⁷ Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*.

³⁸ Shula Marks, ‘History, the Nation and Empire: Sniping from the Periphery,’ *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990): 112.

³⁹ Emilie Cameron, ‘Indigenous Spectrality and the Politics of the Postcolonial Ghost Story,’ *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008): 383.

⁴⁰ Despite adopting this vocabulary at times, Thompson’s account of the enduring effect of empire on Britain is one of the least constrained by frameworks of trauma.

⁴¹ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*; Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Marcus Collins, ‘Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain,’ *Journal of British Studies* 36, 2 (1997): 207-38; Chris Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’ in our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963,” *Journal of British Studies* 36, 2 (1997): 207-238; R.L. Doty, ‘Immigration and National Identity: Constructing the Nation,’ *Review of International Studies* 22 (1996): 235-255.

⁴² Schwarz, ‘The Re-Racialisation of Britain,’ 73.

empire to British contemporary life is not so much an historical argument as a political or, indeed, ethical (anti-racist) imperative.⁴³ The commonly used vocabulary of absences, amnesia, shadows and ghosts gives the empire an emotional charge—one suffused with connotations of guilt, shame and nostalgic longing—that was simply not there in many of the ways in which people interacted with the declining and former empire. This is not to say that the legacies of the imperial past were not present in the ways that the British public engaged with the spaces of the declining empire, nor is it to suggest that shame, violence and trauma played *no* part in the domestic experience of decolonization.⁴⁴ But this thesis argues that we also need to recognize and account for how, in the 1960s, the British Empire was understood in ways other than nostalgia and guilt.

This means thinking not just about the *decline* of empire in British society but also the *production* of replacements. It means questioning how other global and domestic changes in the postwar period might temper feelings of loss and ignite a sense of new possibilities—possibilities that could draw on imperial traditions, networks and experiences without necessarily being drowned by them. New patterns of international engagement emerged in the wake of decolonization, just as old relationships also endured. This thesis is not an attempt to provide a restorative account of the British Empire (one need not look far to find plenty of those), nor is it an effort to obscure the traumatic effect of an imperial past on a colonising power; it is instead an effort to complicate our understanding of the public's experience of a particular moment of Britain's imperial decline. This thesis hopes to outline a much wider range of engagements with the ideas and spaces of empire, showing that, alongside guilt, nostalgia and blind ignorance, there is also room in this narrative to talk about productivity, newness and enthusiasm.

But why has this wider interest not already been captured? If regret, guilt, nostalgia, decline and isolationism form the keystones of the 'narratives' or 'stories' of nation studied to this date, to pick up on a more diverse response to the end of empire we clearly need to look elsewhere. As this thesis will show, frameworks other than the national narrative can give a much broader and more diverse sense of the

⁴³ Howe, 'Internal Decolonization?' 289-90.

⁴⁴ Again, it is important to reinstate the role of violence in Britain's colonial past. For discussions of this see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld, 2005) and Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Cape, 2005).

domestic experience of decolonization. While this project does not lose sight of the imperial nation, it adopts a geographical framework that is distinct from existing studies of domestic decolonization in two key ways. It broadens its scope to take into account how international issues and processes of globalisation also affected the outlook of the British public at this time, while simultaneously narrowing its focus to take account of the individuals, organisations and communities that made up the British public.

A Shrinking Empire in a Shrinking World: Issues of Scale in 1960s Britain

On 27 July 1866 *The Times* printed an article titled ‘Shrinking World’ that celebrated the establishment of a telegraph connection between Britain and the United States:

The Old and the New World will be in telegraphic communication before tomorrow night. The prospect opened to the world by this achievement is so marvellous that any attempt to describe it must give only a faint and feeble picture [...] There can be no doubt that in a few years the entire globe will be spanned by the telegraph wires and the news of the planet will be given every morning in the London papers [...] It is a great work, a glory to our age and nation, and the men who have achieved it deserve to be honoured among the benefactors of their race.⁴⁵

Exactly one hundred years later, on a Wednesday in 1966, *The Times* selected this short article to reprint in full as an instalment of its regular ‘on this day’ feature. Though no new commentary was added to the piece, the themes of nationhood, communication and a shrinking world that it expressed would certainly have spoken to the newspaper’s 1966 readership. In the ‘News from Overseas’ section of the same edition readers in London and across Britain could learn that the United Nations General Secretary was attending talks in Moscow; Buddhists were calling for a stop to fire suicides in Vietnam; the earnings of the Suez Canal were up by three million pounds; and Rhodesian students were being kicked out of university for their role in protest demonstrations. If it had seemed as though the world was shrinking in 1866, the rapid development of communication and transport technologies in the postwar period meant that world of 1966 seemed to be getting smaller still.

⁴⁵ ‘Shrinking World,’ *The Times*, 27 July 1866.

It is evident that in the decades following the Second World War the British public felt a renewed sense of living in a ‘shrinking world’. The phrase was in popular use by politicians, journalists, religious figures, businessmen and humanitarian workers. Debates surrounding how the British nation should situate itself as an important player in this developing new world played out in Parliament, the press and other public arenas. In the pages of broadsheet newspapers the world was described as shrinking when markets expanded into new geographical areas; when increased air travel required new international health regulations to stop the spread of disease; and when the threat of nuclear attack made the internal affairs of one country the immediate concern of another.⁴⁶ In each of these examples the use of the phrase brought together associated ideas of accessibility, visibility and interconnectedness. According to R.J.D. Evans, a shrinking world was a world in which ‘most major issues—economic, political and military—are [...] universal in their import’.⁴⁷

These examples describe the predicaments and possibilities raised by political, economic and military conditions, but the shrinking world also influenced aspects of British social and cultural life. Discussions here were centred on ideas of mobility—including actual and vicarious travel—as well as the need for members of British civil society to interact with others in the shrinking world. While Britain’s main airline BOAC boasted it was ‘unfold[ing] the world’ and advertisements for television travelogues claimed that they could ‘take you around the world in your armchair’,⁴⁸ the manifestoes and constitutions of numerous civic and social organisations urged their membership to take advantage of improved transport and communication technology in order to engage with the outside world. In the 1960s and 1970s organisations and causes that campaigned on international issues—including Oxfam, Amnesty International, the World Wildlife Fund, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Christian Aid, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and the Anti-Apartheid Movement—emerged and expanded at an impressive rate, drawing their support from increasingly international bases.

It was something of a paradox that the world seemed to become more accessible, more visible and more interconnected at the moment of imperial decline.

⁴⁶ ‘Salesmen “Too Diffident,”’ *The Times*, 9 May 1961; ‘New Health Regulations For Air Passengers Predicted,’ *The Times*, 11 February 1966.

⁴⁷ R. J. D. Evans, ‘A Commonwealth Magazine?’ *The Times*, 13 May 1959.

⁴⁸ ‘BOAC Advertisement,’ *The Times*, 6 April 1962; *Amateur Cine World*, October 1959.

In the decades following the Second World War the British Empire lost 500 million people; with each independence ceremony, the pink area on the map grew slightly smaller. Harold Macmillan captured this confluence of events in a speech given to the South African Parliament on 3 February 1960. One of the most famous statements of British decolonization, the ‘Wind of Change’ speech was not just about the need to recognize and respond to growing African nationalisms, but also about how to do so in the context of a shrinking world (one in which the threat of Communism loomed particularly close). Macmillan located the cause of these new nationalisms in the ‘achievements of western civilisation pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge, applying science in the service of human needs, expanding food production, speeding and multiplying communication and above all spreading education’—all features of the globalising shrinking world—and argued that Britain’s responsibility to these nations was shaped by this same context of interconnectedness: ‘we must recognise that in this shrinking world in which we live today the internal policies of one nation may have effects outside it [...] Nothing we do in this small world can be done in a corner or remain hidden.’⁴⁹

Scholarship on the political and diplomatic dimensions of decolonization has long been sensitive to the interplay between international and imperial concerns. Wm Roger Louis meticulously details the pressure put on Britain to decolonize by the United States and United Nations.⁵⁰ More recently, in the edited collection *Britain’s Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, Philip Murphy considers how Britain’s desire to project power on a global scale saw it reaching far beyond the bounds of its formal empire; Jim Tomlinson reveals how British economic policy worked to shape a global *and* imperial economic system; and Richard Whiting discusses how Britain’s presence as America’s ally in world politics influenced debates within domestic British politics.⁵¹

This work complicates our understanding of Britain’s experience of decolonization, yet it reveals little about how the relationship between the imperial and international played out away from Whitehall, within the everyday lives of the

⁴⁹ Harold MacMillan Speech to Houses of Parliament, Cape Town, 3 February 1960. Accessed at Empire Online [<http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/contents/document-detail.aspx?sectionid=126&type=search>, accessed 1 September 2012].

⁵⁰ Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: the Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonisation; Collected Essays* (London: I B Tauris, 2006).

⁵¹ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*.

British public. To date, the complex changing nature of the imperial/international dynamic has received little attention in histories of postwar British culture and society. Experiences of empire in the 1960s were strongly inflected with influences that stemmed both from Britain's wider role as a global power and also the involvement of international rather than imperial organisations and networks. Not only is it incredibly difficult to disaggregate these influences from each other, it is not necessarily productive to do so. This thesis considers how these two shrinking worlds affected the way in which members of British society looked outwards in the 1960s. Through what frameworks and discourses did members of civil society come to participate in a shrinking world that so many felt was their duty to understand? And to what extent did international frameworks come to take precedence over imperial ones during this period of imperial decline? By situating decolonization within the context of mobility, social movements, humanitarian organisations and discourses of international understanding we can recognize how these opportunities might have tempered a sense of loss. Asking these important questions also helps us to avoid overemphasising the importance of the 'nation' in the public's experience of decolonization.

'Glocality': Thinking With and Through the Nation

Antoinette Burton has been critical of the tendency of new imperial histories to 'shore up the nation and re-constitute its centrality.'⁵² As Burton complains, despite scholars' recognition that empire had a constitutive impact on metropolitan society, 'Britain—and England within it—tends to remain the fixed referent, the *a priori* body upon which empire is inscribed.'⁵³ This critique is at least as if not more relevant to scholarship on the end of empire. Some scholars have made explicit their belief that the nation, when studied in relation to imperialism, is indivisible. Anthony Hartley, for example, when contemplating the relationship between empire and national self-confidence, speculates that 'the trophies of imperial success were probably as reassuring in Notting Dale as in Pall Mall.'⁵⁴ More commonly, however, the assumption is implicit, reflected instead in the casual use of the term metropole to

⁵² Burton, 'Who needs the Nation?' 229.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁴ Anthony Hartley, 'The Lost Vocation,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 15 (1980): 68.

variously describe London, England and Britain and in repeated discussion of unsituated ‘narratives of nation’. Not only does this approach increase the likelihood of a distorted understanding of cultural decolonization, particularly when places or institutions with a strong or distinctive imperial tradition are taken to be representative of the nation, it also precludes the discovery of a range of potentially far more complex and subtle configurations of the relationship between ‘home’ and the outside world that might bypass the national narrative.

Burton’s edited collection *After the Imperial Turn* points to a need for the conceptualisation of alternative geographies of empire that move beyond the metropole/colony binary. The solutions put forward by its contributors typically call for an expansion of scale and the consideration of wide international networks that cut across national boundaries. In his consideration of French colonial history, for example, Gary Wilder argues that the limits of the national paradigm can be overcome by widening the unit of study beyond the nation to take account of international networks such as regional economies, diasporic communities, transnational social movements, religious formations and, in particular, the political *form*.⁵⁵

The recent enthusiastic embrace of ‘transnational’ histories embodies many of these same principles and can offer further insights into how we might best understand the relationship between the global and local in relation to the domestic experience of imperialism. A central concern for much of this work has been to understand how issues of global concern become part of the everyday local experiences of people. Akira Iriye argues that the postwar boom in international institutions described in the previous section has been crucial to the development of a global community.⁵⁶ Recent years have seen a surge in efforts to understand the workings and impacts of international organisations, institutions and movements.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Gary Wilder, ‘Unthinking French History: Colonial Studies Beyond National Identity,’ in Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn*, 124-43.

⁵⁶ Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organisations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2002).

⁵⁷ For work on these movements and organisations see Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1992); Nick Clarke, ‘Town Twinning in Cold-War Britain: (Dis)continuities in Twentieth-Century Municipal Internationalism,’ *Contemporary British History* 24, 2 (2010): 173-191; Patricia Clavin, ‘Defining Transnationalism,’ *Contemporary European History* 14, 4 (2005): 421-439; Holger Nehring, ‘National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communication and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957-1964,’ *Contemporary European History* 14, 4 (2005): 559-582; Ruth Jachertz and Alexander Nützenadel, ‘Coping with Hunger? Visions of a Global Food System, 1930-1960,’ *Journal*

Yet despite the interest of some of these scholars on the ‘everyday’, work on transnational epistemic communities is still primarily concerned with the role of ‘elites’—businessmen, economists, military men, experts and the leaders of protest movements and political parties—leaving the experiences of the public and the many ways in which they were exposed to international issues under-studied and under-conceptualized.⁵⁸ This thesis addresses this neglect through its attention to British associational life in local settings.

Alan Lester has been at the fore of those pushing for a networked approach to imperial history. As he argues, newer concepts such as networks, webs and circuits are useful in ‘allowing the social and cultural, as well as the economic, histories of Britain and its colonies to be conceived as more fluidly and reciprocally interrelated’. Such approaches are fundamental to enabling us to think about the ‘inherent relationality of nodal points or “centres” within an empire.’⁵⁹ While Lester’s primary concern in adopting a networked approach is how we might put back together the fragments of imperial history, the conceptual developments that he outlines can also inform the study of the more domestic dimensions of Britain’s experience of decolonization. This project shares the belief that it is possible to ‘think through the nation’ by simultaneously reducing and expanding the subject of enquiry—by seeing the sphere of experience in which members of the British public encountered the empire as simultaneously local and global (or, to borrow Robert Robertson’s term, ‘glocal’).⁶⁰ Studying the experience of decolonization both within specific local contexts and across the networks of *inter-* and *intranational* interaction between these contexts can offer an alternate way of thinking about the cultural dimensions of decolonization that avoids overemphasis of the national paradigm.

In 1993, amidst a surge of pleas for imperial historians to take account of the impact of the empire on domestic Britain, Julia Bush published a short article on Northamptonshire’s forgotten place in the British Empire.⁶¹ While conducting research for a learning pack on the topic for secondary schools, Bush found large

of Global History 6 (2011): 99-119; Antoine Vion, ‘The Institutionalization of International Friendship,’ *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 10, 2 (2007): 281-297.

⁵⁸ Holger Nehring’s ‘National Internationalists’ is an exception to this trend.

⁵⁹ Alan Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,’ *History Compass* 4, 1 (2006): 124–141.

⁶⁰ Ulrich Beck, ‘The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies,’ *Theory, Culture and Society* 19 (2002): 17-31.

⁶¹ Julia Bush, ‘Moving on: And Looking Back,’ *History Workshop* 36 (1993): 183-194.

numbers of objects associated with the region's imperial history 'hidden away' in local archives and museums. Her study provides a useful model for the ways in which empire might be reinstated in local British settings. Shula Mark's roughly contemporaneous 'snipe' at the 'extraordinary historical amnesia' surrounding the domestic social impact of empire contains a similar call for the integration of traditional histories 'from above' with histories 'from below'. 'It is not that we need to jettison the small and the local', she argues, 'but that we do need to see "the connections between things."⁶² Localism need not be a negation of transnationalism.

Although Marks's and Bush's wider calls for historians to take account of the impact of the empire on domestic Britain have yielded a substantial and varied response, the particular nuances that they point to between the local, the national, and the global seem to have been lost in the majority of considerations of cultural decolonization. As described above, the local, the individual and the everyday are generally overlooked in favour of cultural products that often exist in remove from any physical or geographical context.⁶³ Contributions to the recent edited collection *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* that account for some of the different experiences within Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Manchester have started to show how experiences of the declining empire could be mediated 'as much through the locality and region as through the nation'.⁶⁴ But while this collection does contribute to the growing body of work on how space and place might function as 'repositories of social meaning', its geographical focus on imperial cities largely overlooks the experiences of rural and small town England. By revisiting Bush's abandoned approach to the 'local' resonances of cultural decolonization and by beginning to pay attention to the small we can get a better idea of the ways in which empire was (if at all) woven into the fabric of everyday life. Looking at how issues of empire were articulated and explored across Britain not only gives us access to a much broader geographical range of experiences, it also encourages a more nuanced understanding of the home/away binary in postwar Britain.

⁶² Shula Marks, 'History, the Nation and Empire: Sniping from the Periphery,' *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990):116.

⁶³ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*; the essays in Ward's *British Culture and the End of Empire* predominantly focus on institutional media output, including mass media responses to the Coronation and the conquering of Everest, published literary travel accounts, television satire, feature films, and popular children's literature.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *Britain's Experience*. See especially Tom Devine, 'Break-Up of Britain?' 168-9, 175-80.

This approach has already reaped great rewards in work on the earlier imperial period. Looking at the mid-nineteenth century, for example, Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects* focuses on the local rather than national networks through which Briton's engaged with empire. Though the Birmingham focus of the book is not flagged in its title—which alludes to a broader history of the metropole and the 'English Imagination'—Hall is quick to delineate her topic in the introduction. From her case studies of Birmingham and the Baptist Mission to Jamaica, Hall seeks to confirm a wider ranging hypothesis that 'colony and metropole are terms which can be understood only in relation to each other.' Birmingham is selected as a 'provincial town' through which to explore what provincial men and women more widely knew of empire and how they knew it.⁶⁵ Hall is sensitive to Birmingham's specificities and generally careful when drawing 'national' conclusions from Birmingham sources. With the exception of the conclusion, in which Birmingham is almost entirely set aside in favour of a national picture, Hall foregrounds the local contingencies of Birmingham throughout, paying close attention to the social make-up of the city, its industry and its strong Baptist tradition. As Lester rightly praises, Hall's study also productively draws out the ways in which the connective trajectories of Birmingham and the Baptist mission in Jamaica worked to mould each place.⁶⁶

Similarly, Elizabeth Buettner's *Empire Families* offers an analysis of Britons returning from India that takes into account the importance of geographically located social networks to the sorts of experiences that those resettling in Britain might have. A particular strength of this analysis is Buettner's treatment of the Bayswater area in London. Avoiding the tendency of some historians to falsely conceptualize London as both homogenous and simplistically representative of 'the nation', Buettner takes into consideration the local peculiarities of Bayswater, known as London's Asia Minor.⁶⁷ Through her discussion of local shops such as Whiteley's, associations such as the Theosophical Society and the congregation of Christ Church at Lancaster Gate, and local hotels and boarding houses advertising their services for British families returning from overseas, Buettner is able to stress the importance of geographically

⁶⁵ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 11.

⁶⁶ Lester, 'Imperial Networks,' 139. For another carefully balanced analysis of the interconnected trajectories of locations in Britain and the colonies see Gordon Stewart's study of the links between Dundee and Calcutta: Gordon Stewart, *Jute and Empire: the Calcutta Jute Wallahs and the Landscapes of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 212.

situated social networks and the factors that might contribute to a particularly strong sense of community among Britons who had returned from service in India.⁶⁸

Finally, Jim English's recent study of Empire Day celebrations in the first half of the twentieth century is an interesting example of what might be achieved by adopting a methodology that looks at local particulars alongside national frameworks. With the aim of documenting the ways in which Empire Day both represented and configured shifting attitudes towards the empire, English looks at 'local' sources such as published autobiographies and local press descriptions to consider the role played by individuals and communities in shaping Empire Day celebrations. He frames this within a consideration of nation-wide Empire Day initiatives including the way in which Conservative Party activists used British-Empire-Union-commissioned Empire Day medals to '[counteract] the activities of the socialists'; the active support of the Women's Institute and Salvation Army; and the Labour Party's failed 1934 directive that Empire Day be changed to Commonwealth Day. English's approach allows him to show that the relationship between national and local engagement with Empire Day was a two-way street and that community agency played a significant role in shaping the ways in which individuals experienced and remembered the day.⁶⁹

As Shula Marks argues, local case studies need not be insular or parochial.⁷⁰ Many organisations in this period existed simultaneously at a local, national, and global level. Christopher Rootes suggests that social movements usually 'network collective action across geographical space' and, in this sense, they allow and encourage their members to transcend the merely local.⁷¹ It is this particular interest in the ways in which organisations and associations of civil society can become conduits for the flow of information between local, national, imperial and global spaces that guides the central methodology of this thesis. How did individuals and communities navigate these international networks? Through what frameworks did these networks encourage their members to engage with the empire? How did the ideological preoccupations and practical limitations of associational organisations shape the local or personal realities of 'experiencing empire'?

⁶⁸ Buettner, *Empire Families*, 210-219.

⁶⁹ Jim English, 'Empire Day in Britain: 1904-1958,' *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006): 247-246.

⁷⁰ Marks, 'History, the Nation and Empire,' 117.

⁷¹ Christopher Rootes, 'From the Local to the Global: the Globalization of Humanitarian Concern and the Emergence of "Global Citizenship,"' paper prepared for panel on 'Europeanisation and Democracy in Movement,' European Consortium for Political Research Conference, Pisa, 6-8 September 2007.

The Spaces and Faces: Methodology and Case Studies

In order to assess interactions between the local, the global and the imperial in relation to Britain's experience of decolonization, this thesis uses five separate but overlapping case studies, each of which worked at a local, national and international level. The thesis is organized by institution and individual rather than thematically. As is described below, each of the case studies engaged with decolonization in multiple ways and this approach makes it possible to consider how these different engagements played out across the different structures and varied memberships of each organisation. Collectively the examples make it possible consider the importance of sociability, education, friendship, and philanthropy in determining the frameworks through which members of the public engaged with the declining empire.

Chapter One assesses the afterlife of empire as it was lived by those who had been the most involved. Using the various activities of the Royal Commonwealth Society it considers the key role that many former participants of the imperial project played in shaping how the empire and Commonwealth were understood among the British public, and questions the extent to which the Society was able to adapt in the face of rapid decolonization. Chapter Two looks at the international work of the Women's Institute in order to consider how groups without a specific Commonwealth remit engaged with the spaces of the declining empire. The WI's broad spectrum of motivations, activities, and concerns makes the WI an ideal group of which to ask: what did the empire mean in the 1960s to those for whom it did not mean everything? The Institute and its local branches also allow us to think about the role of gender and rurality in shaping experiences of empire and ideas of 'home'.

While the other four chapters explore intra-organizational networks, the middle chapter in this thesis adopts a different methodology and focuses instead on an individual, Charles Chislett. Chislett, was a retired bank manager from Rotherham, South Yorkshire, a keen traveller, an amateur filmmaker, and an incredibly active member of his local community. His commitment to his local Rotherham community and his lack of connection to London's political circles make him atypical of the elite individuals who have traditionally received focused attention in studies of decolonization. This focus makes it possible to map the wider networks of service clubs, community groups, charitable projects and personal contacts that made up

Chislett's ongoing engagement with the empire and assess how the personal experiences of one man might resonate across local networks of sociability and public service.

Chapters Four and Five assess humanitarian engagements with the decolonising empire. By looking at Britain's participation in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC) and the development of the charitable organisation Christian Aid, these chapters consider how international and imperial frameworks overlapped in both religious and secular practices of aid and development. Moreover, they track the influence of imperial philanthropic and missionary traditions on these post-imperial practices. Most work on non-governmental organisations in relation to global civil society has tended to focus on what Matthew Hilton describes as the 'more dramatic forms of campaigning and protests that emerged out of New Social Movements associated with the 1960s'—women's rights, anti-nuclear campaigns and the anti-apartheid movement.⁷² But less politicized charitable campaigns such as the FFHC and Christian Aid were also an important part of Britain's postwar experience. As these chapters explore, both of these organisations provided people with diverse opportunities to participate in everyday forms of international activism—attending fundraising events, running local committees and taking part in educational activities.

The thesis focuses on the years between 1960 and 1970, not only the most intense period of decolonization, but also a key moment in the development of international organizations. Given the intentions of this study to uncover everyday, local and individual experiences of decolonization, an institution-focused approach does pose certain limitations. In each case, the most detailed archival material exists at the level of the central administration. The thesis uses the central archives of the Women's Institute (held at the Women's Library), the Royal Commonwealth Society (held at the Cambridge University Library) and Christian Aid (held at the School of Oriental and African Studies). While the Freedom from Hunger Campaign has no central archive, the minutes of the Central UK Committee and its correspondence with a number of government departments are held in the National Archives at Kew. It is within each of these administrative records that the organisations discuss their intentions, their motivations and their agendas most explicitly. Yet the administration

⁷² Matthew Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary: Non-Governmental Organisations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain,' *Twentieth Century British History* 22, 2 (2011): 240.

of an organisation does not necessarily reflect its membership, or the work going on at the grassroots level. This project therefore makes every attempt to move beyond these central records in order to uncover the relationship between national bodies and the local practices of associational life. In addition to published material and records held in each organisation's central archives, it also makes use, where possible, of local archives of branch activity, the local press and personal papers. The chapter on Charles Chislett, for instance, makes extensive use of his personal papers held at the Rotherham Local Archives Service and of material relating to his amateur filmmaking held at the Yorkshire Film Archive. The chapter on the Freedom from Hunger Campaign also draws on Charles Chislett's personal papers to inform a case study of local fundraising efforts (Chislett was a local treasurer for the campaign).

While an institution-based approach may limit the depth to which we can explore certain local activities, it allows for the thesis to cover a much broader geographical scope and offers opportunities to consider how experiences of decolonization differed across the country, in the north and south, and in rural and urban areas. From these institutional archives we get glimpses of life in places ranging from rural and isolated Gunnislake in Cornwall, where a Christian Aid committee was set up, to Burythorpe in Yorkshire, where a Women's Institute held sock darning competitions and hosted travel talks; in spaces ranging from the decaying Royal Commonwealth Society branch building in Sussex to the school assembly rooms of Rotherham. Despite this geographical range, it is necessary to note that the vast majority of the examples discussed in this thesis fall within England. For this reason, while this project does reflect on local, national and regional identities, it does not explore the distinct identities of Scotland, Wales and Ireland or reflect on the specific ways in which these countries might have interacted with the declining empire. With regards to terminology, despite using predominantly English case studies, the thesis uses the term 'British' rather than 'English' to describe these members of civil society because this was the term contemporaries most commonly used when describing national interactions with the outside world (and used almost exclusively to describe relationships with the empire).

These case studies do not, of course, represent a full spectrum of British society. Their memberships and supporters were largely middle and upper middle class, mostly middle aged or older, and tended to sit towards the right of the political spectrum. This thesis does not, therefore, intend to offer a generalized account of the

‘public’ experience. There is still considerable scope for much more work on associational life, and an altogether different picture might emerge if we were to look at the international engagements of the Cooperative movement, the United Nations Association, or the Anti-Apartheid Movement, for example, or if we focused our attention on youth movements and considered the experiences of a younger generation. Despite these limitations, this project hopes to provide a far more complex account of civil engagements with the declining empire than that which exists in the current scholarship.

Allowing For Complexity

Stephen Howe asserts that ‘post-imperiality should engage historical attention’ but warns that ‘such investigation will go seriously astray if it seeks to overcompensate for earlier neglect of these themes by proclaiming or assuming their absolute centrality to contemporary British history.’⁷³ As Thompson describes, ‘new’ imperial histories have been accused of expanding the definition of ‘imperialism’ to include phenomena only loosely or tangentially associated with Britain’s colonies.’⁷⁴ Critics of postcolonial works have similarly argued that scholars’ commitment to a particular political project may have encouraged them to make broad generalizations about the ‘colonial mindset’, resulting in works that obscure the multiple nature of the colonial experience.⁷⁵ Catherine Nash has criticised postcolonial scholarship as ‘over-generalising and insensitive to the specificities of temporal and spatial contexts’, while Dane Kennedy suggests that their logic is often reliant on a ‘wilful neglect of causation, context, and chronology’.⁷⁶

The overarching aim of this thesis is to reveal the complexity of public interactions with the declining and former empire, but it is also wary of overstating the importance of empire to 1960s associational life. To heed Howe’s and Thompson’s warnings, therefore, the thesis aims to keep in mind both the complexity of the empire and wider world with which members of civil society engaged *and* the

⁷³ Stephen Howe, ‘Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post-colonial Trauma,’ *Twentieth Century British History* 14, 3 (2003): 303.

⁷⁴ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 21.

⁷⁵ See Porter, *Absentminded Imperialists*; and Porter, ‘Further Points on Imperial Absent-Mindedness,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 1 (2008): 101-117.

⁷⁶ Catherine Nash, ‘Cultural Geography: Postcolonial Cultural Geographies,’ *Progress in Human Geography* 2, 26 (2002): 220; Dane Kennedy, ‘Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory,’ in James D. Le Sueur, ed., *The Decolonization Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 15.

broader constellation of changes that affected British society in the 1960s.⁷⁷ It remains attentive to the difficulties of disentangling the specifically ‘imperial’ from wider ‘international’ or narrower ‘domestic’ phenomena and recognizes that decolonization was one of a constellation of factors that influenced 1960s British society, acting alongside globalisation, Commonwealth immigration, the growth of the Welfare State, concerns about the domestication of working-class males, fears over the Americanisation of British culture, dismay at the decline in deference, and debates surrounding the move to European Economic Community, amongst many other factors.⁷⁸

This project also draws particular attention to the Commonwealth, a dimension of the decolonization experience that has been grossly overlooked within recent scholarship. The Commonwealth underwent significant changes in the postwar period. When newly independent India and Pakistan joined in 1947 the association became multiracial for the first time. In the decades following 1947, the ‘Old Commonwealth’ of white dominions—loosely bounded by bonds of kith and kin and shared traditions—transformed into a multiracial ‘New Commonwealth’, rapidly expanding as newly independent countries joined its ranks. Recent scholarship on the Commonwealth has focused on the political and institutional dimensions of this transition, overlooking the informal, personal connections that made up the so-called ‘People’s Commonwealth.’⁷⁹ One significant exception to this trend is Ruth Craggs, whose 2009 doctoral thesis considers the changing nature of Commonwealth imaginings in postwar Britain, focusing on the Royal Commonwealth Society and Commonwealth Institute to explore ideas of hospitality, cosmopolitanism and

⁷⁷ For work on public responses on different dimensions of imperial decline see John MacKenzie, ‘The Persistence of Empire,’ in Ward, ed., *British Culture*, which for considers shifting popular attitudes in relation to three postwar ‘implosions of empire’; Wendy Webster has considered press and cinematic representations of the colonial Wars in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus, relating a wider argument about the domestication and feminisation of postwar national identity to media responses to a specific aspect of decolonization in Webster, ‘There’ll Always Be an England’; Joanna Lewis and David Anderson have considered separately public responses to the ‘dirty war’ in Kenya David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Joanna Lewis, ‘“Daddy Wouldn’t Buy Me a Mau Mau”’: The British Popular Press and the Deomoralization of Empire,’ in E.S. Odhiambo and John Lonsdale, eds., *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 227-50.

⁷⁸ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 23. These issues are explored in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (Rivers Oram Press, 1999); Richard English and Michael Kenny, eds., *Rethinking British Decline* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2000).

⁷⁹ The Commonwealth has attracted surprisingly little historical attention. Exceptions include David McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth* (1991); Krishnan Srinivasan, *The Rise, Decline and Future of the British Commonwealth* (2005); Tim Shaw, *Commonwealth: Inter- and Non-state Contributions to Global Governance* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2007).

modernity. Cragg shows how ideas about the Commonwealth were shifting and contested in this period, drawing not only on imperial traditions and racial stereotypes but also offering opportunities to think about modernity and progress.⁸⁰ There remains significant scope for further study of the Commonwealth in the context of decolonisation and this project hopes to contribute to this emerging field by looking at how sections of civil society who had not led traditionally imperial lives became involved in debates about the modern Commonwealth. The networks of interaction that were created, nurtured, and sustained through the ideology of a 'People's Commonwealth' prompt interesting questions about the ongoing spatial relevance of Britain's former empire after decolonization, about the extent to which the Commonwealth provided a buffer to the potential trauma of the loss of empire, about the developing interactions between international and imperial frameworks, and about the extent to which Commonwealth links were simply commonsense to the British in the 1960s.

It is with these international and domestic complexities in mind that this thesis aims to consider both the lingering imprint of empire on British lives in the 1960s and also the more immediate impact of the processes of decolonization on those same lives. The 1960s were not only a crucial time of inventory and attempted preservation, but also a time in which many institutions and individuals attempted to redefine Britain's relationship with a multi-racial Commonwealth and a new world order. Throughout the decade members of British associational life reasserted, reframed and repackaged their relationship with the spaces of the Commonwealth and former empire. The multiple engagements that I will discuss show that decolonization could be at once disruptive and reinvigorating, traumatic and yet at times easy to overlook.

⁸⁰ Ruth Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies of the Modern Commonwealth from 1947 to 1973' (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2009).

Chapter One:

‘Time is running out’: Learning, Lobbying and Lunching in the Royal Commonwealth Society

The Burden of Empire

In 1969, the Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat, A.L. Adu, gave a speech at the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) in which he contrasted his own approach to the Commonwealth with that of the British population and the gathered audience to whom he spoke. Adu was from Ghana—the first British colony in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence—and he spoke to the RCS as a representative of the multiracial ‘New Commonwealth’:

I am uncommitted to the past, to the weight of British colonial history, to the curious store-houses of emotion and reflex about colonial rule and the British Empire. I do not feel guilty about the Commonwealth. I do not see it as a relic of empire [...] I do not feel sentimental about the Commonwealth [...] Naturally I am not untouched by the Commonwealth’s past but I, unlike others in this country in particular, am not intimately bound up in it. I have, I hope, no weight of feeling to shift from one shoulder to the other before I can think clearly about it.¹

Was Adu right about the weight of feeling that he saw resting on his audience’s shoulders? Of all of the large associational organizations that existed in 1960s Britain, the Royal Commonwealth Society was the most intimately bound up in Britain’s imperial past.² Its membership was largely made up of colonial administrators, retired officers in the colonial civil service, and businessmen with imperial interests. To become a member was to self-identify as a sympathizer with the empire, the Commonwealth, or both. People joined the club, suggests RCS

¹ A.L. Adu, ‘The Reality and Potential Capacity of the Commonwealth,’ *Commonwealth Journal* 12 (February 1969):12.

² The RCS was not the only society to attempt to foster an interest in the Empire/Commonwealth or to provide spaces in which those who were interested could meet—the Royal Overseas League, the English-Speaking Union and the Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship all provided such services. The RCS was, however, the largest and the most senior.

Secretary-General Stuart Mole, ‘almost like adding one of those plastic badges to your lapel as a strand of your beliefs or your identity.’³ To understand the impact of decolonization on associational life more broadly it is first necessary to consider its effects on those most ‘touched’ by the empire’s past; this section of society acted as an important conduit for imperial experience, information and opinion.

The RCS began its life as the Royal Colonial Institute in 1868 with the following objectives:

To provide a place of meeting for all Gentlemen connected with the Colonies [...] and others taking an issue with Colonial and Indian affairs; to establish a Reading Room and Library [...] and a museum; to facilitate the interchange of experiences amongst persons representing all the Dependencies of Great Britain; to afford opportunities for the reading of Papers, and for holding Discussions upon Colonial and Indian Subjects generally; and to undertake scientific, literary and statistical investigations in connection with the British Empire.⁴

When it changed its name to the Royal Commonwealth Society in 1958, almost 100 years after its inception, it re-stated its objectives in similar, though perhaps less precise, terms:

to promote the increase and diffusion of knowledge respecting the peoples and countries of the Commonwealth; to maintain the best traditions of the Commonwealth; and to foster unity of thought and action in relation to matters of common interest.⁵

The RCS engaged with the empire/Commonwealth through varied practices aimed not only at members but also at those outside of the Society. They organized and facilitated a wide range of projects, events and activities with varying emphasis on the educational, the political, and the social. For several generations RCS headquarters in London’s Northumberland Avenue was a key reference point for people interested in the Commonwealth.⁶ The RCS’s explicit remit to foster ‘Commonwealth Consciousness’ makes it a key case study through which to consider not only the experiences of those who were heavily invested in the empire/Commonwealth, but the effect of those experiences on the wider British public.

³ Stuart Mole, from an interview conducted by Ruth Craggs, 14 July 2003, cited in Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies,’ 69.

⁴ ‘Objects of the Royal Colonial Institute, founded 1868,’ Appendix A in Trevor R. Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society, 1868-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 259.

⁵ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 218.

⁶ David McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth, 1965-90* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 208.

Although there is a significant body of research on the interwar activities of empire enthusiasts within organizations such as the Royal Overseas League and the Victoria League, considerably less work has been done on the responses of these groups to the end of empire.⁷ The Royal Commonwealth Society may have outlasted the end of empire—indeed, it is still active today—but how did an organization that was so tied up with the empire deal with its demise? How did they carry the ‘weight of British colonial history’, deal with the ‘store houses of emotion and reflex’ and process the guilt and sentiment supposedly born of their complicated relationship with the Commonwealth?

At the time and since, the Commonwealth has been commonly understood as the source of postwar immigration into Britain, or disregarded as an accidental relic of the past, as ‘the ghost or dilution of empire.’⁸ Of the scholarship on cultural decolonization that does briefly address the Commonwealth, the majority sees it as little more than a buffer for those who were loath to give up the empire.⁹ Darwin, for instance, argues that the Commonwealth provided an ‘anaesthetizing rhetoric’ that helped Britain come to terms with the loss of the empire.¹⁰ This interpretation is certainly not without foundation: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office reported that the ‘lack of forceful promotion of knowledge of and interest in the Commonwealth played into the hands of propagandists against “imperialism” and “Colonialism.”’ Most people, the report concluded, had ‘reacted by refusing to think about the Commonwealth at all’.¹¹ But responses to the Commonwealth in the 1960s were much more complex than is generally acknowledged. In addition to the retrenchment of old white Commonwealth ideals of kith and kin by those seeking to shore up the remaining vestiges of the empire, the 1960s also saw new forms of Commonwealth identity take shape. The addition of newly independent African, Caribbean and Asian nations—and the increasing prominence of speakers such as

⁷ See, for example, Barbara Bush, ‘Britain’s Conscience on Africa: White Women, Race and Imperial Politics in Inter-War Britain,’ in Clare Midgley, ed., *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007), 201; Clare Midgley, ‘Bringing the Empire Home: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1930,’ in Hall and Rose, *At Home with Empire*; J.O. Springhall, ‘Lord Meath, Youth and Empire,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, 4 (1970): 97-111.

⁸ Arnold Smith, in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary, 1868-1968*, ed. Harry Miller (London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1968), 63.

⁹ For a summary of more recent attitudes, see K. Ford and S. Katwala *Reinventing the Commonwealth* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 1999), 50-51.

¹⁰ John Darwin, ‘The Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline Since 1900,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1985): 27-43.

¹¹ Summary of Report of an Interdepartmental Working Party on the Projection of the Commonwealth in the United Kingdom, no date, c. 1960 (National Archives [hereafter TTNA]: DO 35/8232).

A.L. Adu—reinvigorated interest in the Commonwealth and stimulated new ideas of multiracial partnership and cooperation. This chapter analyses the attempts of the Royal Commonwealth Society to transform itself from a long-established Empire society into a newly minted Commonwealth society. Did the Royal Commonwealth Society operate in the present—up to date with and engaged in the rhetoric and practices of the modern Commonwealth—or was merely the continuation of an imperial habit?

Despite its long history and the great potential offered by its substantial archival records there have been very few detailed studies of the Society. Ruth Craggs' 2009 doctoral thesis 'Cultural Geographies of the Modern Commonwealth from 1947 to 1973' is the first concerted engagement with the Society's institutional archives since Trevor Reese's *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society* commissioned for the Society's centenary in 1968.¹² Craggs uses the Society as a case study through which to dissect ideas of the 'modern' Commonwealth looking at the performance of Commonwealth identities both within the Society's headquarters and also on Society-organized trips within the empire and Commonwealth. She focuses on ideas of hospitality, familiarity, home and away, and cosmopolitanism.

Despite Craggs' sensitivity to the networks that linked the sites and spaces of her study, her focus on London and travel outside Britain overlooks the wider domestic structure of the Royal Commonwealth Society. In arguing that Society membership was not necessarily centred on the Society's headquarters, this chapter builds upon and moves beyond Craggs' study by considering the wider organization of the Society within Britain. In the 1960s international membership fluctuated at around 29,000. By 1968 there were forty-one Society branches spread across the Commonwealth, of which eight were in the United Kingdom, two in the Channel Islands, nine in Australia, seven in Canada, and four in New Zealand.¹³ Despite having branches across the old dominions, there was little interaction between the branches on an international level. In 1964 a supplemental charter had permitted branches to apply for autonomy from the central council and over the next few years the majority of international branches did so.¹⁴ In contrast, the UK branches remained closely linked to Society headquarters, reporting their activities in detail and relying

¹² Craggs, 'Commonwealth Geographies.'

¹³ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 215.

¹⁴ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 212.

on headquarters for financial support. This chapter will focus on the eight UK branches, the Society headquarters in London, and the 8,000 members living in the UK who were involved to varied degrees in the activities of the Society.

By approaching the Royal Commonwealth Society within Britain as a structure rather than simply as a site and by taking into account the differing roles played by individual members, regional branches and the central administrative committees this chapter develops a more complex understanding of how the various dimensions of the Society interacted and conflicted with each other to establish and carry out the Society's aims and objectives. As well as widening the geographical scope of the study to include the British branches of the Society this analysis also seeks to further interrogate the relationship between rhetoric and action. It focuses less on the narratives of empire and Commonwealth that were articulated through the Society's journal and lecture series—subjects Craggs has discussed sensitively and in substantial detail—and more on the ways in which the various levels of the Society attempted to enact these identities and to meet their objectives. As a membership society the RCS was funded almost exclusively by subscription fees. This shaped not only the range of schemes and activities it was able to offer, but also, and perhaps more significantly, the target audiences for whom these schemes were organized. This chapter considers the ways in which the Society encouraged or enabled both members and the wider British public to engage with the Commonwealth.

People Like Us: the Membership of the Society

As is the case with any organization of this size, the makeup of the Royal Commonwealth Society was never homogenous; it is important to acknowledge and remain sensitive to the fact that members brought with them to the Society a wide range of opinions and behaviours. Some dominant characteristics can, however, be established. The most visible members of the Society were those who held positions of prestige or authority in the Society's central administrative structure. The four men who held the position of Chairman in the 1960s shared common political, class and administrative backgrounds. Viscount (Alan Lennox) Boyd, Chairman of the Society between 1961 and 1963, had been President of the Oxford Union and the University Carlton Club (the oldest and most elite of the Conservative clubs) and was Secretary

of State for the Colonies in the Conservative government between 1954 and 1959. When the RCS introduced Boyd to their members in 1961 they described how ‘his own zest made it the exacting post it was always ought to have been; he was so very busy *reducing* the Department’s jurisdiction. He negotiated [...] the sovereignty of Ghana and Malaya, the establishment of the West Indies Federation, and British Somaliland’s penultimate step to independence.’¹⁵ Boyd was a protégé of Lord Beaverbrook, outspoken about empire free trade, and had, for much of his time at the Colonial Office, warned against granting independence prematurely on economic grounds.¹⁶ During his Chairmanship of the RCS, his advice continued to be sought by those working in the Commonwealth Office. His successor, Lord John Hope, was a Conservative MP who had been the Under-Secretary for Commonwealth Affairs and the Minister of Works. Lord Hope was followed by the Duke of Devonshire Andrew Cavendish in 1966, the sixth peer to hold office as Chairman of the Society since 1945.¹⁷ Like those before him Devonshire was closely involved in Commonwealth administration, having held the position of Conservative Minister of State at the Commonwealth Relations Office. As nephew to Harold Macmillan (who married his aunt) and husband to Deborah Mitford, Devonshire epitomized the close-knit pool of social elites from which chairmen of the Society were drawn.

Those with backgrounds in the domestic Commonwealth administration were matched by a number of prominent figures with overseas experience. The post of Secretary-General, the most important in the daily administration of the Society, was held by two men in the 1960s. The first, D.K. Daniels, had been involved in military government in Africa during the Second World War and served in a number of roles in Malaysia until his retirement in 1955. His successor, A.S.H. Kemp, had been both a civil servant and prisoner of the Japanese in Malaya.¹⁸ Despite being comparatively few in number, women had long played a prominent role in the Society’s social functions and in the 1960s a number held key committee positions. Elizabeth Owen was appointed as Vice-President of the Society in 1962, having previously been a member of the Conservative Party National Executive in the early 1950s. Although she lacked the imperial administrative experience of Daniels and Kemp, she was also

¹⁵ ‘Lord Boyd’s Commonwealth Life,’ *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 1 (1961): 4.

¹⁶ Philip Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization: The Conservative Party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa, 1951-1964* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995), 53, 197.

¹⁷ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 221-222.

¹⁸ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 224.

an active member of the Conservative Commonwealth Council and integrated into British political circles; these roles, in addition to her vice-presidency at RCS, allowed her to travel extensively in the Commonwealth.¹⁹

Those involved in the administration of the Society may occupy a more prominent place in the institutional archives, but they were far outnumbered by the rest of the Society's membership. The characteristics of this wider membership are somewhat less easy to trace, but a picture can be pieced together from various sources of information. At an international level, prohibitively high membership fees excluded most of the non-white populations of recently independent nations. The majority of RCS branches were in the old dominions, undermining Society claims that they were part of the new modern Commonwealth and not a 'small, rich man's, white man's club'.²⁰ Even those branches in 'new' Commonwealth countries failed to attract a diverse membership. The Ceylon branch, for example, was described by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as an elderly group of persons with 'wholly pre-1948 connections, who look backward to the glorious past of which they were an important part, but not forward to what they regard as an inglorious future in which they are being trampled underfoot by the mob of the shirtless.'²¹ Such a group had little interest in representing a post-imperial Commonwealth based in racial equality.

Within Britain, subscription rates to the Society were also prohibitively high for much of the population and an annual rate for those living in the London area of between nine and twelve guineas limited Society membership to the middle and upper classes.²² A questionnaire conducted in 1973 revealed that the majority of British resident members were white male professionals or retired professionals (of whom the vast majority were over forty and more than a third of whom were over fifty-five). An exception who proved the rule was Prunella Scarlett (*née* Tuff); in her twenties in the 1960s and Public Affairs Officer for the Society between 1965 and 1999, she described the majority of the membership as 'distinctly ancient and dusty'.²³ With regard to political allegiances, despite its non-party principle and the

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of Owen's travel experiences see Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 197-209.

²⁰ Smith in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 61; Kirkman in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 73.

²¹ G.D. Anderson, Memo to General Bishop, 18 March 1963 (TTNA: DO 191/149).

²² 'Report of the Central Council for year ended 31 December 1966,' *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 3 (1961): 140.

²³ Market Research 28 February 1973 (Royal Commonwealth Society Archive, Cambridge [hereafter RCS]: Public Affairs May 1969-1977); Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 107.

presence of a number of Labour members on the central council and list of vice-presidents, the Society retained the image of a Conservative organization, an image that was seen to be a hindrance when trying to attract younger and non-white members to the Society.²⁴ In a critical appraisal of the Society in 1973, it was acknowledged that on the human side they were still far from being a Commonwealth-wide society, that they were almost unknown in many Commonwealth countries and that in others they were considered to be a conservative Anglo- or post-imperial organization.²⁵

As the backgrounds of leading members of the Society discussed above suggest, much of the Society's membership had once made up the scaffolding of empire administration.²⁶ Members not on the central committees included men such as Arthur Barton (1892-1983) who had worked in Imperial Customs and Excise since 1912, with posts in Kenya, Guiana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria, and Roger Barltrop (1930-2009) who held posts in Nigeria, Rhodesia and Ankara as well as working between 1960-69 at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.²⁷ But they also included those who became involved in the empire through other means, such as Herbert Barnell (1907-1973), who held the post of Chief Scientific Advisor for the Ministry of Agriculture, but had worked as a biochemist in Trinidad in the 1930s; Edith Batten (1905-1985), who had not worked overseas or in an official capacity, but was organizing secretary of the British Association of Residential Settlements in the 1930s; Reverend John Gilbert Hindley (1910-1986) who worked in Hong Kong and London and was General Secretary of the Church Assembly Overseas Council from 1955 to 1963; and George Bilainkin (1903-1981), who worked at the *Jamaica Daily Gleaner* and the *Straits Daily Echo* in Malaysia in the inter-war period before returning to England to become a diplomatic correspondent for the *Star*.²⁸

²⁴ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 234.

²⁵ Memorandum: a Critical Appraisal of the Society, 9 January 1973 (RCS: Public Affairs, May 1969-May 1977).

²⁶ Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 69.

²⁷ 'BARTON, Arthur Edward Victor', *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007 [<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U161808>, accessed 24 Feb 2011]; 'BARLTROP, Roger Arnold Rowlandson', *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2010 ; online edn, Oct 2010 [<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U6521>, accessed 24 Feb 2011].

²⁸ 'BILAINKIN, George', *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007 [<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U162013>, accessed 24 Feb 2011]; 'BATTEN, Edith Mary', *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007 [<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U161835>, accessed 24 Feb 2011]; 'BARNELL, Herbert Rex', *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online

Even though most of these members had in some way or other led ‘imperial lives’, it would be misleading to suggest that their experiences and indeed their attitudes towards empire were necessarily all that similar. As Andrew Thompson has stressed, Britain’s relationship with its empire refuses to be reduced to big and broad generalizations.²⁹ Matters of timing and geography affected the types of imperial experiences that members were likely to have had. Some had retired from the Imperial Civil Service when the going was still good, for example, whereas other, younger members cut their teeth at times of considerable strain, and had little first-hand experience of empire that was not bound up with decolonization. Some oversaw decolonization in areas with little violence, while others became embroiled in conflicts in Malaya and Kenya. Arthur Barton, for example, retired from the Colonial Service in 1944, avoiding the era of independences, whereas Roger Baltrop experienced Nigeria as it became independent and served in Rhodesia in the years leading up to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965.

The geographical spread of membership and branches reveals more about the older generation of members than it does the younger. Branch location and membership figures did not correspond to areas with the highest or most concentrated populations; branches were predominantly located in port towns such as Bristol and Liverpool through which imperial products and personnel had long passed on their way to and from the colonies, and in areas in which returning imperial officers and administrators tended to retire. The Bristol branch was the first subsidiary branch to open in 1915, for example, and at various points was associated with the Bristol Migration Committee (which organized migration to the Commonwealth and settler colonies) and the Bristol Canadian Club.³⁰ In Guernsey and Jersey eight per cent of the total population were members of the Royal Commonwealth Society with a combined membership of 806.³¹ The Sussex branch drew members from coastal towns such as Brighton and Eastbourne, which, since the mid-nineteenth century, had held reputations as fashionable watering holes for returned colonials, providing leisure facilities, a warmer climate, and numerous private schools.³² Similarly, it is likely that the branches in Bath and in Bristol, which in 1967 had a fairly high

edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007

[<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U152040>, accessed 24 Feb 2011]

²⁹ Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 32.

³⁰ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 206.

³¹ Minutes, 27 July 1967 (RCS: Council Minutes 1868-1947).

³² Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: 2004), 212, 227-229.

membership of 724, serviced not only their own immediate populations but also the wider South West area and in particular Cheltenham Spa, the best-known British-Indian enclave in the metropole.³³

This geographical spread also confirms that members' connections to the empire were most likely to be administrative or commercial rather than religious. There was no branch in Birmingham, for example, despite its long history as a centre for the Baptist missionary movement. Perhaps more importantly, few of the branch locations were in areas with significant Commonwealth immigration and those that were often had smaller memberships than branches in the Home Counties. Compare, for example, the 597 members of the Hants and Dorset branch to the 153 in Liverpool.³⁴ In Cambridge the branch repeatedly failed to take advantage of the potential for diversity offered by the non-white Commonwealth student population. As this chapter makes clear, no matter how progressive a programme of activities the Society put on, its ability to match itself to the image of a youthful and multiracial Commonwealth that it so frequently advocated was severely limited by the demographic of its members.

That said, its ex-imperial composition does make the Royal Commonwealth Society a key point of access to expatriates returning to Britain at the end of empire. Despite the fact that an estimated five to seven million people were repatriated to Europe during the thirty-five years of decolonization following the Second World War, very little has been written about the experiences or impact of these migrations.³⁵ Many accounts of British communities overseas have commented on the recent opportunities for reconnection and shared recollection provided by the internet but, excepting the work of Elizabeth Buettner, considerably less attention has been paid to what happened to returning Britons in the years during and immediately following decolonization.³⁶ Yet, as Buettner has argued, former participants of the imperial project have played a key role in shaping how the empire was, and is,

³³ Buettner, *Empire Families*, 222.

³⁴ Report of Central Council for year ended 31 December 1967, *Commonwealth Journal*, June 1968.

³⁵ Andrea Smith, ed., *Europe's Invisible Migrants: Consequences of the Colonists' Return* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 9.

³⁶ See various chapters in Robert Bickers, ed. *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons Over the Seas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Buettner, 'Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia in Postcolonial Britain and India,' *History and Memory* (2006): 5-42; Buettner, *Empire Families*; Buettner, "'We Don't Grow Coffee and Bananas in Clapham You Know!'" Imperial Britons Back Home,' in Bickers, ed. *Settlers and Expatriates*, 302-328; Anthony Kirk-Greene, 'Decolonisation: The Ultimate Diaspora,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 36 (2001): 133-151.

understood among the wider British public.³⁷ For this reason, and as Anthony Kirk-Greene comments, the experiences of these repatriates can add a fresh dimension to the study of the domestic implications of British decolonization.³⁸

Because these ‘migrants’ were not identified in national immigration statistics it is difficult to determine precisely the scale and time frame of British repatriations.³⁹ Departures from the empire were staggered by the piece-by-piece nature of decolonization. The Indian Civil Service ended in 1947, the Sudanese Political Service in 1955, and British communities in Shanghai and Egypt deteriorated rapidly in the early 1950s. Although the Colonial Civil Service had exceeded 20,000 in 1957, the rapid decolonization of British Africa ended many careers abruptly and brought many expats back to Britain. As mentioned above, members of the RCS had participated and returned at different stages of the decolonization process. By the 1960s some had had more than a decade to settle back into domestic life, while others had only recently returned.

Buettner’s research identifies a number of key characteristics of the repatriate experience, which for many returning Britons was profoundly unsatisfying. As Buettner describes, narratives of the sense of ennui faced by men once they reached the standard civil service retirement age of fifty-five had been well established since the Victorian era.⁴⁰ Faced with disillusionment, many repatriates found relief in the form of rediscovered companions from overseas, forming communities that allowed them to associate with others of a similar background. These experiences were often exacerbated by decolonization, which engendered a sense of resentment among expatriates at Britain’s apparent betrayal of what they had worked to achieve in the empire.⁴¹ As Buettner argues, the decades immediately following decolonization were a crucial time of inventory and attempted preservation for those invested in the imperial project.⁴² Ex-colonials could either brood from the sidelines as empire was forgotten, or, more productively, take on roles as interpreters.⁴³ This chapter will consider what the Society offered to these people; how, in turn, their membership

³⁷ Buettner, ‘Cemeteries,’ 17.

³⁸ Anthony Kirk-Greene, ‘Decolonisation: The Ultimate Diaspora,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 36 (2001): 134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰ Buettner, ‘Imperial Britons Back Home,’ 315.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 312-323.

⁴² Buettner, ‘Cemeteries,’ 32.

⁴³ Buettner, ‘Britons Back Home,’ 324.

shaped the Society; and finally whether the Society functioned as a conduit through which their experiences and attitudes might have reached the wider public.

Coming to Terms with the Commonwealth

In the postwar period the Royal Commonwealth Society faced a number of significant challenges: how to adapt in the face of rapid decolonization; how to respond to and contribute to new ideas about the Commonwealth; and how to survive a public climate that was fairly apathetic towards the rhetoric of the Commonwealth. When the RCS published the following eulogy in the pages of their journal, its nominal purpose was to praise the efforts and laud the approach of outgoing chairman Earl De La Warr. Yet while the handover of the Chairmanship of the Society from De La Warr to Lord Boyd in 1961 encouraged reflection on the Society's past, it also provided an opportunity for the RCS to develop a vision for the future.

The Society has a greater contribution to make to the Commonwealth today than it has ever had in the past. As the oldest of such societies ours must not be afraid to take the lead [...] Every link which binds even two individuals in different parts of the Commonwealth is precious and to be preserved [...] Time is running out; the Society's work is urgent and must be done quickly.⁴⁴

Also published in this 1961 issue of the *Commonwealth Journal* were an introductory address from the incoming Chairman Lord Boyd, which stated that 'great problems and opportunities confront our Commonwealth', and an article by Conservative Peer and vocal advocate of the Commonwealth Patrick Maitland in which he argued that 'the Commonwealth is moving fast, perhaps without due thought about its proper nature.'⁴⁵ Together, these three statements are indicative not only of the widespread sense of urgency and uncertainty that characterized the Society's experiences in the 1960s, but also of the ambition and strong sense of duty with which the RCS faced the decade.

Not only did members have to come to terms with the loss of the empire—making what one member described as a 'mental somersault'—they also needed to get to grips with what was replacing it.⁴⁶ The Commonwealth underwent rapid

⁴⁴ 'Au Revoir,' *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 1 (1961): 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-11.

⁴⁶ John Chadwick, 'A Very Lively Corpse,' *Commonwealth Journal* 6, 1 (1968): 19.

change in the postwar period. Gone was the pre-Second World War club of cooperative and comfortable informality between so called ‘White Dominions’ and in its place was a ‘modern’ Commonwealth dominated in number by multiracial and newly independent nations. This ‘modern’ Commonwealth, as Guy Arnold wrote in 1964, was an organization with which Britain appeared ‘to have little idea what to do.’⁴⁷ The rapid changes to the makeup of the Commonwealth called for new definitions and new justifications. The Commonwealth Secretary General, Arnold Smith, commented in the Society’s Centenary publication that it was crucial to ‘have straight in our minds why twenty-seven sovereign governments think it important and worthwhile to retain this grouping.’⁴⁸

As Craggs has argued, the linguistic shift from empire to Commonwealth—a shift that the Society itself made in 1958—did not necessarily represent a parallel shift in discourses, practices or ideas about the association of countries that came under the imperial/commonwealth umbrella.⁴⁹ This section asks if and how the RCS came to terms with the modern Commonwealth and considers on what grounds the RCS justified its continued existence. Given the makeup of its membership, we might assume that the Society was simply a vehicle for the nostalgic reminiscences of retired colonial civil servants, wilfully blind to changes taking place in the Commonwealth. The reality, however, was far more complex.

By the 1960s, advocates of the Commonwealth speaking at the Society presented nostalgia as a dangerous illness. Speaking at the Society in 1968, leader of the Liberal Party, Jeremy Thorpe, said that the future of the Commonwealth depends on ‘recognising that what is past, is past.’ ‘It is still possible and eminently desirable,’ he argued, ‘to make of the Commonwealth something more than a club for addicts of nostalgia.’⁵⁰ Indeed, of all the case studies discussed in this thesis, it is the RCS that most explicitly and most frequently articulated the need to move on from the imperial past. As this section and the rest of the chapter will make clear, the varied activities and discourses of the RCS in the 1960s highlight the need to move beyond the polarized stereotypes of nostalgia and amnesia that have come to characterize analyses of the domestic impact of decolonization. Many aspects of the RCS were

⁴⁷ Guy Arnold, *Towards Peace and a Multiracial Commonwealth* (London 1964), 24.

⁴⁸ Arnold Smith, ‘The Point and Value of the Commonwealth’ in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 61.

⁴⁹ Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies,’ 17.

⁵⁰ Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies,’ 96.

neither nostalgic nor wilfully ignorant, but were in fact fully present and critically engaged with the modern Commonwealth of the 1960s.

The Society was compelled to respond to articles in the wider press that called the Commonwealth a ‘gigantic farce’ and a ‘lively corpse’.⁵¹ In the mid-1960s many issues of the *Commonwealth Journal* included articles explicitly discussing the problems and relevance of the modern Commonwealth with titles such as ‘Some somber thoughts on the depressing divisions in the Commonwealth today’ and ‘Some thoughts on the Commonwealth’s formidable difficulties’.⁵² This is not the behaviour of a Society in denial about the loss of the empire, but rather of a group of individuals taking a pragmatic interest in the problems raised by decolonization. Those speeches and articles that focused on the limitations of the Commonwealth repeatedly concluded that it would not function as a comprehensive political, economic, or defensive alliance, and that the ‘pressures of nationalist feeling’ undermined its potential to be an association of peoples sharing the values of liberty, parliamentary democracy and allegiance to the Crown.⁵³

While those speaking at the Society seemed confident in determining what the Commonwealth was not and what it could not do, the Society often found it difficult to articulate in precise terms what purpose it did serve. These difficulties are exemplified in the organization of an essay competition for school children. Following a request in 1962 from a school in South Africa to be allowed to continue to compete in the competition despite no longer being a member of the Commonwealth and a proposal that the competition be thrown open to children throughout the world, the Society declared that this was ‘going too far’. Were the competition opened up, members argued, it could be ‘swamped’ by essays from America and other English-speaking countries, which would offer ‘no benefit [...] to the Society or the Commonwealth’.⁵⁴ There was unresolved tension, then, between developing Commonwealth identities and fostering world citizenship. Despite defining the parameters of the modern Commonwealth, this episode reveals that members often struggled to articulate why these parameters were meaningful. At no point in the discussion of the competition were members able to explain precisely

⁵¹ Enoch Powell called the Commonwealth a ‘gigantic farce’ in an anonymous article in *The Times*, 2 April 1964.

⁵² *Commonwealth Journal* 8, 5 (1965): 259; *Commonwealth Journal* 9, 1 (1966): 1.

⁵³ Duke of Devonshire in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 25.

⁵⁴ Letter from H. Ralph Hone to Secretary General, 8 July 1962 (RCS: Minutes of Commonwealth Studies Committee).

why essays on the Commonwealth from Commonwealth countries were of more value than those from non-Commonwealth countries.

So what was left from which the RCS might draw some sense of purpose? In the Examiners' Report for the 1966 Schools Group Project Competition students were said to be using their essays as an opportunity 'to fit themselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to live up to the transcendence that springs from the Commonwealth idea. They could never disclose this in words but their works declared "the glory and the dream"'.⁵⁵ Norman Jeffries, writing about Commonwealth literature in the Society's Centenary publication, repeated this sentiment, commenting on the 'sense of transcendence that occurs whenever one is working for the Commonwealth.'⁵⁶ Yet for all that this repeating trope of 'transcendence' cast the Commonwealth in a positive light, it failed to provide the Royal Commonwealth Society with a functioning definition that they could use to justify their existence and activity.

For this, the Society relied on the rhetoric of the People's Commonwealth and its two key assumptions: that the Commonwealth was a 'means of surmounting barriers of race, ignorance, and prejudice', and that it was sustained by the actions of individuals rather than governments.⁵⁷ As the Director of the Commonwealth Foundation explained in a speech at Society headquarters, 'being in the Commonwealth, despite all its defects, is one of the best short cuts to human understanding.'⁵⁸ One member wrote in a letter to the *Commonwealth Journal* that 'the national society is too narrow: the world society is still too large, incoherent, distracted and vague. The Commonwealth is an intermediate and working expression of international citizenship and goodwill.'⁵⁹ Comments such as this reveal how wider discourses of international humanism were manipulated to fit the boundaries of the Commonwealth in a way that simultaneously engaged with globalisation and preserved imperial frameworks.

Repeated reference to the role of 'humans' fed into the Society's emphasis on individuals rather than governments, highlighting the wealth of informal and unofficial contacts that were not dependent on the existence of a formal political

⁵⁵ Group Project Competition, Examiners Report 1966 (RCS: Commonwealth Study Committee, Committee Papers 1966-1969).

⁵⁶ *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 91.

⁵⁷ *Commonwealth Journal* 10, 3 (1967): 118.

⁵⁸ Chadwick, 'A Very Lively Corpse.'

⁵⁹ Letter from Philip Birkinshaw, *Commonwealth Journal* 5, 6 (1962): 299.

structure. J.D.B. Miller's 1974 survey of Commonwealth affairs argued that the Commonwealth was 'an assembly of peoples as well as an association between governments.'⁶⁰ The RCS helped to shape these discourses by placing greater value on the non-official, person-to-person ties that were fostered within a Commonwealth civil society than on the ties of governance.⁶¹ One member described the Commonwealth as 'an epic in which the idealism of explorers, doctors, missionaries, magistrates and scientists is interwoven with the expediency of soldiers, merchants, engineers and farmers.'⁶² Another argued that 'the Commonwealth is not just to do with nations; it is to do with human beings,'⁶³ while John Chadwick, writing to defend the Commonwealth against accusations that it was little more than a lively corpse, described it as 'an international idea rather than an organization, a *modus Vivendi* rather than a constitutional entity.'⁶⁴ Margaret Ball has argued that the Commonwealth was like an iceberg, finding in 1971 that under-the-surface non-governmental networks were so extensive 'as to defy description.'⁶⁵

By focusing on individual human action and interaction the Society not only latched on to an identity for the Commonwealth that could survive the political turmoil and flux of decolonization, it also used the discourse of a 'People's Commonwealth' as a framework through which to explain its purpose and justify its existence. 'Though the old Empire may or may not have been created in an absence of mind,' wrote Norman Jeffries, 'the sustenance of the Commonwealth today stems from its presence of mind.'⁶⁶ Arnold Smith concluded his assessment of the Commonwealth with the similarly empowering conclusion that 'the Commonwealth is what we think it is. It can be what we make it.'⁶⁷ Put by another member who was more attuned to the difficult task faced by the Society: the trouble with the Commonwealth was that 'nobody [was] working hard enough at it.'⁶⁸ The RCS positioned itself as a key actor in the 'making' of the modern Commonwealth. Adjusting to the modern Commonwealth was not, therefore, simply a matter of

⁶⁰ J.D.B. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Expansion and Attrition, 1953-1969* (London, 1974), xii.

⁶¹ Srinivasan, *The British Commonwealth*, 3.

⁶² *Commonwealth Journal* 5, 6 (1962): 299.

⁶³ Earl De La Warr, 'Commonwealth Day Message,' *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 4 (1963).

⁶⁴ Chadwick, 'Lively Corpse,' 21.

⁶⁵ Margaret Ball, *The 'Open' Commonwealth* (Durham, 1971), 78-79.

⁶⁶ Norman Jeffries in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 92.

⁶⁷ Arnold Smith in *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 61.

⁶⁸ Nudge Memorandum for Central Council, 20 February 1968 (RCS: Nudge Miscellaneous).

establishing a vibrant new rhetoric of multiracial inclusivity and individual action; the Society also faced the considerable challenge of putting this new identity into practice. In the following sections this chapter will consider the extent to which the Society lived up to its rhetoric and ask whether the image of the modern Commonwealth was enacted equally across the Society, by individual members, by branches, and by its central committees.

Turning Rhetoric into Practice

Putting the rhetoric of a People's Commonwealth into practice did not entail, nor did it necessarily require, a complete overhaul of the Society's day-to-day workings. As discussed above, in the 1960s the Society's wider objectives differed little from those put into writing at its foundation. The methods through which the Society pursued these objectives can be productively categorized according to the following three themes: knowledge and education; action; and interaction and sociability. Within these three themes Society organizers and members articulated complementary and contradictory ideas about the role that the Society ought to play. The complex and at times competitive relationship between these fields was exacerbated in the 1960s by the Society's unstable financial position.

Although the Society's total assets exceeded £325,000 in the 1960s, most of this was tied up in property and by 1968 their annual expenditure was exceeding revenue by about £16,000.⁶⁹ In 1968 the Duke of Devonshire, then Chairman of the Society, announced that the Society was facing 'a very serious financial crisis.'⁷⁰ Financial problems were exacerbated by mismanagement at branch level. The Society was funded almost entirely by its membership fees and in the 1960s there was a severe shortfall in revenue from annual subscriptions. In part this can be ascribed to the loss of fees from the grant of autonomy to international branches, but declining UK membership also played a part. Most significantly, the Society failed to replace the many members they lost to death and old age with a younger cohort. The council aimed to improve the Society's position by raising subscription rates in the London area and launching a Centenary membership campaign, yet successes here were minimal. Despite high ambitions, existing members who resigned their membership

⁶⁹ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 232.

⁷⁰ Council Minutes, 25 July 1968 (RCS: Council Minutes).

in face of higher subscription rates effectively cancelled out what new members the campaign did manage to attract. At a time when the Society saw their work as particularly urgent, the decline in funds created substantial pressure to limit activities and increase efficiency.

The following three sections—‘Knowledge and Education’, ‘Action’, and ‘Interaction and Sociability’—consider to what ends the Society used their dwindling funds. Was the RCS more interested, for example, in increasing awareness about the Commonwealth than in increasing interaction with other Commonwealth countries and populations? Moreover, was it more interested in talking about the Commonwealth than in affecting concrete policy changes? As well as exploring the balance between education, action, and interaction in the Society’s activities, the next sections also consider in more detail on whose behalf the Society was acting. They ask how far the Society was willing or able to reach in order to promote the Commonwealth, exploring whether the Society was able to engage a wider section of the public or whether it focused its attention on those who were already interested in the Commonwealth. Finally, the following sections also ask to what extent the Society’s membership supported and assisted in the achievement of its objectives. It is when considering the limitations of the RCS that the complex relationship between the Society’s central administration and the rest of its membership is most apparent.

Knowledge and Education

In 1957 the Imperial Studies Committee, soon to become the Commonwealth Studies Committee, reported that the educational activities of the Society should be a priority and that ‘any other activities on which [the Society] may be engaged are subordinate.’⁷¹ The value placed by the Society administration on educational activities remained high throughout the decade and in 1968 the Studies Committee reaffirmed that one of the Society’s key objects was to ‘spread interest or knowledge of the Commonwealth’, noting that ‘whilst the other societies all had excellent social

⁷¹ Memorandum by Secretary General on Report of Committee, 30 July 1957 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Foundation)

programmes, the Royal Commonwealth Society was the only one with a good educational programme.⁷²

The renewed enthusiasm for critical and educative projects among the Society's central committee members might in part be explained by the wider context of expanding higher education in the 1960s and the significant number of repatriated colonial civil administrators who went on to work in higher education.⁷³ But educative events were not a new means of engaging with the empire. Since the nineteenth century the middle-class public sphere had presented numerous opportunities for the public to attend meetings and lectures disseminating information about the empire. In London, in addition to talks at the then Royal Empire Society, events were held by the Primrose League, the Victoria League, the British Empire Union, and area specific groups such as the Royal African Society.⁷⁴ Outside of London the middle classes attended talks at regional groups such as the Birmingham and Midland Institute as well as branches of the Eclectic Society, the Mechanics Institute, and the Philosophical Institution.⁷⁵ What the activities of organizations such as RCS make clear is that this form of engagement with the empire/Commonwealth did not disappear with decolonization.

Throughout the 1960s the Society held weekly lunchtime meetings at which invited guests gave talks on a wide variety of topics followed by questions from the audience. The audience for these lectures was considerably expanded by their publication in the bi-monthly *Commonwealth Journal*, which went out to all British members. As Craggs argues, the calibre of the lectures was crucial to presenting the Society as a knowledgeable community of interest concerned with empire and Commonwealth.⁷⁶ In October and November of 1961 the Society hosted lunchtime meetings on the following topics: 'Prospects and progress in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland' presented by the Director of the Institute of Race Relations and held in conjunction with the Royal African Society; 'The Significance of West Indian Independence' presented by the Commissioner for the West Indies; 'Britain's

⁷² Minutes of the Commonwealth Study Committee, 10 October 1968 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Foundation).

⁷³ For a discussion of the returning careers of Colonial Civil Servants see Kirk-Greene, 'Decolonisation: The Ultimate Diaspora.'

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussion of imperial propaganda societies in the first half of the twentieth century see John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1986) 147-173.

⁷⁵ Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*, 276-277.

⁷⁶ Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 68.

Place in the World' presented by Labour politician Denis Healey; 'Aviation in Africa' presented by an advisor on African Affairs to BOAC; 'Basic Democracies in Pakistan' by the eminent historian Rushbrook Williams; and a joint meeting on 'Technical Cooperation Overseas' hosted with the London Chamber of Commerce.⁷⁷ This fairly typical programme is indicative of the geographical spread of RCS talks and of the wide pool of speakers from which it drew, including representatives from industry, government, the Commonwealth Office, and other invested institutions. Topics under discussion addressed the full geographical range of the Commonwealth—both Old and New—as well as issues such as Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, which were thought to reflect on the status of the Commonwealth.

While the central committees of the RCS presented a unanimous front in their celebration of the People's Commonwealth, there was plenty of space within the organization to disagree. The views of one member, Vincent Powell-Smith, which were published in the *Commonwealth Journal*, contradicted the otherwise positive attitude with which RCS spoke about the member states of the New Commonwealth:

I am wondering whether it is the mother country which is to blame. The current fashion among the emergent African nations seems to be to blame Britain for anything that goes wrong; wild accusations of "imperialist exploitation" and the like are made frequently against us by African politicians [...] It is significant that those who are most vociferous in the condemnation of Britain's role in the Commonwealth have not yet put their own house in order.⁷⁸

Similar views denying imperial exploitation and bemoaning the ungratefulness of emergent nations appeared frequently in the letter pages of *The Times* in this period, but it is significant that an organization such as the RCS, which was striving at this time to recast itself as a modern, forward-thinking institution, still made space for such attitudes in its publications and lecture programming. This policy of open discussion was also applied to more controversial issues and the RCS prided itself on being able to accommodate political difference and provide an environment for informed debate. Alongside the more traditionally imperialist views of those such as Powell-Smith, the Society was also host to speakers critical of the Commonwealth and, indeed, of Britain itself. Those speaking at the Society in the 1960s represented a

⁷⁷ 'Coming Events at H.Q.,' *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 5 (1961): 247.

⁷⁸ Vincent Powell-Smith, *Commonwealth Journal* 5, 5 (1962): 228.

much wider range of heritages, interests and ideologies than they had in the 1940s and 1950s.⁷⁹

While the Society endeavoured to preserve a neutral attitude, it nevertheless promoted itself as a platform for the debate of controversial topics. As Craggs has discussed in detail, the two key issues of controversy at the Society in this period—apartheid in South Africa and the events surrounding Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence—were centred on issues to do with racial equality and British policy in the context of the developing Commonwealth. In the 1960s addresses were given by both black and white supporters of anti-apartheid parties in South Africa, as well as South African High Commissioners who attempted to justify the policy of the so-called ‘separate development’ of races. Reception for those advocating apartheid policies was often inhospitable and speakers regularly faced awkward questions from the audience. But despite their broad support for the anti-apartheid cause, the Society was a far from radical organization at this time. Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia, gave a controversial speech about Rhodesian policy at the Society in 1965 in which he criticized British policy and advocated the use of force by the oppressed population. For younger members such as Prunella Scarlett, the event ‘was a great coup’, but Scarlett also acknowledged that ‘others thought it was appalling’. Writing about the event later, Derek Ingram, another relatively young member of the Society’s Central Council, described how the walls ‘almost trembled’ such was the reaction of some of the audience to Kaunda’s address.⁸⁰

The scheduling of such speeches seems to show that the Society was willing to acknowledge and engage with some of the more difficult aspects of British decolonisation. Indeed, Prunella Scarlett saw these events as part of the Society’s overall modernization, outlining how the racist attitudes of some members might be challenged through exposure to wide-ranging opinions:

we’d embarrass them by inviting them to come and listen to a particular speaker who would then provide an eloquent and interesting talk with which it was hard to disagree. Many times I remember people coming up to me afterwards and admitting that they had perhaps been a little hasty in their judgement.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies,’ 104.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

Yet there were still significant silences, even within a politically diverse programme. The violence of colonial encounters, for example, and particularly that which characterized the imperial endgame in countries such as Kenya and Malaya, was given little discussion either in lectures or in the pages of the *Commonwealth Journal*. The likely participation of some members of the Society in the more violent and controversial dimensions of decolonization presumably helped to reinforce this taboo. Moreover, though the programmes delivered at the Society's headquarters presented a diverse range of speakers and subjects, the same was rarely true of those put on at a branch level.

At headquarters the critically engaged lunchtime meetings were kept separate from more social events such as travel talks and film screenings. By contrast, at branch level smaller memberships and limited resources meant that events programmes were often considerably more mixed and less consistently scheduled. The Sussex branch's lecture programmes for 1961-62 and 1964-65 reveal a persistent lack of critical engagement with the pressing issues of the developing modern Commonwealth.⁸² Dominated by talks on issues such as 'Dutch Interior Paintings', 'Highlights of Moorish Spain' and British Railways colour films, Sussex offered little on the political or economic dimensions of the Commonwealth and little that addressed the purpose or meaning of the New Commonwealth. In contrast, the Cambridgeshire branch put together a more balanced programme including a talk on 'The Life of a Foreign Correspondent', a screening of Satyajit Ray's *World of Apu*, and a talk by the Chairman of the Commonwealth Development Finance Company on 'Commonwealth Economics'.⁸³

At both headquarters and branch level the impact of critically engaged events was limited by the size of audience they were able to attract. Headquarters extended invitations for the lunchtime meetings to representatives from a wide range of organizations and industries and in doing so brought these guests into more explicit engagement with Commonwealth issues. Guests at a lunchtime joint meeting with the African Medical and Research Foundation, at which a film entitled 'Flying Doctors of East Africa' was screened, included representatives from the Commonwealth Foundation, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, the BBC, the Commonwealth Association of Architects, the Rank Organisation, the Save

⁸² Lecture Programme 1961-62 and 1964-65 (RCS: Sussex Branch).

⁸³ Programme, Michaelmas Term 1964 (RCS: Cambridgeshire Branch).

the Children Fund, Oxfam, the Readers Digest, the East African Women's League, Unilever, the Royal Society of Arts and BOAC.

Despite this wide range of invited guests, audience turnout at headquarters was inconsistent and varied dramatically from sixty to four-hundred-and-fifty. By the end of the 1960s, decreasing attendances reduced the lunchtime meetings from weekly to fortnightly events.⁸⁴ While the use of the Society's accommodation and bars remained consistently high, by the early 1970s the Society acknowledged that only a handful of their members had the time or interest to attend weekly lunch-time meetings.⁸⁵ If not for the invited audience of corporate members and the staff of high commissions, embassies and the press, commented a memorandum, 'the speaker would often be facing an almost empty hall.'⁸⁶ Similar reductions in meetings also occurred at branch level. Although some branch events remained popular throughout the decade—the Jersey branch's afternoon meetings consistently attracted an audience of around two hundred, for example⁸⁷—the general trend was for attendance at meetings to be described as 'disappointingly small'. The Cambridgeshire branch reported that eminent speakers had begun to complain about the small size of their audiences. Following years of low attendance, Cambridgeshire put forward a motion to terminate their branch in 1967. Though the motion was not passed, equal numbers voted for and against it.⁸⁸ The Liverpool branch responded to low attendance by holding joint meetings with societies such as the Royal Overseas League, and relied on local speakers rather than inviting people from London. Out of their small membership, which had a fairly high average age, fifty was considered a good attendance at an evening talk.⁸⁹

Although internal efforts at critical engagement were let down by unenthusiastic members at both branch and headquarters level, in 1963 the Society reported that it was increasingly being asked to promote Commonwealth-related issues to the wider public through courses and conferences. In 1969, for example, they held a short residential course on 'New Perspectives on Race Relations in Britain', organized jointly with the Commonwealth Institute. Intended to attempt an

⁸⁴ Review of Past and Current Activities, 5 May 1969 (RCS: Commonwealth Affairs Committee Agendas and Minutes).

⁸⁵ Memorandum on Lunchtime Meetings, 13 November 1973 (RCS: Public Affairs).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Annual Report for 1963 (RCS: Jersey Branch).

⁸⁸ AGM May 1967 (RCS: Cambridgeshire Branch Minutes).

⁸⁹ Minutes, 15 December 1966 (RCS: Liverpool Branch).

objective assessment of the economic, social, and cultural effects of the presence of new communities from other Commonwealth countries, the course was attended by forty-seven people including probation officers, community relations officers, and staff of Commonwealth high commissions and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.⁹⁰ Smaller-scale outreach events ranged from briefing students from Minnesota before a trip to Tanganyika to organizing a two-day conference on West Africa at Canford independent school.⁹¹ During 1968 and 1969 the Society met forty-five requests for speakers from external groups including schools, Rotary Clubs, women's organisations and political groups.⁹² These requests were often fielded through local branch networks, rather than through Society headquarters, emphasizing the importance of local connections. In Hants and Dorset, for example, the Chairman gave a speech on the royal family and the Commonwealth to the Bournemouth branch of the Young Conservatives, while another member, Commander C.J. Charlewood spoke to the Beckenham Mothers' Union about Australia's capital cities.⁹³ This method of organization suggests that members of the public living in areas with a high proportion of empire repatriates were likely to have had greater exposure to imperial and Commonwealth concerns than those who lived in other parts of Britain.

The wider public was also served by the Society's Library, which was seen by many as 'the distinguished core of the educational services'.⁹⁴ In the first half of the decade its visual aids loan service had lent around one thousand items annually. These included film strips, wall charts, maps, and photographs and were borrowed by schools, youth organizations such as the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, and adult organizations such as Women's Institutes, the Armed Services and prisons.⁹⁵ Yet the Library was beset by financial trouble throughout the decade, and struggled to keep up with rapid changes to the empire/Commonwealth. The Society librarians commented that the rate of change quickly made many of the library's older items misleading and in some cases liable to cause offence.⁹⁶ The Library's visual aids loan

⁹⁰ Press release on New Perspectives on Race Relations in Britain, 14 August 1969 (RCS: Public Affairs).

⁹¹ Council Minutes, 27 June 1963 (RCS: Council Minutes).

⁹² Review of Past and Current Activities, 5 May 1969 (RCS: Commonwealth Affair Committee Agendas and Minutes).

⁹³ Chairman's Report for 1958, (RCS: Branch Reports, Hants and Dorset).

⁹⁴ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 230.

⁹⁵ Library Visual Aids Service, c. 1966 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Foundation Agendas and Minutes).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

service, one of the few projects that extended the reach of the Society to other non-Commonwealth focused civic organizations, was discontinued in 1967, while the following year further plans were made to sell off some of the Library's assets to help clear debts.⁹⁷

In 1958 the Society acknowledged that although the most valuable educational function it could perform lay in the creation of an informed public opinion, its limited resources necessitated that it concentrate on the 15-20 age group.⁹⁸ When the Society re-stated their objectives in 1964 they included a specific goal to encourage 'mutual interest in Commonwealth countries among young people'.⁹⁹ The RCS tapped into wider discourses on youth and emphasized the importance of educating the young as heirs to the new multiracial Commonwealth. The young had, for a long time, been seen as a crucial sector of the public in which to establish imperial sentiment. Lord Meath, the founder of Empire Day in Britain, had been devoted to making children aware of their responsibilities as 'citizens of the greatest Empire in the world in the interwar period.'¹⁰⁰ Within wider debates about sport, militarism and national character, organisations such as the Boy Scouts also sought to foster a sense of imperial duty in their young members.¹⁰¹ In the interwar period the School Empire Tour Committee, the Overseas Education League, and the Overseas Settlement of British Women sent groups of children to different parts of the empire in an effort to develop their imperial education and commitment.¹⁰²

These kinds of commitments did not disappear after empire; if anything, youth became even more important in a post-imperial context. By 1963, there were 800,000 more teenagers in the British population than there had been the decade before.¹⁰³ Anxieties about declining deference, feral youth, consumerism, counterculture and the 'generation gap' pushed this cohort under the sociological and political lens and into the public eye. This constellation of concerns was also balanced with certain optimism about increasing access to education and the role of the young as internationally-minded citizens of tomorrow. As Joanna Bailkin claims,

⁹⁷ Council Minutes, 19 September 1968 (RCS: Council Minutes).

⁹⁸ Memorandum on Possible Activities of the Commonwealth Studies Foundation, September 1958 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Foundation).

⁹⁹ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 260.

¹⁰⁰ Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire,' 103.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² M. Harper, "'Personal Contact is Worth a Ton of Text-Books': Educational Tours of the Empire, 1926 – 39,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 32, 3 (2004): 48-76.

¹⁰³ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture* (London, 1999), 2-3.

youth became an issue of international relations—one that was particularly fitting to the environment of imperial decline.¹⁰⁴ For the RCS, the rhetoric of youth was perfectly suited to the needs of the modern Commonwealth. By repeatedly referring to the modern Commonwealth as a young association the Society worked to bypass some of the legacies of imperialism and the old ties of white settler dominions. The theme of youth appeared in suggestions by members of the Central Council that the Queen's 1966 Commonwealth Message should discuss 'the concept of the Commonwealth as a young organisation in which all forms of youthful contact and friendship provide the key to the future.'¹⁰⁵

Given this broader enthusiasm for youth in relation to empire and internationalism, it should not be surprising that the RCS was not working alone in this field. The government-funded Commonwealth Institute, tasked with projecting the Commonwealth in Britain, did the most work with children in this period. The Commonwealth Institute shared a similar trajectory with the RCS. It lived its first sixty years as the Imperial Institute and provided expert research and advisory facilities designed to aid economic development and promote trade. Like the RCS, it had to adapt to meet changing needs of the Commonwealth and changed its name to the Commonwealth Institute in 1958. As part of its transformation—and its commitment to being 'an expression of the Commonwealth of today and tomorrow and of the faith which its peoples have in it'¹⁰⁶—the Institute also changed premises to a new, modern building in Hyde Park. By the 1960s, its resources were concentrated on spreading knowledge and developing understanding of the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁷ By 1967 the Institute had more than half a million visitors each year, including over 7000 school visits.¹⁰⁸

Further similarities between the RCS and the Commonwealth Institute indicate a predictable alignment between their take on Commonwealth affairs. Indeed many key figures in the Institute were members and regular speakers at the RCS. The Department of Education, who were heavily involved in the Institute, criticized the number of Institute staff who were 'retired colonial officials who had spend their

¹⁰⁴ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, *forthcoming* 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Council Minutes, 24 February 1966 (RCS: Council Minutes).

¹⁰⁶ *Commonwealth Institute: A Handbook Describing the Work of the Institute and the Exhibitions in the Galleries*, c. 1962, 11.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ O&M Report on the Institute, August 1967 (TTNA: ED121/1048).

entire career overseas'. Both organizations also struggled in their efforts to shrug off the past and bring the Commonwealth 'into proper perspective'¹⁰⁹ Like the RCS, the Institute expressed the view that 'there was a real need at the present time for action to be taken to stress this [positive and multicultural] side of the Commonwealth in order to combat the growing mood of pessimism and the consequent distortion of the "image" of the commonwealth which was being put across to the public.'¹¹⁰

The key difference between the two organizations—aside from the money that government backing brought the Commonwealth Institute—was the political nature of their engagement with the Commonwealth. Whereas the RCS continued to encourage informed political debate, the Commonwealth Institute focused its energies on celebrating the positive cultural dimensions of the multiracial Commonwealth. Their response to the controversial dimensions of decolonization was therefore tied up in pragmatic rather than political concerns. In addition to the constant struggle to keep exhibitions up to date with the ever-changing Commonwealth, for example, the Commonwealth Institute responded to South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth in 1961 by dismantling the South African court and withdrawing the touring exhibition.

The RCS never had the resources to compete with the Commonwealth Institute's youth work, nor were they ever inclined to try. Instead they provided a supplementary service, centred on educational projects that encouraged critical engagement. Of these activities, the two largest and most direct forms of outreach were a Commonwealth-wide essay and group project competition and study conferences hosted for sixth-form students by headquarters in London and by a number of branches across the country. Participants in both schemes were encouraged to latch on to the idea of the modern, People's Commonwealth. In the 1960s Sixth-form study conferences were adapted so that, rather than dealing with the general background of a colonial territory and an 'old' dominion, they presented the Commonwealth as something more than the sum of its parts.¹¹¹ For the essay competition, which was open to school students across the Commonwealth, students in the eldest age category were prompted to engage critically by questions such as the following:

¹⁰⁹ Minutes Executive Committee, 25 January 1962, Commonwealth Institute Education Executive and Managing Committees meetings (TTNA: DO 191/11).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 1 (1961): 43.

‘The Commonwealth is not a static organism. The product of evolution, it is capable of adapting itself, as it has done successfully in the past, to changing circumstances and needs. To what extent do you agree?’¹¹²

Although the competitions and conferences examined the part that young people themselves might play in influencing the future of the Commonwealth, they did not necessarily reach new, untouched portions of the population. By 1967 the essay competition received over 800 entries a year from more than 140 schools across the Commonwealth, but given the number of Commonwealth schools that they might have attracted, entrants were still confined to comparatively few schools. The central Society Sixth Form Conference was limited to two hundred London students each year. Although many branches also ran their own Sixth Form Conferences, reaching a greater number and wider geographical range of school-age children, the conferences remained relatively limited in the range of schools and children that they attracted.¹¹³ A *Guardian* article on the Society’s 1960 Sixth Form Study Conference described the audience as composed of ‘fairly studious children from families “pretty well up the social scale.”’ It was, the article argues, ‘a case almost of preaching to the converted rather than attracting a new type of audience.’¹¹⁴

Members of the Studies Committee acknowledged the problem of reaching young people who left school at fifteen and were never taught about the Commonwealth as whole, but the Committee’s activities varied little in the 1960s and no substantial steps appear to have been taken to include these groups in the Society’s outreach programme. At branch level, annual reports suggest that branches found it difficult to fulfil the hopes of the London committees. Despite being one of the most active branches, and despite running a successful and well-attended youth conference for school children each year, the Hants and Dorset branch struggled to attract young members to attend Society events in their free time. When mentioning the designated Youth Members Section, the branch’s Chairman announced that ‘unfortunately there is little to report.’¹¹⁵ The Jersey branch, which boasted the highest regular attendance at evening meetings, complained of similar difficulties:

The experiment made early in the year, to encourage the attendance of students at the afternoon fixtures by providing them with tea without

¹¹² Committee Minutes, 2 February 1969 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Committee Minutes).

¹¹³ The Hants and Dorset branch study conference was attended by 300 school children in 1966.

¹¹⁴ ‘Holiday Lectures,’ *Guardian*, 30 December 1960.

¹¹⁵ Chairman’s Report, 1959 (RCS: Hants and Dorset Branch).

charge, and asking them also to bring a friend, was a complete failure. It is apparent that the kind of addresses which we arrange, and which seem to satisfy most of the Fellows, do not usually appeal to the young.¹¹⁶

This damning appraisal came in the same season that the Director of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Commander Cobb, gave a speech at the branch entitled ‘The Young are our Future’.

The Society faced a constant uphill struggle to move beyond its conspicuously aging membership, which rather dramatically undermined discourses that identified youth as the future of the Commonwealth. Anecdotal evidence suggests that overall membership and branch level administration were stagnant and that members lost through old age or death were not replaced by a new young cohort. Hants and Dorset reported that ‘age and infirmity’ prevented a ‘steadily increasing number of cases’ from supporting social and other activities.¹¹⁷ A fairly scathing report on the Sussex branch carried out by the Central Council commented that most of the members ‘seem to be very elderly and it cannot be said that the branch pays an important part in promoting the main objects of the Society.’¹¹⁸ Carrington, chair of the short-lived Commonwealth Purpose Group, described the self-perpetuating problems faced by the Society:

Young active people in the prime of life are too busy to give much time to it and it therefore falls into the hands of the retired old fogies who have time to spare; with the further consequence that the ‘cause’ gets written off as an old fogie’s superannuated notion. I am dreadfully afraid that the Commonwealth is so regarded by a great many younger people¹¹⁹

John Chadwick confirmed this view, suggesting that those who were ‘near the biblical limits’—and for Chadwick this seems to be anyone over the age of sixty—were seen to have backward yearnings for empire.¹²⁰ Such stereotypes would hardly help the Society shed the ‘empire aura’ in which it felt it was cast. By contrast, as the later chapters will show, organizations such as the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and Christian Aid were much more successful at involving youth.

¹¹⁶ Annual Report for 1963 (RCS: Jersey Branch).

¹¹⁷ Annual Report for the year 1966 and Annual Report for the year 1967 (RCS: Hants and Dorset).

¹¹⁸ Sussex Branch Overview from Central RCS (RCS: Sussex Branch).

¹¹⁹ C. Carrington to David Whatley, 29 October 1963 (RCS: Commonwealth Purpose Group 1963-4).

¹²⁰ Chadwick, ‘Lively Corpse,’ 18.

Buettner has suggested that ‘as long as there is an audience willing to receive positive messages about the imperial dimensions of British history, individuals with a vested interest in portraying British endeavours [...] to advantage will continue to provide them.’¹²¹ This is certainly true of projects that took place later in the twentieth century such as the oral history projects, questionnaires and requests for private papers carried out by British archives such as the Rhodes House Library at Oxford and the Cambridge South Asian Archives. As Buettner reveals, members of invested organizations such as the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, formed in the 1970s, helped to ‘make Raj nostalgia a recurring feature of British public culture in the late twentieth century.’¹²² Yet though the RCS publicized early manifestations of similar schemes in its journal, the model is not fully applicable to the Society. As the above discussion makes clear, speeches given at the Society, questions asked of sixth formers, and programmes organized for various professions focused predominantly on the present and future of the Commonwealth, rather than offering recuperative accounts of the British role overseas. Moreover, it is unclear whether the willing audience that Buettner and others have identified in the British public during and after the 1970s displayed the same enthusiasm for imperial nostalgia in the 1960s.¹²³ The majority of the educational events discussed here were held either for existing members of the Society or for those already converted to the Commonwealth cause. Did the Society do a bad job of reaching audiences willing to receive recuperative or critically engaged accounts of the empire/Commonwealth, constrained as they were by a financial crisis in the second half of the 1960s, or did this elusive audience simply not exist during the years of decolonization? The types of audience contained within the wider British public will be addressed in the next four chapters.

¹²¹ Buettner, *Empire Families*, 268.

¹²² Buettner, ‘Cemeteries,’ 5.

¹²³ For discussions of imperial nostalgia see Wendy Webster, ‘Elspeth Huxley: Gender, Empire and Narratives of Nation, 1935-64,’ *Women’s History Review* 8, 3 (1999): 527-45; Raphael Samuel, ‘Resurrectionism’, in J. Evans and D. Boswell, *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London, 1999), 163-184; Antoinette Burton, ‘India, Inc.? Nostalgia, Memory and the Empire of Things’ in Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire*.

‘The Hustle is On’¹²⁴: The Royal Commonwealth Society in Action

Despite the RCS’s clear enthusiasm for study and education, this was not the only means by which the Society and its members engaged with the Commonwealth. For many members, there was more to the preservation of the Commonwealth than lunchtime talks and educative outreach programmes, neither of which seemed to quite catch the sense of urgency with which they felt the Society ought to be acting. This section will explore the ways in which the RCS and its members sought to act rather than educate. In 1962, a speech given by Lord Casey at Society headquarters was published in the *Commonwealth Journal* under the exclamatory heading ‘Awake! Awake!’ Casey, an Australian politician involved in Commonwealth Affairs, called for the Royal Commonwealth Society to become a ‘militant fighting body’ and ‘do something before it is too late’. The Society was, Casey argued, ‘ideally situated by [its] membership and prestige to take a much more militant attitude in respect of the Commonwealth: asking awkward questions, making a nuisance of [itself], pointing out in simple understandable language what is at stake and what might be done.’¹²⁵

For some, militancy implied political activism. In response to Casey’s call, Professor Charles Carrington formed the Commonwealth Purpose Group in 1962. Carrington (1897-1990) was part of the Society old guard: Professor of British Commonwealth Relations at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, his many publications on imperial issues included biographies of Rudyard Kipling and T.E. Lawrence. The Purpose Group functioned as a private dining club and planned to meet regularly to air general views about the Commonwealth and consider the best ways that Society members could help in promoting Commonwealth cooperation. Carrington secured the participation of a number of prominent RCS members including Kenneth Kirkwood and Lord Walston, who were both heavily involved in the Institute for Race Relations; James Coltart, Director of Thompson’s publishing company, which owned *The Times*; and John Turnbull, an influential Information Officer in the Civil Service. Yet despite early bombast the group achieved very little. Correspondence between Carrington and prospective members of the Purpose Group reveals a diverse range of views on the role of the Society, including a number of respondees who strongly disagreed with Casey’s call to arms. In his own words,

¹²⁴ Viscount Lambton to Carrington, 17 October 1962 (RCS: Commonwealth Purpose Group 1963-4).

¹²⁵ Lord Casey, ‘Awake! Awake!’ *Commonwealth Journal* 5, 4 (1962): 168.

Carrington was ‘not clever at managing people with whom [he did not] see eye to eye’ and the meetings soon petered out with him concluding in a letter to David Whatley, ‘I don’t want to be a political organizer; I want to be an elderly literary man, reading and writing and lecturing about the Commonwealth as quietly as my nature permits.’¹²⁶ The failings of the inappropriately named Purpose Group also emphasize how crucial individual instigators could be to the success or failure of Society projects.

Carrington encouraged Whatley to continue the work of the Purpose Group, but it was not until 1967 that Whatley took up the mantle, heading a new and active committee called Nudge. Nudge was the most vociferous and demanding manifestation of the RCS. Formed in order to ‘combat the growing apathy towards the Commonwealth from the Government and the people of Britain’, the group aimed to do so by giving ‘a sharp shove whenever and wherever it is needed.’¹²⁷ The group spoke out against the trebling of the Commonwealth press cable rate, against entry to the European Common Market, on Commonwealth citizenship, on racial discrimination in Rhodesia and on forms of commercial cooperation.

Although the group was sponsored by the Society, Nudge press statements came with the disclaimer that they ‘did not necessarily represent [the views] of the Society.’¹²⁸ The group’s approach—often taking significant action without consulting the Executive Committee or Council of the Society—unnerved members of the Society’s central council. In a letter to Stephen Leslie, then Chairman of the Nudge Committee, the Secretary General of the Society wrote that he was ‘worried’ about Nudge’s actions and particularly concerned that a letter sent without consultation by the group to a number of Commonwealth Prime Ministers would be ‘regarded as just a piece of damn cheek!’¹²⁹ The Central Council’s efforts to rein the Nudge Committee in, and their blunt comment that ‘we must either control it or disown it’,¹³⁰ reveal the Society’s broader unease with political activism and the message that it might send. Writing in 1962, one member commented that ‘in these precarious times perhaps the only sure foundation the Commonwealth can count on is genteel

¹²⁶ Carrington to Whatley, 24 October 1963 (RCS: Commonwealth Purpose Group).

¹²⁷ ‘What is Nudge about?’ David Whatley, Chair of Nudge Committee, 1967 (RCS: Nudge Miscellaneous).

¹²⁸ Press Statement by Nudge Committee, 1 May 1967 (RCS: Nudge Miscellaneous).

¹²⁹ A.S.H. Kemp, Secretary General of RCS to Stephen Leslie, Chairman of the Nudge Committee, 14 October 1968 (RCS: Nudge Miscellaneous).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

collaboration, based on enlightened self-interest; and any Royal Commonwealth Society agitation or effort [...] will be regarded in many quarters as a vain attack by the “Old Guard” to recover some of the shorn glory, if not the power’.¹³¹ Statements such as these highlight the Society’s awareness of the awkward climate in which they operated; if it pushed too hard it would be regarded as troublesome, but if it did not champion the Commonwealth, who would?

Once again, the RCS was not the only organization working in this field, and other smaller groups with a narrower political remit were much more active in their lobbying activities. The Round Table was a group with a very small and elite membership of just fifteen to twenty members. Part dining club, part editorial committee, and part pressure group the Round Table was much closer to the many, shorter-lived ‘ginger groups’ that characterized other areas of British political life in the first half of the twentieth century than it was to the other empire/Commonwealth bodies such as the RCS, the Victoria League, and the Overseas League.¹³² With such a small membership, it was easier for the Round Table to promote a united front. Although lobbying for an altogether different kind of imperial policy to the RCS, the virulently right wing Monday Club also acted much more decisively. The Monday Club, which was established in 1961 and named after the so-called ‘Black Monday’ on which Harold Macmillan gave his ‘Wind of Change’ speech in South Africa, became an important base for the Rhodesia ‘settler lobby’ and eventually argued for a racially ‘pure’ Britain unpolluted by the peoples of her former empire.¹³³ Much as the RCS might deny it, empire and decolonization were party political matters. The Society’s own commitment to by-partisanship and inclusivity meant that political action was not only difficult to coordinate among the different views of its membership, it also went against the RCS’s efforts to present a neutral approach to the Commonwealth.

But lobbying was not the only path to direct action that members of the Society might have chosen to follow; overseas charitable aid and development, for example, offered a possible alternative that was considerably less hampered by connotations of meddlesomeness. Whereas—as will become clear in later chapters—the Women’s Institute, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and Christian Aid all

¹³¹ Gerald Graham to Hilary Blood 27 September 1962 (RCS: Commonwealth Purpose Group 1963-4).

¹³² Alex May, ‘Empire Loyalists and “Commonwealth Men”: The Round Table and the End of Empire,’ in Ward, ed., *British Culture at the End of Empire*, 37-56.

¹³³ Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization*, 203-208.

made considerable investments in overseas humanitarianism, the Royal Commonwealth Society gave over little of its time, energy, or funds to charitable efforts. Although the *Commonwealth Journal* published articles on philanthropic causes such as the Ranfurly Library Scheme to send books to Commonwealth countries, the Society's involvement with these schemes rarely went much further than publicity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of individual members were involved in charitable projects, but these typically fell outside the work of the Society. The Society struggled to fundraise and generate enough income to finance its own educational and outreach programmes let alone any external schemes.

When the Society did involve itself in charitable projects it did so within a discourse of service. John Chadwick, director of the Commonwealth Foundation, argued in a speech given at Society headquarters that a lot of young people saw in the Commonwealth, 'in up-to-date terms, the same challenge for service (and it is time we finished feeling ashamed of that word) that young Indian Civil Service cadets or district officers once felt in the '20s and '30s.'¹³⁴ There was, he argued, 'as much room for service as ever there was before.'¹³⁵ For members in agreement with Chadwick, the challenge for service seemed to represent one of the 'best traditions of the Commonwealth' that the Society's 1958 objectives impelled them to preserve. Moreover, this formulation of service was closely linked to the Society's discourse on youth outreach discussed above. 'Young people', the Study Committee argued in 1968, 'would not join an organization unless they felt that the part they would play in it was going to have some influence. Contrary to popular belief they did not wish to spend all their spare time in dancing and playing badminton.'¹³⁶ While this rather blinkered characterization of how British youth passed their time in 1968 goes some way towards explaining the Society's wider failure to attract a younger membership, the Study Committee's emphasis on action was in tune with broader attitudes towards youth and internationalism. Delegates at a conference on Commonwealth Studies in British Schools organized by the Commonwealth Institute also concluded that 'much

¹³⁴ Chadwick, 'Lively Corpse,' 19.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁶ Peter Smith speaking at the Branches Conference, 24 June 1968 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Committee).

could be done with the lively interest found in the average 17-year-old in great humane problems common to people all over the world.’¹³⁷

Given this vocal discourse it is unsurprising that the Society’s main exception to this trend of non-philanthropy was its substantial involvement in Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). J.M. Lee suggests that VSO was, in some ways, an appeal to old-fashioned senses of public service and that it carried some of the social class connotations of service in the colonies.¹³⁸ Alec and Mora Dickson founded VSO in 1958 to send school leavers to underdeveloped countries, the vast majority of which were within the Commonwealth. Alec Dickson also played an active role in the RCS and sat on the Studies Committee. For the first three years of its life, VSO operated from Society offices, which were rented at a nominal rate. The Council gave substantial financial support to the organization, particularly in its early years when it had not yet secured government funding. Returning VSO volunteers spoke frequently at Society events, including at a press conference arranged for sixty boys returning from a year with VSO, and at branch level members often involved themselves more directly in supporting volunteers.¹³⁹ The Oxford branch, for example, formed a local committee to promote interest in VSO and raised sufficient funds to support ten volunteers. The committee organized ‘send off’ and ‘welcome back’ parties for the volunteers, inviting many heads of local schools and their sixth-formers to the latter.¹⁴⁰ VSO formed an important bridge between the educative project of the Society – which sought to instil in young people a sense that they had a crucial role to play in the future of the Commonwealth – and a concrete form of action through which these young idealists could act out their empowerment.

VSO and the above attempts at political lobbying highlight the important role that the Society was able to play as a stage for varied forms of Commonwealth engagement. Despite the fact that the Society’s central committees did not instigate the Commonwealth Purpose Group, Nudge, or VSO, and that the impetus for each came instead from enthusiastic individual members, the Society was nevertheless key in facilitating these sorts of efforts by bringing together like-minded enthusiasts.

¹³⁷ Kenneth Bradley, ‘Commonwealth Studies in British Schools,’ *Commonwealth Institute Journal* 1, 2 (1963): 50.

¹³⁸ J.M. Lee, ‘British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War 1946-61,’ *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 9, 1 (1998): 125.

¹³⁹ *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 3 (1961): 141.

¹⁴⁰ *Royal Commonwealth Society Centenary*, 101.

Interaction and Sociability

Since its foundation the Society had struggled to find a balance between its educational, literary, and political character and its function as a social club.¹⁴¹ The Society openly aimed to function as an instrument of friendship and interaction, working in a way that facilitated meeting people rather than merely knowing about people. Interaction was fostered in a number of interrelated ways: between the Society and other related organizations; between British and other Commonwealth youths; between individual adult members and visiting Commonwealth citizens; and between the members themselves. Although services that encouraged friendship and interaction were key to the rhetoric of the modern People's Commonwealth, the Society was under pressure to encourage the right kind of sociability. Too much of the wrong kind and the Society would gain the reputation of a club rather than a learned society. This section will look at interaction with those outside of the Society as well as between those inside in order to consider whether RCS lived up to its rhetoric as a People's Commonwealth.

The RCS headquarters acted as a centre for coordinating and encouraging other Commonwealth organizations, hosting the Round Table, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council, the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, and the Council for Education in the Commonwealth. Other large-scale collaborative efforts included the frequent joint meetings held with the Royal African Society which, in the 1960s, was resident in the Royal Commonwealth Society offices; the Society's key role in the early stages of VSO; and the Joint Commonwealth Societies Conference at which the Society agreed to work together in the 'new countries' with the Victoria League, the Royal Overseas League, and the English-Speaking Union.

At both branch and central levels there was an awkward combination of cooperation and competition between the Society and other similar organizations. The Hants and Dorset branch, for example, repeatedly cited 'various outstanding difficulties' that prevented them from developing relations with other Commonwealth societies and yet also reported a successful joint function with the Royal Overseas League that was attended by two hundred guests.¹⁴² At the end of the decade

¹⁴¹ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 19.

¹⁴² Chairman's Report for 1959 (RCS: Hants and Dorset Society).

members of the newly-formed Commonwealth Affairs Committee hinted at the lack of cohesion between Commonwealth organizations when it called for the RCS to take a more active role in coordinating voluntary effort on the Commonwealth and bringing together the 200 or so organizations—speaking with ‘200 little voices’¹⁴³—that were concerned with the Commonwealth.

A more successful example of the formal role played by the Society in fostering Commonwealth interaction was the Commonwealth Interchange Study Group Organisation (CISGO), a scheme that sent young businesspeople abroad to Commonwealth countries.¹⁴⁴ Tapping into many of the same themes of service, globalisation, and development as VSO, CISGO aimed ‘to fill a gap in the usual pattern of international travel by giving groups of promising men and women in business and the professions in the Commonwealth the opportunity of a brisk immersion in the life of another part of the Commonwealth.’¹⁴⁵ Candidates were typically in their mid- to late-twenties and in the 1960s groups travelled to Canada, Australia, and Singapore on carefully organized tours, meeting business representatives from a wide range of industries. As with the majority of the Society’s formal activities, the potential impact of CISGO was severely limited by its expense and by the small numbers of candidates it was able to send overseas.

Working on a much smaller scale, the Liverpool branch was similarly interested in business connections. Liverpool was one of the few branches to exist in an area with a considerable migrant population and held a sherry party to celebrate Nigerian independence in 1960 to which they invited the Lord Mayor and around forty members of the Nigerian business community. The branch hoped that the event would foster interest among businessmen concerned with West African trade. Both these efforts formed part of wider culture of promoting business links with Commonwealth in which banks such as Barclays and companies such as the Diamond Corporation West Africa Ltd advertised in the pages of the *Commonwealth Journal*, and in which newly independent countries promoted themselves as stable and profitable environments for business.

The Society’s role as a nexus of Commonwealth connections was, however, strongest when these connections occurred organically and without formal

¹⁴³ Review of Past and Current Activities, 5 May 1969 (RCS: Commonwealth Affairs Committee).

¹⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of CISGO see Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies.’

¹⁴⁵ RCS Publicity leaflet, no date (RCS: CISGO reports).

instigation. Connections fostered by members rather than the administration were not only cheap, they also fit more closely with discourses of the People's Commonwealth that emphasized individual interaction. Although difficult to trace across institutional archives, anecdotal evidence suggests that networks of interaction between societies were frequently fostered and maintained by particularly active individuals. A number of RCS members were serial committee members, active not only in the RCS but also in a number of other civic societies and organizations. The Bath branch announced that a number of fellows were members of all three local commonwealth organizations. One member, who sat on RCS's central committee, was also a representative for his Rotary Club on his local VSO Committee.¹⁴⁶ What sometimes manifested as competition for the central Society was for individual members a happy profusion of opportunities that matched their interests.

The Society's role as the nexus of a number of Commonwealth networks was also carried out through interaction between the varied guests who were invited to Society functions. As the guest lists for Society lectures above reveal, these events brought together groups of people whose interest in the Commonwealth was perhaps only tangential and connected them more explicitly and collectively to the Commonwealth. Moreover, in the 1960s the RCS also hoped to act as a venue for 'New Commonwealth' collaboration. As late as 1956, non-British guests could not be brought to meeting without prior permission from the Secretary General.¹⁴⁷ But by the 1960s the RCS was felt to offer a safe space for Commonwealth hospitality where non-white guests 'could eat, drink, meet, and talk without fear of discrimination'.¹⁴⁸ As Craggs describes, citing an interview with Prunella Scarlett, corporate members such as Barclays and trading companies took advantage of this atmosphere, wanting 'their bright spark from wherever to walk into a prejudice free place where they would feel at home.'¹⁴⁹ The Speakers and Public Relations office reported that the Society was increasingly being asked by the Central Office of Information to arrange lunches and entertainment for touring visitors from the Commonwealth including editors, trade unionists, and youth club leaders.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Council Minutes, 27 February 1964 (RCS: Council Minutes).

¹⁴⁷ Royal Empire Society Programme for 1956 (Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York [hereafter Borthwick] Capricorn Africa Society files, CAP 113).

¹⁴⁸ Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 110.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁵⁰ Council Minutes, 24 October 1963 (RCS: Council Minutes).

Although these interactions helped to dispel stereotypes of the RCS as an imperial hangover, we should not overestimate their importance to the everyday experience of Society members. A market research questionnaire completed by ninety-four members in 1973 revealed the uncomfortable truth that the Society's restaurants were of more importance to members than the interaction with 'Commonwealth People' and access to Commonwealth affairs the Society provided.¹⁵¹ Over half of the respondents identified the Society's restaurants and bars as the aspect of the Society that was of highest personal value to them.

There is a strong sense that members felt that the Society brought together a community of like-minded people and that, at a time when popular opinion was increasingly unenthusiastic towards the Commonwealth, it provided a safe place to discuss positive feelings about the Commonwealth. A member who stayed in headquarters accommodation when visiting London from the Channel Islands commented on the 'atmosphere of friendliness and the feeling of belonging to the great family of members from around the Empire.'¹⁵² In a careful consideration of the difficulties faced by Britons returning home after time in the empire, Buettner describes the relief that repatriates found in rediscovering companions from overseas.¹⁵³ Colonial experiences set people apart from the rest of the public and the social spaces of the RCS provided a haven in which returning civil servants could take refuge in the company of other repatriates. As John Darwin discusses, for upper class British residents overseas, the club was a key site of community and sociability where residents were brought together through sport, the card table, or seasonal jollity.¹⁵⁴ Social functions at the RCS helped to recreate this club atmosphere back home in Britain, preserving a key site of sociability for aging empire repatriates.

Within a Commonwealth discourse that emphasized human actions and interactions, this function of the Society should not be dismissed as insignificant. As RCS member and Commonwealth Office official Roger Barltrop put it, the Society was a 'good contact place' and 'there is, after all, nothing like personal experience and knowledge.'¹⁵⁵ The Society had long been a meeting place for those home on furlough and for politicians, governors, and diplomats. Although this changed

¹⁵¹ Pilot Scheme on Market Research, 28 February 1973 (RCS: Commonwealth Affairs Committee Papers).

¹⁵² Cited in Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 70.

¹⁵³ Buettner, 'Britons Back Home,' 313.

¹⁵⁴ Darwin, 'Orphans of Empire,' 339.

¹⁵⁵ Interview by Craggs cited in 'Cultural Geographies,' 108.

somewhat as decolonization returned large numbers to Britain permanently the Society nonetheless remained a key space in which Commonwealth contacts could be made and maintained. As Craggs argues, the location of headquarters at the centre of the diplomatic landscape meant that it remained tied into these same networks even after decolonization.¹⁵⁶

Yet despite the potential for serious discussion offered by this social dimension of the Society, there remained significant scope for a member to be an active participant in the Society without ever engaging critically with the changing Commonwealth. Whereas the Commonwealth Purpose Group and Nudge often struggled to survive, many social groups fared much better within the Society. The active Social Committee organized visits to Battersea Dogs Home, the Bank of England, Frogmore Gardens, Woburn Abbey, and Ascot.¹⁵⁷ Popular film evenings screened titles such as the Ealing Comedy *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *Desirée* (starring Marlon Brando as Napoleon). In the course of the 1960s a Royal Commonwealth Motor Group was established and the Billiards Committee saw users of the billiards room increase from twelve to around one hundred. Social events were also more popular than educative meetings at branch level. So successful was the Hants and Dorset Bridge Circle that they had to introduce a second afternoon each week to avoid overcrowding.¹⁵⁸ If older members were attracted by bridge and billiards, it was the fruit machine installed in the Bristol branch that was key to luring younger members into the premises.

Far more consistent than the centrally organized events, this ‘unofficial’ and unorganized social dimension of Society life was also the area that the Society’s central committees were least able to control or direct towards its wider aims. By the end of the 1960s critical appraisals of the balance between club and educational functions increased dramatically. As Reese argues, social activity was important, but it ‘could not alone form a durable and worthwhile basis for a society that wished to be taken seriously.’¹⁵⁹ Concerns of this sort were exacerbated by branch level failings and mismanagement. The 1969 Annual General Meeting of the Cambridgeshire branch, for instance, revealed that so much had been spent on a party for the visiting Australian cricket team, in the hope of attracting new members, that it had been

¹⁵⁶ Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies.’

¹⁵⁷ *Commonwealth Journal* 4, 3 (1961) 144.

¹⁵⁸ Chairman’s Report for 1958 (RCS: Branch Records Hants and Dorset).

¹⁵⁹ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 257.

impossible to afford much else for the rest of the year.¹⁶⁰ This was not the first time the Cambridgeshire had attracted the attention of the central RCS. In the 1940s, as Reese describes in his Centenary History of the Society, the branch was reported to be suffering from the ‘monopolistic enthusiasm of a mettlesome, peppery woman who had made her home the headquarters and tended to dominate the branch’s affairs herself, inevitably associating the society in the public mind with her own numerous activities and with her somewhat reactionary *obiter dicta* at branch meetings.’¹⁶¹

A Future Policy Agenda for the Commonwealth Affairs Committee noted that ‘the society was more and more in danger of becoming merely an inexpensive club with an Empire aura and a tendency to be emotionally involved in rather vague Commonwealth ideals without enough vital contact with politics, economics and people of the Commonwealth to carry conviction.’¹⁶² A critical appraisal of the Society repeated these sentiments three years later, concluding that ‘most members and others who come into contact with the Society regard it as, on the one hand, quite a good inexpensive Commonwealth club, and, on the other, a sound but ineffective Commonwealth Affairs institute.’¹⁶³ Similar appraisals were levelled at the Society’s branches, some of which were described as ‘little more than loose groupings of members of the Society who happen to live in the area, who come together once or twice a year on some occasion which is primarily social but has a Commonwealth flavour’ and others of which were criticized for being ‘to all intents and purposes social clubs, relying for their appeal on distinguished patronage and social cachet.’¹⁶⁴

As in the clubs attended by British communities overseas, the Society’s bars and dining rooms were exclusive. There were strict rules about who could use which of the Society’s facilities, and although a number of guests were hosted by the Society, these were generally already converts to the Commonwealth cause. Regardless of how open-minded or outward-looking the conversations held at the Society’s bars and restaurants might have been, they did not touch the wider British population. Far from being a conduit for wider Commonwealth consciousness, this

¹⁶⁰ AGM, 25 April 1969 (RCS: Cambridgeshire Branch Minutes).

¹⁶¹ Reese, *Royal Commonwealth Society*, 213.

¹⁶² Future Policy Agenda, 9 June 1970 (RCS: Commonwealth Affairs Committee Agendas and Minutes May 1969-February 1962).

¹⁶³ Memorandum: a Critical Appraisal of the Society, 9 January 1973 (RCS: Public Affairs, May 1969-May 1977).

¹⁶⁴ Guidance to Branches Overseas, 30 September 1970 (RCS: Financial and Administrative Arrangements with Branches).

social space worked to temporarily isolate repatriates and their shared recollections from the rest of the public. It was a fairly damning blow for the outward-reaching Central Committee that the Society thrived most when the rhetoric of the multiracial People's Commonwealth was least fulfilled. The social function of the Society reveals a clear gulf between the objectives of the RCS leadership—including those running and sitting on its committees—and the wishes and needs of the Society's membership.

Pragmatism, Stagnation and Enthusiasm – Some Conclusions

Lord Casey, whose call for RCS militancy was discussed above, also wrote a book on the future of the Commonwealth in which he argued that 'many of the Society's social and other activities [...] represent nostalgic recollections of the glories of the past, not anxious constructive looking-forward into the future of the Commonwealth.'¹⁶⁵ This chapter has asked whether the Society met the challenges posed by the shifting Commonwealth or whether it stagnated, warranting the epithet of 'imperial hangover' that many sought to give it. It has asked whether the RCS embraced the modern Commonwealth wholeheartedly, or whether it was dragged through the 1960s holding on for dear life to this fast-changing association of countries. In a Society of this size with a fairly large membership base and an established structure of regional branches, it is not surprising that the answer depends on where one looks.

If we were to look at the Sussex branch we would see an aging membership which met monthly in a decaying building to drink sherry and watch illustrated travel talks about countries that were not necessarily members of the Commonwealth. But this stagnant branch represents only one aspect of the Society, and headquarters accused Sussex of failing to play an 'important part in promoting the main objects of the Society' and of 'carrying out the Commonwealth work of the Society with insufficient effort and initiative and with insufficient relevance to the modern Commonwealth.'¹⁶⁶ An altogether different picture emerges if we look at the 1961 Study Conference organized by headquarters for 265 Sixth formers. Speakers at the

¹⁶⁵ Lord Casey, *The Future of the Commonwealth* (London: 1963), 38.

¹⁶⁶ Deputy Chairman of Council to Sir William Sullivan, 11 November 1961 (RCS: Sussex Branch, Sussex Branch Overview from Central RCS)

conference were the Bishop of Johannesburg, who reflected on problems in South Africa; the editor of the newsletter *Africa 1960*, Charles Janson, who spoke about Ghana and Guinea in the context of the struggle for West African Leadership; and J.Z. Gumede, a Matabele headmaster from Southern Rhodesia who spoke on the future of the Federation. In addition to the educative critical engagement with the modern Commonwealth encouraged by these three talks, students at the Study Conference were also encouraged to involve themselves more actively in the Peoples Commonwealth. They were spoken to not only by returning VSO volunteers but also by the Commonwealth Service Group who talked about the social welfare initiatives that they undertook among non-student West Indian Immigrants. Through its balance of outreach, education, action, and interaction, this Conference embodies the Society's key aims and practices as they appeared in the records of the central administration and in its publications.

The RCS was aware of the conditions of the present, generally enthusiastic about the potential of the Commonwealth and yet was hampered in its efforts to do very much about it by a long list of factors. As May argues, for bodies like the Round Table and the RCS which 'emerged from the end of empire committed to the new Commonwealth, it was a very different world from that in which they had been conceived.'¹⁶⁷ In the 1960s the RCS described the pursuit of their aims as 'long and difficult.'¹⁶⁸ The overarching aim of the RCS, as Alec Dickson of the Commonwealth Studies Foundation and later VSO told the *Manchester Guardian* was to develop a 'Commonwealth consciousness' here at home.¹⁶⁹ The Society did organize and support a number of outreach schemes and efforts were made to extend the reach of its influence, but the majority of its functions and operations were nonetheless geared towards providing for its fee-paying members.

Efforts to promote the Commonwealth struggled against what many members saw as an apathetic public. The Society swallowed what they described as a particularly 'bitter pill' in 1967 when the postmaster general rejected their proposal for a Centenary Stamp in favour of one commemorating a half century of votes for women.¹⁷⁰ The next chapter on the international work of the Women's Institute assesses the extent to which the frameworks and narratives of the Peoples

¹⁶⁷ May, 'Empire Loyalists and "Commonwealth Men,"' 53.

¹⁶⁸ *Commonwealth Journal* 6, 2 (1963): 45.

¹⁶⁹ 'Britain needs "Commonwealth Consciousness,"' *Manchester Guardian*, 6 January 1959.

¹⁷⁰ *Commonwealth Journal* 6, 6 (1967): 225.

Commonwealth might still have been meaningful to other sections of British society, despite the RCS's perceived failure to capitalize on this. External factors were not, however, the RCS's only downfall; indifference from within also limited the Society. The Society's struggle to influence its membership was not constrained to those who preferred its restaurants to its discussion groups; the RCS also had substantial difficulty in encouraging the right sort of people to become members. As discussed, there was a gulf between the active outlook of the Society's committees and the majority of the Society's members who were content to make use of the facilities at headquarters when in the area and use the society as a social club within which they could be with like-minded people.

Faced with these challenges the Society's attempts to counteract images of Commonwealth decline and stagnation can be summarized as piecemeal rather than holistic.¹⁷¹ Yet despite these internal and external obstacles, the Society showed no sign of stopping and it continues in the present day to offer many of the same services that it did in the 1960s. Don Taylor, speaking at the Society's Branches Conference in 1968, encapsulated this attitude of perseverance. Responding to suggestions that the Commonwealth might collapse, Taylor argued that even if it did the Royal Commonwealth Society would continue to be 'the guardian of the principles, traditions and contacts with the people with whom Great Britain had had such a long connection.'¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ See Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies' for a discussion of the Society's efforts to improve Headquarters, 96.

¹⁷² Branches Conference, 24 June 1968 (RCS: Commonwealth Studies Committee, Committee Papers 1966-1969).

Chapter Two:

‘Be World Wise with the WIs’: Silence and Empire in the International Work of the British Women’s Institute

More than Just Jam and Jerusalem

When Mrs. Rachel Wild of the Cliffords Women’s Institute (WI) in Yorkshire asked her daughter to join the WI in the late 1960s, the daughter turned her request down with the exclamation ‘oh mother, jams and jellies’.¹ Stereotypes such as this abound about the WI, most of them portraying the movement in patronizingly insular terms. The following extracts from the records of monthly meetings kept by the Burythorpe Women’s Institute, also in Yorkshire, do little to challenge such an image:

March 1952: Competition for the best darn in a sock heel.

June 1952: Miss Seaton gave a demonstration on salads.

July 1954: Visit to the Blind Institute in Hull to be arranged. Demonstration on butter icing.

June 1959: Presentation on the Hoovermatic Washing Machine.

August 1960: Competition for the best necklace made from garden produce.

June 1961: Presentation on soft slippers.²

While domestic concerns were undoubtedly an important part of members’ involvement in the movement—as the case of Burythorpe makes clear—there was more to the WI than the proverbial jam and Jerusalem. Despite the parochial

¹ ‘We Can Play Politics Now,’ *Guardian*, 9 June 1971.

² (Borthwick: Burythorpe Parish Minutes).

connotations of their motto 'For Home and Country', in the 1960s the WI undermined their 'jams and jellies' stereotype not only through involvement in local causes but also through projects international in scope. Alongside sock darning and salad making, the WI involved itself in a wide range of international issues, many of which related either explicitly or implicitly to the British Empire and Commonwealth. It is precisely this combination of local and international concerns that makes the organisation such a valuable case study through which to consider domestic experiences of decolonization.

Taking into account the full gamut of activities that made up the WI, it is fair to assume that most members did not attend WI meetings primarily for an opportunity to campaign on international issues. Whereas organizations and campaigns such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the United Nations Association, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement were motivated by specifically international objectives, the WI was, at its heart, a mechanism for rural sociability. The ways in which a group without a specific empire/Commonwealth remit and for whom international work comprised only a part of their function engaged with the wider world can give us much a better idea of the ways in which the empire/Commonwealth was (if at all) woven into the fabric of everyday British life. Its broad spectrum of motivations, activities and concerns makes the WI an ideal case study through which to consider how empire became a part of lives that were otherwise not traditionally imperial.

Julia Bush has shown that female imperialists became increasingly specialized after the First World War, adapting to the fact that women's increasingly diverse interests required differentiated, separate organizations.³ Unlike Bush's female imperial societies, however, the Women's Institute resisted this trend towards specialization. If anything the movement expanded rather than narrowed its remit as it developed through the twentieth century. This broad scope means that although the WI may have involved its members in issues of empire less frequently or intensively than would have been the case with imperial societies, the number of women that it brought into contact with the empire and commonwealth was far greater and drawn from a far wider section of society. Unlike the Royal Commonwealth Society or groups such as the Victoria League and the Royal Overseas League, the WI

³ Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999), 200.

movement was not disproportionately populated by a membership of ex-colonial administrators, their wives, or their daughters. Instead, the WI's membership represents a group of approximately half a million actors who are not usually included within histories of decolonization: rural women. As this chapter will make clear, though they may not have stalked the bars and billiard rooms of the Royal Commonwealth Society, members of the WI were still active participants in the British experience of decolonization.

Lorna Gibson aptly criticizes the apparent neglect of the Women's Institute within histories of feminism purely on the grounds that it was a rural, non-political organization.⁴ To date, discussions of the women's movement in Britain have tended to focus on the activities of urban-based women, neglecting rural women's experience of politics, feminism, and—of particular interest to this study—imperialism. As Gibson notes, 'little is known about the activities of rural women apart from their involvement in the Women's Land Army (with which the National Federation was not officially involved) during the Second World War.'⁵ Rather than assuming that rural women would experience decolonization in the same way as those living in the imperial capital or other urban areas, the Women's Institute allows us to consider the ways in which rural conditions might shape engagements with the wider world. Away from the male- and urban-centric 'high politics' of imperial decline, members of Women's Institutes across Britain were involved in redefining ideas about 'home', 'away' and nationhood. Their activities encourage us to rethink who we consider as international actors in this period.

With the exception of its London-based Central Office, the British WI movement was an almost exclusively rural organization. Formed by the wives of members of the Farmer's Institute, the WI movement began in Canada in 1897, but it was not until 1915 that the first meeting of a British WI was held on the Welsh island of Anglesey. The British movement was initially intended to provide a female counterpart to the male-dominated British Agricultural Organisation Society. This had been founded in 1901 to promote cooperation between farmers, smallholders, and growers in order to increase agricultural production, and the WI's early objectives developed from these intentions. From its inception the WI sought to revitalize rural

⁴ Lorna Gibson, 'The Women's Institute and *Jerusalem's* Suffrage Past,' *Women's History Review* 15, 2 (2006): 326-7.

⁵ Gibson, 'Jerusalem's Suffrage Past,' 328.

communities and encourage rural women to become more involved in food production. At this time, it was one of the few women-only organisations to hold monthly meetings that were partly social, partly educational, and partly a forum for pressure-group politics.⁶ In so doing the WI offered rare opportunities for leisure and self-development to many of its members, and this remained the case in the 1960s.

By 1961 there were 8,517 Women's Institutes meeting regularly across Britain and this number steadily increased throughout the decade to 9,051 in 1969.⁷ The size of Institutes ranged between small groups of less than twenty members to those exceeding a hundred. In addition to networking rural women on a national scale, the WI's broad membership base also brought together women from across the social spectrum. Institute meetings provided a rare space in which women from different classes would meet, interact and expose themselves to interests and preoccupations that lay outside their own class-based social networks. Pat Thane suggests that in its early years the WI encouraged 'a shift in rural power relationships among women.'⁸ Writing about the movement in 1925, the chronicler J.W. Scott described how 'country women' had gained an insight into the lives of working-class women and 'learnt something about the implications of democracy, and that Socialists have the good of the country as much as heart as Conservatives.'⁹ As Helen McCarthy describes, as the WI grew in the interwar period it became strongly involved in discourses of active citizenship, and committed to creating a space in associational life that was free from party or sectarian conflict.¹⁰ Indeed, until 1969 there was a rule forbidding the discussion of any party political or sectarian matters at meetings.

That said, despite including members from across the class spectrum and despite its publicly plural persona, we cannot overlook the fact that the majority of WI membership was middle class and conservative and that these characteristics inevitably shaped their engagement with the declining empire. Working on the

⁶ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement, 1915-1960* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997), 154.

⁷ Women's Institute, 'History of the W.I.: 1960s' [<http://www.thewi.org.uk/standard.aspx?id=63>, accessed 1 May 2010].

⁸ Pat Thane, 'What Difference Did the Vote Make?' in Amanda Vickery, ed. *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750-Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 270.

⁹ J. W. Robertson Scott, *The Story of the Women's Institute Movement in England and Wales and Scotland* (Idbury, Oxon, 1925), v.

¹⁰ Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain,' *The Historical Journal* 50, 4 (2007): 892.

interwar period, Ross McKibbin sees the professedly non-political nature of organizations frequented by the middle classes as serving to shore up the anti-socialist mentalities of their members. The tendency to depoliticize social relationships was in fact deeply political, he argues, and represented the informal Conservative hold on associational life.¹¹ In 1922, for example, the WI were criticized by the general secretary of the National Union of Agricultural Workers for ‘working insidiously against the Labour Party and the trade unions and in favour of “leaving things as they are”’.¹²

Was the same true in the 1960s? Broadly speaking, WI membership represented a partisan network of c/Conservative sociability. The *Guardian* described one typical member as ‘a don’s wife with children away at boarding school who fills her spare time with Women’s Institute work—and has more lately to her great delight been elected to the county council. Her views are Conservative and she is a strong Suez supporter.’¹³ As will be discussed, these affiliations and beliefs certainly played out in the movement’s international work, but they were not the only factor at play. Indeed, the WI was actually far less reactionary than one might expect. The glowing review of Antonioni’s provocative 1966 film *Blow-Up* published in their magazine, *Home and Country*, reminds us that while the WI tended to work within conventions, they could also be strikingly modern at times. Juxtapositions between tradition and modernity carry through the international work of the WI.

While the rural nature of the movement offers a way of seeing how the very local was not necessarily insular, its female membership allows for a consideration of how the ‘female space’ within which the WI operated shaped their engagements with empire and decolonization. As Joanna Lewis summarizes, ‘European women, whether as wives of administrators, as missionaries, as lobbyists at home, or working overseas as amateur do-gooders, nurses, teachers, welfare officers are now seen as having played an important part’ in upholding the imperial project.¹⁴ Philanthropy—one of the WI’s primary international activities—had long been configured as an activity in which ‘woman’s nature and mission joined in near perfect harmony.’¹⁵ By

¹¹ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹² *Daily Herald*, 7 December 1922. Cited in McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations,’ 902.

¹³ ‘Nonpolitical Visitors,’ *Guardian*, 26 May 1961.

¹⁴ Joanna Lewis, *Empire State Building: War and Welfare in Kenya, 1925–52* (Oxford, 2000), 11.

¹⁵ Anne Summers, ‘A Home from Home: Women’s Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century,’ in Sandra Burman, ed., *Fit Work for Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 34.

studying the international work of the WI in the 1960s we are able to follow the well-plotted trajectory of women's involvement with empire into new territory, beyond the 'end' of empire.

Despite its substantial membership and the important role that it played in hundreds of thousands of British women's lives, almost no scholarly work has been written about the Women's Institute. Aside from the occasional reference to the WI within histories of other women's groups and movements and the organisation's own plentiful but non-scholarly publications, only one academic history of the movement has been written. Maggie Andrews' *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement, 1915-1960* takes the movement's relation to wider histories of feminism as its primary concern, seeking to rescue it from what she aptly describes as 'trivialisation and condescension' through a reconsideration of it as a potential cradle of feminism.¹⁶ Lorna Gibson has since built upon this work by looking at the relationship between feminism and music in the WI.¹⁷ Though valuable, this work does little to take the WI beyond a feminist narrative and there is substantial scope to consider some of the ways in which the activities of the movement and its members related to other societal contexts and trends. This chapter offers the first detailed analysis of the international dimensions of the WI, and uncovers how a substantial portion of the association's international remit entangled members from all levels of the WI in issues of empire, Commonwealth, and decolonization.

International Activity within a Shrinking World

The WI was certainly not the first group of women to encourage forms of internationalism and international understanding. At the end of the nineteenth century, decades before the first WI meeting was held on British soil, women had already begun to organize across national borders.¹⁸ The International Council of Women (an organization with American roots), the International Alliance of Women, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom all proclaimed

¹⁶ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, x-xii.

¹⁷ Gibson, *Jerusalem's Suffrage Past*.

¹⁸ Leila T. Rupp, 'Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888-1945,' *The American Historical Review* 99, 5 (1994): 1573.

openness to women of all continents, religions, political affiliations, and colours.¹⁹ While the WI was still focused on female participation in domestic rural productivity, these other groups began to campaign on women's rights issues. Despite not being involved in these early manifestations of international female networking, the international dimension of the WI did start to take root not long after the movement's establishment. After the widespread destruction caused by the First World War, associational, religious and humanitarian groups began to discuss the best means to restore and preserve harmony. During the interwar years the WI took part in wider efforts to promote the peace-keeping merits of internationalism by supporting the League of Nations Union and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, two of the transnational women's organizations in this period with the widest international reach. At the same time that the WI promoted internationalism, they also showed a particular interest in the British Empire.

In fact, before the Second World War, the empire dominated the WI's international work. Empire-related events took place at Institutes throughout the year, promoting the spectacle of the empire and celebrating British greatness. Most notably, WI members were active participants in the large-scale community events held to celebrate Empire Day each year. Empire Day had been founded by Lord Meath in 1904 in an effort to promote imperial education in schools. The event was run on entirely voluntary lines, making the contributions of organizations such as the WI crucial in spreading festivities at a grass roots level. The company in which the WI supported Empire Day was varied; they took part alongside overtly imperialist organizations such as the National Service League and British Empire Union as well as groups like the Salvation Army and Co-operative Movement.²⁰ Like the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Empire Day Movement was under considerable pressure to respond to the changing nature of the Empire/Commonwealth in the postwar period. Whereas the RCS had some success in adapting to this new climate, efforts to rejuvenate Empire Day as Commonwealth Day after 1958 were largely unsuccessful, failing to shed the image of the celebration as an imperialist relic, out of touch with the postwar international order.²¹ The Empire Day Movement declined rapidly after

¹⁹ As Rupp discusses, there were limitations in practice to these discourses of inclusion.

²⁰ Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back?*, 118; Thompson, 'Empire in the Public Imagination,' 269-70; English, 'Empire Day'; Springhall, 'Lord Meath.'; Empire Day' *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 7 November 1934; *Western Daily Press*, 4 June 1934.

²¹ English, 'Empire Day,' 274.

1945, losing the interest of most of its earlier supporters, including the WI. But how else did the WI's international activity change after the Second World War?

Despite their earlier participation in events like Empire Day and organizations such as the League of Nations Union, the real, practical growth in the WI's international remit did not take place until the postwar period in the context of debates about the 'shrinking world'. In 1954 the WI added a clause 'to promote international understanding among countrywomen' to its local and national rules. This statement of purpose, along with others of similar sentiment, recurred frequently across WI publications. A pamphlet on the international work of Women's Institutes described the rationale behind this new outward-looking dimension, stating that

Just as members are realising the necessity to break down the traditions of British "reserve" and insularity and are becoming more openly welcoming to overseas visitors so the movement as a whole appears increasingly aware that its aims to improve conditions of rural life cannot now be worked out in one country in isolation from the rest of the world.²²

The international organization of rural women and Women's Institutes to which the British National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) were affiliated, the Associated Countrywomen of the World (ACWW), also sought to 'ensure that the association was perfectly placed to accept the challenges of this new age of mass communication and travel'.²³ That these similar objectives were framed somewhat differently by the ACWW and the NFWI speaks to how supposedly transnational imperatives could also be layered with identifiably national sentiments.²⁴

The NFWI's mantras closely resemble broader political and economic debates about Britain's place in a 'shrinking world'. As in the examples from the national press discussed in the Introduction, the WI's approach to globalisation seems to have been driven in equal parts by concern about Britain's declining world status and enthusiasm for the possibilities presented by increasing communication and mobility. The WI identified a need for Britain to seek favour with members of the increasingly interconnected world (or else risk insularity and isolation), while simultaneously

²² *International Work of the Women's Institutes*, NFWI pamphlet, May 1955.

²³ '1957-1970: Looking Ahead' in *Working With Women Worldwide: Highlights of 75 Years of ACWW*, Associated Country Women of the World (London: Associated Country Women of the World, 2004), 21-24.

²⁴ This sense of British exceptionalism, and the relationship between national and internationalist sentiment, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

looking beyond the nation state to celebrate an emerging global civil society. By 1968, for example, it acknowledged that with globalisation came great opportunities for ‘informal meetings and discussions, exchanges of knowledge and personal experience in community development, the solving of problems which a changing and complex world and economy continually present, [and] the bridging of the growing gap between the older and newly emerging nations.’²⁵ ‘More than at any other time in the history of the world’, it argued, ‘we need to live together as individuals, as families, as communities and as nations if the world as we know it is to survive at all.’²⁶ A National Federation handbook setting out the international work of the WI began with the acknowledgement that ‘because the world has grown “smaller” our own lives are more closely linked with the peoples of other nations and woven with theirs to the intricate pattern of international affairs. It is, therefore, vitally important that we learn all we can about them.’²⁷

These pamphlets and handbooks took the tone of rallying calls, enthusing members with pride for what the WI had already achieved internationally and outlining the potential for future action. The central International Affairs Committee consistently spoke volubly of their desire to instigate international involvement across the WI movement. But these discussions seem a far cry from the sock darning and salad dressing taking place at the Burythorpe Institute. Were they simply empty rhetoric? Did international work permeate the everyday experience of WI membership? The organization was (and still is) organized across three tiers in a pyramidal structure, at the top of which stood the National Federation of Women’s Institutes. Working out of headquarters in London, the NFWI operated through a series of sub-committees which each coordinated a different aspect of the Institutes’ work. In the middle tier of the movement many of the structures of the NFWI were replicated at the level of County Federations, which were intended to act as an intermediary between national headquarters and the rest of the WIs. At the base of the pyramid were the Institutes themselves, populated by a membership of around half a million. The pyramidal structure of the WI—as well as the predictable weighting of available historical sources towards the National Federation at the top of it—means

²⁵ *Home and Country*, November 1968.

²⁶ *Home and Country*, November 1968.

²⁷ *Home and Country*, March 1967.

that we need to be particularly sensitive to the potential gap between the lived experience of the membership of the WI and its leadership at a national level.

Andrews has argued that national and international campaigns tended to be the preoccupation of the middle-class leadership, while working-class members were more likely to focus on their own branch and related local concerns.²⁸ Gibson similarly notes that although an examination of the WI's early founders reveals dense networks of membership across more openly feminist women's organizations, 'it seems unlikely that these women (who were largely drawn from the aristocratic elite and gentry) should be seen as representative of its members.'²⁹ Similar disparities between the movement's upper and lower echelons continued into the 1960s. One member complained in *Home and Country* that practically all WI trips abroad were undertaken by NFWI members, arguing that 'the movement was created for all WI members and everyone should have the chance.'³⁰ Others protested more broadly that "'headquarters" [was] too remote and far removed from an ordinary WI.' 'After many years of membership,' one woman wrote, 'I am no nearer to knowing what headquarters does and what the vast sums of money are spent on.'³¹ From the perspective of the intermediary tier, members of the Yorkshire Federation's International Subcommittee complained that their local WIs did not fully appreciate the importance of the movement's affiliation to international bodies such as the Associated Countrywomen of the World.³²

Despite these disparities, there is still substantial evidence that the WI's international remit did permeate at the local institute level. The WI's three tiers interacted through multiple channels and at each tier the WI showed sensitivity towards the local, national, and global networks that they sought to navigate. Flowing from the NFWI downwards were pamphlets, publications and the monthly *Home and Country* magazine, as well as internal circulars that went out to the various subcommittees at county level. County Federations and members themselves interacted with the NFWI by sending in monthly news reports of the events held at their Institutes, and individual members wrote in to *Home and Country* with questions and comments. Central and County committees drew together lists of

²⁸ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, 60-63.

²⁹ Gibson, 'Jerusalem's Suffrage Past,' 327.

³⁰ *Home and Country*, December 1966.

³¹ *Home and Country*, November 1966.

³² Committee Minutes, 18 November 1965 (Borthwick, Yorkshire Federation International Committee: File WI/Int 1).

people to act as conduits for international information and many members also had access to personal networks that stretched across the globe.

One report suggested that approximately eighty per cent of 1969 WI programmes included at least one travel talk per year and there were many other opportunities, besides the travel talk, for members to take part in international issues. These included the establishment of 'Links' with WIs overseas; courses on international issues at the WI's own Denman College (a residential short course college for WI members in Abingdon, Oxfordshire); philanthropic endeavours such as participation in UN World Refugee Year in 1959 and the 1960-69 Freedom from Hunger Campaign as well as smaller projects that the WI took on itself including the provision of material and sewing machines to the Windward and Solomon Islands, and also the provision of hospitality to Commonwealth students, foreign dignitaries, administrators, and visiting academics. As one member put it for the WI's monthly magazine *Home and Country* in 1967, 'I can't imagine that any WI member anywhere hasn't had a finger in some international pie or other by now.'³³

As is almost always the case with an organisation of this size and spread, the WI's positions on empire, Englishness, decolonization, and globalisation are not easily determined. There are silences, inconsistencies, and contradictions. The following sections first consider the balance between imperial and global frameworks within the WI's educational work before looking at the imperial legacies present within the WI's overseas philanthropy. The chapter will then move on to explore the discourses of 'home' in the WI's provision of hospitality to Commonwealth students, the movement's differing configurations of the New and Old Commonwealth, and the vocabulary of the family through which the WI articulated their relationship with the developing Commonwealth and dismantling empire.

Global Frameworks and Commonwealth Preoccupations

The WI's 'education' in international issues occurred through three primary channels: speakers giving presentations at monthly Institute meetings; the attendance by a smaller number of members of courses run on international issues at Denman College; and the larger-scale arrangement of publicly attended International Days by

³³ *Home and Country*, October 1967.

regional sub-committees. In order to provide these opportunities to their members the WI drew on a range of resources, the availability of which inevitably shaped the kind of international 'education' members would receive. The precise resources to which a given group or county-level committee had access depended on the personal networks of members themselves, the provision of speakers and materials by other organizations, and varying regional contexts. County Federations, for instance, were expected to provide panels of speakers for their Institutes on international subjects and were encouraged by the NFWI to approach embassies, legations, high commissions, the English Speaking Union, the Victoria League, the Commonwealth Institute and the UN Information Centre to find them.³⁴ Many of the organizations offering speakers were unambiguously preoccupied with imperial/Commonwealth issues, and it is important to consider the extent to which the WI's association with such people entangled the movement and its members within those same preoccupations. Despite speaking in terms of *international* understanding, a significant proportion of the WI's educational activities was focused on empire-related issues or on countries within the empire/Commonwealth. Given the popularity of discourses of internationalism at this time, why was this the case? Did the WI actively seek out speakers on the Commonwealth, or were these speakers simply more readily available—more eager to find an audience—than those speaking on more broadly international issues?

While individual Institutes such as Burythorpe often seemed little concerned with decolonization, the WI's educational programme was nevertheless shaped by the urgency with which external organizations sought to promote the declining empire. From its establishment in 1901, for example, the Victoria League worked energetically to promote imperial sentiment among the British public. In the interwar years the Victoria League organized thousands of lectures on imperial topics, many of them to WIs that they specifically targeted in an attempt to bolster interest in empire among newly enfranchised rural women.³⁵ Women's Institutes were also frequently visited by representatives of the Empire Marketing Board in this period: Colonel Cox spoke to the Denby WI about Empire production; at Pendeen WI in Cornwall

³⁴ *International Work of Women's Institutes*, NFWI pamphlet, October 1957.

³⁵ Barbara Bush, 'Britain's Conscience on Africa: White Women, Race and Imperial Politics in Inter-War Britain,' in Clare Midgley, ed., *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007), 201; Clare Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1930,' in Hall and Rose, *At Home with Empire*, 246.

members heard a talk by Nancy Williams on the 'Common Empire' before competing to draw the 'best sketch of Hitler on a blackboard'; and Eldred Walker spoke about the 'Resources of Empire' at the Saltford WI. As one member sat knitting a 'something nothing' and another rocked her baby in a pram, Walker spoke to her audience about butter from New Zealand, cheese from Australia, fruit from South Africa and wheat from Canada.³⁶ Such occasions tied in neatly with the WI's support of Empire Day described above.

This activity continued into the 1960s when the apparent vulnerability of Commonwealth ties drove invested groups to redouble their promotional efforts. Indeed in this period some of the largest, most detailed, and most frequently updated lists of speakers from which the WI put together their programmes were provided by organizations such as the Commonwealth Institute (funded through the Commonwealth Relations Office to 'project the Commonwealth in Britain') and the Women Speakers for the Commonwealth (a voluntary bureau made up of women returning from their own or their husbands' overseas service).³⁷ Events organized at Denman College, such as a popular week-long course on South Africa from the Boer War to Apartheid, drew from these same repositories of speakers.³⁸ In 1962 a new course ran entitled 'Africa and the New Emergent Countries'. Held over five days, this was attended by twenty students from thirteen countries including Britain. There were talks given by Lord Hemingford (a well travelled journalist for *The Times*) and representatives of the African Development Trust, Voluntary Service Overseas, the Overseas Development Institute and the Tanganyika Council of Women.³⁹ The repeated scheduling of similar events suggests a combination of a central WI interest in the changes brought by decolonization, and the widespread availability of speakers on the matter.

As well as drawing upon national organizations such as these, the Institutes themselves also made good use of regional, local, and personal networks. One group in Alperton, for example, enjoyed a talk on life in Jamaica by a member whose daughter was working in the High Commission. Another in Cranborne hosted a talk

³⁶ *Cornishman*, 29 May 1941; *Western Daily Press*, 6 May 1925; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 1933.

³⁷ Memorandum by Commonwealth Office to British High Commissions, 23 March 1967 (TTNA: FCO/13/324).

³⁸ Anderson, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, 143.

³⁹ 'Course 41: Africa and the New Emergent Countries' (National Federation of Women's Institutes, The Women's Library, London [hereafter WL]: 5/FWI/D/2/2/20).

by a woman who had worked as a missionary and social worker in Southern India.⁴⁰ After a National Federation circular sparked an interest in Ceylon, members of the Yorkshire International Subcommittee sought out speakers from the Ceylon Tea Centre in Leeds; when they organized an International Day on India the committee started their search for speakers in the Yorkshire area.⁴¹ They also contacted Hull and Leeds Universities to see if they had any Indian students who might visit for the day and asked Lord Scarborough to speak at the event or recommend someone else who had been on the recent Royal Tour of India.⁴² Occasions such as these, in which empire-related events were pieced together through a careful nurturing of local resources, make clear that there were also instigators with imperial/Commonwealth interests at the more local level of the WI.

A closer consideration of the WI's membership also reveals that many of the more middle- and upper-middle class members had more direct connections to the declining empire. Anecdotal evidence about the composition of the Yorkshire Federation's international subcommittee, for example, suggests that it included members who had personal, familial or employment links with many parts of the empire. One member left the committee for nine months to go to Ceylon, while another combined her active role on the subcommittee with being a member of the Commonwealth Panel of Speakers. This particular link suggests that there was not merely interaction between but also crossover in membership between the WI and organisations with a more explicit Commonwealth purview. The mixed class composition of most local institutes worked to bring the international connections and imperial interests of some middle-class members into a social network shared by the working class, exposing working-class women to empire-related experiences and concerns that they may not themselves have sought out.

While it is difficult to account for the precise content of WI talks we can piece together some sense of the range of imperial issues that might have been discussed in institutes across the country. One talk about the empire/Commonwealth was certainly not the same as another. Connections with white settler populations in colonies, for example, gave the British WI access to a particular set of opinions about issues of race and independence. Dr. Olive Robertson, 'one of those formidable women' and a

⁴⁰ *Home and Country*, April 1967.

⁴¹ Yorkshire International Subcommittee Minutes, 2 February 1965 (Borthwick: WI/Int 1).

⁴² Yorkshire International Subcommittee Minutes, 13 April 1961 (Borthwick: WI/Int 1).

member of the Rhodesian WI, toured Britain in 1965 and spoke to over 60 meetings about Rhodesian independence. She described herself as ‘unashamedly right wing’ and her opinions were unambiguously ‘colonial’ in nature:

We cannot continue in this twilight zone between colonialism and self-government. The choice is quite clear: independence on our terms or black majority rule and all the horrors of the Congo. [...] Britain, you see—we can’t call it our home anymore, Rhodesia’s our home—always gets hold of the wrong end of the stick. Take the hoary tale that we mistreat the Africans. What rubbish! I get on very well with my house girl, Janet. [...] And take discrimination. So poor Chad Chipunza [a leading member of the Rhodesian Opposition Unit People’s Party] can’t stay in any hotel he likes? Is that the government’s fault? [...] I tell you, if the blacks ever get hold of the reins of government they’ll have to drag me kicking and screaming from this country.⁴³

Other speakers were less personally attached to these concerns, and likely spoke about imperial issues and colonial spaces from a point of engaged interest rather than direct involvement. One such speaker was sixty-year-old Heather Marsden-Smedley, a Chelsea resident from a well-to-do family. Interviewed by the *Guardian* in 1961 as an example of a ‘non-specialist’, Marsden-Smedley had been to the Congo three times, both before and after independence, and to ‘the rest of Black Africa too’. The *Guardian* described her as a woman whose great interest was in Africa:

She leaves you breathless as she rattles on talking about Kasavubu [the first president of the Republic of the Congo] and Tshombe [the first president of secessionist Katanga]; about Jesuit priests and Moslem dignitaries in Tehad; about Guinea’s president, Sékou Touré, whose signed photograph occupies a place of honour in her cluttered study.⁴⁴

Marsden-Smedley’s approach to international engagement was clearly much closer to the Women’s Institute’s official model of international understanding than the fiery rhetoric of Olive Robertson would have been. The *Guardian* concluded that Marsden-Smedley’s ‘strength, as well as her weakness perhaps, is that she sees international relations in terms of human relations.’ Her talks would have likely included stories about meeting the President of the Republic of the Congo and showing him a photograph of her husband, Basil, in his mayoral gown; or about an African leader

⁴³ ‘Rhodesia for the Rhodesians,’ *Illustrated London News*, 23 October 1965.

⁴⁴ ‘The Non-Specialist,’ *Guardian*, 23 October 1961.

who gave her a carved sculpture after a conversation about Mary Kingsley, situating information about the political situation in parts of Africa that she had visited alongside personal anecdotes. The role of amateurs and ‘non-specialists’ such as Marsden-Smedley, whose personal travel experiences and community activity made them important conduits for information about empire in this period, is explored in much greater detail in Chapter Three through the case study of Charles Chislett.

As some of the events listed above suggest, others presenting to the WI spoke from positions of professional expertise (most often in development work), or as returned volunteers from a period of service overseas. As is discussed in Chapter Four on the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, these experts in colonial development and administration were likely to have spoken positively about the potential for British intervention in newly emergent countries. By contrast, the WI’s financial support of young British volunteers overseas brought them into contact with appraisals of Britain’s philanthropic mission and mandate that were often critical of colonialism. Collectively, returning volunteers gave talks to hundreds of individual Institutes. One particular student—supported by the WI as a graduate volunteer for the African Development Trust in Tanganyika—wrote of the gulf between the paternalism of old colonialists and the newer approaches of a younger generation of volunteers in Africa. ‘Can youth achieve what our parents have failed to do,’ he asked, ‘and unite the world with the common purpose of victory over poverty?’⁴⁵ The extent to which this view jarred with older conceptions of trusteeship is evident in external reports of this student’s time in Tanganyika. A project supervisor and contact of the WI described him as a troublemaker, writing that a newsletter the student published was very badly received by the white population there, that ‘he did not fit in at all’, and that he ‘rubbed everybody’s back up.’⁴⁶ What these varied modes of engaging with and talking about the empire and decolonization make clear is that the WI were exposed to multiple and often partial (in both senses of the word) interpretations of empire. Views were shaped by the discourses of development, volunteerism, tourism and white settlerism. As this chapter’s later sections discuss, these different dimensions of empire also permeated the WI’s philanthropy and friendships.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Power to Isobel Curry, 1 November 1964 (WL: 5/FWI/D/2/2/33).

⁴⁶ Notes from Mrs. Landell Mill’s interview about funded graduate volunteers (WL: 5/FWI/D/2/2/95).

While the empire and Commonwealth clearly formed a substantial component of the WI's education in international affairs, they were still but one aspect of a more inclusively global education. Members were certainly interested in the Commonwealth, but not exclusively so. Other international themes and regions that attracted substantial interest included the UN, North America, and Europe. The Education and Public Questions subcommittee in Yorkshire, for example, was involved in the planning of a United Nations Association discussion project and Denman College also ran courses on the UN as well as on slightly more prosaic topics such as holidaying in Europe.⁴⁷ Similar interests prevailed at a regional level and are apparent in the popular International Days organized by International Subcommittees across the country. International Days were large-scale yearly events organized on the theme of a selected country and put on by the WI for the public. The day typically included speakers, cultural performances, and traditional food and many committees spent months planning these popular events. In the late 1950s and the 1960s the Yorkshire Federation International Subcommittee organized International Days on Holland, America, Spain, Italy, India, Iceland, Greece, Canada, Japan, and Russia that attracted up to 400 guests. Although a neighbouring county was mentioned to have held events on Ceylon, Yorkshire showed a dramatic preference for Western and European countries.⁴⁸ At the Yorkshire Federation, therefore, Commonwealth interests were second to developing interests about Europe and North America. Kenley in Surrey showed interests even closer to home, choosing Ireland for their 1966 International Day.⁴⁹ For these groups, the international shrinking world took precedence over the shrinking empire.

Given the parochial stereotype of the WI, it is also important to note that some of these broader international activities were strikingly forward thinking. This was nowhere more so than in the NFWI's concerted efforts to make contact with rural women in Communist countries. From the late 1950s the WI worked separately from state apparatus to forge ties across the Cold War divide. In 1961 the WI described 'a welcome breakthrough to the Communist countries' and the arrival of two Russian women for a two-week tour of Britain was widely reported in the national press.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Anderson, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, 123-144.

⁴⁸ Yorkshire Federation International Subcommittee Minutes, 1955-1970 (Borthwick: WI/Int 1).

⁴⁹ *Home and Country*, March 1966.

⁵⁰ Barbara Kaye, *International Countrywomen: a Guide to the International Work in the Women's Institutes* (London: NFWI, 1967), 6.

Mrs Galina Burkatskaya, a 45-year-old war widow, the chairman of a large collective farm in the Ukraine, and a member of the Supreme Soviet's executive, the Praesidium, and Mrs Galina Marsova, the translator and an English teacher at the Moscow Agricultural Academy, visited farms, schools, rural industries, and a cooperative packing station. They stayed in the homes of WI members who were 'forever plying them with questions about life in the USSR and what they think of Britain.' This potentially controversial scheme, which carefully sidestepped heated political matters, is further evidence that the WI's discourses of international understanding were not just empty rhetoric, but a policy mantra that was frequently put into action. While the empire and Commonwealth sat comfortably alongside the small 'c' conservatism of many WI members, this fraternization with socialists was much more in line with the movement's non-partisan persona. That said, despite the more genuinely international scope of these educational talks, courses, and events, as the next sections discuss the WI's philanthropic and friendship-based international work significantly favoured the empire and Commonwealth as locations for intervention and interaction.

Female Philanthropy: Tracing Imperial Legacies within the WI's Post-colonial Benevolence

Whereas the movement's educational work had a broad geographical scope, their charitable activity was limited almost exclusively to the declining and former empire (and more specifically to British territories in Africa and the Caribbean). Once again, while the WI spoke in terms of internationalism—arguing that they were dedicated to 'improving the lives of rural women everywhere'—it acted in a way that prioritized the empire. WI support for the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign to 'help the hungry to help themselves' (discussed in much greater detail in Chapter Four) was almost entirely limited, without explanation or justification, to projects located within former colonies. The two clothing projects in which the WI participated in the 1960s also supported communities in British colonies or protectorates. In 1960 the provision of cotton dress lengths to enable sewing classes to be run in the Solomon Islands was organized in response to a request from a

British contact working in the Department of Education there. In 1967, in conjunction with a Commonwealth branch of the Save the Children Fund, the WI sent off fabric to the Windward Isles for children's clothes. In another project the Surrey Federation, having heard that the people of Zanzibar were suffering from the loss of their trade in cloves, ran a competition in 1957 amongst their members for pomanders (pomanders are made by pushing cloves into an orange and are typically made and displayed as a fragrant Christmas decoration). This project would have been stimulated by the fact that Surrey were able to invite the Sheikh of Zanzibar, who was visiting Britain at the time, to judge the entries. So impressed with their efforts was the Sheikh, claims the pamphlet detailing the project, that Zanzibaris began to sell WI-inspired pomanders to tourists.⁵¹

The WI also supported a scheme in which young British volunteers were posted in projects in 'the developing countries'. The scheme was grand in scale and run in conjunction with a number of organisations including the Catholic Institute for International Relations, the International Voluntary Service, the National Union of Students, the United Nations Association and Voluntary Service Overseas. In 1967 around 1,500 volunteers were sent overseas under these initiatives. The students supported by the WI typically volunteered in Africa and the Caribbean in coordination with either VSO or with the African Development Trust. As was the case with talks given at monthly meetings, personal connections of WI members to individuals involved in some way in the empire or commonwealth also shaped individual Institutes' philanthropic involvement in these regions. Berkshire WI members, for example, sent over thirty parcels to Sierra Leone when a Harwell member's VSO daughter based there appealed for scrap material for a craft club she was running.⁵²

The fact that many Commonwealth countries were English-speaking further facilitated the implementation of projects, with the lack of a language barrier allowing the WI to forge stronger connections with the projects that they supported. In both the clothing schemes and the Freedom from Hunger projects WI groups were encouraged to make and sustain contact with the communities that they supported. Institutes that sent packages to the Windward Islands were asked to include something personal, such as a letter, a description of the Women's Institute, or 'something of the life of

⁵¹ *International Work of the Women's Institutes*, NFWI pamphlet, October 1957.

⁵² *Home and Country*, July 1967.

the village'.⁵³ Without the shared language, the Shropshire Federation would not have been able to organize the collection of English books to send to Commonwealth countries.⁵⁴

Each of these schemes was facilitated by networks and practices that had been established through a long history of imperial philanthropy and more recent late-colonial investment in development projects. Imperial legacies were not only of practical import, they also shaped the ways in which the WI understood their charitable activities. The persistence of a colonially-informed approach is starkly apparent, for example, in the case of the WI's British liaison in the Solomon Islands. Writing to the WI in 1960 she noted that 'somehow there are so few "colonial" opportunities left to us in Britain, and these Islands are so worth helping.'⁵⁵ By suggesting that colonial charitable efforts were different—even preferable—to other forms of benevolence, this comment taps into longstanding discourses of British imperial responsibility. The NFWI pamphlet *Be World Wise with the WIs* also situated the organisation's work within similar discourses of colonial trusteeship, telling members that women from 'newly-emergent' countries were anxious to learn how to solve their problems from the British WI.⁵⁶ As will be discussed below, these attitudes appear in even sharper relief when considered alongside the WI's relationship with the 'Old' Commonwealth. As Thomas Laqueur points out, humanitarian enquiries have historically 'created a sense of property in the objects of compassion [as] they appropriated them to the consciousness of would-be benefactors.'⁵⁷ In the WI's promotion and discussion of their philanthropic and hospitality work the 'subaltern' recipients of their charity are denied both agency and voice; white British representatives monitored the progress of the WI's overseas projects and reported back to the NFWI. This should not be seen as starkly different from the operations of many contemporary charitable projects in which the subaltern continue to be spoken for by charitable organizations and their celebrity spokespersons. But the WI's approach to philanthropy nonetheless indicates that in their tendency to speak for sufferers the Women's Institute movement—as but one

⁵³ Isobel Curry to Beryl Rose (Save the Children Fund), 23 May 1969 (WL: 5/FWI/D/2/2/18).

⁵⁴ Minutes of Yorkshire International Subcommittee, 24 July 1961 (Borthwick: WI/Int 1).

⁵⁵ Marjorie Stewart (dept. Education, British Solomon Islands) to Mrs Freeman (NFWI), 25 November 1960 (WL: 5/FWI/D/2/2/32).

⁵⁶ *Be World Wise with the W.I.'s*, NFWI pamphlet, no date, WL.

⁵⁷ Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details, and Humanitarian Narrative,' in L. Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 179.

participant in a much wider trend—perpetuated imperial frameworks of benevolence through and beyond the processes of decolonization.⁵⁸

The WI's work also suggests that even after what is often characterized as the final 'implosion' of empire in the 1960s, philanthropic efforts did not disengage from empire. The decolonizing and post-colonial world still offered a fruitful field for intervention, and national organizations—and their local community wings—continued to be interested in issues that were once related to imperial benevolence and trusteeship. For the WI, which only really embraced an international remit in the 1950s, it seems as though the global conditions of the postwar period both extended and accelerated their opportunities for philanthropic interaction with the Commonwealth.

The relationship between these imperial networks and assumptions and post-imperial humanitarianism is discussed in much greater detail in Chapters Four and Five. But the particular experiences of the WI as a women's movement make it relevant here to consider the prominent and distinctive role that women played within this broader narrative of benevolence. Was the WI continuing a particularly female model of imperial engagement? As Clare Midgley has argued, campaigns around empire offered openings for 'assertions of feminine agency and power both in relation to British men and in relation to colonised peoples, particularly women.'⁵⁹ In the interwar years, for example, it became fashionable for liberally-educated women to take up worthy political causes.⁶⁰ Eliza Riedi writes that in the Edwardian period women's groups such as the Victoria League restricted their work to areas within woman's 'separate sphere' in order to accommodate women's activism within the 'man's world' of empire politics. Appropriately female activities included philanthropy to war victims, empire education, the promotion of social reform as an imperial issue, and also hospitality to colonial visitors.⁶¹

Though the majority of the overseas projects that the WI supported were focused on women as beneficiaries of the aid, these projects were not purely 'domestic' or 'home-based' in nature. The WI bought cows for young women in

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the legacies of empire in postcolonial benevolence see Helen Gilbert and Chris Tiffin, eds., *Burden or Benefit? Imperial Benevolence and its Legacies* (London: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ Midgley, *Women Activists in Imperial Britain*, 1.

⁶⁰ Bush, 'Britain's Conscience on Africa'; Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home,' 246.

⁶¹ Eliza Riedi, 'Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914,' *The Historical Journal* 45, 3 (2002): 578.

Jamaica, set up a thirty-five acre farm in Trinidad, and supported a tractor hire scheme to encourage crop rotation in Dominica.⁶² The rural makeup of the WI and its earlier focus on increasing agricultural production during the First World War meant that it was readily able to align its broader aims to improve the lives of rural women with the technocratic vision of agricultural development that campaigns such as the Freedom from Hunger Campaign adopted. This was a very different vision of female philanthropy to that articulated by more urban-based organizations, which were more likely to limit themselves to supporting the woman as *mother* and not also as *farmer*. This wide scope—in addition to the WI's relative distance from feminist activism in this period—means that the movement's engagement with empire needs further attention before it can be said to have developed directly out of the activities of earlier female imperialists. That said, although the WI were not strictly 'female activists' their philanthropic work was nevertheless conditioned by some of the precedents established by women's earlier involvement in the British Empire. Indeed in other areas of the WI's international work their approach was much more identifiably 'feminine'. The movement's involvement with the Associated Countrywomen of the World, for example, often had a strong domestic slant. WI members entered essays for a competition entitled 'Rural Home', and the three winners all portrayed home as a site of domestic labour.⁶³ 'Letter friendships' with members of the ACWW in other countries were often founded on the exchange of news, recipes and knitting patterns.⁶⁴ But the most interesting example of the WI's 'feminine' activities is the hospitality that they offered to Commonwealth students.

Home and Away: The Place of Commonwealth Students

A *Home and Country* article published in February 1967 described the British public as the hosts 'with the longest guest list in the world.'⁶⁵ While this statement may have been published with little proof to support its claim, its sentiment is appropriate to the postwar British context. At the beginning of 1960 there were at

⁶² *Home and Country*, June 1967.

⁶³ Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*, 96.

⁶⁴ Kaye, *International Countrywomen*.

⁶⁵ *Home and Country*, February 1967.

least 35,000 students from the Commonwealth in Britain.⁶⁶ In the preceding decade the overall black population of Britain had risen from an estimated 74,500 in 1951 to close to 500,000 by the time the Commonwealth Immigrants Act took effect in 1962.⁶⁷ In addition to these longer-term ‘guests’ the British Government also invited around six hundred people a year from the Commonwealth to tour Britain.

Of these three ‘influxes’ the most interesting in relation to the WI’s international work was that of Commonwealth students. As A.J. Stockwell points out, the presence of unprecedented numbers of colonial students in postwar Britain placed the Colonial Office in a novel position. It was now obliged to deal at first hand, rather than at arm’s length, with the grievances and ambitions of colonial peoples. Students may not have been wholly representative of their countries, but they were representative of elites whose desire for self-rule was driving colonial politics and re-shaping British policies.⁶⁸

An editorial in *The Times* argued that since these students were ‘the intellectual or hereditary elite of the colonies and the leaders of tomorrow [...] the principle should be that, if it is worth allowing them over here at all, it is worth looking after them well.’⁶⁹ It was important for the Government to get this right since the provision of education was a crucial part of the fabric of Britain’s wider efforts in the postwar competition for global influence.⁷⁰ And yet in the mid-1950s systematic surveys introduced to chart the experiences of colonial students ‘revealed ignorance and prejudice across British society and charted the disillusionment of Britain’s “disappointed guests”’.⁷¹ As the governor of Nigeria had observed in 1937, ‘The harm that can be done, on his return to his own country, by one African student who has managed to accumulate a store of real or fancied grievances during his stay in England far outweighs the good done by a dozen students who come back successful and satisfied.’⁷² These concerns were all the more pressing in the postwar climate of developing nationalisms and external pressures on Britain to decolonize.

⁶⁶ J.M. Lee, ‘Commonwealth Students in the United Kingdom, 1940-1960: Student Welfare and World Status,’ *Minerva* 44 (2006): 16.

⁶⁷ Chris Waters, ‘“Dark Strangers” in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963,’ *The Journal of British Studies* 36, 2 (1997): 209.

⁶⁸ A.J. Stockwell, ‘Leaders, Dissidents and the Disappointed: Colonial Students in Britain as Empire Ended,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 3 (2008): 493.

⁶⁹ Cited by Stockwell, ‘Leaders, Dissidents and the Disappointed,’ 497.

⁷⁰ J.M. Lee, ‘Overseas students in Britain: How Their Presence was Politicised in 1966-67,’ *Minerva* 36, (1998): 311.

⁷¹ Stockwell, ‘Leaders, Dissidents and the Disappointed’, 492.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 489.

So what was to be done about it? In 1950 the British Council took over responsibility for the provision of welfare for colonial and Commonwealth students from the Colonial Office. In 1953 they issued 9,500 invitations to overseas students in London to meet British people in their homes, clubs or societies, drawing upon the resources of some seventy voluntary organisations, including the Victoria League, the Over-Seas League, the League of Coloured Peoples, the Rotary Club, East and West Friendship Council, Workers' Educational Associations, the YMCA, the YWCA, various Christian and Muslim bodies, local authorities, learned societies and, of course, the WI.⁷³ At its core this was a cultural offensive designed to rehabilitate Britain's international image (this became particularly crucial after the disastrous Suez crisis), and instil respect in Commonwealth visitors for so-called British 'ways of life'.⁷⁴ From 1948 onwards officials had met regularly to consider the causes of students' dissatisfaction and find ways of winning their trust, such as providing them with opportunities to witness liberal institutions in action and savour the 'British way of life' at weekends and during vacations.⁷⁵

The frequent reference in *Home and Country* and NFWI pamphlets to the hospitality provided by members suggests that the WI were proud of their work with Commonwealth visitors and from their point of view they were 'doing splendidly' in this project. In a 1967 article describing WI hospitality towards Commonwealth students *Home and Country* reported that stories came in from all over the country of

delighted students going on tours arranged by County Federations and individuals being welcomed into homes, shown round farms, hop fields, schools; taken into dances, dressmaking classes, WI meetings, fetched in cars; put on to buses and trains and generally cherished by WI members at every step.⁷⁶

As *Home and Country* informed their readers, the guests of the WI 'on returning home, most of them to responsible posts, give a good account of us to their families and, in due course, to their children.'⁷⁷ By assisting the British Council in providing hospitality to students and visitors the WI implicated themselves within the aforementioned wider governmental commitment to improving Commonwealth relations. This form of cultural diplomacy reflected what J.M. Lee characterizes as a

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 500.

⁷⁴ Lee, 'Commonwealth Students in the United Kingdom,' 17.

⁷⁵ Stockwell, 'Leaders, Dissidents and the Disappointed,' 494.

⁷⁶ *Home and Country*, February 1967.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

new form of post-imperial ‘outreach’ through which ‘imperialism gave way to cooperation, and cultural hegemony to cultural exchange.’⁷⁸

‘Exchange’ was indeed key to the way in which the WI envisaged their role as hostesses. On the one hand they saw Commonwealth students as a valuable resource through which they could learn about other countries. A Shropshire member described the WI as a “‘listening’ family’ which, ‘once having made people from other countries feel at ease, prefer[s] them to do the talking.’⁷⁹ And on the other hand, they saw their role as a fundamentally philanthropic one, providing a crucial service to visitors studying in Britain. In their support of Commonwealth ‘visitors’ the WI also walked a line between treating overseas students as temporary residents with whom they could retain friendly contact on their return home and acknowledging that many students were now arriving in Britain as economic migrants seeking permanent settlement.⁸⁰ They supported a long-term aim to create conditions in which young immigrants could settle happily without prejudice and ‘in close relationship’ with the indigenous population.⁸¹ But they also emphasised that their hospitality gave students ‘a “home” in this country and some sort of roots to come back to if they wish[ed].’⁸²

Home was a key motif for the WI. Not only does the title of the WI’s magazine, *Home and Country*, indicate how fundamental the home was to the movement’s self-conception, the popularity of domestically-oriented activities at monthly meetings emphasizes its key role as a factor in the movement’s success. The fact that much of the hospitality offered to Commonwealth students took place in the home was frequently emphasized by WI publications. This vocabulary of ‘home’ is key to an analysis of the WI’s Commonwealth hospitality and crucial in enabling us to plot the place of the WI on a longer trajectory of female imperial benevolence and activism. In these discourses—and more widely—hospitality was understood as primarily women’s work.

Hospitality was configured as feminine not only for its apparently inherent domesticity but also because it conjoined two other seemingly ‘unmitigated’ feminine virtues: practicality and personability. As the eleventh Annual Report of the Victoria League expounded, ‘Politicians deal with institutions; the Victoria League deals with

⁷⁸ Lee, ‘Commonwealth Students in the United Kingdom,’ 23.

⁷⁹ *Home and Country*, February 1967.

⁸⁰ Lee, ‘Commonwealth Students in the United Kingdom,’ 20.

⁸¹ *Home and Country*, July 1967.

⁸² *Home and Country*, February 1967.

individuals.’ Bush has developed this declaration, arguing that ‘visible results, efficiency and attention to detail were qualities which were much prized by the lady imperialists across the full spectrum of their work.’⁸³ Hospitality fitted comfortably within these frameworks and thus provided a point of access for women in Britain to engage with empire. As Riedi has outlined, the gendered language of ‘home’ used by the Victoria League worked to legitimize the League women’s imperial activism.⁸⁴

We must be wary in applying this model based on an earlier era simplistically to the WI. As argued above, the movement was not populated by imperial activists, by feminists, or by women desperate for a route into the man’s world of empire politics. Yet despite these distinctions between the WI and the Victoria League, it is clear that the feminine frameworks of hospitality and philanthropy continued to shape the ways in which women interacted with the empire during and after decolonization. In the 1960s the WI tapped into these same discourses of practicality, commenting that ‘quietly throughout the years, in practical commonsense ways, we have expanded our international work.’⁸⁵

The vocabulary of ‘home’ was also crucial to the ways in which the WI, however implicitly, policed the boundaries of their national identity. Chris Waters, Alison Light, and Raphael Samuel have argued that in the interwar period ‘hearth and home’ rather than ‘sceptre and sword’ became the key symbols of national existence.⁸⁶ As Light describes, ‘the 1920s and ‘30s saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national identity [...] to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private – and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine”.’⁸⁷ Wendy Webster has extended this ‘narrative of nation’ by characterising the ‘home’ as the key symbol of Englishness in a postwar narrative of immigrant ‘invasion’. For many, the narratives of nation that converged around these themes are seen to be intrinsically linked to Britain’s loss of empire. Webster traces parallels between discourses about Britain’s colonial wars in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus and those surrounding Commonwealth

⁸³ Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, 74.

⁸⁴ Riedi, ‘Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire,’ 585.

⁸⁵ *Working Internationally*, NFWI pamphlet, WL.

⁸⁶ Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’”, 212; Raphael Samuel, ‘Introduction,’ in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 1., *History and Politics*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989), xiv; Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁸⁷ Light, *Forever England*, 8.

immigration, identifying the invasion of a domesticated space as a key shared theme.⁸⁸ Building upon existing work on postwar race relations, Webster argues that Commonwealth immigrants were disassociated from domestic life, that they were portrayed as violating English domestic boundaries, and that they were configured as transient and rootless against an England that stood for order and homeliness.⁸⁹ Employing similar rhetoric, Bill Schwarz ties postwar immigration to Britain's imperial past by conceiving it as a restaging of the primal colonial encounter in reverse. With immigration, he argues, the colonial frontier came 'home'.⁹⁰

These analyses focus on the predominantly working-class urban immigrant population. Did the same ideas of invasion surround the Commonwealth students that the WI invited into their homes? In the case of the WI's hospitality towards students, as in Webster's analysis of Commonwealth immigration more broadly, the home figures as a key location in the interaction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'; and in both cases women stand as the guards of this domestic boundary. But, unlike Waters' and Webster's narratives of immigrant invasion, in the WI's interaction with immigrants the home was not a violated sanctuary but instead a site at which familial and friendly bonds could be formed. Through hospitality the WI opened up the private and domestic home of tea and jam, knitting and sewing, and made it public. This domestic space was thus a crucial aspect of the WI's global role – and for many members unable to travel, also a crucial access point to the wider world. This is a clear example of the way in which the incredibly local could be a site at which the national and global were also present. Many WI members opened their doors and enthusiastically invited 'outsiders' across the threshold and into this inner sanctum of Englishness. In fact, such was the demand for Commonwealth students to host that by 1969 the WI were struggling to find enough guests to entertain.⁹¹

It is worth noting that the WI's rural nature meant that few members were likely to have lived in those urban areas that experienced a high immigration influx. Yet it is precisely this rurality that makes the WI such a valuable case study, since it provides a crucial counterpoint to those scholarly works that focus almost exclusively on cultural products, the press, or on race relations in areas with a high immigrant population. As discussed above, the students hosted by the WI were usually elites and

⁸⁸ Webster, 'There'll Always be an England.'

⁸⁹ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 10.

⁹⁰ Schwarz, 'Re-racialisation of England'.

⁹¹ Report of Denman College International Conference, held 10-12 July 1970 (WL: 5/FWI/D/2/2/20).

were not generally representative of the immigrant population as a whole, which was predominantly working class.⁹² For the WI, interaction with Commonwealth students and immigrants was a choice and, since they were always the hosts, the interactions occurred on their terms. This interest of the WI in these students provides an interesting and important counterbalance to the popular cultural trope that only ‘outsiders’ in the white population chose to consort with immigrants. The WI’s privilege of choice would have affected these interactions, certainly, but it also emphasizes the fact that the WI were interested enough to seek out opportunities to interact with the New Commonwealth through its migrant peoples. In so doing, the WI used the home—in many ways the most traditional, safe, and insular location of identity available to them—to push against boundaries, undermine prejudices and respond to issues of race relations in a manner far more forward thinking than that displayed by much of the British population.

The Old and the New: Dividing the Commonwealth through Family Discourse

Thus far this chapter has considered the WI’s interactions with the people and locations of the empire and Commonwealth as if these made up a homogenous unit—as *the* periphery rather than as a series of peripheries. It has argued that the WI’s philanthropic work was overwhelmingly shaped and contained by imperial and Commonwealth frameworks and boundaries—and this much is certainly true. But the picture is also more complicated than mere preoccupation. As the previous chapter has made clear, the Commonwealth was not a uniform body and, predictably, the WI did not engage with it in uniform ways. If we situate the philanthropic work of the WI within their international work as a whole, clear distinctions emerge between the WI’s approach to British colonies and ex-colonies in Africa and the Caribbean and their approach to old settler dominions; or, put another way, between their engagements with the New Commonwealth and the Old Commonwealth. In the philanthropic case studies discussed above, the WI clearly looked upon New Commonwealth nations as populations in need of support and guidance. By contrast, as this section will show, for both the local and national tiers of the WI the Old

⁹² Many films and books blur this distinction. See, for example, Colin MacInnes, *City of Spades* (London, 1958) and the film *Sapphire* (1959) in which the death of a mixed race student reveals a dual life of academic respectability and seedy nightclub encounters.

Commonwealth was primarily a source of friendships, ‘Link’ societies, and exchanges, tied together through reciprocal gift giving and social networks of British expatriates and British-descended peoples. At the Yorkshire Federation’s Golden Jubilee celebrations, for example, the international subcommittee presented a display with a purportedly ‘rainbow theme’. Yet in reality a two-tier conceptualisation of the Commonwealth presided. The International Pavilion sequentially displayed a series of ‘windows’ on Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—detailing the vibrancy of the WI’s friendships within these Old Commonwealth nations—followed by windows that drew special attention to ‘the underdeveloped countries’ that had been supported through the Freedom from Hunger Campaign.⁹³

Nowhere is this distinction between friendship and charity clearer than in the WI’s quest for overseas companionship. Since 1927—following an AGM resolution—WI members vowed to ‘further close relations with similar Associations of women overseas by correspondence, and where possible by interchanging visits with a view to mutual assistance and understanding.’⁹⁴ In the 1960s the WI’s magazines and pamphlets continued to encourage Institutes to gain first hand information about other countries through pen friends and ‘Link’ groups. Links could be found through personal contacts, the county level international sub-committee, or the Associated Countrywomen of the World, but once established individual Institutes took on the responsibility of maintaining contact and determining the nature of the relationship. ‘Links’ were, therefore, a means of international contact that largely bypassed the NFWI, relying instead on the initiative and enthusiasm of individuals and their local Institutes. The ‘News from Overseas’ section of *Home and Country* was dominated by references to link societies and pen friends, suggesting that these relationships formed a substantial portion of the ‘everyday’ international activities of WIs across the country.

Jordanna Bailkin has emphasized the need to account for ‘affect’ in the experience of decolonization.⁹⁵ There is considerable scope for a much broader consideration of the role of friendship and personal ties in the public’s participation in decolonization. Anecdotal evidence in ‘News from Overseas’ suggests that many of the WI’s ‘Old Commonwealth’ Links had been established through the postwar

⁹³ Yorkshire International Subcommittee Minutes, 4 December 1969 (Borthwick: WI/Int 1).

⁹⁴ *Working Internationally*, NFWI pamphlet, WL.

⁹⁵ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (forthcoming Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

emigration of existing acquaintances, many of whom were once WI members in Britain, and/or through the return to Britain of women who had lived in the Old Commonwealth and maintained contacts there. Such connections celebrated common ground and their geographical distribution reveals a great deal about the WI's relationship with the declining empire.

The overwhelming majority of Links discussed in 'News from Overseas' were within the Old Dominions or countries with large settler populations such as South Africa and Rhodesia. The section made almost no reference to Link societies in New Commonwealth countries in Asia, Africa, or the Caribbean and very few to Links in Europe. One month's news, for instance, detailed Institutes sending a year's supply of *Home and Country* to their Canadian Link, the receipt of a letter from a Link correspondent in British Columbia, a gift of oranges by a former WI president now living in Australia and a gift of embroidery sewn by native women from an ex-member's Rhodesian Institute.⁹⁶ Another 'News from Overseas' item described the Link-minded Burgh Heath WI, which, acting on a belief that Link contact would help foster the feeling of world-wideness in the WI movement, nurtured connections with groups in Ontario, Australia and New Zealand.⁹⁷ This sense of familial camaraderie was mutual and reciprocal. In 1967 a representative for WIs in South Africa wrote to *Home and Country* encouraging British WI members visiting South Africa to arrange to visit Institutes.⁹⁸ One Berkham member spent four months in South Africa and while away attended a number of local WI meetings, talking to members about life in the British WI.⁹⁹ The movement's continuing close ties to groups in South Africa even after it left the Commonwealth contrasts significantly with the practices of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Commonwealth Institute and indeed with their own openness towards welcoming black immigrants into their homes. For the WI, the political events of decolonization and the widespread campaigning against apartheid that went on at this time seemed to have little effect on their connections to the spaces of the empire. Imperial connections, in this case, were more about friendship than the politics and practices of the formal empire.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *Home and Country*, February 1967.

⁹⁷ *Home and Country*, September 1968.

⁹⁸ *Home and Country*, September 1967.

⁹⁹ *Home and Country*, October 1966.

¹⁰⁰ Rob Skinner, 'Facing the Challenge of "Young Africa": Apartheid, South Africa and British Decolonisation,' *South African Historical Journal* 54, 1 (2006): 54-71; Rob Skinner, 'The Moral Foundations of British Anti-Apartheid Activism, 1946-1960,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35,

This distorted distribution of Links occurred in spite of the fact that many ‘New Commonwealth’ countries also had rural women’s movements of their own that British WIs could have chosen to correspond with. An article in *Home and Country* describes a ‘Journey to the Caribbean’ that saw Lady Anglesey, the then chairman of the WI, visiting a number of projects that the movement had raised money for as part of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. The article makes clear that WI members would not have been oblivious to the potential of forming friendship Links with women in the ‘New Commonwealth’. It discusses the Jamaica Federation of Women—which hosted Lady Anglesey during her visit—as ‘virtually the WI of the country’; it describes how four hundred members of the Trinidad WI met Lady Anglesey for tea in ‘the magnificent Trinidad Hilton Hotel’; and it details a stop in St Kitts to sing *Jerusalem* with the island’s WI group.¹⁰¹ Yet despite this seeming potential for Links offered by the New Commonwealth there was no reference in ‘News from Overseas’ to friendly correspondence with WIs in these countries.

Similarly, while the ACWW’s president described ‘an unseen bond of friendship among women of the world whose skin, colour, religion, social customs, and way of living are different’ in 1965, this rhetoric was not upheld by the British WI.¹⁰² In 1950 the WI arranged an empire ‘get together’ for countrywomen from Canada, Australia, South Africa, Ceylon and Northern Ireland. Representatives from these countries met at Denman College before they went to join about seven hundred other members of the ACWW in Copenhagen for the organization’s triennial meeting, prioritizing the imperial over the international.¹⁰³ This prioritization of the Old Commonwealth continued at least until the end of the decade. Indeed, the crowd of white faces in a photograph of delegates arriving at the 1959 ACWW triennial meeting in Edinburgh—plump middle-aged bodies in cardigans and flowery dresses—hardly captures the multiracial youthful Commonwealth that organizations such as the Royal Commonwealth Society were trying to promote.¹⁰⁴ Where links *were* formed with women in ‘emerging nations’ of former colonies they were conceived of in much more practical terms. The means of engagement was the

2 (2009): 399-416; Håkan, Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹⁰¹ *Home and Country*, June 1967.

¹⁰² ‘1957-1970: Looking Ahead,’ in *Working With Women Worldwide*, 23.

¹⁰³ ‘Empire Get Together,’ *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 9 September 1950.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 22.

exchange of knowledge and experience rather than gifts and recipes. To exist, links with non-settler communities had to be formalized as productive—as for the good of the wider world. Friendship, it seems, was not enough.¹⁰⁵

The WI's behaviour here can be productively situated within a longer history of imperial networks formed between women in Britain and the self-governing dominions.¹⁰⁶ For many at the turn of the century, Riedi argues, the empire meant above all 'Greater Britain', that is, 'the colonies of white settlement which shared a language and culture with the "mother country"'.¹⁰⁷ Since the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer South African War (1899-1902) the belief that continuing British settlement in the dominions was the best 'safeguard' of colonial loyalty was widely held and female emigration societies in particular looked to women to pass on British values to the next generation.¹⁰⁸ Pursuing similar objectives through alternative means, the Victoria League also introduced a 'newspaper scheme' in 1905 designed to bring together those in Britain willing to send papers to the dominion with those wishing to receive them. As Riedi argues, 'as well as the personal tie that might be [...] created between sender and recipient, the scheme was intended to strengthen the imperial bond by keeping British settlers in touch with British news and culture.'¹⁰⁹ Riedi's study of the Victoria League between 1901 and 1914 reveals that a significant aspect of the League's mission was to foster in visitors from the dominions (not the colonies) a feeling of being 'at home' at the imperial centre, and 'to strengthen the imperial connection by a network of personal links and happy memories'.¹¹⁰ As discussed above, by the postwar period both the Victoria League and the WI had extended similar welcome schemes to Commonwealth students studying in Britain. This does of course suggest a substantial degree of adaptation to the new multiracial makeup of the Commonwealth, but the extent to which the WI accepted these new additions is called into question somewhat by the fact that a preference for Old

¹⁰⁵ Working on a similar principle to the Associated Countrywomen of the World, the ICW sought to put women working on similar problems in different parts of the world in constant touch with each other so that 'thought and experience flow mutually'. The ICW's Committee on Peace and International Relations took principle that 'at the present stage of human history a developed national society, for the sake of its own stability and welfare, tends to take on an international dimension.'

¹⁰⁶ Eliza Riedi, Ian C. Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine, eds., *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London: Routledge, 2000); Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian women, Colonialism and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Riedi, 'Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire,' 571.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 584.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 588.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 585.

Commonwealth friendships clearly survived the establishment of the New Commonwealth and continued beyond the end of empire.

The value placed by the WI on the Old Commonwealth continued into the 1960s and is particularly clear in the following ‘News from Overseas’ extract. ‘Amid the prevailing gloom of Commonwealth problems’, read the section in January 1966, ‘it is a pleasure to report the sending by Effingham of a portrait of the late Sir Winston Churchill as a Christmas present to their New Zealand Link knowing how much it will be treasured.’¹¹¹ Not only was this a rare reference by the WI to problems in the Commonwealth, but the sentiment behind their gift of a Churchill portrait was also significant. In 1966 the mention of ‘Commonwealth problems’ was likely to refer to the sense of disarray caused by the swathe of African and Caribbean decolonizations and in particular to the obstructions to this development put forward by white settlers in Rhodesia. The acceleration of decolonization in Africa changed the whole nature of the Commonwealth, putting immense strain on the defacto two-tier system on racial lines that had long operated in the wings of the Commonwealth.¹¹² Though the WI voiced no direct objections to the ‘New Commonwealth’ the redemption that seemed to be offered by the New Zealand Link group’s predicted enthusiasm for Churchill—by its anticipated affirmation of British values—emphasized that for the WI the Old Commonwealth remained a source of easy friendship and comfortable cooperation. These reciprocal bonds offered by overseas kith and kin remained important to the WI despite the perceived gloom of shifting international circumstances.

Further indicators as to nature of the WI’s two-tier engagement with the Commonwealth can be found in their use of the vocabulary of the family. The literary and artistic iconography of empire has long drawn heavily upon familial images. These range from the brotherly—in the abolitionist slogan ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’ and the ‘great Masonic doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man’¹¹³—to the parental—in configurations of childlike natives in need of the support and guidance of a white imperial power. The ways in which the WI used this available

¹¹¹ *Home and Country*, January 1966.

¹¹² Krishnan Srinivasan, *The Rise, Decline, and Future of the British Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹¹³ Jessica Harland-Jacobs, ‘All in the Family: Freemasonry and the British Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,’ *The Journal of British Studies* 42, 4 (2003), 448-482.

vocabulary and drew upon these existing discourses reveals much about how they configured themselves in relation to the Commonwealth, Old and New.

In a study of women's activism in organisations with an imperial focus between 1790 and 1930 Midgley reveals that white women in Britain and the settler colonies articulated 'a strong familial bond based explicitly on assertions of common cultural heritage and, less openly, on white racial solidarity.'¹¹⁴ Julia Bush suggests that belief in the powerful ties of British racial inheritance reinforced the fondness of these groups for family metaphors.¹¹⁵ Similar characterizations can be seen to continue into later postwar governmental portrayals of the 'Old Commonwealth' as a 'choate association of loyalists' that functioned best 'through intimate and collegial family ways'.¹¹⁶ The WI's relationship with the Old Commonwealth also corresponds with this trend, again continuing existing familial discourses. Yet while the WI understood the relationship between themselves and women in old white dominions and settler populations as sisterly, they employed a mother-daughter metaphor to describe their relationship with non-white women in the new commonwealth nations. This distinction divided the wider family of the Commonwealth into the parental, fraternal and sororal white dominions and the childlike 'emerging nations'.

A circular on hospitality for Commonwealth nurses commented that 'there is nothing they like better than to stay in an English home and to be made to feel part of the family.'¹¹⁷ This sentiment was echoed in a captioned photo in *Home and Country* of a host's family and their Basotho guests describing 'Shropshire WI member, Mrs. Williamson, with her own family and the "additions" to her family.'¹¹⁸ One member, describing a young Nigerian who decided to call her "Mamma", explained that 'this love was the very thing [she] wanted' from her guests.'¹¹⁹ Yet for all that these comments brought the New Commonwealth within the family circle, the frameworks of hospitality also subtly figured these students in the role of the child to the WI's beneficent mother, tapping into longstanding discourses of paternalism and maternalism.

This was friendship, certainly, but it was not of the same kind as the sense of kinship that was envisaged to link WI members with the Old Commonwealth.

¹¹⁴ Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home', 244.

¹¹⁵ Bush, *Edwardian Ladies*, 84.

¹¹⁶ Srinivasan, *The British Commonwealth*, 8.

¹¹⁷ Circular: Holiday Hospitality for Commonwealth Nurses, 3 July 1969 (WL: 5/FWI/D/2/2/90).

¹¹⁸ *Home and Country*, February 1967.

¹¹⁹ *Home and Country*, February 1967.

Promotional material for various charitable campaigns often employed cloyingly maternalistic language. Pamphlets and publications described how many Institutes made a point of following the progress of the projects that their contributions financed, ‘just as a good god-mother will keep in touch with the progress of her god-child’; how visiting Commonwealth students were ‘cherished’ by their hosts; and how County Federations should support the Windward Islands clothing scheme by ‘adopting’ an island.¹²⁰ In this guise maternalism can be seen as the feminine component of the ideology of trusteeship.¹²¹ Through their geographical distribution of maternalism and sisterhood the benevolent vocation of the WI took on a markedly imperial tone, one which paralleled ideas being articulated at an international level. As Marcus Power argues of Commonwealth discourses, the use of gendered and generational metaphors in conjunction with the multi-racial family metaphor ‘gives the impression of a voluntary union for mutual good whilst at the same time maintaining the notion of hierarchy and placing white Commonwealth nations at the head of the family.’¹²²

As is consistent with the WI’s tendency to oscillate between being traditional and modern, insular and outward-looking, the archive also reveals notable exceptions to this trend of patronizing maternalism. At an international level, for example, the head of the Associated Countrywomen of the World was an Indian woman Mrs. Aroti Dutt. The WI commented in a 1968 *Home and Country* article on international interaction that perhaps they could learn something ‘from the emerging countries where, in spite of great handicaps, the women were taking over positions of high authority very often denied to their Western sisters.’¹²³

Andrews has argued that the WI was radical in its rejection of definitions of black as other in this period. While I would agree that the movement was, as a whole, welcoming towards immigrant populations and open towards contact with foreigners, I strongly disagree with Andrews’ suggestion that the WI did not still see these groups as an other. Andrews cites the following extract from an article titled ‘Black Beauty’ in *Home and Country* as an example of these radical rejections:

¹²⁰ *Home and Country*, February 1967; Kaye, *International Countrywomen*.

¹²¹ For a discussion of the relationship between maternalism and British colonial policy see Susan Pedersen, ‘The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: the Controversy over ‘Child Slavery’ in Hong Kong,’ *Past and Present* 171, (2001): 161-202

¹²² Marcus Power, ‘The Commonwealth, “Development” and Post-colonial Responsibility’, *Geoforum*, 40, (2009), 16.

¹²³ *Home and Country*, November 1968.

Coming down the corridor towards them was a nurse. She was black [...] and she was wonderfully beautiful, radiantly alive. Her white uniform emphasised her colour vividly. Oh dear, thought Mrs Martin nervously. Supposing Andrew says something awkward. But Andrew gazed with awe. 'Oh Mummy,' he breathed ecstatically at last, 'Isn't she beautiful.'¹²⁴

But what Andrews sees as a radical shift was really just a relocation of longstanding discourses of blackness to an 'everyday' British setting. As those working within the field of postcolonial studies such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha have made clear, 'othering' is not purely about forming negative stereotypes; it is also about the fetishisation of difference.¹²⁵ In the nineteenth century blackness was often celebrated as beautiful by white travellers describing the bodies of those they encountered on their journeys. The repeated praise of the vivid, radiant beauty of the nurse was clearly working against an assumption Mrs Martin and/or the author of the extract believed was present in British society: that blackness is not (or perhaps, cannot be) beautiful. Mrs Martin's sense of discomfort that her son might say something embarrassing also indicates that she was aware of the wider context of debates about race and racial equality taking place at this time. While it certainly offers a positive description of blackness, this extract does not escape the vocabulary of race. The WI's attempts to be accepting and welcoming were still bounded and structured by longstanding discourses about skin colour. Whether positively or negatively expressed, othering continued to be an important part of how people processed the introduction of black people to British communities in this period.

Moreover, in celebrating difference in descriptions such as this the WI also reified it. Articles in *Home and Country* frequently exoticized foreign countries and encouraged WI members to participate in forms of engagement that were centred on novelty and difference. When the Beatles visited Japan, *Home and Country* held a competition for the best verse of a new song for the Beatles 'with a suitable oriental slant'. Entrants included the lines 'she's a cutie, my slant-eyed girl' and the inadvertently racy 'baby be my little geisha, be my fragrant lotus bloom, it's so hard babe to release ya, you're so groovy let's get zoom.' However much these entries might have been written in a spirit of celebration and openness, this is not the vocabulary of a group radically rejecting conceptions of foreign as other.

¹²⁴ Cited in Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*, 163.

¹²⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

The Commonwealth as Commonsense: Understanding the Semantics of Silence

There are two particularly striking features that recur across the WI's international activities. First of all, it is striking just how much of their work took place within the boundaries of the empire and Commonwealth. And second, it is remarkable, given this persistent preference, just how oblivious—or, at the very least, silent—the WI was about this fact. Their educational, philanthropic and friendship-based international activity all favoured the spaces of the empire and Commonwealth and yet the WI never acknowledged their preoccupation with these spaces. Why? What does this silence mean? Does it support those arguments that characterize the years of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s as a period of imperial amnesia? Is it evidence that the WI did not care about empire, or that they did not notice decolonization? Was the WI guilty of selectively forgetting Britain's imperial past—much as the Royal Commonwealth Society overlooked the more violent aspects of colonialism—or was it not fully aware of the ongoing imperial nature of their international engagement? Were there simply other discourses that better attracted their attention (such as the burgeoning enthusiasm for internationalism that is discussed in much greater detail in the following three chapters)?

Silences can mean many different things and it is important to pay close attention to their resonances. The unspoken should not always be understood as an absence—as a sign that something is missing—since silences can also represent something so very present that it does not need mentioning. Rather than seeing the empire as the awkward, guilt-ridden elephant in the room—as has much work on postimperial Britain—the silence of the WI can be better understood as an acknowledgement of the implicit, assumed place of these structures in their thinking. They were not discussed, because they were never questioned. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose argue that people who lived in the imperial heartland were comfortable with the empire whether it was backdrop or centre stage in their lives.¹²⁶ Indeed, Andrew Thompson has shown that 'it was perfectly possible [...] for people's lives to be affected by empire without them realizing it.'¹²⁷ Patrick Wright argues similarly that empire was omnipresent in the everyday lives of 'ordinary people', there as part

¹²⁶ Hall and Rose, *At Home with Empire*.

¹²⁷ Thompson, *Britain and the Experience of Empire*, 26.

of 'a familiar and pragmatic world which under normal circumstances, is taken for granted.'¹²⁸ We should not, Thompson argues, 'downplay the forces that shaped peoples' lives simply because they were unaware of them.'¹²⁹ Nor should we downplay them simply because groups such as the Women's Institute did not speak about them. After all, the WI did not talk much of the sun rising and setting either, and yet surely this too shaped their existence.

The WI's silence on imperial matters should not, therefore, be read as evidence of the absence but of the presence of such matters in the lives of the British public. Implicit and commonsense, the empire or Commonwealth as an entity to which Britain continued to belong was taken for granted by the Women's Institute. This is not to say that the empire was forever on the minds of the WI, or that they fully engaged with its political, economic or cultural intricacies, but that its existence as a conglomerate of countries permeated and shaped the WI's international work in tangible, meaningful and perhaps unacknowledged ways. Bush has argued that the Achilles' heel of female imperialism was that 'even associations with a clear propaganda mission, such as the Victoria League and the Primrose League, tended to allow (or encourage) lady members to revert to the "practical" work in which they felt more confident, leaving publications and public platforms in the hands of men.'¹³⁰ The WI's use of 'quiet' and 'practical commonsense' to describe their international work makes clear that this quietness, this silence, was in fact a key part of their self-definition. Practicality was not drum-beating or platform-seeking; for the WI it meant simply getting on with it.

Clare Midgley has convincingly shown that female imperialists and anti-imperialists between the 1790s and the 1930s contributed in vital ways to 'shaping public debate on empire' by bringing empire home to the British public and highlighting its relevance to their everyday lives.¹³¹ If we were to move Midgley's end point into the postwar period and even past the end of empire, would we be able to credit the WI with any meaningful role in this narrative? As argued above, WI members were not imperial or anti-imperial activists by any stretch of the imagination. Their overwhelmingly apolitical outlook and their silence on such matters denies them this role. And yet neither were they entirely detached from

¹²⁸ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, (London, 1985), 6.

¹²⁹ Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back?*, 40.

¹³⁰ Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, 80.

¹³¹ Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home', 250.

imperial issues. However silently they did so, their maternal and sisterly entanglements in a shrinking empire and growing Commonwealth could not help but 'bring empire home' to their members in rural locations across Britain. Without explicitly advocating the Commonwealth ideal the WI tied members to it through projects that spanned the three tiers of the movement. Through their philanthropic, educational, and communicative schemes WI members became active participants in the developing 'People's Commonwealth' that the Royal Commonwealth Society had been so keen to celebrate and promote.

Looked at in this way the WI's international work both supports and extends Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose's argument that the empire was taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain's place in the world.¹³² Decolonisation seemed to cause little or no crisis for the WI and despite the swathes of independences fought for and granted before and during the 1960s the WI's strong and everyday connections to the ex-empire continued untarnished. If anything, their interaction with the spaces of the empire increased in this moment of imperial decline, facilitated in large part by the Commonwealth, through which these spatialized imperial networks could survive and indeed thrive past the end of the empire. For WI members, silent or not, imperial and Commonwealth frameworks shaped the friendships that they made and the aid that they gave. Even if they wouldn't say so.

¹³² Hall and Rose, *At Home with Empire*, 2.

Chapter Three:

Individual Experience and Community Practice: the Amateur Enthusiast at the End of Empire

The Public and Private Lives of Amateurs

The other four chapters in this thesis use organizations and institutions as their key frameworks of analysis. This chapter employs a different methodology and starts with the individual rather than the organization. Instead of tracing networks *within* organizations—between central administrative bodies, regional committees, and individual members—this chapter tracks one man’s multi-faceted engagement with the empire and Commonwealth and maps the wider networks of service clubs, community groups, charitable projects, and personal contacts across which this engagement took place. It responds, in particular, to the problematic neglect of public agency within existing histories of the domestic experience of decolonization. While scholarship has considered the individual experiences of figures such as Enoch Powell and Elspeth Huxley, there has been no focused study of an individual hailing from outside of these traditional political and settler backgrounds.¹

As did the previous chapter on the Women’s Institute, this chapter continues to show that we need to broaden our definition of who could be an international actor in this period and reconsider through what means an individual could have lived an ‘imperial life’. It uses one man to explore how the ideas, motivations and experiences of an individual might influence the networks of which he was a part. Although the individual organizations that are discussed in the other four chapters played an important role in shaping the public experience of the end of empire, it is important to recognize that individuals’ interests and activities often transcended the boundaries of institutions. As this chapter shows, the relationship between individuals and

¹ Schwarz, *White Man’s World*; Webster, ‘Elspeth Huxley’.

institutions was a key part of how communities came to engage with empire.

Enthusiasts and instigators at a local level were absolutely crucial in determining how a community might engage with the outside world.

The enthusiast in question was Charles Chislett. Like the majority of the British population, Charles Chislett had not led a traditionally imperial life. Born in 1904, he was a member of the affluent middle class and made his living as the manager of a local retail bank branch in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. Unlike most of those towns with branches of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Rotherham had little direct connection to the empire. It was a medium-sized industrial town with a population of approximately 220,000 in the 1960s. Like many comparable places, Rotherham experienced a significant decrease in mining and utilities in the 1960s, meaning that the majority of the population were employed in manufacturing and services industries.² Chislett was one of approximately 8,500 managers and professionals living in the area, a much smaller proportion of the population than in Royal Commonwealth Society towns such as Bath and Cambridge. Approximately 85 per cent of Rotherham's working males were skilled, manual and unskilled labourers.³ Significantly, while it was close to cities like Sheffield and Doncaster with larger immigrant populations, Rotherham itself was an outlier. As this chapter shows, the role of individual and organizational conduits becomes all the more important in less cosmopolitan locations such as Rotherham. Chislett was one of these conduits.

After his retirement from the bank in 1962 Chislett continued to live in Rotherham with his wife Grace. Together they had one daughter, Rachel, who had grown up and left home. By this point Chislett was a serial committee member and well-known member of the Rotherham community, appearing frequently in the local press. He was chair of the Chamber of Commerce, superintendent of Masborough Chapel's thousand pupil-strong Sunday school, chair of Rotherham Celebrity Lectures, and past president of the Rotherham Round Table and Rotherham Continuity Club. He held honorary treasurerships of the local children's convalescent home, boys' welfare club, St Johns Ambulance Brigade and the Rotherham Freedom from Hunger Campaign. Alongside these formal posts Chislett was involved with the

² 'Rotherham Through Time, Standardized Industry Data,' *Vision of Britain* [http://visionofbritain.org/data_cube_page.jsp?data_theme=T_IND&data_cube=N_INDUSTRY_GEN&u_id=10084763&c_id=10001043&add=Y, accessed 12.5.2012].

³ 'Rotherham Through Time, Grouped Social Class,' *Vision of Britain* [http://visionofbritain.org/data_cube_page.jsp?data_theme=T_SOC&data_cube=N_RGSOC_GROUP&u_id=10084763&c_id=10001043&add=Y, accessed 12.5.2012].

Rotary Club, Church and Pastoral Aid, the Rotherham Arts Council and Civic Society, the local hospital's management committee and a number of local sports clubs. Finally, on top of this portfolio of community commitments Chislett was also a prolific amateur filmmaker. In his lifetime he found time to complete over one hundred film projects and accepted over nine hundred invitations to screen his films. In the first half of the 1960s he gave around 150 lectures to local and national audiences.⁴ In 1967, in honour of this active community life, Chislett was elected a Freeman of the Borough.

He was, he felt, an ordinary man. His stable life in Rotherham certainly seems a world away from the typical experiences of members of the Royal Commonwealth Society, many of whom spent a significant proportion of their life in imperial theatres overseas. Yet despite these dimensions of 'normality', Chislett's archive has clearly survived because aspects of his life—his filmmaking, and the extent of his community activity—were unusual enough to merit preservation. To date, Chislett has attracted academic attention primarily for his filmmaking and this research has drawn on material held at the Yorkshire Film Archive (YFA).⁵ This material includes the films themselves and substantial written records relating to the planning and screening of these films, including lecture notes and articles written for *Rotary in the Ridings*, the regional magazine for Yorkshire Rotary clubs. In addition to using the material held at the YFA, this chapter also mines hitherto untapped personal papers held at the Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Service. This archive consists of five boxes of uncatalogued material, mostly relating to Chislett's community activity in Rotherham but also containing military records and correspondence with acquaintances overseas. These records allow a far more complete and nuanced account than the YFA material can provide, offering a rare opportunity to analyse this kind of life in so much detail.

⁴ 'All for Good Causes,' Newspaper clipping, 21 February 1959, and General Notes (from Charles. J. Chislett) (Charles Joseph Chislett Collection, The Yorkshire Film Archive, York [hereafter YFA]: 331).

⁵ Heather Norris Nicholson, 'In Amateur Hands: Framing Time and Space in Home-Movies,' *History Workshop Journal* 43 (1997): 199–212; idem, 'Telling Travellers' Tales: The World through Home Movies,' in T. Cresswell and D. Dixon, eds., *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47–66; idem, 'At Home and Abroad with Cine Enthusiasts: Regional Amateur Filmmaking and Vizualizing the Mediterranean, ca.1928-1962,' *GeoJournal* 49 (2004): 323–333.

At first glance, Chislett's involvement in the Rotherham community appears inward-facing; a great number of the projects in which he was involved were concerned with improving life within Rotherham. But, as I argue throughout this thesis, the local is not necessarily parochial. As was the case with the Women's Institute, many of these community groups also provided opportunities for international engagement. Chislett was a self-appointed ambassador to his community, caught up in discourses of internationalism, shaped by imperial traditions and absolutely dedicated to the town of Rotherham. As chair of Rotherham Celebrity Lectures, Chislett organized talks on foreign places and international issues. Within the Rotary Club he used his post as chairman of the International Service Committee to encourage interaction with clubs overseas. Chislett also travelled extensively with his wife Grace, sharing these experiences with the Rotherham community through lectures and film shows. Understanding the relationship between international engagement and community engagement that characterized Chislett's experiences in the 1960s is key to understanding the everyday experience of decolonization. This chapter argues that the study of the domestic impact of decolonization should not be isolated from the study of public experiences of community and associational life in this period. As this case study of Charles Chislett makes clear, decolonization not only registered in grand narratives of nation, it also permeated everyday life.

The case of Charles Chislett also highlights an important and often overlooked dimension of the public's experiences of decolonization: their variability. In stark contrast to the carefully orchestrated efforts of the government-funded Commonwealth Institute, Chislett's engagement with the former empire was a rather haphazard affair. Unregulated, unconstrained by the written objectives that bind the activities of organizations and institutions and without responsibility to a paying membership, Chislett was free to dabble as he pleased. As this chapter will discuss, his interests in foreign places and international issues were shaped by different frameworks at different times; his methods of community engagement were multiple; and the views that he shared were often inconsistent (though almost always well suited to the audience at hand). Chislett regularly excused himself from the responsibilities of the professional or the expert and his flexibility and adaptability was a key component of his amateur persona.

Like many amateurs Chislett's filmmaking began as a hobby or pastime that necessarily existed alongside his professional practices. For Chislett, and for many

other filmmakers at this time, being an amateur was about having a commitment to his community and to his craft. It was about developing expertise in a non-commercial setting, and sharing an affinity with one's audience that the professional writer or filmmaker could not match. Amateur film has long been associated with the domestic, private and family space. Home movies are studied as vestiges of private lives and private activities: a child blowing out the candles on a cake, a family opening presents around a tree, aunts and uncles sat about the caravan in Devon.⁶ But for the ranks of 'serious' amateurs such as Chislett, amateurism could be a very public practice. Films were often publicly screened or communally made and therefore need to be seen as firmly situated within cultures of community sociability. Amateur practices therefore call into question the opposition between private and public discourses.⁷

This chapter works in two parts. The first considers the two-way relationship between Chislett's direct overseas experiences with empire and decolonization and his attitudes towards the end of empire. Did Chislett look backwards to Britain's imperial heyday or forwards to a post-imperial globe? Did he engage with empire nostalgically or critically? How did he portray the legacies of empire? Using Chislett's experiences, it considers the ways in which varied and multiple interactions with empire might combine to constitute one individual's 'experience' of decolonization. The second section situates Chislett within his Rotherham community and considers how the personal experiences of one man might resonate across local networks of sociability and public service. It uses Chislett's extensive outreach work to explore the frameworks through which he interacted with the public and to consider how he interpreted his personal experiences for public consumption.

⁶ See, for example, Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1995); K.L. Ishizuka, ed., *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

⁷ Sonka Kmec and Viviane Thill, eds., *Private Eyes and the Public Gaze: The Manipulation and Valorisation of Amateur Images* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2009), 9; Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Chislett Abroad: National Service, International Networks and Tourism

As was the case with the Women's Institute, there is no evidence that Chislett ever conducted a coherent or sustained analysis of decolonization, but his writings, films, and lecture notes are shot through with comments that touch on related themes of nostalgia, paternalism, development, optimism, and decline. In his varying praise of modernization and change, fixity and timelessness, pervasive and paternalistic imperial influence, and areas allegedly untouched by civilisation, Chislett displayed a range of potentially contradictory views on the end of empire. This section will focus on three related dimensions of Chislett's response to decolonization: nostalgia towards the loss of imperial power; enthusiasm for the possibilities of economic development; and faith—or lack thereof—in the ability of native populations to run their own countries. It will consider these responses in relation to three of Chislett's direct interactions with empire and decolonization: Chislett's experiences during and immediately after the Second World War; his extensive travel during the 1960s; and his position within international networks based on business and missionary contacts.

As stated above, Charles Chislett had not led a traditionally imperial life. Until the Second World War he experienced the empire only vicariously. In 1945, at the late age of 39, he joined the war effort, and it was here, serving in the Intelligence Corps, that he had his first direct experience of Britain's imperial outposts. After making a photo-record of a 2,500-mile trip through Europe, Chislett was posted to the Far East where he served in Ceylon, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and finally spent seven months in Penang, Malaya. The significance of wartime experiences such as Chislett's to the public's engagement with decolonization has received very little academic attention. As discussed in relation to the Royal Commonwealth Society, scholarship has begun to consider the expatriate experiences of the British overseas and on return to Britain.⁸ Yet while this field is a burgeoning one, showing an ever-expanding geographical and thematic reach, the distinct experiences of British military expatriates serving in imperial locations during and after the Second World War have attracted comparatively little attention. Crucially for this study, even less

⁸ Bickers, *Settlers and Expatriates*; Buettner, *Empire Families*; idem, "'We Don't Grow Coffee and Bananas in Clapham You Know!'" Imperial Britons Back Home,' in Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates*, 302-328; Kirk-Greene, 'Decolonisation: The Ultimate Diaspora'.

work has been done on these expatriates' experiences *after* serving in the military.⁹ This neglect is problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it overlooks an important way in which imperial experiences might impact on the otherwise non-imperial lives of significant sections of the working- and middle- classes. In comparison to the experiences of many upper- and upper-middle class members of the Royal Commonwealth Society, for whom the empire had been a lifelong career and often a long-term home, many of those who served in the military overseas did so for far shorter periods of time. Offering little choice about the location of one's posting, National Service thrust men into imperial environments.

The Second World War was a war fought in imperial theatres by imperial forces.¹⁰ British troops fought across the empire in the Mediterranean, Malaya, Burma, India and East Africa. Defence of the empire continued after 1945 and for many young men, until National Service was abolished in 1957, military service meant time in key sites of imperial defence or unrest, including Aden, Burma, Cyprus, India, Malaya, Malta and Singapore. Under National Service every healthy male between the ages of 17 and 21 was required to serve in the armed forces for 18 months. In the years before 1957, around 2.5 million young men were called up for service.¹¹ For some British youths and their families National Service was a source of resentment, especially if, as Nicholas White describes, this meant being shot at in the distant and sweltering jungles of Malaya, but for a significant proportion of troops time overseas did not involve combat operations.¹² Although this new military mobility took place in tightly regulated circumstances, for personnel who, like Chislett, were not front line troops, National Service was often an early opportunity to see the world and meet interesting people. The military offered the possibility of

⁹ The exception is Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, "They Called Them Communists Then ... What D'You Call 'Em Now? ... Insurgents?" Narratives of British Military Expatriates in the Context of the New Imperialism,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, 8 (2008):1335-1351. Rogaly and Taylor used interviews to explore the connections between contemporary narratives of past expatriate lives and the same people's views on contemporary immigration to the UK. Alan Allport's otherwise excellent account of the demobilization experience in postwar Britain does not differentiate between the experiences of those returning from Europe and those returning from imperial outposts: Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (London: Yale University Press, 2009). Andrew Thompson provides brief discussion of National Service and also points to need for further research: Thompson, 'Empire in the Public Imagination,' in Thompson, ed., *Britain's Experience of Empire*, 290.

¹⁰ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), ix.

¹¹ Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 91.

¹² Nicholas White, *Decolonization: The British Experience Since 1945* (London: Longman, 1999), 32.

education, an opportunity to participate in wider discourses of service overseas and a chance to escape the pressures of ‘Austerity Britain’.¹³ For some, this would be their first and only taste of international travel, but for others such as Chislett who prospered in their post-military careers, National Service inevitably fed into the appetite for foreign travel in the 1960s.

Military experiences clearly varied significantly depending on location, timing and rank, and it is not the aim of this section to provide a detailed account of British military life across the postwar empire.¹⁴ Instead, by using Chislett’s experiences and actions—overseas and once back in Britain—this section considers how the encounters with empire provided by military service might have shaped wider public interest in decolonization. As Andrew Thompson has briefly discussed, surviving military memoirs suggest that many national servicemen adopted a ‘typical white settler mentality’, one that ‘not only denigrated the “enemy” but precluded any questioning of the rights and wrongs of the colonial situation’.¹⁵ Others, and in particular those sent to occupy the Suez Canal, began to question the pointlessness and absurdity of it all.¹⁶ Many of those who served in imperial theatres struggled to settle back in to life at home, altered and distanced from domestic Britain by their time overseas.¹⁷ How does Chislett’s response compare?

When the war ended Chislett remained in South East Asia until 1947 and was transferred from the Intelligence Corps to the Education Corps where he was responsible for the organization of an Education Centre in Penang. Although Chislett wrote to friends back home describing his ‘dire adventures with cobras and rats falling from the roof,’ that this was the worst of what he had to endure attests to the remarkably lucky timing of this posting.¹⁸ His seven months in Penang fell in the brief lull between Japanese occupation during the Second World War and the Malayan Emergency of 1948-60. British Malaya had suffered military and civil collapse in the face of Japanese invasion in 1941. By 1942, 2,585 British civilians

¹³ Rogaly and Taylor, ‘They Called Them Communists Then,’ 1338.

¹⁴ Descriptions can be found within Bickers, *Settlers and Expatriates*, though the emphasis is on long-term rather than transient populations overseas.

¹⁵ Thompson, ‘Empire in the Public Imagination,’ in Thompson, ed., *Britain’s Experience of Empire*, 290. See also, J. Newsinger, ‘The Military Memoir in British Imperial Culture: The Case of Malaya,’ *Race & Class* 35, 3 (1994): 47-62.

¹⁶ Thompson, ‘Empire in the Public Imagination,’ 291.

¹⁷ See Allport, *Demobbed*.

¹⁸ Cpl Sekirk, SEAX newspaper, Calcutta to Charles Chislett, 22 November 1945 (Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Service [hereafter RA]: 358/F, Box 2).

were interned *en masse* in Changi prison, and prisoner-of-war camps held hundreds of volunteer soldiers until August 1945 when Malaya was reoccupied by British forces.¹⁹ Chislett avoided this conflict and was instead part of the large inflow of military personnel into the region after 1945. During his role as Education Officer in Penang unrest in Malaya was fairly minimal. Writing on his return to England, Chislett described that his ‘impressions came after the end of the official fighting [...] I take off my hat to those who went through the rough stuff on all fronts and made the lot of later comers pleasanter.’²⁰

Although labour unrest was common in the years preceding the Emergency, Chislett was demobbed before the first overt acts of violence against European plantation managers in 1948 and by the time the Emergency began, Chislett had settled into life back at the bank in Rotherham.²¹ The ‘lucky’ timing of his posting seemingly had a significant impact not only on the ease with which Chislett was able to reintegrate into British society on his return, but also on his attitudes towards Britain’s role in Malaya, the possibilities of economic development in the empire, and the native population in Penang. Writing after the war but before the Emergency began Chislett spoke very positively about the potential of Malaya describing how ‘she has won the character, in spite of her medley of population, of being one of the few countries free from poverty [...] and political and racial strife.’²²

Chislett’s experience of and response to the military differed significantly to that of ‘Angry Young Man’ Alan Sillitoe who also served in Malaya in the 1940s. Like Chislett, Sillitoe hailed from England’s industrial heartland, born in Nottingham in 1928. But the similarities between the two men seem to end there. Sillitoe’s family was working class whereas Chislett was part of the affluent middle class; Sillitoe was considerably younger than Chislett when he completed his National Service (eighteen years to Chislett’s thirty-nine); and, perhaps crucially, Sillitoe served in Malaya two years later than Chislett during the Communist insurgency. Whereas Chislett mostly avoided conflict in his role as an Education Officer, Sillitoe served as an RAF wireless operator and was charged with directing Lincoln bombers towards

¹⁹ Tim Harper, ‘The British “Malayans”,’ in Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates*, 258.

²⁰ Chislett’s typed notes, ‘Malaysia and Singapore and the Work of the Congregational Council for World Churches’ (YFA: 335).

²¹ There are no documents in the Chislett archives that describe his experience of demobilization in any detail. What evidence there is suggests that Chislett made the transition relatively easily. As suggested above, this was not always the case.

²² ‘Impressions of Malaya’ (YFA: 335).

Communist guerrilla bases. While Chislett returned home full of praise for the work of the British abroad and re-settled easily into his comfortable position in the social hierarchy, Sillitoe returned pessimistic, disillusioned and railing against Britain's ruling class. He later described how the war against the Malayan Races Liberation Army 'had nothing to do with us.'²³ One National Service experience was not the same as another.

The timing and nature of Chislett's posting situated him firmly within the discourses and practices of late imperial trusteeship and development. His attitudes were forged through his active involvement not only as Education Officer but also as the founder and chairman of Penang's first Round Table (an adaptation of the Rotary Club's model of service and business networking for men under the age of forty). Through his role as Education Officer and in the Round Table, Chislett developed an interest in Malaya that was practical and pragmatic. He showed little nostalgia for the luxurious golden days of the imperial past, but his written accounts of Malaya were shot through with paternalistic platitudes to the achievements of the British administration and judgments about the future of Malaya that fit neatly within wider discourses of trusteeship. He described how the 'British Administration brought amenities of civilization and much greater unity of ideas' to Malaya and that Malaya 'as a world economic unit' was 'a creation of the last half century'—'the richest and most highly developed colony in the Empire.'²⁴ Similar discourses of civilization and development recur throughout the humanitarian case studies discussed in the next two chapters.

Chislett's own attitudes of practical paternalism are most clearly borne out in his involvement with the Penang Round Table. Round Table's culture of business networking and community service was not new to the region. Malaya had had Rotary clubs since 1929 when they were established as part of a conscious attempt to build links across the colour line. For many businessmen worldwide, Rotary served as a platform on which members could socialize and interact as business peers and as community leaders committed to service. Since the 1930s, Rotary had represented a key sphere of sociability that made up a middle ground between the colonial elite and wider Malayan society.²⁵ As Chislett described, 'the Table accomplished a

²³ For a more detailed discussion of Sillitoe see Thompson, 'Empire in the Public Imagination,' 292-3.

²⁴ 'Impressions of Malaya' (YFA: 335).

²⁵ Harper, 'The British "Malayans",' 243-244.

considerable amount of community service and brought together the various nationalities in social life sometimes for the first time.²⁶

As well as providing a site for interactive sociability and cooperation between the Malaysians and Western settlers and expatriates, Round Table was, for Chislett, an arena in which the values of community service could be passed on from the colonizers to the colonized. 'The more the spirit of Rotary and Round Table enters into the councils in and of Malaya,' he argued, 'the greater will be the future and the happiness of the land.'²⁷ Paternalism and trusteeship may have been couched in the language of cooperation and partnership, but they were never far from the surface and never more so than when Chislett returned to Britain and began to check up on the Penang Table remotely. Loathe to give up his responsibilities to the Table entirely and working to stay in fairly regular contact with individual members, Chislett recorded and sent an address that could be played to new members he had never met. British paternalism could have lived on in the disembodied voice of Chislett, crackling away on a record player in a Penang clubroom. But without his supervision and enthusiasm the Penang Table did not last. Writing to a friend, Chislett described the fate of the Table after he left Malaya:

during the 'trouble' in Malaya the Table only struggled on and since then it has suffered through the dispersion of original members and inclusion of too many members who had not the unselfish ideal of community service at heart.²⁸

When Chislett returned to Malaysia as a tourist in 1967 he found the Table had disbanded, its membership had been absorbed by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and other social clubs, and 'nobody was interested enough to re-start it.'²⁹ Chislett's eventual return to Malaysia and the prolonged contact he maintained with acquaintances and members of the Penang Table indicates how the experiences of National Service might stimulate a longer-term engagement with the empire and Commonwealth. What is more, as will be discussed in detail in the second section of this chapter, Chislett's National Service stimulated an engagement with the empire that was more than personal—he also aimed to interest the Rotherham public in the charm of Malayan life and importance of its economy to British commerce.

²⁶ Chislett to L. Marchesi Esq, 8 November 1959 (RA: 358/F, Box 4).

²⁷ 'Impressions of Malaya' (YFA: 335).

²⁸ Chislett to L. Marchesi Esq, 8 November 1959 (RA: 358/F, Box 4).

²⁹ Chislett to Alan Welstenhelm, British High Commission KL, 30 May 1968 (RA: 358/F, Box 2).

In addition to this regulated, military experience, Chislett also encountered the end of empire under his own steam as a traveller and tourist. Before the Second World War Chislett had travelled domestically and within Europe—taking in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland—but in the 1960s Chislett’s travel horizons expanded substantially. In September 1965 he set off from Heathrow Airport for a four-month Thomas Cook tour in East Africa. Travelling with his wife Grace and his 16mm cine Kodak camera, he described his sense of excitement and anticipation for the journey ahead.

Even in the days of jet travel the start of a journey to Africa, with twenty three thousand miles of travel in and around that Continent ahead is something of an event—at least to the average person. Add to that the fact that I had been brought up on Rider Haggard’s African adventure books and a deep desire to experience something of the remoter areas, before civilization, for want of a better term, took over from the remnants of ‘Darkest Africa’, and see the last of the concentrations of big game in the freedom of the great Game Reserves—and Heathrow on one night in mid-September was not just ‘another airport’.³⁰

Chislett would spend the next four months travelling through former British colonies from Kenya to South Africa, staying in luxurious resorts in national parks, spotting big game from the safari jeep, visiting bustling cities and keeping an eye out for ‘Darkest Africa’. Though by far the longest, this was not Chislett’s only excursion to the former empire. Taking advantage of the time afforded him by retirement—and the financial security that a lifetime at the bank had provided him—Chislett travelled extensively in the 1960s. In 1962 he embarked on a thousand-mile cruise up the Nile through Egypt to Wadi Halfa in Sudan, following this up a year later with an air cruise in the Middle East. In early 1965 he took a boat cruise along the East coast of Africa from Tanzania to Suez and in September of that year left for Africa again on the holiday described above. Finally, he spent a month travelling across Asia in 1967, visiting India, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Singapore, before returning to the site of his military service: Penang, Malaysia. Though there is no evidence that Chislett ever explicitly commented on the fact, these trips took place almost exclusively within the bounds of the former British Empire. Moreover, the timing of these trips in the mid to late 1960s meant that Chislett visited these many of these places during or

³⁰ Charles Chislett, ‘Africa Old and New’ (YFA: 329).

immediately after their decolonization. Chislett returned from these journeys with hours of film footage, pages of accumulated facts and a collection of experiences that shaped and informed his understanding of the end of the British Empire.

Scholarship has long recognized the strong relationship between travel and national identity. Amongst others, Mary Louise Pratt, David Spurr and Alison Blunt each emphasize the crucial role played by travel texts in shaping narratives of British identity and imperialism, particularly in the Victorian era.³¹ While scholars are increasingly turning their attention to travel cultures in the twilight years of the British Empire, existing work has focused almost exclusively on the experiences of 'literary adventurers' and their published travel texts or television documentaries while overlooking the experiences of amateurs and tourists such as Chislett.³² Although professional travel narratives, such as those written by Jan Morris, Eric Newby, Norman Lewis and Patrick Leigh Fermor, undoubtedly played an important role in shaping (post)imperial consciousness back home in Britain, they tell us little about how travel as a leisure pursuit—as opposed to a professional endeavour—provided the British public with experiences of imperialism and decolonization.³³ What interested those who travelled overseas? How did they encounter the outside world? What hopes and expectations did they share with their professional counterparts? And what role did the common tropes of imperial nostalgia and amnesia play within their diverse travel experiences?

In contrast to the individual attention paid to professional travel writers, amateurs and tourists have almost always been conceived collectively. Commonly described as moving in droves, herds and swarms tourists are repeatedly configured as mass consumers of the commodities provided by the tourist industry; in the words of Jonathan Culler, 'animal imagery seems their inevitable lot.'³⁴ Although recent work has begun to emphasize the diversity of the tourist experience, the ways in

³¹ Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992); David Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

³² Clive J. Christie, 'British Literary Travellers in Southeast Asia in an Era of Colonial Retreat,' *Modern Asian Studies* 28, 4 (1994): 673–737; Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004); R. Phillips, 'Decolonizing Geographies of Travel: Reading James/Jan Morris,' *Social & Cultural Geography* 2, 1 (2001): 5–24; Hsu Ming Teo 'Wandering in the Wake of Empire: British Travel and Tourism in the Post-imperial World,' in Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 163–189.

³³ This problem is discussed in relation to the Grand Tour in Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Sutton, 1992), iv.

³⁴ Jonathan Culler, 'The Semiotics of Tourism,' *American Journal of Semiotics* 1, 1 (1981): 127–40.

which individuals such as Chislett record and account for their experiences are still understudied, particularly in relation to specific historical contexts such as decolonization.³⁵ This tendency is exacerbated by the comparative scarcity of source material on individual touristic experiences against the published exploits of professional writers. It is unlikely, for example, that Chislett's travel accounts would be available to us were he merely the 'average person' he purported to be as he set off for Africa. The preservation of these private and amateur experiences in the form of the silent films Chislett shot while travelling, rough notes for lectures he gave at film screenings and articles he wrote for his local Rotary Club magazine, offers us a rare opportunity to reconstruct some of the neglected experiences of British travel and tourism in the 1960s.³⁶

As the empire contracted in the postwar period an equivalent expansion in commercial air travel was taking place, giving affluent members of the British public access to the empire in its moment of decline. As Chislett himself emphasized, these faraway holidays took place in the 'days of jet travel'. Commercial airline operations had been established in the 1930s but it was not until the postwar period that aeromobility began to have a significant impact on British travel practices. Commercial air travel expanded throughout the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the introduction of jet propulsion, wide-bodied aircraft and lower-cost carriers, gradually opening up far-flung and postcolonial destinations to British tourists.³⁷ The consistent growth in press advertisements for international travel throughout the 1950s and early 1960s attests to this rapid expansion—BOAC invited potential customers to 'Fly Away Far Away', for instance, and Air India tapped into the excitement of expanding opportunities with their 'Look out Mr. World. I'm coming to see you with jets jetting'.³⁸ Chislett embraced the touristic experience wholeheartedly, making extensive use of Thomas Cook's services to arrange packed itineraries for each of his trips. As an amateur—and also as a husband on holiday with his wife—Chislett's approach to filming in the 1960s was, like that of most other amateur filmmakers,

³⁵ Nathan Uriely, 'The Tourist Experience: Conceptual Developments,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 32, 1 (2005): 199–216.

³⁶ These films and papers are held as part of the Charles Joseph Chislett Collection, YFA. The films include *Air Cruise to Lebanon, Syria and Jordan* (1963), *Egypt 200,000 Days Ago* (1963), *Africa Old and New* (1966) and *Malaya* (1967).

³⁷ M.L.J Dierikx, *Clipping the Clouds: How Air Travel Changed the World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008) 35-71.

³⁸ BOAC Advertisement, 6 April 1962, *The Times*; Air India Advertisement, 12 January 1962, *The Times*.

opportunistic. His films document what on the surface appear to be the typical practices of tourism: the constant and repetitive movement from hotel to hotel and sight to sight in the company of a large group of other tourists. The same sequence of pyramid, camel, man with cattle, desert and Nile dhow repeats throughout footage of his cruise in Egypt, while a similar degree of repetitiveness saturates the two hours of African footage—variation upon variation of the same theme: giraffe, zebra, lion, elephant, dusty road, pristine hotel grounds, sunset. Frequent shots of aeroplanes, including footage of busy airports as well as shots from round windows out onto the plane wing and clouded landscape below, also reveal Chislett's unerring enthusiasm for the technologies of modern travel.

These admissions—celebrations, even—of the tourist experience differ significantly from the disdainful attempts to avoid tourist practices so prevalent in travel writing dating from the same period. Many self-styled literary travellers went out of their way to avoid the beaten track, and as Hsu-Ming Teo describes, an astonishing number of travel writers expressed a 'nostalgic sense of loss [...] for the possibilities of "real" travel' in the decades after decolonization.³⁹ Yet for non-professional travellers such as Chislett who were not constrained by the expected tropes of published travel writing, the increased aeromobility of the 1960s was felt to offer expanding rather than diminishing opportunities to experience and understand the shrinking world.

As well as relying on the increasing affordability of jet travel, Chislett's touristic experiences also rode, to borrow Hsu-Ming Teo's phrase, 'on the coat-tails of colonization'.⁴⁰ In many Commonwealth and postcolonial nations the tourist industry was inescapably intertwined with the legacy of imperialism—shaped not only by its organisational infrastructure, but also by the fantasies of exotic travel that the industry knowingly tapped into.⁴¹ This interplay is clearly present in Chislett's brief description of his flight to Africa quoted above; the game reserves he was so keen to see were a legacy of both a nineteenth-century imperial infrastructure and a later boom in conservation practices that tied in with Britain's postwar development

³⁹ James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Culler 'The Semiotics of Tourism'; Paul Fussler, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Teo 'Wandering in the Wake,' 172.

⁴⁰ Teo, 'Wandering in the Wake,' 164.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

and modernisation agenda.⁴² As Chislett explained, his decision to travel was also shaped by Rider Haggard's fantastical stories of exotic African adventures, first published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Discourses of expansive adventure have long informed Britain's relationship with its empire and Haggard's novels were an influential part of this process.⁴³ When reviewing Haggard's autobiography in 1926, Horace G. Hutchinson wrote that it was 'not to be doubted that Haggard's South African romances filled many young fellows with longing to go into the wide spaces of those lands and see their marvels for themselves.'⁴⁴ A quarter century on, Graham Greene described how reading Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* as a child fostered his own 'old African Obsession'.⁴⁵ And, as Chislett's enthusiasm reveals, these same narratives continued to be meaningful to a new generation of men in the postwar era of decolonization. Amateur travellers, while perhaps not wholly confined by the tropes of published travel writing, were nevertheless entwined in the complex intertextual discourses and traditions that shaped stereotypes of travel and tourism. How did these frameworks shape Chislett's touristic engagement with the imperial past?

As Caren Kaplan contends, 'imperialism has left edifices and markers of itself the world over, and tourism seeks these markers out, whether they consist of actual monuments to field marshals or the altered economies of former colonies.'⁴⁶ Ian Baucom documents how 'mournful wanderings through the lapsing architectures of England's imperial past' became a significant feature of 1980s nostalgia.⁴⁷ This sense of belatedness is particularly explicit in Stephen Weeks's *Decaying Splendours* (1979), which, as Hsu-Ming Teo describes, is a nostalgic and melancholy tour of postcolonial India in which Weeks contemplates what he regards as 'the sunset of an era.'⁴⁸ This sense of arriving 'too late on the scene' was shared by other professional travellers including Philip Glazebrook, who travelled to Kars in the footsteps of nineteenth-century explorers—as he put it, 'in the company of ghosts'—and Gavin

⁴² R.P. Neumann, 'The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,' *Environmental History* 7, 1 (2002): 26-30.

⁴³ W.R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ H. G. Hutchinson (1926) cited in Katz, *Rider Haggard*, 1.

⁴⁵ Graham Greene, *The Lost Childhood* (1951), 14, cited in Katz, *Rider Haggard*, 1.

⁴⁶ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), 63.

⁴⁷ Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 166.

⁴⁸ Teo, 'Wandering in the Wake,' 169.

Young who set off ‘in search of Conrad’ on a trip that he described in his eponymous travel book as a ghost hunt ‘among the echoes and shadows of a flickering past.’⁴⁹ While there was clearly a burgeoning market for published accounts of nostalgic tours in the 1980s, Chislett’s experiences make clear that the ghosts of empire flickered for amateur travellers long before the nostalgia boom, highlighting the need for a more nuanced consideration of the forms that imperial memory and nostalgia took in the immediate aftermath of decolonization. His archives offer a window onto the particular aspects of the imperial past that might have appealed to amateurs travelling in the settling dust of decolonization as well as allowing us to consider the precise ways in which their nostalgia for these pasts was performed. This section considers his nostalgic engagement with the imperial past at three distinct sites of memory: a ruin in Sudan, an African landscape and a nineteenth-century hotel at Luxor.⁵⁰

Abandoned, desolate and decaying, ruins are a quintessential image of what has vanished from the past. The sense of pathos that they invite can make them evocative sites of memory for those wishing to dwell on what went before.⁵¹ When in Wadi Halfa, Sudan, Chislett encountered a deserted military camp—one of the more common ruins dotted across the former empire—commenting that it seemed a ‘ghost town of the British army.’⁵² The region had once been a busy component of the British military in the Middle East, initially as the base for British forces during the reacquisition of Sudan in the late nineteenth century and later as a communication base for the Allied Forces during the Second World War.⁵³ By the time Chislett arrived there in 1963, however, the desert was rapidly reclaiming the area. Reflecting upon the ruins, Chislett conjured up an evocative image of the past in which he described how ‘the parade grounds are silent and deserted in the blazing sun, but you half expect to hear the imperative summons of a bugle, or meet a squad of pith

⁴⁹ Gavin Young, *In Search of Conrad* (London: Penguin, 1991), 3. Young is discussed in greater detail in Teo, ‘Wandering in the Wake’; H. Henderson, ‘The Travel Writer and the Text: My Giant Goes with Me Wherever I Go,’ in M. Kowalewski, ed., *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel* (Georgia: Pelham Groom, 1992), 239.

⁵⁰ The concept of ‘sites of memory’ derives from Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,’ trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25. See also Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Buettner, ‘Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia’.

⁵¹ Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris,’ 5.

⁵² Charles Chislett, ‘Two Million Days Ago’, *Rotary in the Ridings* 33, 5 (1963): 18.

⁵³ Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, 116-117.

helmeted sweat-stained khaki figures arguing about Gordon or Kitchener.⁵⁴ This brief reverie highlights three important and recurring features of Chislett's touristic engagement with the imperial past: the notable absence of melancholy; the vivid reconstruction of a past that he has never experienced; and the temporal location of that reconstruction in the nineteenth century.

Chislett's vision of bugles and pith helmets was sentimental, certainly, yet it was far from sorrowful, expressing little of the mournful longing identified in later professional narratives. Svetlana Boym productively distinguishes between two types of 'performative nostalgia': the 'reflective'—a bitter-sweet pain of longing and loss that lingers on ruins, absences and silences—and the 'restorative', which acts on a desire to 'return to the original and patch up the memory gaps' through reconstructions of the past.⁵⁵ It is clear that Chislett's nostalgia at Wadi Halfa was more 'restorative' than it was 'reflective'; although his reverie was prompted by ruins and silences, these functioned as little more than a trigger, quickly left behind as he worked to reconstruct and superimpose a nineteenth-century imaginary onto the scene.

The absence of loss from Chislett's description is brought into sharp focus through comparison with another more reflective account of a deserted military camp, this time by Archer Cust, the Secretary General of the Royal Commonwealth Society in the late 1940s. Cust, who had served in military intelligence during the Second World War, returned to Egypt in 1948, describing a flight over Mena camp and his 'old depot on the bluff' where 'the roofs had been removed from most of the buildings, and soon the sand will blot out all traces of the roads, huts, and tented areas that were familiar to so many tens of thousands of the Empire's forces.'⁵⁶ For Cust, the ruins of British military camps represented a dialogue between absence and presence in which the presence of these ruins could not help but signify the absence of the British. Whereas Chislett appeared remarkably untouched by any sense of pathos, preoccupied as he was with the vibrant imagery of the British Empire of the previous century, for Cust the mournful narrative of British loss was made explicit through the powerful imagery of the camp being blotted out by the desert sand. This difference is partly to do with experience. For Cust, who had his own memories of

⁵⁴ Chislett, 'Two Million Days Ago,' 18.

⁵⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

⁵⁶ Archer Cust, cited and discussed in greater detail in Craggs, 'Cultural Geographies,' 180.

the depot on the bluff, the loss was personal, tied to a specific moment in the not so distant past; for Chislett, who was seeing the camp at Wadi Halfa for the first time in 1963, the loss could not be more than abstract. Chislett may have had military experience in Malaya, but this did not map neatly onto the realities of decolonization in the Middle East. As Thompson has emphasized, we must be sensitive to the breadth of imperial experiences that shaped Britons' engagements with the empire.⁵⁷ This lack of personal connection to specific dimensions of the imperial past likely shaped the experiences of many tourists.

Yet while it may have dampened the emotional resonance of the scene, Chislett's lack of personal experience in the Middle East only fired his imagination. The physical remains at Wadi Halfa prompted Chislett to reconstruct a scene from Britain's imperial past that he had not personally experienced but which nevertheless seemed to be vividly available to him. That Chislett was so easily able to access this imperial iconography speaks to the extent to which narratives of British imperialism were embedded within domestic cultural memory. Chislett's reconstruction also reminds us that tourists were not simply passive consumers, spoon-fed by the tourist industry. As Mazierska and Walton suggest, tourists are often construed as 'disempowered addicts or sheep'—as 'consumers of objects and meanings rather than their creators'.⁵⁸ While we cannot be sure in what terms Chislett's tour guides introduced the ruins at Wadi Halfa—or, indeed, if they were even an intended 'site' on the tour—Chislett's own reverie clearly marks him as an active participant in the production and interpretation of meaning. Similar attempts to seek out and construct meaning in the touristic experience saturate Chislett's written travel accounts.

The third important feature of this reverie is its temporal specificity. Chislett drew upon his repertoire of imperial imagery to conjure up a scene from the halcyon days of nineteenth-century high imperialism replete with period costumes and famous figures—an act of imaginative dexterity that enabled him to overlook the awkward and painful postwar years of decolonization in the Middle East. When Chislett travelled the Nile in 1963, the Suez crisis was fixed in the public conscious as an 'unambiguous failure to recover a lost show of strength'.⁵⁹ By the beginning of the 1960s Jordan had denounced her alliance with Britain, the Hashemite regime in

⁵⁷ Thompson with Kowalsky, 'Empire in the Public Imagination,' 251-297.

⁵⁸ E. Mazierska and J.K. Walton, 'Tourism and the Moving Image,' *Tourist Studies* 6 (2006): 6.

⁵⁹ M. Thomas, B. Moore and L.J. Butler, *Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe's Imperial States* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), 78, 93; Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, 17.

Iraq—Britain’s staunchest ally in the region—had been overthrown and British influence was constrained to the maritime periphery of the Middle East at Aden and along the Persian Gulf.⁶⁰ The events of 1956 forced a withdrawal from the region that was hasty, humiliating and almost impossible to assimilate within the preferred decolonization narrative of a steady march towards democracy and independence.⁶¹

Yet in his various notes about the trip Chislett makes no mention of the Suez crisis or of the significant turning point in the course of decolonization that it was commonly held to have signified.⁶² His silence here should not be read as amnesia about Britain’s imperial past, nor as obliviousness to the political present—in notes on his air cruise in the Middle East Chislett revealed an awareness of contemporary politics when he commented that ‘Nasser is the brightest star in the Arab firmament and other political set-ups seem to be designed and described according to their relationship to him.’⁶³ Instead the silence should be read as a selective erasure, an avoidance strategy that sought solace in the comforting imagery of the previous century. Chislett’s mobilisation of these particular signs of the past at Wadi Halfa worked, in short, to impose a reassuringly familiar British presence onto the destabilized, decolonized and potentially traumatic present.

These same three features—the notable absence of melancholy; the vivid reconstruction of a past that he has never experienced; and the temporal location of that reconstruction in the nineteenth century—also characterized Chislett’s nostalgic response to the African landscape, three years later. He took extensive film footage of rural African scenery from ground level and covered long distances by road, but the particular moment under analysis here was prompted during his flight to Kenya when he looked down on the landscape from above. Chislett spent much of the flight looking out of the window and, enthralled by the novelty of an aerial view, wrote about the ‘gleaming snowfields of Mt. Blanc’, ‘the silver crescent of the seafront of Genoa’ and the ‘necklaces of lights along the North African coast’.⁶⁴ When the plane reached Southern Sudan near the end of the flight, Chislett began to slip into a more nostalgic mode:

⁶⁰ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonization*, 212.

⁶¹ Craggs, ‘Cultural Geographies,’ 180.

⁶² Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, 4.

⁶³ ‘Middle East Mosaic’ (YFA: 458).

⁶⁴ ‘Africa Old and New’ (YFA: 329).

Beneath we could now see something of that mysterious area of the Sudd—reed choked wastes around the Nile still one of the world’s unexplored areas. Cumulus was piled high over Mount Kenya and Mount Elgon but ahead there was a gleam of reflected sunshine on Lake Victoria and we could pick out Jinja and the official source of the Nile, and remembered the courage and the devotion of those early explorers Speke, Grant and Stanley who saught [*sic*] it in the maze of twisting waterways to the north.⁶⁵

Once again he looked back to the expansive high imperialism of the nineteenth century, peopling the postcolonial landscape with heroes of a bygone empire and calling on the empowering tropes of exploration and discovery. If, as Martin Green has argued, adventure was the energising myth of the British Empire, Chislett’s re-narration of Speke, Grant and Stanley’s courage in Africa—as well as his earlier enthusiasm for Rider Haggard—explicitly signals the enduring appeal of these discourses to tourists travelling at the end of the empire.⁶⁶ His descriptions here and at Wadi Halfa illustrate the deep influence of inter-medial contexts in inscribing certain landscapes and landmarks with narratives of empire—narratives, moreover, that could be continually invoked and accessed through travel and tourism in the post-imperial world.

The final reverie I wish to consider took place at the Winter Palace Hotel at Luxor. Built in 1886, the hotel was a living memorial to the grandeur of nineteenth-century tourism and a much more standardized and well-defined ‘site of memory’ than the military ruins and African landscapes discussed above. In the 1890s similar grand hotels had been built across the empire as fashionable destinations for well-to-do travellers.⁶⁷ In Cairo, at Luxor and at Aswan these new modern hotels were the centres of many tourists’ social circles.⁶⁸ As travel writer Eustace Reynolds-Ball wrote in 1901, ‘from January to April there is one unceasing round of balls, dinner parties, picnics, gymkhanas and other social functions.’⁶⁹ Chislett’s Nile tour took him to the Winter Palace Hotel precisely because of this history. The hotel was, as he

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge, 1980), xi. See also R. Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁶⁷ J. Whidden, ‘Expatriates in Colonial Egypt, 1864-1956,’ in Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates*, 50.

⁶⁸ D. Gregory, ‘Colonial Nostalgia and Cultures of Travel: Spaces of Constructed Visibility in Egypt,’ in N. Alsayyad, ed., *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 127.

⁶⁹ Eustace Reynolds-Ball, *Cairo: The City of the Caliphs* (London, 1901), 130.

described it, ‘an Edwardian museum-piece, which should be experienced’ and he recounted the visit thus:

Small Egyptian boys dust your shoes as you pass into the great hall. The public rooms are very large [...] but the original furniture still graces some of the lounges, and you can almost hear the rustle of the long dresses of the stately ladies, suitably escorted of course, who did the Grand Tour of “Thomas Cook’s Canal” in the early days of the century.⁷⁰

This reverie followed the same basic pattern as those at Wadi Halfa and Lake Victoria—a reimagination of a high-imperial scene, lacking in melancholy though vividly described. But Chislett’s experience at the Winter Palace Hotel also differed from his other reveries in ways that strikingly prefigured the nostalgia boom to come. The ‘restorative nostalgia’ evident at the Hotel—materialized in its explicit efforts to reconstruct the past—was a precursor to what Lowenthal characterizes as the era of ‘rampant heritage’ in which ‘regard for roots and recollection permeates the Western world and pervades the rest.’⁷¹ Cultural heritage projects ranged from the work of the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, which began to target decaying colonial era European graveyards in the 1970s, to the Mbwani Ruins Hotel in Zanzibar where guests could sleep in the first Anglican Christian missionary settlement in East Africa.⁷² Between the late 1970s and the 1990s similar projects of ‘cultural salvage’ across the former empire encouraged travellers to indulge in nostalgic colonial role-playing.⁷³ In South East Asia in the 1990s a number of similar grand colonial hotels underwent renewal and commercial relaunch, socially reconstructed as historical monuments.⁷⁴

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Chislett’s participation in the public display of restorative nostalgia at the Winter Palace hotel also prefigured some of the prevailing themes of the later nostalgia boom. His description of the ‘long dresses of the stately ladies,’ for instance, matched an enthusiasm for costume drama that peaked in the 1980s with television serializations such as *The Jewel in the Crown* and *The Far*

⁷⁰ Charles Chislett, ‘Two million days ago,’ *Rotary in the Ridings* 33, 4 (1963): 15.

⁷¹ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

⁷² Buettner, ‘Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia,’ 13.

⁷³ Teo, ‘Wandering in the Wake,’ 168; Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris,’ 12.

⁷⁴ M. Peleggi, ‘Consuming Colonial Nostalgia: The Monumentalisation of Historic Hotels in Urban South East Asia,’ *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 46, 3 (2005): 255-265.

Pavilions.⁷⁵ Stephen Weeks's description of a similar scene for *Decaying Splendours*, written more than fifteen years after Chislett's trip, closely echoes Chislett's own reverie while emphasizing the movement towards ever more 'restorative' projects of nostalgia. As Weeks (who doubled as a director of television films for the BBC) described, 'It seemed such a short step, especially for someone like myself, so used to peopling film-sets at the drop of a hat with handfuls of fake Dukes or ballrooms of Edwardian ladies, to restore, perhaps, and certainly to regret the loss of, the British Empire.'⁷⁶ Whereas in the 1960s Chislett could only people ruins, landscapes and hotels with the ghosts of his imagination, the nostalgia boom made it commercially viable—lucrative even—to people them with costumed actors and actresses. Chislett's reveries here indicate a much longer and less broken trajectory of interest in the imperial past than is often attributed to the British public.

In addition to the thrills of the safari and the flickering lure of the imperial past, Chislett's trips also offered what felt like a last-chance opportunity to chase after disappearing traces of primitive life before 'civilisation [...] took over'.⁷⁷ Many safari films in this era—both amateur and professional—capture what Amy Staples describes as a similar quest 'not simply for encountering and documenting the remote and the exotic, but for an experience of difference that is increasingly positioned at the edge of extinction.'⁷⁸ It was a paradox that for many former colonies the transition to independence was often also a period of increased 'westernisation,' prompting nostalgia among tourists not only for the heyday of empire, but also for the loss of uniqueness, exoticism and primitivism that empire had done away with.⁷⁹ As Elizabeth Buettner reminds us, calling attention to the work of Fredric Jameson, Renato Rosaldo, and Raphael Samuel, 'in deracinated postmodern circumstances the allure of disappearing worlds, environments "at risk," and nostalgia for what has been destroyed can readily become enhanced.'⁸⁰

In his written accounts of his trips to the Middle East Chislett made clear his desire to experience something of the pre-imperial past, titling the film of his Nile

⁷⁵ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 538; Buettner, *Empire Families*, 252-271.

⁷⁶ Stephen Weeks, *Decaying Splendours: Two Palaces, Reflections in an Indian Mirror* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1979), 68.

⁷⁷ 'Africa Old and New' (YFA: 329).

⁷⁸ Amy Staples, 'Safari Adventure: Forgotten Cinematic Journeys in Africa,' *Film History*, 18 (2006): 407.

⁷⁹ Jacinta Matos, 'Old Journeys Re-visited: Aspects of Postwar English Travel Writing,' in Kowalewski, *Temperamental Journeys*, 216.

⁸⁰ Buettner, 'Cemeteries, Public memory and Raj Nostalgia,' 14.

cruise, *Egypt 2,000,000 Days Ago* and later describing how in Jordan ““Old Testament” land and life was [*sic*] all about [him]”.⁸¹ Through his films, in particular, Chislett also attempted to record a still present but disappearing way of life. Each of his holiday films contained multiple rural scenes in which indigenous men and women—some of them clearly uncomfortable about being filmed—were positioned in the centre of still, lingering shots. In *Egypt* indigenous people face the camera, grouped as if for a photographic portrait; in footage from Malaysia topless women and children stand at the roadside, frowning at the camera; and in footage from Africa women carrying large pots on their heads are again filmed by the roadside, standing as though taking a moment from their daily routine to pose resignedly for the tourist’s camera. The regular recurrence of such shots indicates Chislett’s participation in what is perhaps best characterized as an informal ethnographic safari in which ‘traditional’ rural groups were sought out as specimens of ‘authentic’ culture not yet transformed by the spread of civilization. In one particularly striking scene from his Africa footage Chislett filmed another member of his tour group standing, knees bent, by the side of the road to photograph an African woman in traditional dress. The shot not only suggests that the practice of drive-by ethnography was a common part of touristic experiences in the former empire, it also raises questions about the assumptions that tourists and travellers frequently made about their right to film foreign peoples.

In footage from his Middle Eastern Air Cruise Chislett included a shot of a street scene with two men in the middle-distance, clearly signalling to the camera that they did not want to be filmed. Chislett may have made some gestures towards cultural sensitivity, writing that ‘you naturally consider the feelings of those who object to being photographed,’ but he greatly undermined this moral stance by admitting that it was the threat of violence rather than deference to the will of indigenous peoples not to be filmed that prompted him to turn off the camera. As he described: ‘When the subjects are intriguing veiled women, complications can arise in the form of male owners [...] who give every appearance of being ready to emphasize any argument with a knife.’ Tellingly, Chislett’s response to situations

⁸¹ Charles Chislett, ‘Air Cruise to the Lebanon, Syria and Jordan,’ *Rotary in the Ridings* (c.1964):15.

such as this was not to stop filming but to conclude instead that ‘the best answer is a telephoto lens.’⁸²

In adopting such methods, Chislett reveals how the mindsets and assumptions that informed earlier colonial photography continued to influence filmmaking practices beyond the formal end of empire. Through their subject matter as well as their use of a presentational conception of space and address, these moments in Chislett’s films hark back to ethnographic photography of the nineteenth century.⁸³ Shot in this way, indigenous people were presented as two-dimensional ‘primitive’ character types rather than individuals with agency. Indeed, such was Chislett’s desire to capture the disappearing primitive on film that he was willing to resort to manipulation and, as Heather Norris Nicholson describes, inserted into *Africa Old and New* a close up still image of a woman and three children standing in front of a hut ‘derived from different (possibly commercial) film stock and edited as a repeated single frame’.⁸⁴

In these varied efforts Chislett clearly mourned the loss of primitive life and yet he repeatedly failed to hold colonialism accountable for its role in this loss. Such an act of oversight closely conforms to Renate Rosaldo’s characterization of ‘imperialist nostalgia’.⁸⁵ Indeed, we could dismiss Chislett as a blinkered imperial nostalgist were these efforts at ethnographic documentation and the romanticized reveries discussed above his only engagements with Britain’s imperial role. In actual fact, his treatment of decolonization both included and transcended these more typical nostalgias of travel writing. Unlike writers such as Levi-Strauss, whose obsessive preoccupation with the past left him, in his own words, ‘groaning among the shadows,’ Chislett balanced his ‘ghost hunting’ with a keen interest in contemporary development.⁸⁶

For every wistful comment that Chislett made about the past, he made another that engaged critically with the postcolonial present; for every shot of rural life, he filmed another of a busy city. Juxtapositions between ‘traditional’ life and bustling modernity were a prominent feature of the appropriately titled *Africa Old and New*, which contrasts shots of unpeopled open plains with footage of cities such as Nairobi

⁸² Chislett, ‘Two Million Days Ago,’ 11.

⁸³ See Ryan, *Picturing Empire*.

⁸⁴ Norris Nicholson, ‘Framing Time and Space in Home Movies,’ 205.

⁸⁵ Rosaldo, ‘Imperialist Nostalgia’.

⁸⁶ Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris,’ 28.

and Dar es Salaam where the buildings are decked in advertisements for international brands and modern cars line the curb. Similarly, in *Egypt* Chislett contrasted dusty footpaths and rural agriculture with new paved roads and large modern buildings, repeating this sequence of comparisons at each new location on his trip. One of the most striking juxtapositions of his holiday films takes place in Chislett's footage of Malaysia when a series of mid-distance shots of a busy port full of large, modern boats negotiating routes between each other is followed by a long still shot of a single rowing boat on empty water, the sea and sky vast behind it. The comparisons drawn between 'old' and 'new' were further emphasized by Chislett's use of different filmic techniques. In contrast to the lingering and static roadside portraits discussed above, Chislett was much more inclined to use wider panning shots to film urban life. In these shots, crowds are allowed to move through the scene rather than being contained within it. Not subjected to the 'fixing' gaze of a still camera, these 'modern' individuals regularly walk across shots, intent on their business and often oblivious to the camera.⁸⁷

Here the camera was relatively well suited to conveying a sense of passing time, and the contrasts that these films drew between old and new were also layered with the binaries of rural/urban, poor/rich, and primitive/westernized. Through these juxtapositions Chislett offered explicit and implicit commentaries on the economic and cultural changes that these societies underwent in the postwar period. Following the loss of India in 1947, Britain redoubled her efforts in Africa and South East Asia, emphasising social and economic development in order to get the most out of her remaining colonies.⁸⁸ The long sequences of city life in *Africa Old and New* show an effort to record the rapid intensification of urbanisation at the end of this 'second colonial occupation'. In Malaysia, where accelerated reforms and social welfare initiatives had been an essential complement to the armed counter-insurgency throughout the 1950s, Chislett's busy port scenes and built-up cities tell a similar story of industrial development. These shots were reinforced by his written claims, already discussed above: it was the British who had brought 'the amenities of civilization' to Malaysia and Malaya 'as a world economic unit' was 'a creation of

⁸⁷ For further discussion of the 'Colonial Gaze' see Kaplan, *Looking For the Other*; Norris Nicholson, 'Telling Travellers' Tales'; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; and Sandon, 'Projecting Africa: Two 1920s British Travel Films,' in E. Hallam and B. Street, eds., *Cultural Encounters: Representing 'Otherness'* (London: Routledge, 2000), 108-148.

⁸⁸ A.G. Hopkins, 'Rethinking Decolonization,' *Past and Present* 200 (2008): 217.

the last half century’ — ‘the richest and most highly developed colony in the Empire.’⁸⁹ By the time Chislett returned to Malaysia in 1967 the former colony had become somewhat of a success story for trusteeship.⁹⁰ Chislett tapped into the same discourses of development that allowed decolonizing imperial powers such as Britain to reconcile themselves to their sudden loss of power. As Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard describe, development connected former colonial powers with their ex-colonies, justifying a continued sense of their mission in shaping their future.⁹¹ This connection will be discussed in far greater detail in the next chapter.

Chislett clearly found comfort in these frameworks of trusteeship and development, but his enthusiasm for the ‘new’ was also matched by an interest in the problems that emerging nations faced in independence. He engaged most explicitly with the processes of decolonization in relation to Africa, one page of his scrawled notes listing what he identified as local and general problems in the post-colonial continent. These included ‘chips on shoulder re white help [*sic*]’, ‘evil propaganda’, ‘nationalism – often quite illogical’, ‘power of witch doctors’ and ‘Africans unwilling to prepare for future’, as well as mentioning more specific examples such as the 1963-67 secessionist Shifta War in Kenya, ‘problems in Uganda’ (presumably referring to separatist Bugandan revolts) and the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, all events that occurred either during or immediately before his trip.⁹² On another set of note cards for a lecture he gave to members of the London Missionary Society, Chislett repeated a similarly critical evaluation, writing that the missionary ‘has to stay there and ride the tides of anti-European, anti-British, anti-white, anti-Christian feeling’ that has been ‘whipped up by evil propaganda.’⁹³ Comments such as these reveal that Chislett did not accept decolonization with total equanimity. In comparison to his account of Malaysian economic success in which he was quick to claim British credit for economic infrastructure, this more critical account of Africa entirely overlooks Britain’s possible culpability, placing any blame firmly on the shoulders of Africans and propagandizing Communists. In conjunction with his conspicuous silence on the Suez Crisis, it shapes his broader commentary on

⁸⁹ ‘Impressions of Malaya’ (YFA: 1151).

⁹⁰ Thomas, Moore and Butler, *Crises of Empire*, 60-62.

⁹¹ Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences* (London: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

⁹² ‘Africa Old and New’ (YFA: 333).

⁹³ Africa L.M.S. meeting notes (YFA: 329).

the significance of imperial decline into an account far more inclined to highlight the positive aspects of the experience than the negative.

There was no one single moment in which the British Empire ended. British decolonization was a complex and overlapping series of processes, driven by a diverse international cast of actors. If Chislett's forays into the former empire did not furnish him with a particularly sophisticated or internally coherent understanding of decolonization, the impact of British imperial decline nevertheless resonated throughout his touristic experiences—in his nostalgic reveries, in his ethnographic attempts to document disappearing primitiveness, and in his fascination with the physical signifiers of development and modernity. As outlined above, increased mobility in the 1960s gave a greater proportion of the British population first-hand access to the 'out there' spaces and places of the former empire. Widespread enthusiasm for touristic experiences—encapsulated in the excited anticipation that Chislett expressed before leaving for Africa in 1965—offers an important counterpoint to narratives of post-imperial decline and inward-facing parochialism.⁹⁴ In his touristic search for empire, primitivism *and* modernity Chislett made clear that individuals could hold potentially irreconcilable views, called into play by different moments of the amateur travel experience. The nostalgia that characterizes professional travel writing was certainly present in Chislett's reveries, but any sense of mournful longing was tempered by the parallel enthusiasm that he showed for both the typical practices of tourism and also the discourses of development and trusteeship.

In teasing out the indeterminacies, intricacies and contradictions within Chislett's accounts it becomes clear that tourism and critical engagement were not mutually exclusive practices. If looked at in isolation, Chislett's film footage would seem to suggest that the touristic experience offered little opportunity to engage with the more complex dimensions of imperial decline. Looked at in conjunction with his written accounts, however, it makes clear that although these limited frameworks were the most easily accessible to travellers and tourists, they did not preclude more meaningful engagements with decolonization. Multi-layered responses such as Chislett's show us that we need to look beyond the tourist industry, its packaged tours and the frameworks through which it promoted its fare to account instead for the

⁹⁴ R. English and M. Kenny, eds., *Rethinking British Decline* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

individual agency and interests of its heterogeneous consumers. As Teo argues, for most Britons travelling abroad the nostalgic colonial experience was but one of many different modes of tourism available. The variability of Chislett's experiences explored here certainly attests to this, but while, as Teo suggests, many travellers might juxtapose a colonial heritage tour with a shopping trip, Chislett balanced his instead with an effort to find out about the political and economic conditions of postcolonial nations.⁹⁵ As he travelled through the former empire, Chislett was not only hunting for ghosts, sifting through the imperial debris in search of memorative signs, but carefully collecting and piecing together a complex series of impressions of the pasts, presents and potential futures of these far-flung holiday destinations.

Chislett's interest in post-imperial futures was certainly stimulated and served by his touristic travel experiences, as is made clear in the discussion above, but it was also shaped in important ways by the international networks of which he was a part. Here we can start to trace the ways in which individuals such as Chislett moved within and between institutions. Using friendship, business, missionary and military networks, Chislett was able to put together a long list of overseas contacts with whom he could connect while abroad. Articles in the local Rotherham press commented on the shrinking world in which these activities took place, describing the networks that tied Rotherham to international locations. An article in the *Rotherham Advertiser* describing Chislett's trip to India, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia detailed how he met up with a number of people with connections to Rotherham. Chislett spent Christmas in Calcutta with a couple who had lived in Rotherham; met another Rotherham man who served with the Embassy in Bangkok; and in Hong Kong met a former Rotherham journalist, now an information officer.⁹⁶ Before his trip to South Africa a mutual friend put Chislett in touch with R. Holman of Contractor Ltd who offered his services as 'chauffeur, guide and general factotum.'⁹⁷ Of these international contacts, the networks of business and friendship provided by Rotary International are particularly important in thinking through Chislett's

⁹⁵ Teo, 'Wandering in the Wake,' 168.

⁹⁶ 'A Small World,' *Rotherham Advertiser*, 11 March 1967.

⁹⁷ R. Holman, Contractor Ltd, Cape Province, SA to Charles Chislett, 1 October 1965 (RA: 358/F, Box 2).

experiences at the end of empire.⁹⁸ It was in relation to these networks that he commented most explicitly on a vision for the world after empire.

By 1964 there were 65 Rotary Clubs in the Yorkshire Ridings district and 3225 members attended their monthly meetings with an average attendance rating for the district of 81.5 percent.⁹⁹ At a local level, service clubs such as Rotary and Round Table offered a mix of social networking, educational activities and philanthropic work to their middle-class members. But these clubs also situated their members within an international community that encouraged international as well as local service, providing members with access to a far-flung community at a time of increasing geographical mobility.¹⁰⁰ As a Rotary booklet on International Service proudly boasted, ‘membership of a world movement provid[ed] a ready-made link, and from that assumption of fellowship everything should follow without barrier or hindrance.’¹⁰¹ In the interwar period it had been common to call in at club luncheons across the country if passing through on business; by the postwar period of international travel, members could find warm welcomes at Rotary Clubs across the globe and many members made time to attend local meetings while travelling. In Egypt Chislett visited a ninety-member Rotary club with its headquarters in the Nile Hilton Hotel where he received a ‘warm welcome’, presented a flag, and addressed the meeting for a couple of minutes.¹⁰²

Rotary’s overarching international objective was ‘the advancement of understanding and good will, and international peace through a world fellowship of businessmen united in the Rotary ideal of service.’¹⁰³ Although the language with which Chislett described his setting up of Round Table in Penang was certainly paternalistic—fitting within wider narratives of British trusteeship and preparation for independence—the business context in which Rotary Clubs and Round Tables interacted with each other was conceptualized as an international rather than imperial network. Rotary prided itself on its ‘forward looking’ attitude and this identification

⁹⁸ For histories of the Rotary Club see Roger Levy, *Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland* (Plymouth: Continua Productions, 1978); and David Shelley Nicholl, *The Golden Wheel: The Story of Rotary 1905 to the Present* (Plymouth: Macdonald and Evans, 1984).

⁹⁹ *Rotary in the Ridings*, December 1964.

¹⁰⁰ Helen McCarthy, ‘Service Clubs, Citizenship, and Equality: Gender Relations and Middle-Class Associations in Britain Between the Wars,’ *Historical Research* 81, 213 (2008): 537.

¹⁰¹ *International Service* (London: Rotary International, no date).

¹⁰² *Rotary in the Ridings* 33, 3 (1962): 17.

¹⁰³ Brendan Goff, ‘Philanthropy and the “Perfect Democracy” of Rotary International,’ in David Hammack and Steven Heydemann, eds., *Globalization, Philanthropy, and Civil Society: Projecting Institutional Logics Abroad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 58.

with modernity and discourses of world brotherhood was more compatible with internationalism than with empire.¹⁰⁴ In Britain, for example, Rotary clubs cooperated much more closely with the United Nations Association than with organisations such as the Royal Commonwealth Society, Royal Overseas League or Victoria League.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the Women’s Institute, they showed no real preference for Old Commonwealth ties or the discourses of kith and kin that were commonly used to validate them. Rotary networks of hospitality overseas were also considerably more cosmopolitan than those provided by imperial clubhouses and the overseas branches of the Royal Commonwealth Society; the Cairo Rotary club, for example, had active members from fourteen nationalities and seven religions.¹⁰⁶

How did Chislett’s membership of an avowedly international organization shape his ideas about decolonization? Given the nostalgia he showed while travelling for some elements of Britain’s golden imperial past, we might have expected him to draw comfort from the ideas of the Commonwealth, but he never discussed the Commonwealth as a potential model for the future. For Chislett, empire was to be replaced by the international. In a speech to the Rotherham Chamber of Commerce Chislett tried to explain the difference between ‘the world of Commerce during our “Empire” period and now’:

We as a nation still retain a large degree of know-how in colonial government and administration, but without an empire to govern. We have those who are willing to take responsibility, and if the schools and the training which produced the men who ran the empire can be retained with a different slant to prepare the best human material to head the world in commerce, opportunities are both challenging and boundless.¹⁰⁷

As well as showing a paternalistic faith in the know-how of colonial government, Chislett also set out a new, ‘boundless’ international framework for British commerce, envisioning a broader rather than narrower British reach at the end of the empire. The international Rotarian networks within which he situated himself inevitably played a part in this vision for Britain’s international commercial future. As we will see in the next two chapters, this vision of British post-imperial global reach—an ambition that was seen as justified by the years of experience that Britain

¹⁰⁴ McCarthy, ‘Service Clubs,’ 896.

¹⁰⁵ *International Service*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Cairo Rotary Club to Rotherham Rotary Club, 12 October 1956 (RA: 358/F, Box 3).

¹⁰⁷ Charles Chislett, ‘Chamber of Commerce, President’s Report 1964-5’ (RA: 358/5, Box 1).

had developed as an imperial power—was also a central part of humanitarian and development discourses at this time.

It is unproductive to try to isolate Chislett's experiences from his attitudes. Did Chislett join Rotary because he already believed in international frameworks, for example, or did Rotary's international objectives inspire Chislett's efforts to encourage international understanding? Did Chislett travel because he wanted to know about the empire, or were these interests the result of his international exploits, stimulated by the travel experiences themselves? Each shaped the other in complex ways that make it impossible to determine causality. The next section will consider how these experiences and attitudes played out when Chislett was at home in Rotherham.

Cameras in the Community: Virtual Mobility and the Rotherham Public

Despite the increasing democratization of air travel, the costs of travel of the sort that Chislett undertook remained prohibitive to the majority of the British population. Those with whom he and his wife travelled were typically of the same social standing—doctors, dentists, a Classics master at Eton and a 'gaggle of headmistresses'—and, as the local press made clear when it reported that Chislett was 'one of Rotherham's most widely travelled citizens', such extensive travel was unusual enough to be noteworthy.¹⁰⁸ The frequent appearance of articles on travel experiences in the *South Yorkshire Times*, including one on the increasing number of Rotherham residents finding their way to South Africa, further emphasizes the enduring novelty of international travel in this era.¹⁰⁹ The average holiday was much more likely to be reached by car or boat than by plane, and most holidays took place within rather than beyond the European continent. But while international travel itself may have been limited to these affluent members of society, the cultural impact of transcontinental mobility on 1960s Britain had a much wider reach. Thus far, research on postwar mobility has tended to focus on the experience of physical travel itself. In doing so, it overlooks the extent to which cultures of international travel became part of the fabric of everyday life within 1960s Britain.

¹⁰⁸ Newspaper clipping, title and date missing, c.1967 (RA: 88-Z); 'Middle East Mosaic' rough notes, (YFA: 458).

¹⁰⁹ 'South Africa Visits,' *South Yorkshire Times*, 27 February 1965.

The previous chapter discussed how many who spoke to the Women's Institute about international issues were sharing their own travel experiences. This section continues to address this issue by turning to Chislett's role within the Rotherham community in order to consider how his increased travel opportunities interacted with and affected local recreational practices. It asks how an interested and enthusiastic individual such as Chislett might effect a wider community's engagement with decolonization.

As already discussed, Chislett was known in Rotherham as a man about the community. Yet, though Chislett's level of social activity was very high, the pattern of the majority of his community involvement was not unique. Rotherham's range of political, religious, and voluntary associations was very similar to that of Banbury, for example, the locus of Margaret Stacey's 1960 community study *Tradition and Change*.¹¹⁰ Like Banbury, Rotherham had a lectures committee, an arts society, a Rotary Club and a Chamber of Commerce. As in Banbury, moreover, its voluntary associations appeared to be divided according to occupational status. A significant proportion of Chislett's social activity was limited to his own class and his standing in local business networks was reflected in the annual dinners to which he accepted invitations: the Insurance Institute of Sheffield, the Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, the Institute of Bankers, and the Sheffield and District Productivity Association.

What was distinctive about Chislett was the quality rather than the quantity of his social activity. In his 1968 study of Redditch Kenneth Morley distinguishes between two forms of community activity: social participation and social enterprise. Morley uses this distinction to emphasize the importance of considering how individuals stimulated the participation of others within the community. Social participation, Morley argues, is the meeting together of a number of people simply to pursue an activity or interest. Social enterprise 'adds to this an ambitious and expansionist attitude designed to maximise social participation.'¹¹¹ Such a distinction is helpful in interrogating how and why some individuals, groups and communities became involved in issues of empire while others did not. As the case of the Women's Institute suggests, those with existing 'international' experience were most

¹¹⁰ Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and Change: a Study of Banbury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

¹¹¹ Kenneth C. Morley, 'Social Participation and Social Enterprise in Redditch (England),' *Community Development Journal* 3 (1968): 4-9.

likely to instigate further international activity within the organization. Regardless of how extensive Chislett's personal experiences and interests in the end of empire might have been, these would have had little impact on members of the Rotherham community if he had not chosen to share them. Chislett was not simply a participant in Rotherham voluntary associations, he was also an instigator, and many of his ambitious actions sought to maximize the engagement of the Rotherham public in matters of local and international concern.

The most notable of these activities—and the activity that differs most from the pattern of community participation modelled in Banbury—was Chislett's prolific amateur filmmaking. As described in the introduction, Chislett made over one hundred films in his lifetime. He started making films as a hobby in the 1930s and over the next three decades shot footage for a wide range of projects: social documentaries illustrating urban poverty for Church and Pastoral Aid, an industrial film of the steel making process at a local plant, and numerous films of his domestic and international travels.¹¹² In the 1960s he shot and edited hour-long films of his trips to Africa, Egypt and India and shorter reels of footage for personal consumption in Malaysia, on the cruise from Tanzania to Suez, and in the Aegean Islands. While much of his other community participation was limited to interaction with members of his class and profession, Chislett screened his films to a wide range of audiences and framed his discussions to suit numerous different interests. Chislett's own wide range of interests and his enthusiasm for adaptability meant that he functioned as a link point between numerous social networks that would otherwise have had little overlap or interaction.

The significant role played by the interrelated cultures of travel, photography and film in creating an imperial consciousness within Britain is well established, yet little has been written about the experiences of making amateur travel films and even less about their cultures of consumption.¹¹³ In 1985 Robert Allen and Douglas

¹¹² Norris Nicholson, 'Framing Time and Space in Home Movies,' 204.

¹¹³ For work on image and empire see James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997). What work there is on film focuses either on America or on the travelogue's adoption and adaptation by early cinema at the turn of the century. See, for example, C. Musser, *High-class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Jeffrey Ruoff, ed., *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 18; Jeffrey Ruoff, 'Forty Days across America: Kiyooka Eiichi's 1927 Travelogues,' *Film History* 4, 3 (1991): 237-256; Patricia Zimmerman, 'Geographies of Desire: Cartographies of Gender, Race, Nation and Empire in Amateur Film,' *Film History* 8 (1996): 85-98.

Gomery argued that local film exhibition was ‘a large and hitherto virtually untapped source’.¹¹⁴ Little has changed in the decades since. Allen, Gomery, and Ryan Shand have all written enthusiastically about the potential for study offered by amateur film exhibition, describing the opportunity for the local researcher to find and use a great variety of primary material, particularly the ‘extensive coverage’ that amateur films might receive in the local press. But despite their optimism, few have taken this opportunity.¹¹⁵ Heather Norris Nicholson, for example, has written fairly extensively about Chislett’s filmmaking but her work, particularly on the postwar period, focuses on the films themselves rather than on their exhibition or consumption. Norris Nicholson treats Chislett’s films as a window upon his private geographies, using the footage to interpret how Chislett gave meaning to the world he inhabited and studying it for the social values, prejudices and assumptions that are held to be embedded in filmic imagery.¹¹⁶

This discussion focuses not on the footage itself, but on the circumstances in which it was consumed, situating Chislett’s filmmaking within the context of his wider community role. As James Ryan and Joan Schwartz point out, cultural representation can properly be explored ‘only in relation to the concrete forms and practices in which meaning is embedded.’¹¹⁷ This section approaches Chislett’s filmmaking as a socially constructed, culturally constituted, and historically situated practice.¹¹⁸ It considers Chislett’s motivations, the audiences that he spoke to and the ways in which he discussed the films that he screened. Although non-professional screenings attracted audiences that were considerably smaller than those watching television travel programmes, their unique cultures of consumption can provide fresh insights into how these years of transcontinental mobility were experienced within Britain. The production, exhibition and consumption of amateur footage were important sites for identity formation.¹¹⁹ Like their commercial counterparts at the cinema and on television, these films provided their audiences with diverse portrayals of travel, variously emphasizing the joys of tourism, the thrills of exploration, or the

¹¹⁴ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985), 193.

¹¹⁵ For an exception see Jeffrey Ruoff, ‘Around the World in Eighty Minutes: The Travel Lecture Film,’ *Visual Anthropology* 15, 1 (2002): 91-114.

¹¹⁶ Norris Nicholson, ‘In Amateur Hands,’ 201-202.

¹¹⁷ Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: IB Tauris, 2003), 8.

¹¹⁸ Ryan and Schwartz approach still photography within these frameworks, *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁹ Norris Nicholson, ‘Mediterranean Landscapes,’ 325-6.

educational value of ethnographic study. But unlike cinema and television, non-theatrical screenings were also social events in themselves, a form of recreation organized collectively by members of the local community.

The high level of audience participation and interaction involved in local screenings makes it possible to move closer to understanding the everyday experience of mobility. For the more affluent members of society, such screenings were an affirmation of the mobile world to which they belonged. They were an arena in which to perform one's own mobility when back in Britain and a way of giving something back to the community. For those who could not travel, film screenings offered vicarious access to the outside world, mediated through the experiences of the more mobile. When Chislett appointed himself as an informal ambassador for Rotherham, he also acted as a cultural broker for his audiences. Considering travelogue consumption in a local setting and within the context of other forms of community participation brings to light the more subtle contexts within which footage of abroad was consumed.

Chislett's own filmmaking and lecturing took place within a wider context of nationally broadcast and locally instigated film screenings. As opportunities for 'real' travel increased, so too did those for 'virtual' or 'vicarious' travel.¹²⁰ Like 'real' travel, virtual experiences shaped how Britons saw the world and their place within in. Without leaving the country the British public could consume an ever-expanding repertoire of travel films, gaining vicarious access to places that the wealthier could afford to visit themselves. In the words of a 1959 advertisement, travelogues could 'take you around the world in your armchair!'¹²¹ In 1960 sixty-seven per cent of domestic households owned a television and by the end of the decade that figure rose to ninety-two percent.¹²² Travel programming filled regular slots within prime-time schedules, with one-off features and weekly series such as the BBC's *Adventure* and *Traveller's Tales* and ITV's *True Adventure* and *Expedition Presents* attracting

¹²⁰ Mazierska and Walton, 'Tourism and the Moving Image,' 7.

¹²¹ *Amateur Cine World*, October 1959. Virtual travel was not a new concept. Visual media such as photography and film have long informed and mediated engagement with the world and the link that this advertisement makes between film and virtual travel can be traced back to discussions of some of the earliest filmic travelogues. See, for example, Ryan and Schwartz, *Picturing Place*, 3.

¹²² Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, [<http://www.barb.co.uk/facts/tvOwnershipPrivate>, accessed 28 August 2011].

audiences of between eight and ten per cent of the population.¹²³ Travelogues could also be watched at the cinema in shorts screened before the main feature or in films such as *Windjammer* (1958) and *The Royal Tour of India* (1961).¹²⁴

In addition to these national and commercial screenings, local non-commercial screenings of travel footage also took place in a wide range of venues across Britain, including service clubs, community halls, school assembly rooms, libraries and museums.¹²⁵ They were characterized by silent footage in rich saturated colours (a stark contrast to the black and white of television); by the live narration of the filmmaker—sometimes a well-known face or sometimes a stranger who had travelled up on the train, but almost always a member of the more mobile affluent classes; and by a high level of audience participation. While a significant proportion of the filmmakers were amateurs who screened their films for little or no monetary exchange, the footage that they presented often approached professional standards.

With opportunities for virtual travel so readily available on television, why did community screenings such as those put on by Chislett not merely survive in the 1960s, but go on to thrive? If cinemas suffered declining attendance in the face of such competition, why not the community screening as well? In the 1940s and 1950s three key developments took place that reinvigorated local consumption of travel footage, widening access and increasing participation. First, during the Second World War the Ministry of Information established a precedent for non-commercial documentary-style film screenings in local settings. Prior to the War, the nontheatrical distribution of 16mm films occurred for the most part within a politically (left) driven network of film societies, predominantly in urban areas. Without the high volume of public information films screened by the Ministry of Information the majority of the public would have remained unfamiliar with factual non-theatrical films. Instead, in the years 1943-44 the Ministry used its 144 mobile film units to give more than 64,000 shows of films such as *The Harvest Will Come* and *Rescue Reconnaissance*, reaching more than 11 million people across Britain.¹²⁶

¹²³ British Universities Film & Video Council, *TV Times Project 1955-1985* (online database), [http://tvtip.bufvc.ac.uk/index.php, accessed 20 August 2009]; 'Travel and Features Programme List (BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading: T50).

¹²⁴ E. Crosby and L. Kaye, eds., *Projecting Britain: The Guide to British Cinemagazines* (London: British Universities Film and Video Council, 2008).

¹²⁵ See, for example, Ruoff, 'Around the World in Eighty Minutes.'

¹²⁶ K. Loukopoulou, "'Films Bring Art to the People': the Art Film Tour in Britain (1950-1980)," *Film History* 19 (2007): 414-415.

Left-wing film societies continued to make oppositional and avant-garde films after the War, but they were now joined by an increasing number of non-oppositional cine clubs and individuals, following in the footsteps of the Ministry of Information and screening amateur and professional films for local audiences.¹²⁷

Second, advancements in camera technology increased the number of active filmmakers, and among these were members of the affluent mobile classes who would go on to film and screen their travel experiences.¹²⁸ Amateur cinematography thrived in this period and the growth in the number of publications catering to film enthusiasts certainly attests to this development; by 1960 the studious filmmaker could peruse the pages of *Amateur Movie Maker*, *Amateur Cine World*, and the frequent publications of the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers in search of tips, suggestions and events listings. As Heather Norris Nicholson suggests, this amateur activity exemplifies not only the rise of middle-class leisure-related spending and the affordability of film technologies, but also the collective nature of much of this consumption.¹²⁹ In the postwar period cine-groups thrived and communities across the country organized screenings of amateur films, many of which would have included footage of travel experiences. In 1960, for example, the Watford Cine Society held a film festival at which they screened eight films to over 1,000 audience members¹³⁰. Many societies also built their own facilities for more regular screenings such as the Durham society which turned a storeroom into a cinema and the Wakefield Cine Club, which in 1964 built a 42-seat cinema for regular screenings.¹³¹

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, a related growth in associational life provided these filmmakers with diverse networks of audiences. Although we should not ignore the ascendancy of television, it is easy to overestimate the extent to which leisure became privatized in this period. As the previous chapters describe, non-partisan and mass-membership associations had been on the rise since the inter-war years and were further stimulated in the 1950s and 1960s by growing affluence and

¹²⁷ Ryan Shand, 'Theorizing Amateur Film: Limitations and Possibilities,' *The Moving Image* 8, 2 (2008): 43.

¹²⁸ Heather Norris Nicholson, 'Through the Balkan States: Home Movies as Travel Texts and Tourism Histories in the Mediterranean, c.1923-39,' *Tourist Studies* 6, 1 (2006): 13-36; Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Penguin, 1977), 9.

¹²⁹ Norris Nicholson, 'Mediterranean Landscapes,' 325-6.

¹³⁰ *Amateur Cine World*, March 1960.

¹³¹ *Amateur Movie Maker*, February 1964.

increased leisure time on evenings and at weekends.¹³² Local amenity interest groups like the cine clubs discussed above existed alongside nationally affiliated organizations such as the Rotary Club, the United Nations Association and the Women's Institute. For many filmmakers, the memberships of these expanding civic and recreational organizations were a crucial source of eager audiences.

Non-theatrical screenings were ephemeral, but traces do exist that allow us to consider what audiences might have watched beyond the cinema and television screen. *Amateur Cine World* gives some clues as to the sort of non-theatrical, professional films that cine clubs were watching. In 1959 the magazine introduced a monthly feature that provided information about organizations and companies which made films available for free loan. The companies making and lending films included Unilever, the International Wool Secretariat, the National Coal Board, and the High Commission for India. Although the films were typically intended to inform their viewers about the sort of work these companies did, they were not usually direct advertising. Unilever's films about African life, for example, were included in the National Film Theatre's 1959 season on *The Negro World*.¹³³ The *Amateur Cine World* feature showed a significant preference for films about foreign locations, such as Unilever's 'informative, if biased, documentaries with a businessman's view of African life'¹³⁴ and the two hundred films held by the Film Section of the High Commission for India which covered topics such as 'Indian art and culture and travel films presenting the cities and people.'¹³⁵ That such films were in high demand by cine-societies across the country indicates substantial interest in foreign and often imperial locations and supports Hallam and Street's suggestion that the public's desire for "eye-witness" accounts and experiences was not reduced but enhanced as the empire itself declined.¹³⁶

Rotherham does not seem to have had an active cine-society renting and screening these sorts of films, but it did have Chislett. As we will see below, Chislett's screenings not only tapped into the same discourses of education and information as professional films for rent, they also added a crucial personal component to the consumption of footage of abroad. When Chislett stood on stage to

¹³² Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain,' *Historical Journal* 50, 4 (2007): 892, 897; Norris Nicholson, 'Mediterranean Landscapes,' 184.

¹³³ *Amateur Cine World*, October 1959.

¹³⁴ *Amateur Cine World*, March 1960.

¹³⁵ *Amateur Cine World*, December 1959.

¹³⁶ Hallam and Street, *Cultural Encounters*, 32.

lecture alongside his films he provided an important link between the ‘here’ of the school hall or community centre where he was speaking and the ‘there’ of Egypt, Africa, Lebanon, Malaysia or wherever he was showing footage of. What were his motivations? What image of the declining empire was he providing and what was the effect on his audiences? Chislett gave what he called ‘personal running commentaries’ when he screened his silent films, ‘spoken to the split second’ and varied ‘to suit different audiences’.¹³⁷ Rather than reading from a full script, Chislett lectured using a series of typed introductions followed by scrawled note-cards that prompted key narrative events, supplementary ‘facts’ and ‘impressions’ to be discussed. For this reason no complete records survive of the lectures themselves and analysis is necessarily based upon a piecing together of Chislett’s complete footage, his incomplete lecture notes, and his prose accounts of the same holidays written for *Rotary in the Ridings* which are taken to be indicative of the sort of language that Chislett may have used to narrate the lectures themselves.

Although we have no complete list of the screenings that Chislett gave in the 1960s it is possible to piece together a sense of the sort of audiences that he spoke to. Audiences varied significantly in size and composition. They included those who invited him to speak—such as the Rotary Club, the London Missionary Society, local women’s groups, local schools, the Saint’s Lambretta Club (a local group of scooter enthusiasts), regional film societies and the Church and Pastoral Aid Society—as well as those who attended public screenings put on in community centres. Chislett’s educational impulse and seemingly unwavering commitment to giving travelogue lectures to large and small groups of people of all ages and social backgrounds suggests that his own predominantly middle- and upper-class impulses might also have pervaded a wider section of society. With his travelogues he provided audiences from a wide spectrum of society with a means to ‘connect’ with and ‘encounter’ otherwise intangible places.

Chislett did not have the same vested interest in promoting positive images of Britain overseas as those with more prolonged imperial careers may have had, but he did have his own set of strong motivations for getting into his car on cold winter evenings to go and lecture to the wide range of audiences listed above. Throughout his filmmaking career Chislett saw his screenings as a way of giving something back

¹³⁷ Chislett, ‘General Notes’ (YFA: 331).

to the community. By aiming to ‘make [his] hobby serve an extra useful purpose’ he provided personal justification for what was a predominantly middle-class leisure pursuit. Although his desire to serve his community remained constant in the thirty years that Chislett screened films, the precise nature of the moral imperative that guided it did not. Prior to and during the war, Chislett saw his primary role as an entertainer. In a profile for Christy’s Lecture agency printed in the early 1940s he described how his ‘light hearted lectures’ would:

1. Tell you something.
2. Cheer you up.
3. Tickle your sense of imagination and your sense of humour.
4. Help you to re-live the joys and thrills of past holidays, or suggest ideas for new ones.¹³⁸

The list was used to publicize films of Chislett’s daughter discovering England, a voyage to New York, and trips to Norway and the Pyrenees. While it briefly mentions the educational potential of the films, its emphasis is clearly on their entertainment value, a tone that was well suited to a wartime Britain in which people felt the need to be cheered up. Audience testimonies from this period emphasize the escapist element of Chislett’s screenings. As one viewer from Leeds commented, ‘the manner in which ‘Rachel’ [his daughter] was introduced, and her childish pleasure and excitement, made us feel as if we were also on holiday and Leeds, and Work, and the war were forgotten for the evening.’¹³⁹ For the doorkeeper at one screening, a veteran of many lectures, ‘It fair made you feel you was in another world.’¹⁴⁰

As described above, in the 1960s Chislett’s travel horizons expanded dramatically. As Chislett’s own mobility increased—and perhaps in part *because* it increased—his motivations for screening travel films shifted to emphasize the educational rather than entertainment value of his hobby. Travel provided opportunities for relaxation and escapism, but for many—and particularly for those who travelled further afield—it was also regarded as an edifying tool for cross-cultural understanding. In a set of objectives written twenty years after the first and in relation to the travel films that he shot in the 1960s, Chislett wrote that he hoped:

¹³⁸ Christies Advert, c.1943 (YFA: 331).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

- a) To increase general and photographic knowledge through the sharing of travel records designed to recapture the pleasures of holiday journeys, as well as the atmosphere, interests and beauties of the countries visited
- b) To increase the knowledge of overseas countries and their peoples, and so to help to build friendship on understanding
- c) To encourage people to realize what an interesting and beautiful place the world is.¹⁴¹

Although he does not entirely disregard the entertainment value of his films, it is clear that the balance between education and entertainment had shifted dramatically in favour of the former. A common binary of media discourse in the 1950s and 1960s was the divide between education/entertainment. The birth of ITV in 1955 had challenged the BBC's previous dominance and entertainment programmes on ITV regularly achieved significantly higher viewer figures than those on the BBC.¹⁴² Now in competition with commercial television broadcasting, the BBC needed to justify continuing the license fee and at the crux of these debates was the balance between education and entertainment.

Chislett's adoption of these criteria indicates that he was influenced not only by contemporary media debates, but also by a longer tradition of celebrating forms of 'rational recreation' in an effort to shape the leisure activities of the Victorian working classes.¹⁴³ These debates were reinvigorated in the postwar period in the context of fears about the Americanisation of culture and the growing delinquency of youth. Travel films and educational television, alongside activities such as volunteering and international service, were commonly seen as agents of social improvement. Chislett's adoption of the role international ambassador came hand in hand, therefore, with the role of patrician educator.

His 1960s remit also taps into the interrelated discourses of education and international understanding that dominated the Women's Institutes', Royal Commonwealth Society's and Commonwealth Institute's literature on international engagement. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ideals of cultural internationalism, which saw international understanding as a crucial factor in

¹⁴¹ Chislett, 'General Notes' (YFA: 331).

¹⁴² John Corner, 'General Introduction: Television and British society in the 1950s,' in John Corner, ed., *Popular Television in Britain* (London: BFI Publishing, 1991), 6-10.

¹⁴³ On 'Rational Recreation' see C. M. Parratt, 'Making Leisure Work: Women's Rational Recreation in Late Victorian and Edwardian England,' *Journal of Sport History* 26, 3 (1999): 471-488; Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London; New York: Methuen, 1987).

developing international goodwill, had been a prominent aspect of the interwar peace movement.¹⁴⁴ These discourses continued to develop in the postwar period and were given new vigour by parallel developments in discussions about widening access to education and by the escalating tension of the Cold War. As the next chapter will discuss in greater detail, there is no one model of internationalism or international understanding. In the specific case of Chislett it is important to acknowledge the influence that his own widening experiences of different places and cultures might have had on his ideas about using his films to provide international education rather than simply entertainment. Like the interwar proponents of international education, Chislett felt that people ought to be educated in order to achieve international open-mindedness and so as to understand the value of cultural and intellectual exchange. While the Women's Institute had prioritized agricultural development as key aspect of this international interaction, Chislett's own brief background as an Education Officer in Malaya likely influenced the way in which his particular interpretation of internationalism prioritized youth and education. He contended that the 'future of this country, if not the world, depends on young people who can take the best of this country to those they visit and bring back the best not the worst of others.'¹⁴⁵ This was clearly not international cultural relativism; as many of Chislett's more paternalistic comments make clear, his model for international understanding did not require overlooking 'the worst of others'. Instead, he made a concerted effort to encourage audiences to see Britain's future as an international one, entailing interaction with and not isolation from the rest of the world.

In addition to the peace-preserving aims of inter-war proponents of international education, Chislett also saw international understanding as a means to preserve Britain's position on the world stage. His vision for Britain explicitly linked international understanding with economic prosperity. In a letter written during the Emergency to friends in Malaya Chislett expressed sympathy and concern—'we often think of you and the dark cloud of trouble and danger which hangs over Malaya'—as well as outlining his efforts to educate the public about Malaya's crucial economic role in the empire. As he described,

I have given a number of talks on Malaya lately and done what I could to bring to people's minds not only the beauties of your country and

¹⁴⁴ Liping Bu, 'Cultural Understanding and World Peace: the Roles of Private Institutions in the Interwar Years,' *Peace and Change* 24, 2 (1999): 148.

¹⁴⁵ Chislett, written notes for screening of *Africa Old and New* (YFA: 333).

the charm of life there but its vital economic importance and the difficulties which it is undergoing.¹⁴⁶

This interest in spreading cultural *and* economic interest in Malaya is very similar to the objectives of the Commonwealth Institute at this time. But whereas the Commonwealth Institute and Royal Commonwealth Society celebrated the Commonwealth as a beacon or exemplar of international cooperation, Chislett stuck to a more truly international model. As the previous discussion of Chislett's touristic practices makes clear, the spaces of the former empire were important in Chislett's mental global landscape. When talking about the future, however, he made no attempt to reconfigure the empire into the modern Commonwealth.

Framed as it was in the language of international understanding, what image of empire and decolonization did Chislett provide for his audiences? Chislett repeatedly referred to a 'responsibility' not to generalize, and supplemented his 'impressions' of foreign places with factual detail – providing information on climate, population, history, disease, and economy. His lecture notes suggest that at many screenings issues of empire and decolonization would have made up a significant portion of his commentaries. As discussed above, he did not provide coherent or sustained analyses of decolonization, but emphasized different aspects of the process in accordance with the interests of his audience. Speaking to Rotary, Chislett emphasized the economic dimensions of decolonization and post-imperial business. Speaking to the LMS about his trip to Malaysia and the 'work of the Congregational Council for World Churches' he commented on the ways in which the missionary role in the region was changing: 'The era when Christian missionaries were able to interest and help prospective converts medically, by agricultural advice and other services from the highly educated to the underdeveloped has passed entirely.'¹⁴⁷ Chislett's personal interaction with missionaries while travelling in Africa permitted him to enter into these discussions back home in Britain. At a talk to the LMS in 1966, for example, he considered the emergence of a new Africa and the role that missionaries were playing in it.¹⁴⁸ As we will see in Chapter Five, similar debates about the changing role of missionaries at the end of empire were commonplace in

¹⁴⁶ Chislett to Yeang and Gladys, 10 October 1950 (RA: 358/F).

¹⁴⁷ Chislett, 'Malaysia and Singapore and the Work of the Congregational Council for World Churches' (YFA: 335).

¹⁴⁸ Chislett, note cards in envelope titled 'Africa LMS Meeting' (YFA: 329).

missionary circles at this time. In contrast, when speaking to audiences with a less explicit international remit Chislett seemingly focused more on the adventurous aspects of his travels and on the ‘atmosphere interests and beauties of the countries visited’.

Yet despite Chislett’s obvious efforts to respond to and encourage interest in decolonization, the film footage itself was conspicuously bereft of any visual accompaniment to the issues put forward in his lecture notes. As described above, the films he shot on his travels are dominated by typical touristic activities. Such a discrepancy suggests that although Chislett may have wanted to grapple with the more complex aspects of decolonization, he was unable to match his holiday footage to the stories he wished to tell. The contrast between the political, economic and social judgements contained in Chislett’s lecture notes and the failure of his footage to visually account for these claims creates a dissonance that ruptures any attempt to offer a totalizing account of decolonization. Moreover, the conspicuous absence of decolonization from his footage raises significant questions about *how* decolonization could have been accounted for visually.

Across amateur *and* professional film, visual accounts of decolonization were rarely able to extend beyond the more readily available iconography of independence or flag-changing ceremonies, conferences, official visits and Royal Tours.¹⁴⁹ Further research is needed into the ways in which these ceremonial events may have come to function as visual symbols for decolonization, standing in for the complex range of social, economic, and political changes that it wrought upon Britain’s ex-colonies. The frameworks within which the outside world was presented by travelogues shaped the terms of debate, contributing to the visual and verbal vocabulary with which issues of empire could be thought about and discussed. That this limited framework was the most easily accessible to travellers and tourists has inevitably shaped the British public’s understanding of decolonization.

How did Chislett’s films affect his audiences? Was the engagement momentary, lasting the length of the lecture and perhaps the walk home, or did his talks trigger a more sustained interest and involvement in international issues? To answer these questions it is necessary to approach the viewing of Chislett’s

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion of the narratives of decolonization that were presented in independence ceremonies see David Cannadine, ‘Introduction: Independence Day Ceremonials in Historical Perspective,’ in Robert Holland, Susan Williams and Terry Barringer, eds., *The Iconography of Independence: Freedoms at Midnight* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1-17.

travelogues not simply as the ‘end point’ in a chain of production, distribution and reception, but as a social activity that interacted with a range of other community and national initiatives, some of which entailed more direct interaction with the former empire. One way of assessing Chislett’s impact on his community might be to consider whether seeing and hearing about the spaces of the declining empire prompted members of the public to engage with these spaces in other more direct ways. Chislett saw international understanding as a crucial way of generating international good will and his lectures encouraged his audiences to identify and interact with international ‘others’. But did his enthusiasm drive others to action? Did he make efforts to move his audiences and the Rotherham community from knowing foreign places and peoples to interacting with them?

The most sustained and successful of Chislett’s efforts appeared to take place in relation to existing networks and organizations—in particular missionary societies and the Rotary Club—suggesting that one man could only do so much. Chislett was chair of the Rotherham Rotary Club’s International Service Committee. In a similar manner to the relationship between the Associated Countrywomen of the World and local British Women’s Institutes, local Rotary groups connected with Rotary International through its magazine, the *Rotarian*, which described itself as ‘a forum, a mirror, sometimes perhaps a torch; it is a market, a job, a communication link.’ Emphasising the roles played by individual members, the magazine described how it ‘links a man to his big organization and to the other men in it. It links their families. It starts with Mrs Smith of Tennessee writing to Mrs Jones of England; soon they’ll be exchanging recipes, later on children.’¹⁵⁰ In Yorkshire, the Barnsley branch made a film to show in other countries, the Bingley branch arranged for transparencies of Bingley to be shown at Rotary Clubs in Australia, and Chislett’s Rotherham Club entered into a stamp-collecting agreement with the Kuala Lumpur Club.¹⁵¹ Rotherham Rotary also made efforts to connect with local international students and kept in touch with Clubs overseas.

Rather than always instigating new means of international interaction, therefore, Chislett’s efforts were often conducted in conjunction with community organizations with pre-existing international remits. Chislett was not the only

¹⁵⁰ *Rotarian* 106, 1 (January 1965): 7.

¹⁵¹ *Rotary in the Ridings* 33, 5 (March/April 1963); Charles Chislett to Alan Welstenhelm, British High Commission KL, May 30 1968 (RA: 358/F, Box 2).

Rotherham citizen to believe in the value of international education. He ran the Rotherham Celebrity Lecture series with the support of a range of established and active Rotherham institutions including the Rotherham Business and Professional Women's Club, the Continuity Club, the Distaff Club and the Soroptimists Club. In a similar manner to Chislett's screenings, lectures were put on as a form of 'intellectual entertainment' and selected to cover a wide range of topics and appeal to the diverse interests of Rotherham residents. As well as cultural and scientific topics such as 'At Home with the Planets', 'The Horse in the Twentieth Century' and 'The Artist and His Work', lectures were organized on international issues and travel such as 'South Africa from the Inside', 'Spotlight on Red China', 'Ethiopian Adventure', and 'Kariba Dam.'¹⁵²

Beyond missionary work, film screenings, Rotary and the Celebrity Lecture Series, Chislett's participation in the Rotherham community was focused on local rather than national or international issues. This juxtaposition of international interest and local activity is most clear in the fundraising that went alongside many of his film screenings. Photographic and filmic images—in large part because of their currency as truthful witness—have long been used in humanitarian or missionary engagements with empire. John and Anne Harris, for example, made extensive use of photographic records of their travels when campaigning against the Congo Free State in the early twentieth century.¹⁵³ Filmic travelogues of the 1950s and 1960s, like photographs before them, provided a tangible link between people in Britain and the peoples and places of Britain's former empire. In doing so they continued to stimulate and interact with philanthropic engagement with empire. Both the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and Christian Aid—the subjects of the next two chapters—made extensive use of film as part of their promotional and fundraising efforts.

Despite this strong connection, however, Chislett did little to link his films to international philanthropic efforts. As described above, he was acutely aware of the privilege that he had to travel and motivated by a desire to give something back. By the mid 1960s he had raised more than £7,000 for charity, but the money that he raised from his screenings was usually donated to local rather than international causes. There was a dissonance between the content of the lectures and the causes, such as the local Filey care home, that they were screened to support. A similar

¹⁵² Rotherham Celebrity Lectures (RA: 358/F Box 2).

¹⁵³ Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 222.

dissonance between international discourse and charitable work was also present in the work of many local Rotary clubs. As their international objectives make clear, Rotary had dreams of saving the world through international service, yet as Brendan Goff describes, the various charitable projects taken on by local Rotary clubs usually lacked any particular plan or coherency. For the most part, clubs met social needs that were personal and local rather than political and systemic.¹⁵⁴ The one key exception to this trend was Chislett's and Rotary's involvement in the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Crucially, the common feature across almost all of Chislett's community activity, whether it was focused on the very local or the far-flung empire, was sociability. While he encouraged his audiences to engage with the spaces of the former empire in a wide range of ways—working with political, economic and touristic models—many of these engagements only became part of people's lives in the context of social occasions. Issues of empire and decolonization were therefore present in people's lives, but they existed alongside other interests (such as scooters, local philanthropy, or a narrower appreciation of the technical art of amateur filmmaking). There are clear parallels here with the Women's Institute, where talks on international activity commonly took place within an evening programme that also included demonstrations on slipper making or cooking with electricity and competitions for the best home made scones or the largest potato. For a man such as Chislett, who was dedicated to the ideals of education and international understanding, these causes were a key part of his identity. For many of those that he spoke to, they were something to do on a Friday night. Imbued with the lofty language of international understanding, travel talks provided an acceptable, indeed 'rational' form of recreation. While Chislett's film screenings inevitably shaped their audiences' understanding of the outside world and Britain's place in it, they did not necessarily guide their everyday existence.

¹⁵⁴ Brendan Goff, 'Philanthropy and the "Perfect Democracy" of Rotary International', in David Hammack and Steven Heydemann, eds., *Globalization, Philanthropy, and Civil Society: Projecting Institutional Logics Abroad*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington (2009), 55-56.

Conclusion: The Amateur as Ambassador

This chapter has charted how Chislett's complex range of personal experiences—in the war, as a tourist, and within international Rotary networks—interacted to shape his attitudes towards the end of the British Empire; it has explored the variability possible in one man's response to decolonization; and it has considered the effect an enthusiastic and enterprising individual might have had in engaging a wider audience with issues of empire and decolonization. Chislett's non-imperial life and his self-appointed role as an amateur gave him the flexibility to approach issues of decolonization from a range of different angles, alternately employing imperial and international frameworks to conceptualize Britain's developing role in the world. The indeterminacies in his attitudes towards empire—variously praising modernization, primitiveness, imperial influence, and authentic untouched culture—are evidence not just of inconsistency but also of the wide range of different frameworks and tropes that shaped Britons' experiences of decolonization. Significantly, like the Women's Institute, Chislett's work also shows a balance between localism and internationalism that reminds us to be wary of seeing these two interests as mutually exclusive. Despite his keen interest in the Rotherham community, Chislett's attitude was defiantly not that of the 'Little Englander' so frequently stereotyped by scholars such as Wendy Webster in accounts of inter-war and postwar identity.¹⁵⁵ In fact, Chislett's interest in his local community was key to bringing his international experiences to audiences with and without a prior interest in the end of empire. Chislett took on the mantle of an international ambassador, bringing Rotherham to the world and the world to Rotherham. Characters like Chislett existed across Britain in this period, acting as conduits to the outside world. This chapter has offered one detailed case study, but there is still significant scope for further research into the local ambassador as a key figure in Britain's postwar experience of globalisation and indeed decolonization.

¹⁵⁵ Webster explores the idea of 'Little England' in *Englishness and Empire*, 129-35. See also Doty, 'Immigration and National Identity,' 235.

Chapter Four:

The Many Faces of Philanthropy: Britain and the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign

The National within the International

Between 1960 and 1965 the British public raised seven million pounds for the Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC), a United Nations (UN) initiative to tackle world food shortages.¹ Contributions were sought from ‘every town, city, village and hamlet in Britain’ and money came in from organizations, communities, businesses and individuals across the country.² Women’s groups held whist drives and coffee mornings; primary schools put on jumble sales; teenagers went on sponsored walks; businessmen attended ‘hunger lunches’; community associations put on concerts; churches organized dances and hot dog suppers; Members of Parliament donated an hour’s pay to the cause; and Cerebos Meat and Fish Spreads rather perplexingly donated 800,000 jars of fish paste that they would have otherwise dumped in the sea.³ Away from the performance of public fundraising, people also made private contributions: an anonymous widow gifted her late husband’s coin collection to the campaign, and a mother, grateful that her own children ‘never had to go short of food’ posted a small donation to her local campaign treasurer.⁴ This chapter uses the British public’s support for the campaign as a window onto the changing experience of international philanthropy during an era of decolonization.

The Freedom from Hunger Campaign was launched by B.R. Sen, the Director-General of the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 1960 as an ambitious attempt to ‘help the hungry to help themselves.’ Following in the footsteps of World Refugee Year, which had raised money to help relocate refugees

¹ ‘Britain’s £7m. for Hunger Campaign,’ *Guardian*, 20 November 1964.

² ‘Who will adopt a herd of Buffaloes?’ FFHC advertisement, *Guardian*, 21 November 1962.

³ ‘Freedom from Hunger Week wins wide support’, *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March 1963; *Guardian*, 1 August 1963 and 23 May 1964.

⁴ ‘Widow (Pensioner)’ to Charles Chislett, 20 March 1963 (RA: 358/F); Anonymous to Charles Chislett, 1 May 1963 (RA: 358/F).

from Europe and the Middle East in the aftermath of the Second World War, the FFHC was the second international fundraising campaign to come under the UN umbrella.⁵ With the involvement of more than one hundred countries, it was by a considerable margin the largest effort of its time. While the earlier work of the FAO had dealt primarily with technocrats—focused on the science of nutrition and logistics of food supplies—Freedom from Hunger propelled development work into the public sphere, becoming more activist and less academic in its focus. The networks, practices and discourses that it established were at the foundation of the modern international development movement.⁶ Yet despite the insight it can offer into local, national and global practices of humanitarianism, the campaign has received little academic attention either from the field of development studies or from historians of voluntary action and humanitarian aid.⁷

For Sen and the FAO, Freedom from Hunger had two key objectives. The first was educational: it was ‘to awaken the conscience of the world to the continuing problem of hunger and malnutrition in many lands’ and, using study and publicity, create ‘a body of aroused and informed public opinion ready to demand and support the measures needed to speed up the at present unsatisfactory rate of progress.’ The second was practical: using money raised by the newly informed and compassionate public, the FFHC would fund research and provide expertise and equipment in projects designed to help raise levels of production and consumption across the underdeveloped world.⁸ This programme of education and fundraising was initially to cover a five-year span, but in light of the campaign’s successes and the considerable challenges still ahead, committees agreed to expand the FFHC for a further five years, tying in with the designation of the 1960s as the first UN Development Decade.

Early work on transnational organizations and communities has focused primarily on administrative elites, overlooking the experiences of the fundraising

⁵ Peter Gatrell, *Free World?: The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956-1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶ For further discussion of FFHC’s legacies to international development see Matthew James Bunch, ‘All Roads Lead to Rome: Canada, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, and the Rise of NGOs, 1960-1980,’ (PhD Diss., University of Waterloo, 2007).

⁷ Bunch, ‘All Roads Lead to Rome’. FFHC is also discussed in the context of other campaigns and organizations in Gatrell, *Free World?* and Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Time: Oxfam The First Fifty Years* (London: Oxfam Professional, 1992).

⁸ ‘What Every Non Governmental Organisation Should Know About FFHC,’ FFHC May 1960 (Christian Aid Archive, School of African and Oriental Studies [hereafter SOAS]: CA/I/3/3).

public.⁹ This neglect has been shaped in part by the arguments of those such as Frank Prochaska who argue that British philanthropic bodies, after a golden age in the late Victorian era, entered into a long and terminal decline.¹⁰ But as the previous three chapters attest, while methods of participation might have changed, high levels of voluntary membership continued throughout the postwar period. Humanitarianism continued to be a key means of engaging with the spaces and peoples of the declining empire. Across the political and social spectrum Britons gave their time and money to this cause. To give a sense of the scale of the Freedom from Hunger promotional effort, more than six million leaflets and seven million flags were distributed in Britain during the campaign's first five years. In the UK National Committee and the thousand local committees established across the country the FFHC brought together members from over one hundred affiliated institutions including the Royal Commonwealth Society, Christian Aid, the Rotary Club, the Women's Institute, and the United Nations Association. The FFHC also attracted different forms of civic participation ranging from volunteerism to political activism to more detached financial support—what is known as cheque-book activism.

The FFHC was a global movement, but it also informed and was informed by specific national experiences. Each country participating in the FFHC brought with it its own traditions of associational culture, its own security preoccupations and its own historical experience of hunger. Both Ireland and India had experiences of famine in the nineteenth century, for example. In India, the much more recent Bengal famine of 1943 would have been in living memory for much of the population and certainly influenced the approach of FAO Director B.R. Sen, an Indian national. The global standing of nations also influenced their contributions to the campaign. While Canada's participation was shaped by its status as a middle power,¹¹ small states such as Madagascar brought what an FAO newsletter described as 'the concrete experience of dealing with the serious problems that inevitably surround the development of a newly liberated country.'¹² Britain's own participation was shaped by the legacies of imperial and humanitarian intervention as well as the contemporary context of

⁹ For an excellent exception see Holger Nehring, 'National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communication and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957-1964,' *Contemporary European History* 14, 4 (2005): 559-582.

¹⁰ Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).

¹¹ Bunch, 'All Roads Lead to Rome.'

¹² *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News*, October 1963, 9.

decolonization. A large part of the FFHC's wide appeal came from its alignment with the widespread enthusiasm for the discourses and practices of development that characterized the postwar period. Yet while the campaign certainly captured the development *zeitgeist* it was also able to mean very different things to the different sectors of society supporting it. Beyond the objectives and expectations of FAO campaign material, the FFHC provided a canvas onto which members of the British public could project their own narratives of humanitarianism, development and decline.

The different narratives that coalesced around the campaign in Britain raise important questions about how the public experienced Britain's imperial decline. Did their moral geography change as they lost their empire? Was there a role for the empire/Commonwealth within the framework of international humanitarianism? Which imperial legacies remained intact in the FFHC, which were adapted, and which discarded? To answer these questions, this chapter looks at the behaviour of a wide range of actors involved in the FFHC, considering what the campaign meant to those at the FAO, to those on the British National Committee and to those who supported it from across the country. There is, however, an important and large group of campaign stakeholders that this chapter does not address: those who were receiving financial and technical support. It is beyond the scope of this study to judge the campaign's successes or critique its failings overseas, particularly since a substantial and growing body of work already exists that addresses these concerns.¹³ Rather, this chapter focuses on British 'givers', the meanings that they found in the FFHC and the identities that they performed through it.

British support for the FFHC was not uniform. As has been the case throughout this thesis, the most accessible voices from the FFHC are those of people in positions of power and prestige. Although we can recover the *actions* of individual participants—the widow donating her husband's coins, the school child going on a sponsored walk—the voices of 'ordinary' participants, their reasons for giving to the FFHC and their sense of the campaign's purpose are less easy to establish. For this reason, the first section of this chapter focuses primarily on the public face of the campaign as constructed by the UK National Committee, situating this within wider

¹³ See, for example, Marcus Power, 'The Commonwealth, "Development" and Post-Colonial Responsibility,' *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 14-24; Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1945*; Uma Kothari, 'Authority and Expertise: the Professionalisation of International Development and the Ordering of Dissent,' *Antipode*, (2005): 425-445.

debates about imperial benevolence and national purpose. How did the ideological preoccupations and practical limitations of associational organisations shape the local or personal realities of ‘experiencing empire’?

While the Committee’s concerns were not necessarily shared by all of those who supported the campaign, they nevertheless shaped the way in which the FFHC was promoted to the British public. The second section uses the FFHC as a way of thinking about the particularities of postwar internationalism in relation to Britain’s experience of imperial decline. Here the more ‘official’ voices of the Campaign are considered alongside examples from institutions and individuals who supported the FFHC, paying particular attention to the ways in which participants variously constructed themselves as local, global, Commonwealth and British citizens.

Benevolent Britain and the Imperial Tradition

The history of international humanitarianism is closely intertwined with the history of imperialism. Thomas Haskell’s work on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows how the economic and political ties to overseas that were formed through imperial expansion were not only crucial in making philanthropy in some places more practical than in others, they also provided the foundations of benevolent and humanitarian sentiment back home in Britain. Looking at what he calls the ‘unprecedented wave of humanitarian reform sentiment’ that swept through Europe in the hundred years following 1750, Haskell argues that empire expanded ‘the range of opportunities available to [the public] for shaping the future and intervening in other lives.’ It was this expansion, he claims, that pushed Britain over the threshold and into humanitarian action.¹⁴ David Lambert and Alan Lester emphasise that in many cases contemporary mobilisation in support of philanthropic intervention would have been impossible without ‘the channels of compassion linking the West and its postcolonial “periphery” that were instituted above all by colonial philanthropists over the last two hundred years or so.’¹⁵ From the late eighteenth century onwards, colonial philanthropists employed a wide range of methods to foster this compassion.

¹⁴ Thomas Haskell, ‘Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1,’ *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 357.

¹⁵ David Lambert and Alan Lester, ‘Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy,’ *Progress in Human Geography* 28, 3 (2004): 322.

Humanitarian promotional efforts included metropolitan speaking tours by British witnesses and colonized victims, as well as increasingly detailed and rapidly produced reports of revolts, land appropriations and instances of religious persecution. While abolitionists and missionaries have attracted the most scholarly attention, attitudes and responses to hunger were also a key issue in shaping the relationship between imperialism and humanitarianism within British society.

From the humanitarian ‘discovery’ of hunger in the late nineteenth century to the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940, Britain occupied a central position in the shaping of hunger’s modern history. As James Vernon suggests, imperial Britain played a formative role in shaping the modern meaning of hunger and determining the systems for redressing it. It was in Britain, Vernon argues, that hunger first came to be acknowledged as an imperial and later global problem, and where new political movements and forms of statecraft developed that promised to free the world from its scourge.¹⁶ The two key imperial sites of intervention were Ireland and India, where famines in the second half of the nineteenth century spurred governmental and public debates about responsibility, divine intervention and methods of relief. Over the course of almost a century, a wide array of British actors including politicians, economists, social scientists, journalists and philanthropists participated in efforts to govern and eradicate hunger.

These diverse interventions came to play a central role in narratives of national pride and purpose. Since the early nineteenth century a significant part of Britain’s imperial identity had been bound up with ideas about benevolent leadership and public philanthropy, building an image of the British Empire as an uplifting force acting to affect a mutually beneficial transformation of the world and its peoples.¹⁷ As Lambert and Lester have argued, so enduring and widespread was a ‘proselytized association between Britishness and benign rather than malignant intervention, that it still characterizes popular and indeed some academic thinking about the distinctions between European empires.’¹⁸ Britain’s self-identification as a benevolent nation did not disappear at the end of the empire. If anything, discourses of benevolence grew stronger rather than weaker as the British Empire lurched towards dissolution. A strong historiography identifies the interwar and immediate postwar period as a

¹⁶ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3-4

¹⁷ Lambert and Lester, ‘Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy,’ 323.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 320.

‘moment of intense and anxious engagement with empire.’¹⁹ Not only were Britain’s material interests in empire renewed by its increased reliance on the sterling area, but related discourses of trusteeship and development also worked to reinvigorate an ideological engagement with empire. In the late colonial epoch, as well as continuing to draw heavily on older philanthropic motifs such as trusteeship, abolitionism, missionary work and famine relief, Britain’s sense of imperial mission was rearmed by the beliefs and practices embodied in the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which allocated metropolitan resources to programs aimed at raising the standard of living of colonized populations.²⁰

These discourses of trusteeship and development made it possible to think about the end of empire as a positive, constructive act rather than a passive, enforced dissolution. Since the interwar period decolonization had been widely conceptualized as the ultimate goal of imperialism and final affirmation of British imperial benevolence.²¹ Recent scholarship may have undermined interpretations of decolonization as a carefully orchestrated fulfilment of Britain’s longstanding commitment to self-government, but this narrative was still meaningful in the 1960s.²² As the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip told the public in 1966, British service overseas had ‘resulted in the independence of almost all the old colonial protected territories.’²³ Never mind that it had also *resulted* in the subjugation of those same peoples. Independence ceremonies throughout the 1960s reinforced the idea that independence had always been the intention of the British imperial

¹⁹ Susan Pedersen, ‘The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: the Controversy Over “Child Slavery” in Hong Kong,’ *Past and Present* 171 (2001): 201.

²⁰ Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, 31; Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), 8. In addition to large scale government initiatives the Church Missionary Society embarked upon a retrenchment programme in Africa at the end of the Second World War; conservationist organizations showed a renewed engagement with environmental issues in Africa; and the Anti-Slavery Society and women’s groups campaigned to abolish *mui tsai* practices in Hong Kong. See respectively, John Stuart, ‘Overseas Mission, Voluntary Service and Aid to Africa: Max Warren, the Church Missionary Society and Kenya, 1945-63,’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3 (2008):527-543; Ralph Neumann, ‘The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,’ *Environmental History* 7, 1 (2007): 37; Pedersen, ‘The Maternalist Moment.’

²¹ John Darwin, ‘Imperialism in Decline?’, 657-8.

²² Wm Roger Louis, ‘The Dissolution of the British Empire’, in Judith M. Brown and Wm Roger Louis (eds.) *Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. V The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329.

²³ Prince Philip, ‘Service Overseas by Volunteers,’ *World*, March 1965 (SOAS: CA/I/3/2).

mission.²⁴ What this interpretation did not solve, however, was the question of ‘what next’? What happened to this narrative of national purpose in the wake of decolonization? And what would happen to imperial benevolence without an empire to bestow it upon? As the case of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign will make clear, despite the rise of discourses of international aid in the ‘under-developed’ or ‘third’ world, the British public’s transition from imperial to international benevolence was not quick, smooth, or all-encompassing.

Britain had begun to lose its monopoly on the concern with hunger in the aftermath of the Second World War. By the time the FFHC was launched in 1960, hunger and development had become global issues of concern, championed not only by wealthy nations but also by newly independent states and an ever-expanding set of transnational humanitarian organizations that included Save the Children, Oxfam and Inter-Church Aid (soon to become Christian Aid). As Frederick Cooper discusses, the disintegrating colonial empires were being rapidly internationalized in this period, ‘still at the bottom of a development hierarchy, but now the object of concern of all “advanced” nations’, not least the United States.’²⁵ In the wake of this expansion, Britain’s role in shaping the history of hunger and international development was at severe risk of being marginalized.²⁶ Moreover, by the time the FFHC was launched, its sponsor the UN was felt to be a particularly important and threatening part of this process. Discussing the campaign in 1963, the Cabinet Committee on Development Policy expressed concerns about the increasingly expansionist tendencies of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, criticizing the unwelcome influence that it sought to exert on British aid policy.²⁷ By the 1960s Britain was just one country among more than a hundred taking part in the FFHC, and this inevitably raised questions about its changing status within a rapidly growing field. As Chairman of the UK National FFHC Committee, Earl De La Warr warned, ‘it is up to us in the United Kingdom to see to it that we play a worthy part in what has now become a great new international attack on hunger.’²⁸

²⁴ David Cannadine, ‘Introduction: Independence Day Ceremonials in Historical Perspective’ in Robert Holland, Susan Williams and Terry Barringer, eds. *The Iconography of Independence: ‘Freedoms at Midnight’* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 9.

²⁵ Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, 84.

²⁶ Vernon, *Hunger*, 273.

²⁷ Committee on Development Policy, United Nations Development Decade, 15 October 1963 (TTNA: MAF 252/243).

²⁸ Earl De La Warr, *Gazebo*, 24 (TTNA: OD 11/72).

One common way of understanding the FFHC was to treat it simply as the next chapter in a narrative of British international and, more specifically, imperial benevolence. By emphasizing continuity rather than change, Freedom from Hunger could be understood as the latest in a long line of British interventions in global hunger. Earl De La Warr claimed that ‘no country in the world has had greater experience than has our own in working in underdeveloped countries.’²⁹ This narrative was repeated almost verbatim two years later by campaign patron the Duke of Edinburgh who described how ‘the British, perhaps more than most people, have a long tradition of successful service overseas.’³⁰ And it resurfaced again and again in statements that drew on the motifs of British administrative expertise, benevolent paternalism and charitable practice. Speaking about the campaign in the House of Lords, the Bishop of Coventry argued that Freedom from Hunger could be ‘one of our finest hours if, having trained many countries for self government and freedom, we train them and other nations for industrial self-development.’³¹ At the launch party for the fundraising stage of the campaign in June 1962, Harold Macmillan gave a speech in which he celebrated the nation’s aptitude for humanitarian intervention. ‘Work of this kind’, he suggested, ‘is particularly suited to the British genius for voluntary effort and coordination.’³²

The narratives of British exceptionalism that coalesced around the FFHC reveal underlying concerns about declining status and international reputation. The statesmen and campaign representatives who emphasized Britain’s particular strengths in humanitarianism were also aiming to assert British authority in an increasingly international field.³³ By presenting the FFHC as an opportunity to continue the ‘worthy British tradition of governmental voluntary assistance’, commentators established the continuing relevance of Britain’s imperial experience in the post-imperial period. As the Duke of Edinburgh explained, ‘Today newly independent and developing countries are facing the most critical years of their existence and they need a very particular kind of help. People are still needed to fill

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Voluntary Societies’ Committee for Service Overseas, ‘Service Overseas By Volunteers 1966’ (SOAS: CA/1/3/2).

³¹ ‘Points from Parliament,’ *Daily Mail*, 5 March 1963.

³² FFHC Public Launching Ceremony, Festival Hall, 27 June 1962, Notes for the Prime Minister’s Speech, (TTNA: MAF 252/241).

³³ JD Anderson (FO) to John Wyndham (Private Secretary to PM) 15 March 1962 (TTNA: MAF 252/226).

the gaps in the developing fabric of the public, educational and agricultural services.³⁴ Such claims were well suited to the model of development promoted by the FFHC. The campaign was at the vanguard of those arguing the need to move away from existing models of humanitarian relief (provided in response to particular crises or needs) towards a preventative model for development that would address the causes of poverty. This made it possible to tie the welfare and development initiatives of late colonial administrations to the longer history of imperial benevolent action by the British public.

Within these discourses, taking a lead in international projects such as the FFHC also became a way for Britain to reclaim some of the moral authority that had been lost during the Suez crisis. For the beleaguered Foreign Office the FFHC was a chance ‘to demonstrate our interest at the United Nations in the economic and social field and dispel the reputation for reluctance we have unfortunately acquired in this field.’³⁵ Putting a more positive spin on these motivations for benevolence, the Duke of Edinburgh proclaimed that ‘with the wholehearted support of the entire nation, the British Freedom from Hunger Campaign can become an example to the rest of the world.’³⁶

When conceptualized as a continuation of imperial benevolence, the FFHC served a dual purpose. As discussed, when projecting outwards it was a way to save face and legitimate the leading role that many in Britain hoped to take in this new international field of development. But for many commentators at the time, there was more than pride and status at stake. Looking inwards this narrative was also capable of smoothing over some of the disruption rendered by decolonization upon metropolitan identities. In 1962 American lawyer and statesman Dean Acheson captured the essence of a wider concern about the impact of decolonization on the structure of British life when he delivered the pithy verdict that Britain had ‘lost an empire, not yet found a role.’³⁷

In his 1963 analysis *The State of England*, Anthony Hartley described a country reaching ‘the end of an old, good humanitarian song’.³⁸ Although Hartley

³⁴ Duke of Edinburgh, ‘Service Overseas By Volunteers 1966’ (SOAS: CA/I/3/2).

³⁵ ‘Committee on Development Policy, United Nations Development Decade,’ 15 October 1963 (TTNA: MAF 252/243).

³⁶ ‘Who Will Adopt a Herd of Buffaloes?’, *Guardian*, 21 November 1962.

³⁷ Cited in Stuart Hall, ‘Interview,’ in Richard English and Michael Kenny, eds., *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 110.

³⁸ Anthony Hartley, *A State of England* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1963), 13.

was positive about the reform efforts that fed into the liquidation of the empire, he regarded their zenith as a cause for concern rather than celebration. With no empire and only scraps of programmes and fragments of idealism left—‘a movement of penal reform here and a protest of apartheid there’—what would be left to give the nation a sense of purpose?³⁹ In his history of the first ten years of Voluntary Service Overseas, written in 1968, Michael Adams looked back favourably on the extraordinary range of opportunities that the imperial age had offered to the ‘enterprising Englishman’:

From the sub-continent of India to the smallest island dependency in the West Indies, there was a constant and reassuring demand for British administrators, judges, clergymen, clerks, police officers and all the assorted instruments of colonial rule [...] No one with ambition, a sense of purpose or a simple taste for adventure could fail to find, somewhere on that imperial globe, an outlet for his energies or a chance to make his fortune.⁴⁰

For Adams—and also for Alec and Mora Dickson, the founders of VSO—decolonization was a ‘traumatic moment for Britain, involving as it did the renunciation of a role in the world which had become second nature’. Speaking in similar terms to Hartley, Adams described how decolonization ‘brought in its train all kinds of adjustments, both material and psychological, which were anything but easy to a people accustomed to claim for themselves [...] a certain primacy in the counsels of the world.’⁴¹ Author Elspeth Huxley also described the vacuum left by decolonization in very similar terms. Without the empire, she argued, Britain suffered ‘the malaise of crusaders without a cross and youth without a cause.’⁴² Without a convenient outlet for moral fervour, these commentators worried, Britain’s population was becoming restless. Intellectual life was seen to be showing signs of claustrophobia and frustration, while teenagers were delinquent and sexually permissive.

Huxley’s and Hartley’s accounts are representative both of specific concerns about the impact of decolonization on the structure of British life and also of wider narratives about a society in flux. Change was the *leitmotif* of the postwar period. It

³⁹ *Ibid.* 13.

⁴⁰ Michael Adams, *Voluntary Service Overseas: The Story of the First Ten Years* (London, 1968), 23-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴² Cited in Wendy Webster, ‘Elspeth Huxley: Gender, Empire and Narratives of Nation, 1935-64,’ *Women’s History Review* 8, 3 (1999): 530.

was read in the impact of postwar affluence on family roles and emerging youth cultures; in fears of internal moral collapse surrounding the Americanisation of culture; in the effect of deindustrialization on certain occupations; in the decline of traditional working-class neighbourhoods; and in the impact of the immigration influx on understandings of national belonging.⁴³ According to scholars such as Hugh Seton-Watson, ‘the coincidence of the high expectations of the upwardly mobile with a contraction of Britain's place in the world economy, and of British power and prestige (of which loss of empire was a significant part) led to a disproportionate increase of bitterness.’⁴⁴ Writing at the time, Adams described a ‘general upsurge of youth everywhere, rebellious, critical, irreverent, self-confident, impatient of the old nostrums and of those who peddled them’.⁴⁵ To Hartley, these were ‘flounderings’ such as those ‘undergone by a good swimmer suddenly forced to exercise his skill in some element other than water—say treacle.’⁴⁶ Youth would not rebel and intellectuals would not narrow their horizons, these commentators opined, if only some other morally invigorating duty could be taken up.

Looking *outwards* was absolutely key to these discourses of duty in the 1960s. At the same time that the outwardly-focused FFHC captured the attention of the British public, for example, a rediscovery of poverty *within* Britain was also taking place, driven by the findings of social policy workers at the London School of Economics and groups such as Shelter, Child Poverty Action and Crisis. Yet despite what seem like obvious links between the problems of hunger at home and overseas, no effort was made to relate the moral mission of the FFHC either to current issues of poverty within Britain or the harsh experiences of the hunger in the 1930s, which would have been in living memory for many Britons.⁴⁷ As Jordanna Bailkin has shown, members of the Conservative party argued that it was impossible to find a sense of national purpose only ‘by looking inwards upon ourselves in this island.’⁴⁸ Writing about VSO in 1965, David Wainwright wrote disdainfully about a climate of public opinion that had begun to ‘make a national hobby of introspection’:

⁴³ These issues are explored in Conekin, Mort, and Waters, *Moments of Modernity*. See also, English and Kenny, *Rethinking British Decline*.

⁴⁴ Hugh Seton-Watson, ‘Aftermaths of Empire,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, 1 (1980): 202.

⁴⁵ Adams, *First Ten Years of VSO*, 27.

⁴⁶ Hartley, *State of England*, 13.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the Hungry Thirties see Vernon, *Hunger*.

⁴⁸ Neil Marten to Dennis Vosper, May 17 1962 (TTNA: OD 10/35).

The general picture of Britain's part in the world, as presented by much of the press, radio and television, was that we were being thrown out of country after country, and that the best thing we could do would be to put up with it gracefully, after a certain amount of huffing and puffing, and a gaol sentence for any potential prime minister. And after that forget. Forget the British people in those countries. Forget the responsibilities of the past towards all the people involved—the newly articulate demanding politicians, the unfortunate settlers, the traders. Turn it all off, with the television picture. What else was there to do?

No matter that young people in Britain were becoming 'frustrated by the very chaos that the immediate postwar generation had created.'⁴⁹ It was in this same climate and in response to these same fears that the Royal Commonwealth Society and Charles Chislett sought to interest young people in the outside world.

Hartley's answer to Britain's crisis of purpose was to look outwards to Europe and to the European Economic Community.⁵⁰ But by framing the FFHC as a seamless and satisfying substitute to the imperial burden—one that called on the particular administrative and organisational skill set that Britain had developed as an imperial power—some commentators found an alternative way to jump back in the water. In a speech on the floor of the House of Lords in which he responded to Dean Acheson's claim that Britain had not yet found a role, Dr Bardsley, the Bishop of Coventry, shared his belief that 'part of that mission is to be found in our contribution to this vast world problem of famine relief.'⁵¹ This was not the only solution proffered to this particular social malaise; as Bailkin discusses and as the case of VSO makes clear, calls for new forms of overseas service that would put British youth to work in foreign places were also popular.⁵² This is evident in the support that that Royal Commonwealth Society, the Women's Institute and Christian Aid (discussed in the next chapter) all showed towards VSO throughout the 1960s. Not everyone could be sent abroad, however, and if, as Hartley diagnosed, the less mobile British public were also nostalgic for a wider field of action, perhaps philanthropic campaigns such as the FFHC could provide it for them.⁵³

⁴⁹ David Wainwright, *The Volunteers: The Story of Overseas Voluntary Service* (London, 1965), 20-26.

⁵⁰ Hartley, *State of England*.

⁵¹ 'Peer's World Food Plea,' *Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 1963.

⁵² Jordanna Bailkin, *The Aftermath of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, *Forthcoming* 2012).

⁵³ Hartley, *State of England*, 70.

Situating the FFHC within narratives of imperial benevolence may have been largely about seeking ‘emotional’ reassurance in a time of considerable flux, but it was not entirely an act of fiction. Colonial advisors of the 1940s had already established a precedent for the overwhelmingly agrarian vision that the FFHC projected for the future of developing countries.⁵⁴ As Uma Kothari describes, ‘there has not been a unilateral trajectory from a colonial to a development moment but rather an intertwining of these fields wherein heterogeneous and shifting ideologies and practices were imbricated in each other.’⁵⁵ Freedom from Hunger encouraged the overlap of charitable enthusiasm, colonial administrative experience and the technocratic expertise of development experts. Such imbrications are apparent in a number of dimensions of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. Take, for example, personnel. If, in the words of Anthony Hartley, decolonization took away a British ‘vocation’ then the FFHC in a very literal sense provided some sections of society with a new one. As Joseph Hodge has shown, many of those who worked for the colonial administration towards the end of empire went on to become ‘experts’ in the international development movement.⁵⁶ Throughout Freedom from Hunger, the Department for Technical Cooperation, which had been established in 1961 to bring together expertise on colonial development, helped British-funded FFHC projects to recruit members of the expatriate civil service to work as experts overseas.⁵⁷

In addition to the many (ex)colonial ‘experts’ now working out in the field, a significant proportion of those sitting on the UK Committee also had backgrounds and ongoing roles in the colonial administration. These men show that there were opportunities for imperial or commonwealth activities beyond the Royal Commonwealth Society. Chairman of the Committee, Earl De La Warr had himself had spent a long career in colonial and agricultural administration. As well as having interests in Africa both as Director of the Standard Bank of South Africa and also of two ranching companies in Southern Rhodesia, he had been chairman of the Royal Commonwealth Society for four years before he took up the chairmanship of the FFHC. Other committee members included Arthur Gaitskell, who was a member of the Colonial and then Commonwealth Development Organisation between 1954 and 1973; Sir William Slater, chairman of the Colonial Development Corporation’s panel

⁵⁴ Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, 262.

⁵⁵ Kothari, ‘Authority and Expertise,’ 433.

⁵⁶ Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*.

⁵⁷ FFHC Note of a Discussion held on 15 January 1963 (TTNA: OD 11/71).

of scientific advisors; and Leslie Farrer-Brown, who was heavily involved in the Colonial Social Science Council, the Overseas Visual Aid Centre and the Commonwealth Trust. Committee minutes and reports celebrated rather than obscured these imperial connections. When looking to replace the retiring Vice Chairman, Arthur Rucker, De La Warr was keen to find ‘the right type of retired colonial governor or diplomat’ to fill the role.⁵⁸ Rucker’s replacement, Sir Gilbert Rennie was lauded for his ‘long and distinguished career in the colonial services’, where he had served between 1948 and 1954 as Governor and Commander in Chief of Southern Rhodesia.⁵⁹

Significant though this overlap in personnel was, the most striking of the continuities between FFHC and the practices of late colonial development was the geographic distribution of British-funded projects. The vast majority of these fell within the bounds of the empire-Commonwealth. The people of Accrington raised money to finance the introduction of new varieties of rice in Fiji, for example; Wandsworth and Putney supported a project to train buffalo in Sarawak; and Morecambe financed the purchase of a ten-tonne fish freezer for British Guiana.⁶⁰ At the end of the first five years of the campaign more than £3 million had been spent in support of 117 projects in Africa (amounting to more than half of the total funds raised by the British public) and a further £1.2 million on projects in Central and South East Asia. Significantly less was spent in areas where Britain had a smaller imperial influence: just £89,000 in the Far East, for example, and £322,152 in Central and South America.⁶¹ In a number of cases FFHC funds even went into pre-existing development projects, established either by colonial governments or missionary societies and stretched beyond the end of empire by ongoing FFHC support. Britain did not have a monopoly on projects in its former colonies. Sweden sponsored a home economics centre for women in Tanzania, Canada and Denmark jointly funded a food technology training centre in India, and the German Evangelical Church Organisation supported a project on swamp rice production in Liberia.⁶² In general, however, imperial powers such as France, Britain and Spain focused on their support

⁵⁸ AJD Winnifrith to Mr Bishop, 2 February 1962 (TTNA: MAF 252/213).

⁵⁹ FFHC UK Committee Newsletter, April 1962, (TTNA: MAF 252/226).

⁶⁰ *Guardian*, 18 March 1963.

⁶¹ *The First Five Years: Freedom from Hunger 1960-65* (TTNA: MAF 2552/213).

⁶² *Food and Agricultural Organisation Report, Number 53* (Rome: FAO, 1969); *Food and Agricultural Organisation Report, Number 66* (Rome: FAO, 1970); *Food and Agricultural Organisation Report, Number 63* (Rome: FAO, 1970).

for the FFHC within their own former colonies and protectorates. Britain's experience was therefore representative of a wider pattern of post-imperial aid giving, and this preferential approach continues to shape contemporary aid and development practices today.

Freedom from Hunger might have been a global campaign, but from Britain's perspective it did little to shake the existing geographies of imperial preference. Moreover, such a significant bias was not merely coincidental. The UK Campaign Committee made a conscious decision to 'concern itself mainly with the provision of assistance to the under-developed territories in the Commonwealth.'⁶³ On the basis of this decision they contacted colonial governments and the High Commissioners of recently independent countries to put together the portfolio of development projects that the British public would go on to support. At the prompting of the Foreign Office in 1962, the Committee's projects group had made some efforts to improve the geographical distribution of projects, acknowledging that the vast majority of those approved thus far related to Africa, and particularly British East Africa.⁶⁴ Help was extended to some foreign countries such as Greece and Thailand, but this never really swayed the balance away from the empire-Commonwealth. Comments made by the Committee reveal an awareness of the overlapping imperial and international geographies of the campaign. As they described, the 'campaign is world-wide and the United Kingdom Committee cannot therefore confine its attention solely to Commonwealth countries. Nevertheless the Committee will give a high degree of priority to sound schemes submitted from within the Commonwealth.'⁶⁵

The records of the UK Campaign Committee never explicitly comment on why British support for the FFHC followed this pattern. As was the case with the Women's Institute, their silence on the matter suggests that their decision to prefer the empire-Commonwealth registered as so 'common sense' that it did not require further justification. Nostalgic narratives of benevolent imperialism were surely influential, particularly given the backgrounds of many of those involved, but it is clear that this geographical 'favouritism' did not *just* stem from a sense of extended

⁶³ Freedom from Hunger Campaign brief for Overseas Development Secretary Alan Dudley for his meeting with Earl De La War, 25 October 1961 (TTNA: OD 11/70).

⁶⁴ FFHC UK Committee General Secretary's Report, 29 May 1962 (TTNA: MAF 252/226).

⁶⁵ Memorandum from Freedom from Hunger Campaign United Kingdom National Committee, November 1961 (TTNA: OD 11/70).

imperial responsibility: there were also obvious practical and pragmatic advantages to working within the empire-Commonwealth.

For the committee itself, the wider context of the Cold War generated pressure to use development as a way of shoring up newly independent countries against the threat of communist expansion.⁶⁶ For colonial governments, the campaign was seen as a sensible way to reduce the financial burden of administering development projects--publically raised FFHC money was often fed into pre-existing programmes.⁶⁷ More broadly, the [asymmetrical networks of people and information that had developed over a long imperial history made the declining empire a convenient geography in which to conduct development projects.](#)⁶⁸ Colonial administrators had existing experience in these locations; many organizations affiliated to the FFHC already had people on the ground in a number of colonial territories; and, perhaps most importantly, [the Foreign Office was able to play a key role in the execution of British FFHC projects, often acting as mediator between the FFHC and colonial governments. As the Foreign Office described, 'we are cooperating fully with the campaign organisers, especially \(but not exclusively\) as regards the needs of the colonial territories who stand to gain considerably from the fund which is about to be raised.'](#)⁶⁹ Once projects were underway, advisors from the Commonwealth Relations Office who were on tour were able to look in and report back to the FFHC Committee.⁷⁰ Through these links, the FFHC worked to increase the public's participation in the final days of the imperial project, involving them (albeit indirectly) in projects that were once the purview of the Colonial Development Office.

As much as British and colonial governmental priorities shaped the geographical spread of British funded-projects, however, the FFHC also represented the beginning of a process of decentralization that saw power gradually shift away from colonial governments and towards NGOs and newly independent governments—a significant proportion of British FFHC projects in dependent and independent territories were implemented by Christian Aid and Oxfam, for instance.

⁶⁶ Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*.

⁶⁷ JW Howard to Miss J Owtram, 14 November 1963 (TTNA: DO 189/335).

⁶⁸ Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,' *History Compass* 4, 1 (2006): 124–141.

⁶⁹ JD Anderson to John Wyndham, 15 March 1962 (TTNA: MAF 252/226).

⁷⁰ JW Howard (DTC) to APF Bache (Commonwealth Relations Office), 31 October 1963 (TNA: DO 189/355).

This transfer of power away from colonial government was not seen as necessarily problematic; for some, the FFHC offered an ideal opportunity to bridge the transition to independence. FFHC-advisor Charles Weitz hoped that larger British territories would create their own FFHC committees so as to ‘establish on a long-term basis an indigenous group dedicated to the principle of development self-help which will survive whatever political changes may come about in the dependent territories.’⁷¹

Moreover, while the continuities between the FFHC and Britain’s late colonial development programme may have been obvious to those involved in the Central Committee and the Foreign and Commonwealth administration, they went almost entirely unacknowledged by the majority of the British public. Moreover, despite the apparent concern that commentators such as Hartley and Huxley expressed over the moral fortitude of the population, evidence of any strong sense of British imperial purpose was noticeably lacking from the more ‘everyday’ or practical forms of campaign participation that characterized how most people interacted with it. Instead, a pattern of apparently oblivious imperial preference was repeated across most public support for the campaign. This apparent disjuncture might be explained by the nature of the source material available; a pile of letters to a local campaign treasurer, for example, provides considerable detail about the amount of money raised by various groups and companies, slightly less about the method by which that money was raised, and almost nothing about *why* people chose to support FFHC. Despite these difficulties, however, we can still tease out some of the differences between discourse and practice at a more local scale.

The case of the Women’s Institute, for example, is illustrative of how many individuals and institutions engaged with the campaign. The WI was in the vanguard of British voluntary organizations to become interested in the FFHC and went on to raise over £182,000 towards it. Over five years they supported projects almost exclusively within the empire-Commonwealth, financing schemes in Uganda, Trinidad, India, East Pakistan, Botswana, Northern Rhodesia, Ceylon, Sarawak and Fiji. Yet none of their promotional, published or internal records show any acknowledgement of this geographical bias. Their silence on the matter of empire is particularly striking when we take into account the fact that a number of these locations underwent dramatic political changes during the course of the campaign;

⁷¹ Letter Charles H. Weitz to Tweddle, 1 March 1962 (TNA: MAF 252/226).

Trinidad and Uganda gained independence in 1962, Sarawak in 1963, and Northern Rhodesia in 1964. Yet as in the press more broadly, WI reports tended to relate fairly specific details about the countries they supported and the type of projects their money went to support without reference to the changing political climate or potential legacies of imperialism.

Why exactly were these imperial contexts overlooked? The silence of organizations such as the WI did not likely stem from a simple lack of engagement with the destination of donated money; as discussed above, education was at the heart of the FFHC's objectives. Campaign materials published by FAO wrote about the educational imperatives of the campaign with the same urgency that they discussed the practical solutions to hunger and starvation. B.R. Sen repeatedly cautioned against the temptation to rely on sensationalist slogans and superficial appeals—to his mind, for the FFHC to have lasting effects, the public needed to be made aware that the root of the problem was vast and complex.⁷²

In order to create this informed body of opinion, the FFHC made a great deal of information available to the public in the form of pamphlets, films and public speakers. Local committees across the country were encouraged to form study groups and a monthly *Ideas and Action* bulletin kept readers abreast of conferences, published reports and the progress that was being made on specific projects. More detailed information was also provided by the *Basic Studies* series, designed for use by non-governmental organizations cooperating in the campaign.⁷³ These studies aimed to use 'brief but authoritative language' to state the facts of important aspects of the campaign and explored topics such as *Weather and Food, Animal Disease and Human Health*, and *Nutrition and Working Efficiency*. For those local committees that were particularly interested in the destination of their money, visits could sometimes be arranged by FAO advisors to help 'crystalise and clarify' the fundraisers' ideas about the projects they intended to support.⁷⁴ More widely, affiliated organizations with their own resources also published further informational material for their members. Christian Aid, for example, provided detailed accounts of their £2 million-worth of anti-hunger schemes in a 16-page report which allowed

⁷² B.R. Sen, *Towards a Newer World* (Dublin: Tycooley, 1982), 123.

⁷³ 'Freedom from Hunger Campaign: Use of FAO Basic Studies' (Food and Agricultural Organisation, Rome, RG12, Sec 4, B-067 B15, Box 3, No File Label), 1.

⁷⁴ *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News*, October 1963, 8.

members to locate the actual project that their committee or town had helped fund as well as getting a sense of the broader scope of the campaign.

Like many other participants, the WI wholeheartedly embraced this educational component of the campaign. Alongside typical fundraising activities such as bring-and-buy sales and whist drives, institutes organized speakers and film screenings focused specifically on the countries in which they were supporting projects. Over 4,500 members attended a touring lecture about the Ugandan farm institute supported by WI funds and frequent features in *Home and Country* discussed the FFHC's achievements, including a four-page spread on International Secretary Isobel Curry's tour of WI projects in the Caribbean and Colombia. Yet as stated above, none of these many accounts seemed to consider the potential implications of colonialism for Britain's relationship with these projects.

If these conspicuous silences did not stem from a lack of interest in the FFHC's work, perhaps we should regard them instead as an effort to reframe Britain's relationship with the outside world. The WI did not simply overlook the processes of decolonization occurring throughout the campaign; they also spoke about the countries they supported in ways that actively obscured their imperial pasts. This was at odds with their approach to the Old Commonwealth, as discussed in Chapter Two, in which Britain's long imperial relationship with these nations was felt to merit ongoing relationships beyond the end of empire. In the context of the FFHC, former colonies of the New Commonwealth such as Uganda, Sarawak, Botswana, and East Pakistan came to be understood collectively either as 'the undernourished side of the world' or as 'newly emergent' countries.⁷⁵ Yet no obvious thought was given to the complicated and uncomfortable histories of colonization from which these new nations were 'emerging'. Through selective silence and euphemism groups like the WI simultaneously configured poverty as a 'new' global challenge and the British public as an important part of a new global solution. This process was symptomatic not only of what many have characterized as imperial amnesia, but also of the wider discourses of internationalism that framed the Freedom from Hunger Campaign.

As explored above, in the 1960s decolonization made development international in the most literal sense—a process now increasingly negotiated

⁷⁵ *Home and Country*, January 1968.

between sovereign nation states.⁷⁶ This changing dynamic entailed a new, more inclusive vocabulary: as a pamphlet explaining the origins of FFHC described, from the stresses of the Second World War ‘emerged a humanism such as the history of mankind has not witnessed before. This new humanism calls for international cooperation to deal with hunger and poverty.’⁷⁷ What was needed, Sen argued, was ‘a conscious dedication to the right of man to grow to his full stature, regardless of the place of his birth, the colour of his skin, or of the faiths and beliefs he might cherish.’⁷⁸ As publicity material repeatedly made manifest, Freedom from Hunger was a *global* campaign. Operating within this environment of increasing internationalism, perhaps it is not surprising that groups like the WI spoke so little about the British Empire.

‘Internationalism’, however, has never been an internally coherent concept, and it was certainly not a new one by the postwar period. Various manifestations of internationalism have waxed and waned throughout the course of the twentieth century. The particular combination of imperial preference and internationalist discourse that characterized British participation in the FFHC raises important questions about how the two geographies related to one another in the 1960s. Was there something distinct about the form that internationalism took in this era of imperial decline? The remainder of this chapter discusses how three different configurations of the international-imperial dynamic played out through the FFHC, while also relating these dynamics to the activities of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Women’s Institute and Charles Chislett discussed in the previous three chapters. In the first configuration, internationalist discourses were employed in support of empire-Commonwealth ties, while in the second internationalism was conceived as a replacement for the imperialist world order. In the third, a new vocabulary of people-to-people internationalism was superimposed over imperial frameworks and habits, yet without much awareness of how the two might interact.

⁷⁶ Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 91.

⁷⁷ *The Basic Freedom: Freedom from Hunger* (Rome: FAO, 1962)

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

The Overlapping Internationalisms of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign

As discussed in the previous chapters, internationalist ideas started to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century but it was not until the interwar period that they really took root. The traumas of the First World War created a greater consciousness of social, political and economic problems that transcended borders and saw the emergence of internationalism as both foreign policy and civic ideal.⁷⁹ Advocates of the League of Nations such as Willoughby Dickinson wrote that nations would gradually draw together and ‘by cooperating constantly for the good of all they will develop a new internationalist spirit.’⁸⁰ At this time the predominant British interpretation of this spirit was a fusion of empire, liberal internationalism and moral self-righteousness that sought to reconcile the interests of the British Empire with the preservation of the civilizing mission.⁸¹ In the interwar period, as Mark Mazower suggests, imperial internationalism was articulated in a world that took the robustness of empire largely for granted.⁸² The empire was to be ‘*the* great example of the sort of international cooperation on which a stable system of organized world relations can be erected.’⁸³ Overlooking the coercion required to hold the empire together, advocates of imperial internationalism boldly claimed that ‘no legal sanctions can be so efficient or permanent as the free and spontaneous willingness to cooperate which is the real foundation of the British Empire today.’⁸⁴

Forms of moral internationalism that began to transcend imperial boundaries also emerged in the interwar years, setting an early precedent for the subsequent growth in international social relief organizations in the postwar period. A number of the international humanitarian organizations that were involved in the FFHC had their origins in British imperial interest groups.⁸⁵ Although many of these groups initially took on causes—such as the traffic of women and children—within the bounds of the

⁷⁹ Daniel Gorman, ‘Empire, Internationalism, and the Campaign Against the Traffic in Women and Children in the 1920s,’ *Twentieth Century British History* 19 (2008): 189.

⁸⁰ Daniel Gorman, ‘Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 45 (2010): 63-4.

⁸¹ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 191.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸³ J. Coatman, review of Zimmern, *The Third British Empire*, 3d ed. (1934), *International Affairs* 14, 3 (1935): 419-20.

⁸⁴ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 92.

⁸⁵ Gorman, ‘Empire, Internationalism,’ 187.

empire they increasingly came to see these problems as manifestations of truly international issues requiring truly international solutions.⁸⁶ Yet the postwar world into which these organisations emerged was a very different one from that in which they had been founded. Whatever their early gestures towards a more inclusive internationalism, these took on new meaning in an era of imperial decline.

As Helen McCarthy suggests, the model of international community that liberal internationalists had dramatized so effectively between the wars rested on the assumption of Britain's premier status as a global power.⁸⁷ If, in the interwar years, Britain had been successfully able to adapt to, exploit and defend itself from the dictates of internationalism, the same is less true of the postwar period.⁸⁸

Decolonization, the Cold War, the events of the Suez crisis and Britain's declining global status made it increasingly difficult to hold together the multiple images of Britain as an historic English nation, a great imperial power, and a responsible member of the international community—though some still clearly tried.⁸⁹ As discussed, the limited geographical distribution of British FFHC projects within the former empire was clearly shaped by earlier concepts of imperial-internationalism.

The narratives of British benevolence discussed in the first section of this chapter explicitly sought to make the British Empire and Commonwealth the shining example of moral intervention for the postwar world. When asking the Royal Commonwealth Society to spare a contribution for 'this tremendous worldwide crusade', for instance, advertisements from the FFHC described how it was 'helping strengthen the British Commonwealth' by setting under-privileged countries and people on their feet.⁹⁰ These claims complemented and drew upon the discourses discussed in Chapter One in which the Royal Commonwealth Society configured the limited geography of the Commonwealth as the best path to *international* understanding. Membership of an international community could still be promulgated—as it was in the interwar period—*alongside* the special bond of empire.⁹¹ Indeed, as Marcus Power has shown, efforts to reconcile the imperial with

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸⁷ Helen McCarthy, 'The League of Nations, Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain, c.1919-56,' *History Workshop Journal* 70 (2010): 127.

⁸⁸ Gorman, 'Empire Internationalism,' 189.

⁸⁹ McCarthy, 'League of Nations,' 127.

⁹⁰ Advertisement, 'How the Freedom from Hunger Campaign is Helping Strengthen the British Commonwealth,' *Commonwealth Journal*, April 1963.

⁹¹ McCarthy, 'League of Nations,' 119.

the international continued into the late twentieth century. Recent British agendas for Africa have constructed the Commonwealth as leading a global project of development, echoing ideas of trusteeship in the way that they imply a sense of responsibility over Africa. The Department for International Development argued in 1997 that the Commonwealth's close historical relations "make it particularly well placed to mobilize support for poverty elimination." Once again the force of Commonwealth 'experience' and the 'moral power' of its authority were used to justify Britain's global leadership.⁹²

Despite its longevity, the pairing of the imperial with the international was not a dynamic that appealed to everyone. For those who questioned the morality of an imperial role, international development schemes such as FFHC also represented an opportunity to carve out a new world order in which Britain could critique and move on from its imperial past. In these alternate discourses internationalism was configured as the *antidote* to imperialism. As will be discussed, these interpretations were not only considerably more politicized than the majority of responses to the campaign, but also much more in tune with the wider goings on at the UN in the 1960s. Where once the League of Nations had been envisioned as an adjunct to the British Empire, now the UN seemed to threaten its existence. The founders of the UN deliberately played down any continuities between their new world organisation and the League of Nations, and by the time the fundraising element of FFHC was launched in Britain in 1962 the UN had acquired a global reputation as an 'aggressive, anti-colonial champion of self-determination.'⁹³

In 1960 the General Assembly had passed Resolution 1514 calling for a rapid and unconditional end to colonialism and in 1961 Committee 17 was established to work towards these aims. As Wm Roger Louis describes, 'the Committee became famous in the history of the UN for its persistent, voluble and impassioned attacks on Western colonial powers, especially Britain.'⁹⁴ In 1963 alone Committee 17 discussed Southern Rhodesia, Aden, Malta, Fiji, British Guiana, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Zanzibar, Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Swaziland, Gibraltar and the Gambia, many of these being countries in which FFHC projects were then taking place. Even more problematically for the Colonial Office, the Committee demanded

⁹² Power, 'Commonwealth, Development,' 16-22.

⁹³ Louis, 'Public Enemy Number One,' 692-695.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 702.

visiting missions to Aden, Fiji, and British Guiana, all of which had the potential to upset the delicate balance between indigenous inhabitants and immigrant populations with violent results.⁹⁵ David Jerrom, head of the International Relations department in the Colonial Office, complained of how the ‘wretched committee [...] has become a political factor of importance in all delicate colonial situations.’⁹⁶ By 1965 almost 50 of the 119 members on the General Assembly had only recently emerged from colonial rule. As Mazower describes, ‘every act of decolonization swelled the size of the [UN General] assembly and diluted the strength of Europe’s voice.’⁹⁷ Postwar internationalism had new parameters.

Fundraising organizations and individuals across Britain may not have been so acutely aware of the struggles taking place at the UN as was David Jerrom, but the pressure to decolonize was not entirely lost on them. A *Times* feature on the eighteenth annual session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1963 described how ‘Britain came in for more than her fair share of criticism’. In a section titled ‘attacks on Britain’, the UN Correspondent reported on how the Assembly and Security councils ‘took Britain to task’ over Rhodesia, describing how Britain was also ‘the butt of the African and Arab groups on issues such as Aden, Oman, British Guiana and the protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland.’⁹⁸ Other articles in the national press described how UN visiting missions stoked the fires of nationalist movements, describing Tanganyika as a ‘hot-house plant nourished from outside the territory.’⁹⁹

As an early FAO pamphlet on the Freedom from Hunger Campaign made clear, new times called for new action:

Since the end of the Second World War 800 million people in various parts of the world have won their independence [...] This is a major revolution of our time because nearly one third of the human race, within the span of 15 years have become masters of their own destiny [...] to secure a life of dignity and freedom from the misery and degradation of poverty.¹⁰⁰

Great hopes were invested in the organizational galaxy of the UN in the early 1960s. The United Nations charter, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 709.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 709.

⁹⁷ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 185.

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 19 December 1963.

⁹⁹ *Guardian*, 2 August 1963.

¹⁰⁰ *The Basic Freedom: Freedom from Hunger* (Rome: FAO, 1962), 7.

the constitution of the Food and Agricultural Organisation all expressed hopes of a ‘new world conscience’.¹⁰¹ FAO represented what felt like a new opportunity for ‘genuine international cooperation’ in pursuit of development. As Director General of the FAO, B.R. Sen was the public face of this new dynamic. Born in India in 1900, Sen studied English literature at the Scottish Churches College in Calcutta before completing a PhD in history and economics at Oxford. He served a long career in the Indian Civil Service and eventually became Director General of Food for India in 1943, a post created following the Bengal famine of 1942-43.¹⁰² His election as Director General of the FAO in 1956 made him the first individual from a developing country to become the head of a UN agency and a sympathetic advocate for the needs of newly independent countries.

Earl De La Warr—who was the most public face of the British campaign alongside the patron the Duke of Edinburgh—also reflected on this changing dynamic.

A little while ago constructive work in helping primitive peoples to grow more food for themselves was largely limited to the British Colonial and some other territories. Now, however, the Food and Agriculture Organization is conducting a worldwide campaign through its own and a vast number of other agencies. Everywhere we look the cry is for independence. Dependence on charity is not independence. Our movement should therefore be the corollary of “trade not aid.”¹⁰³

While De La Warr’s comments rather simplistically equated the long-term aims of colonialism (to prepare countries for independence) with the aims of the contemporary development movement, they also indicate a willingness and desire to move away from colonial hierarchies. His arguments echo wider debates taking place at the Royal Commonwealth Society at this time in which members and speakers sought to describe a Commonwealth based on partnership rather than dependency.

Running parallel to developments at the UN, the number of NGOs with specifically international remit more than doubled from 1268 to 2797 in the 1960s.¹⁰⁴ Facilitated by increasing mobility and new opportunities for global communication these NGOs tapped into the same discourses of internationalism as

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰² Bunch, ‘All Roads Lead to Rome,’ 27.

¹⁰³ Speech delivered by Earl De La Warr to Institute of Rural Life at Home and Overseas, 20 April 1961 (SOAS: CA/I/3/3).

¹⁰⁴ Akira Iriye, *Global Community: the Role of International Organisations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (London: University of London Press, 2002), 98.

the UN, forging transnational networks of solidarity and activism across the globe. With its UN backing and the support of a number of these new international NGOs, it is unsurprising that the FFHC also facilitated models of internationalism that sought to supersede the geopolitics of imperialism. Representatives of these organisations argued that national security could be achieved through peacekeeping and international development rather than military might. As a FFHC conference organized by Oxfam appealed, ‘there can be no permanent peace or security so long as the existing disparities persist.’¹⁰⁵ At a one-day conference organized for 16-18-year-old school children in 1963 students debated British foreign policy, articulating different visions of power for a hungry postwar world. Some still preferred a military model, anxious about the Cold War climate and keen to preserve imperial authority. As one student boldly put it, ‘Are you content to return to a time when this country was no more than a squalid little lump in the ocean? Because if you are, I’m not!’ But in the end, the idea that preventing hunger was a more effective solution to world unrest prevailed and a motion urging Britain to cut arms expenditure and contribute more to humanitarian aid was carried.¹⁰⁶ Again, this was closely in tune with discussions taking place at the United Nations where Secretary General U. Thant described the focus of the 1963 Session as ‘the three Ds—‘Disarmament, development, and decolonization.’¹⁰⁷

Anti-colonial ideas were most commonly expressed by those who were young and/or left wing. While an organization such as the Women’s Institute might not have conceived of Freedom from Hunger as an antidote to imperialism or the flag bearer of a new kind of global order others did. War on Want was one of the larger contributors to the campaign and appropriated Freedom from Hunger as part of their broader remit to promote peace through trade and development. War on Want emerged out of the Association for World Peace, which had been established in 1951 to build alliances between pacifists and non-pacifists concerned with the threat of the Cold War. Set up by Victor Gollancz, a socialist publisher, War on Want had strong associations with the Labour Party and the vocal support of prominent Labour MPs. Unlike organizations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, which prioritized fundraising, War on Want identified itself as ‘first and foremost a political campaign.’ Local organizer

¹⁰⁵ ‘Call for 1% of Income: Hunger Relief,’ *Guardian*, 6 August 1960.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Children Speak Out,’ *Guardian*, 9 November 1963.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 19 December 1963.

Walter Crawford described how an early War on Want pamphlet 'fuelled the hopes of the Left and Centre-Left for a socialist foreign policy to crown the other social achievements of the Attlee Government.'¹⁰⁸ This explicitly political remit meant that War on Want also attracted the support of radical students involved in causes such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and protests against the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁹

Not all left-wing support was politicized, however. Alan Leather describes how in the 1960s trade unions tended to regard organizations such as Oxfam and the FFHC as primarily fundraising efforts and did not, therefore, get involved through them in a broader international strategy to challenge the causes of poverty. Leather suggests that charitable organizations made little attempt to mobilize the trade unions in this decade. It was still, he describes, 'about using the starving child to move hearts, and never mind using the head to link that child to issues of exploitation and inequality that trade unionists understand so well.'¹¹⁰ This non-political dimension of Freedom from Hunger support is discussed in greater detail below.

In addition to a political divide, there was often also a generational divide between those who adopted an explicit anti-colonialist stance and those who were more likely to fall back on a narrative of imperial benevolence. As Harold MacMillan had written to Norman Brook, Secretary to the Cabinet, in 1960, 'Young people of all parties are uneasy about our moral basis.'¹¹¹ At the Second World Food Congress organized by the FFHC in 1970 it was the youth attendees who were most vocal about the need to reorder existing political structures and systems.¹¹² The organizers of FAO and the FFHC were keen to capitalize on this trend, introducing the Young World Mobilisation Appeal in 1965 to harness the idealism and enthusiasm of youth in the fight against hunger, thereby piggybacking on the growing youth movement around the world.¹¹³

Youth, more than anything else, epitomized a fresh start. Concerns about Britain's future at this time were tied in with enthusiasm about the potential of the young to be tomorrow's leaders. In a magazine aimed at involving 13-15-year-olds in

¹⁰⁸ Mark Luetchford and Peter Burns, *Waging the War on Want: 50 Years of Campaigning Against World Poverty* (London: War on Want, 2003), 20.

¹⁰⁹ Luetchford and Burns, *Waging the War on Want*, 51.

¹¹⁰ Alan Leather, 'Guest Editorial: Trade Union and NGO Relations in Development and Social Justice,' *Development in Practice* 14, 1 (2004): 14.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Ritchie Owendale, 'The End of Empire,' in Richard English and Michael Kenny, eds., *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 269.

¹¹² Bunch, 'All Roads Lead to Rome,' 155.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

the UN and FFHC the Council for Education in World Citizenship wrote that ‘it is important for all of us, but particularly the young, to understand that we belong not only to one country but to the wider family of all nations.’¹¹⁴ Young people born after 1940 had grown up in an era of decolonization rather than imperial expansion: as the World Council of Churches committee commented in relation to the FFHC, ‘The older generations of our time have grown up in circumstances stressing the differences and similarities between races, creeds, nations and classes. But to young people new horizons have been opened by the revolution in technology and communications which have followed the Second World War.’¹¹⁵ As discussed in previous chapters, the Royal Commonwealth Society and Charles Chislett also sought to influence this younger generation—a generation felt to be untainted by colonialism—to their own particular models of a multiracial Commonwealth and international understanding.

But youth’s idealism allegedly also made them vulnerable. Campaigners worried that this idealism had in the past ‘been all too often exploited for war and other destructive ends.’¹¹⁶ Concerns about rethinking Britain’s relationship with the outside world were therefore particularly present in the educational component of the campaign, which often saw itself as facing an uphill battle. At a workshop on ‘British Schools and the Third World’, participants complained that foreign history was studied only in connection with Britain’s colonial past and that ‘older books, which tend to look at the world from a colonial or insular position, may be fostering attitudes which are hardly appropriate for today or for the future.’¹¹⁷ The ‘condescending attitudes’ of many older textbooks were felt to be entirely at odds with the ideals of equality and partnership at the heart of the campaign.¹¹⁸ These efforts positioned Britain within wider global discourses of equality and internationalism—discourses exemplified by UNESCO’s ongoing search for opportunities to re-educate the whole world through networks of cooperation and mutual understanding.

Maggie Black has argued that the FFHC helped Britain to recast its own humanitarian interventions in the mould of the UN, an organisation whose unbiased

¹¹⁴ Council for Education in World Citizenship, *World 1*, 1 (1965), 1 (CA/I/3/2, SOAS).

¹¹⁵ World Council of Churches Committee for Specialized Assistance to Social Projects, 3 June 1964 (SOAS: CA/I/21/1).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ideas and Action Bulletin 75* (June 1971), 14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

machinery was comparatively free from the taint of self-interest and assumed superiority that clung to old colonial powers.¹¹⁹ This new discourse of international development certainly offered an alternative language that, on the surface at least, was free of racial signifiers.¹²⁰ But the extent to which it actually replaced the habits of imperialism was considerably more limited. Rather than *recasting* British humanitarian interventions, I would argue that the FFHC simply *repackaged* them. While paternalism, racism and ‘assumed superiority’ were always fair game for critique, for example, very few went so far as to locate any blame for the ‘underdeveloped’ state of colonies and former colonies with the western powers that had colonized them.¹²¹ As a whole, FFHC projects looked to find participatory means for coping with the present rather than encouraging the poor to seek justice for past crimes against them. As Firoze Manji and Carl O’Coill have argued, the dominant discourse of development in campaigns such as Freedom from Hunger was not framed in the language of emancipation or justice, but with a vocabulary of charity and technical expertise.¹²² This was certainly the case in the maternalistic discourses of philanthropy employed by the Women’s Institute and explored in Chapter Two. Development was still predicated on the assumption that some people are more ‘developed’ than others and therefore have the knowledge and expertise to help those who are not. This inevitably reproduced the social hierarchies that had prevailed between both groups under colonialism.¹²³ The development concept, some have argued, allowed for an ‘internationalization’ of colonialism as the one-to-one relationship of metropole to colony was transformed into a generalized economic subordination of South to North, of Africa and Asia to Europe and North America.¹²⁴

In this sense, the anti-colonialism expressed through FFHC was only ever partial at best. If anything, despite the wider context of decolonization and increasing nationalisms, British participants in the FFHC invited far less criticism of the colonial administration than had earlier public campaigns carried out at the height of Britain’s imperial power. As Vernon suggests, hunger has long been grounds for political mobilisation and at various points in the nineteenth and early twentieth century

¹¹⁹ Black, *Oxfam: The First Fifty Years*, 70.

¹²⁰ Firoze Manji and Carl O’Coill, ‘The Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa,’ *International Affairs* 78, 3 (2002): 572.

¹²¹ Manji and O’Coill, ‘Missionary Position,’ 576.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 574.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 91.

hunger (and more specifically famine) were put forward as evidence of the failings of the colonial state.¹²⁵ That this did not happen with the FFHC was largely due to the widespread depoliticization of development in this period.

The downplaying of the political can be attributed to three key factors. Firstly, technical and administrative development discourses worked to exclude political agency. Joseph Hodge has shown how poverty had already begun to be depoliticized and dehistoricized in colonial development discourses of the 1940s and 1950s, which recast the social and economic problems of British dependencies as technical ones that could be fixed by rational planning and expert knowledge.¹²⁶ By the 1960s these assumptions dominated development discourse and the underdeveloped world that FFHC sought to support was rarely seen as something actively produced in the course of colonization.¹²⁷ This change is particularly clear when contrasted with the early efforts of the FAO to eradicate global hunger. Although it was the FFHC that brought development discourses into the public eye, its vision of intervention and action was much more conservative than the ideas being discussed at the FAO in the 1940s and early 1950s.

The FAO's first director was Sir John Boyd Orr, a man with experience in both domestic and colonial hunger administration. While most public discourses of hunger in the 1960s failed to associate domestic welfare with international development, for figures like Boyd Orr they were two sides of the same coin.¹²⁸ At the FAO Orr pursued what Frank Trentmann describes as a 'globally integrated picture of food supply that placed domestic rights and duties within an understanding of global needs and trade coordination'; 'the coordination of food supply and demand were reconceived as a shared global project of social justice.'¹²⁹ Orr was supported in these efforts by a number of British figures including E.M.H. Lloyd who had worked for the British Food Ministry during the War and for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in its immediate aftermath and Arthur Salter, who as head of the Economic Department of the League of Nations, had proposed the institution of an International Food Board to prevent price fluctuations and balance

¹²⁵ Vernon, *Hunger*, 41-54.

¹²⁶ Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, 19.

¹²⁷ Marcus Power, 'Commonwealth, Development,' 16.

¹²⁸ Frank Trentmann, 'Coping with Shortage: The Problem of Food Security and Global Visions of Coordination, c.1890s-1950,' in Frank Trentmann and Flemming Just, eds., *Food and Conflict in Europe in the Age of the Two World Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 30.

¹²⁹ Trentmann, 'Coping with Shortage,' 27, 32.

regional deficits in distribution.¹³⁰ But Orr's internationalist vision was rapidly sidelined within the FAO and his visions of food security and relief were compromised by imperial and national interests.¹³¹ While the polarizing climate of the Cold War encouraged nations to prioritize their own interests, the British government was reluctant to cede British control in colonies to international organizations. Governmental interests clearly prioritized the imperial model of internationalism discussed above. In part because of these early failings, when Sen took the helm at the FAO he was distrustful of the ability of national governments to act for the benefit of the wider world. In his role as Director General he worked to ensure that the Freedom from Hunger Campaign was not constrained by political influences, further promoting the depoliticization of development discourses.¹³² By the 1960s, therefore, the FAO had come to focus on improving living conditions rather than restructuring international systems in order to eliminate world hunger.

The second key factor in this depoliticization concerns the broader community of NGOs that supported the FFHC. Although international NGOs arrived on the scene at a rapid rate in the postwar period, the radicalization of many of these new social movements did not take place until the late 1960s. As Adam Lent suggests, for most of the 1960s emphasis on rebuilding traditional family life after the ravages of war made for an unfriendly atmosphere towards radical views about issues such as gender, sexuality and international relations.¹³³ Whereas movements such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Anti-Apartheid Movement embraced radical politics earlier in the 1960s, aid and development organizations only made this transition later on. Most humanitarian organizations had only begun to move from a model of aid and relief to a model of prevention and development in the late 1950s; it took almost a decade before this preventative objective became politicized.

The third and closely related factor in the FFHC's depoliticization was the role played by Charity Commissioners in England in constraining the political activities of charitable NGOs. NGO legitimacy often rests upon both political neutrality and the professionalism with which they can tackle specific issues, a theme Matthew Hilton has addressed. Charity Commissioners scrutinized and curtailed any

¹³⁰ Ruth Jachertz, 'Coping with Hunger? Visions of a Global Food System, 1930-1960,' *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011): 103.

¹³¹ Trentmann, 'Coping with Shortage,' 34.

¹³² Bunch, 'All Roads Go to Rome,' 29.

¹³³ Adam Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945: Sex, Colour, Peace and Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 8.

activities of organizations such as Christian Aid, War on Want and Oxfam that were deemed too political.¹³⁴ Direct calls upon the government for a change of policy were declared uncharitable; for example, Charity Commissioners attempted to stifle the political language of a Manifesto on Aid and Development issued in 1969 by Action for World Development, a grouping of humanitarian organizations including Oxfam, War on Want and Christian Aid. The difficult situation that this created for many NGOs can be seen in debates taking place at Oxfam about the organisation's involvement in 'political' movements for change between those who prioritized fundraising and those who believed that Oxfam ought to be campaigning for social justice. Fundraisers did not want Oxfam's image to be tarnished by pictures of young supporters taking part in CND associations or associating with anti-establishment organizations such as trade unions.¹³⁵ While behind closed doors many supporters may have viewed the FFHC in explicitly anti-colonial terms, their opinions could never be more than tentatively embraced in public by organizations seeking to retain charitable status. In the 1960s many of these pragmatically-minded groups eschewed more radical solutions in order to secure their seat at the technocratic table.¹³⁶

It was not until the end of the decade as social movements began to radicalize that some of these groups developed a more stridently political voice, eventually separating their charitable and lobbying activities so as to avoid the scrutiny of Charity Commissioners. Despite being one of the more openly political organizations involved in the FFHC, for example, War on Want's public assault on industries seen to be exploiting the Third World did not really begin until the early 1970s. Only then did the projects they supported move from conventional aid packages to radical initiatives that allied the organization with the aspirations of the oppressed.¹³⁷

Within this same pattern of depoliticization, public campaign discourse also overlooked the significance of the geopolitics of the Cold War to the FFHC. The desire to shore up newly independent countries against communism had been a key factor in internationalizing development and welfare interventions in former colonies.¹³⁸ In the late 1950s Washington and London decided that Africa—soon to

¹³⁴ Matthew Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain,' *Twentieth Century British History* 22, 2 (2011): 256

¹³⁵ Leather, 'Trade Union and NGO Relations,' 15.

¹³⁶ Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary,' 266.

¹³⁷ See for example, Don Thompson and Rodney Larson, *Where Were You Brother? An Account of Trade Union Imperialism* (London: War on Want, 1978).

¹³⁸ Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*.

become the recipient of the largest portion of British FFHC fundraising—was the next likely area of Soviet expansion.¹³⁹ Such concerns had not diminished in the early 1960s, and inevitably informed the Foreign Office’s wider aid strategy at this time, but they do not seem to register in the public’s support of FFHC. Perhaps quite understandably, the fundraising public did not want to taint the apparent ‘benevolence’ of their donations with an acknowledgement of the altogether more cynical motivations of Cold War international diplomacy that informed the FFHC. Alternatively, perhaps it simply did not occur to most supporters that their whist drive, sponsored walk or hunger lunch could have anything to do with the geopolitics of the Cold War.

For most supporters, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign was about people not politics. As described above, some supporters did link internationalism explicitly to either imperial or anti-colonial frameworks. Most, however, never openly explored or articulated the complex relationship between imperialism and internationalism. This apparent oversight should not necessarily be surprising—there was very little onus on the actors and institutions involved in the campaign to coherently define either internationalism or imperialism. This section reflects in more detail on precisely how Freedom from Hunger entered into the lives of the public. Many of those who donated and became involved did so through associational organizations to which they already belonged. The commitments made by organizations such as the Women’s Institute, the Rotary Club and the United Nations Association at a national level drew many of their members and local committees into the campaign. As described above, the educational remit of each of these organizations meant that their members were more likely to be exposed to the educational material supplied by the FFHC.

But what about the rest of the population? At a national level, campaign organizers made bold claims about the breadth of support that Freedom from Hunger attracted. This was not, for the most part, an exaggeration. The case of Rotherham, where Charles Chislett was local campaign treasurer, attests to the diversity of support for the campaign within specific communities. Donations came in from across the Rotherham community to fund the provision of tools and equipment for an agricultural engineering workshop at the University College of Rhodesia and

¹³⁹ Ovendale, ‘The End of Empire,’ 262.

Nyasaland. Chislett received money from primary and secondary schools; from local businesses such as Steel, Peech and Tozer, Glen Quarries and the Baker Electric Company; from sports and social organizations such as the Rotherham Harriers, the Phoenix Golf Club Ladies Section, the County Police Office sports and social club, the Greaseborough flower arrangement class, the Rotherham and District Allotments and Gardens Council, and the Lambretta scooter club; and from women's organizations such as the Women's Cooperative Guild, the Rotherham Conservative Women's Association, the Rotherham Ladies Circle, the Electrical Association for Women, the Mothers' Union, the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence and the Women's Gas Federation.¹⁴⁰

Methods of fundraising varied significantly and in ways that suggest some members of the community were considerably more engaged with the aims of the campaign than others. For some, participation entailed little more than dropping a shilling in a collection box. Other groups organized specific fundraising events, though not all of these would have increased community awareness about Freedom from Hunger. In Rotherham, for example, the dance held by the Council of Catholic Action and the male voice choir concert put on by the Kimberworth Park Community Association contrast with the activities of the Distaff society which associated its fundraising with the screening of the Freedom from Hunger film in local cinemas. As a whole, however, community fundraising practices in Rotherham and across Britain placed far greater emphasis on sociability than did the national publicity for the campaign, which typically focused on the distress of poverty and the practicality of development. Many areas also combined existing community interests with fundraising in ways that seemed to detract attention from the specific aims of Freedom from Hunger. Members of the Rydale Methodist Youth Club toured a kitchen sink religious drama through fourteen isolated villages on the North York Moors, donating the proceeds to the FFHC. The Minister described the play as 'a very hard-hitting play about religion in a back street'—little to do, that is, with either hunger or development.¹⁴¹ This example contrasts with Chislett's film screenings discussed in the previous chapter where footage of the former empire served to raise money for a local care home.

¹⁴⁰ Freedom from Hunger Campaign Donation Letters, Charles Chislett (RA, 358/F, Box 3).

¹⁴¹ 'Tractor Takes Theatre to Villages,' *Guardian*, 16 April 1963.

That said, it is important to acknowledge that the public's apparent remoteness from geopolitics did not necessarily mean remoteness from international issues entirely. They may have been apolitical, but many were far from disengaged. Instead, their support of the FFHC was informed by a discourse of internationalism much more in tune with Akira Iriye's model of 'New Internationalism', predicated on the idea that nations and peoples should cooperate instead of preoccupying themselves with their respective international interests.¹⁴² This model encouraged the public's participation in a moral global community that existed over and above specific states.¹⁴³

The 'civic tradition' of internationalism that rested on pageantry and public ritual may have begun to show signs of decay by the mid 1950s, but people-to-people internationalism directed through international NGOs thrived in the 1960s. This was epitomized by the wide participation in the UN designated International Cooperation Year in 1965, but can also be seen in the emphasis that organizations such as the Women's Institute and Rotary Club placed on personal interaction in this period.¹⁴⁴ In the context of the FFHC, B.R. Sen was very clear about his desire 'to create a climate of public opinion favourable to genuine international co-operation.' FAO publications repeatedly emphasized the role the FFHC could play as a tool for international cooperation, encouraging a spirit of understanding that was grounded in 'goodwill and good neighbourliness.'¹⁴⁵ By placing greater emphasis on the people-to-people nature of the campaign than on the roles played by various national governments, the FFHC allowed the public to operate at a remove from geopolitics. The focus on the individual dimension of the campaign even appealed to the Foreign Office because it was able to detract attention from government responsibility.

Over and over campaign material lauded the voluntary, personal nature of the FFHC. In a reflection of its international frameworks the press within Britain focused not on the paternalistic potential of the British government as a national (imperial) power but on the networked fundraising efforts of individuals, community groups, and international charities. Appeals for youth involvement, in particular, sought to find ways of uniting young people in one country with their generational counterparts in other parts of the world. A youth mobilisation appeal launched in 1965 intended to

¹⁴² Iriye, *Global Community*, 9.

¹⁴³ Iriye, *Global Community*, 8; Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 102.

¹⁴⁴ McCarthy, 'League of Nations,' 110-111.

¹⁴⁵ *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News* (November 1962), 3.

be more than merely a money-raising venture, for example, aiming to relate acts of service in the local community to service in its worldwide context.¹⁴⁶ Other organizations affiliated to the campaign also adopted this participatory vocabulary with Oxfam, for instance, asking supporters to ‘share in constructive work.’¹⁴⁷ Fundraising activities tapped into these same discourses, often seeking to empathize with those in need and show solidarity through personal sacrifice. Children acted out scenes of hunger in school plays, Scout troops ate a diet of plain rice and camped out under sheets to experience a night as ‘refugees’ and the students of Appleby Grammar School in Westmoreland raised funds through a self-imposed Sweet Denial Week.¹⁴⁸ Some of these efforts were clearly more heartfelt than others. After reading about a particularly unmindful businessmen’s ‘Hunger Lunch’ held to raise money for the campaign, Mrs G.V. Thompson was driven to write in to the *Guardian* to express her disgust: ‘Only melon, veal, peas, potatoes, fresh fruit and coffee! And only one wine! [...] One is filled with sympathy for them in such an ordeal and for their courage in undertaking it.’¹⁴⁹

Those taking part in the campaign also emphasized the local dimensions of the projects that they supported and many groups sought to foster personal ties with those in receipt of aid. Rather than raising money for a central fund, most communities and organizations selected specific projects to support, increasing the sense of identification with those overseas. Bristol, for example raised £48,000 for a Farm Institute in Nyasaland, Nottingham raised £40,000 to extend a training centre for Gwembe fisherman in Northern Rhodesia, and Reading contributed £12,310 to a crossbreeding scheme for dairy cattle in Allahabad.¹⁵⁰ Fundraisers often had a relatively clear idea of precisely how their money would be spent and what would be achieved: 26,000 gallons of milk would be processed daily at a plant in the Andhra Pradesh State of India, for instance, and an agricultural college in Swaziland would be capable of providing a two-year diploma course for twenty students per year.¹⁵¹ Where larger affiliated organizations such as the Women’s Institute might send representatives overseas to report on the progress of their projects, small groups and

¹⁴⁶ Youth Against Hunger Minutes, Youth Mobilisation Appeal, 1965 (SOAS, CA/ I/ 21/3).

¹⁴⁷ ‘How Does Oxfam Act,’ *Guardian*, 2 November 1962.

¹⁴⁸ *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News*, October 1963, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Letters to the Editor, *Guardian*, 22 March 1963.

¹⁵⁰ ‘£5.6 Million Raised for Hunger Campaign’, *Guardian*, 27 May 1964.

¹⁵¹ ‘Freedom from Hunger,’ *Guardian*, 10 December 1962; ‘Who Will Adopt a Herd of Buffaloes?’ Advertisement, *Guardian*, 21 November 1962.

local communities initiated letter-writing exchanges and took advantages of other local resources to learn about the countries and communities that they were supporting.

The experiences that the counties of Somerset and Devon had while fundraising to support farm projects in Tanganyika/Tanzania illustrate just how local, specific and personal British participation in the FFHC could be. Somerset and Devon used FFHC to assert their local and regional identities at the same time that they declared and celebrated membership of a wider international community. The following account clearly expresses the sense of local *and* national pride that these counties invested in their participation in the campaign:

Local rivalries have played a major part, from a friendly game of one-upmanship scored in tennis between the two county committees, to a ding dong battle between two extremely enthusiastic borough councils who have trebled their original targets. This fact was not unnoticed by four Tanganyikan journalists who visited us recently and went home to describe the people of Somerset of Devon as “a grace to the whole of the British Isles” but went on to say they found “our tribal differences intriguing.”

For Somerset and Devon, the FFHC was about more than just raising money for farmers’ training centres in East Africa. At the heart of the two counties’ involvement in the campaign was an exciting opportunity to forge links between their own ‘largely rural community’ and what Devon committee member Julia Canning Cook, described as ‘some far distant land’. During the campaign, the Secretary for the Somerset Committee, Hubert Fox, flew out to see conditions at their sponsored projects in Tanganyika bringing back a filmed record of his journey and an exhibition of African arts and crafts which toured the neighbouring counties in the back of a Mini.¹⁵² Fox was even able to meet Julius Nyerere at a London airport who, as he described ‘was most enthusiastic about the “people-to-people” aspect of the FFHC and even declared it was much more valuable than anything a government could do.’¹⁵³ These clearly novel experiences led Canning Cook to conclude that from FFHC

something quite new has emerged. A deep and lasting understanding by individuals in these two counties of the difficulties facing subsistence farmers in Tanganyika, and on their part a realisation that people here are interested in them as fellow farmers facing the mammoth task of conquering hunger.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News*, October 1963, 8.

¹⁵³ *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News*, September-October 1962, 32.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Here, as in the Women's Institutes discussed in Chapter Two, Somerset's and Devon's experiences draw our attention to an important aspect of cosmopolitanism and globalisation that is often overlooked: the particular globalisation experience of rural communities in developed countries. The way in which they emphasized rurality as a point of commonality across national boundaries closely resembles the way in which the Women's Institute participated in the campaign. As Christopher Rootes has argued, social movements 'network collective action across geographical space'.¹⁵⁵ FFHC was no exception, its practices and discourses permeating and transcending urban and rural communities across Britain.

The Public's Part in Development - Conclusion

The typical narrative of postwar development is one of professionalization – what Joseph Hodge elegantly describes as the 'triumph of the expert.' It is a compelling narrative, set largely in late colonial Africa, in which the experienced district administrator who 'knew his native' was replaced by the educated specialist who 'knew his science'. Its basic tenets were also repeated in NGO initiatives where the enthusiastic amateur found himself marginalized from the increasingly professionalized ranks of development employees.¹⁵⁶ In many respects the Freedom from Hunger Campaign is the perfect illustration of these trends—a cadre of experts sent out into the field to carry out extensive research, their findings and progress carefully recorded and picked over in technical publications and at conferences. But the FFHC also complicates this narrative. When we look beyond events taking place in Whitehall or on the ground in 'underdeveloped countries', as this chapter has aimed to do, we start to see an alternative story of inclusion rather than exclusion. The FFHC provided the British public with an unprecedented opportunity to get involved with the international development movement. Rather than excluding them from the triumph of expertise, the campaign's educational imperative sought to include them within it.

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Rootes, 'From the Local to the Global: the Globalization of Humanitarian Concern and the Emergence of "Global Citizenship,"' paper prepared for the Panel on 'Europeanisation and Democracy in Movement', European Consortium for Political Research Conference, Pisa, 6-8 September 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*.

Most work on NGOs and global civil society has tended to focus on what Matthew Hilton describes as the ‘more dramatic forms of campaigning and protests that emerged out of New Social Movements associated with the 1960s’—women’s rights, anti-nuclear campaigns and the Anti-Apartheid Movement prominent among them.¹⁵⁷ But charitable campaigns such as the FFHC were also an important part of Britain’s postwar ‘internal globalisation’, through which issues of global concern became part of ‘ordinary’ experiences of the British public. FFHC provided people with diverse opportunities to participate in everyday forms of international activism—attending fundraising events, running local committees and taking part in educational activities. The campaign also became entwined in peoples’ lives in ways that could be very personal. Mrs. Sarah A. Entwistle, a bereaved mother from Manchester, made an annual donation to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign on the anniversary of the birthday of her son, ‘a brilliant student who died tragically shortly after he graduated from Cambridge’. Another campaign supporter decided that each day he and his wife would lay a symbolic plate at their table in the name of the world’s hungry and set aside a small donation towards solving the problem.¹⁵⁸ With the limited sources available, we can never fully understand the motivations that shaped these individual experiences. This difficulty does not, however, remove our responsibility to remain sensitive to the FFHC’s micro-histories and to avoid as much as possible doing any violence to them when we reconstruct the macro-discourses that framed the campaign.

What does it mean that the public spoke in terms of internationalism and acted within imperial geographies? As Neil Smith has warned it is ‘a mistake to conclude that [...] de-colonisation marked the end of empire. It did effectively signal an end to colonialism as a specific form of empire, but imperial interest and global reach continue to the present.’¹⁵⁹ If anything, through its vigorous educational efforts the FFHC increased rather than decreased public engagement with the spaces of empire and former-empire in this period. As Hartley diagnosed in 1963, even those who were critical of imperialism and ‘fled with horror from the idea of being colonialists’ could not resist the allure of ‘technical assistance’ and ‘aid to underdeveloped countries’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Hilton, ‘Politics is Ordinary,’ 240.

¹⁵⁸ *Freedom from Hunger Campaign News*, October 1963, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Neil Smith, ‘Introduction: Postcolonial Geographies’, in Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, eds. *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1994), 268.

¹⁶⁰ Hartley, *State of England*, 72.

Jordanna Bailkin has suggested that we might ‘read this era not in terms of a withdrawal from empire, but rather as a reinvestment in a new internationalism in which the former empire played a significant part.’¹⁶¹ This is certainly true of the public’s participation in the FFHC.

The FFHC shows that even if decolonization did not register as a traumatic event for most Britons, and even if habits of imperial philanthropy endured the end of the empire, the way in which the public conceptualized these international engagements was gradually changing. As James Vernon has argued, in the postwar period British-based NGOs neatly repackaged the old imperial conceits of the civilizing mission into their efforts in the now global war on hunger.¹⁶² By mapping the discourses of development onto old imperial geographies, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign helped Britain to transform its colonial development apparatus into a foreign aid system; at the same time it also helped the British public to see themselves international humanitarians rather than imperial philanthropists.

¹⁶¹ Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire* (forthcoming).

¹⁶² Vernon, *Hunger*, 273.

Chapter Five:

‘A Shrinking World and a Secular Age’¹: Christian Aid, the Parish, and the End of Empire

A Secular Age or a Secular Outlook? Reinstating Religion within Histories of Decolonization

Religion does not figure strongly in histories of British decolonization. This neglect is particularly surprising given the important role that religion and, in particular, missionaries are seen to have played in the formation, expansion and justification of the British Empire. Missionaries not only made up a significant proportion of the white British population living overseas, the networks of which they were part also tied the domestic British public to these foreign spaces. The nature of the relationship between missionaries, churches and imperialism has always been complex, attracting animated debate about the degree to which Christian missions were implicated in the imperial project.² As Andrew Porter contends, ‘the manner in which missionaries both experienced empire and interpreted that experience for others at home and overseas varied under the shifting influences of racial perceptions, denominational politics, gender, class and theological fashion.’³ Research into domestic ecclesiastical attitudes to British rule abroad has revealed how closely interrelated these attitudes were with the experiences of missionaries overseas.⁴ Crucially for this project, missionary involvement focused domestic churchgoers’ attention on the empire on a regular and passionate basis in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁵ Pamphlets, travel accounts and sermons related first-hand imperial

¹ Kenneth Sansbury, letter to *The Times*, 3 August 1967.

² Andrew Porter, ‘Introduction,’ in Andrew Porter, ed. *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), 1. See also Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).

³ Porter, ‘Introduction,’ 3.

⁴ David Bebbington, ‘Atonement, Sin, and Empire, 1880-1914,’ in Andrew Porter, ed. *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co.:Cambridge, 2003), 16.

⁵ Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1999).

experiences to less mobile audiences, while church campaigns such as those against slavery and the practice of sati formed bonds of care between the metropole and its imperial peripheries. This chapter asks how these traditions were affected by the end of empire.

Decolonization affected the Christian churches and their followers in multiple ways and encouraged a broad range of responses. In particular, churches overseas were put under increasing pressure to ‘indigenize’ their structures and respond to growing demands for independence. While a growing body of scholarship addresses these ‘overseas’ adaptations, little attention has been paid to the changing relationship between religion and empire *within* Britain at this time.⁶ Sarah Stockwell’s work on the active role played by Archbishop Fisher during decolonization reinstates the upper Anglican Church hierarchy in our wider understanding of the political discussions and processes through which Britain divested itself of an empire.⁷ Yet the broader role of domestic religious life in shaping the public’s engagement with decolonization—reaching from the top of the institutional hierarchy to the local parish church, and including affiliated organisations and campaigns—remains shadowy and under-defined.

Changing practices in missionary work overseas had diverse repercussions in domestic Britain. As with the Colonial Civil Service, decolonisation forced many missionaries to leave posts across the British Empire, contributing to the broader movement of return-migration discussed in relation to the Royal Commonwealth Society in Chapter One. The expatriate experience of these missionaries was not uniform, but it shaped the domestic experience of decolonisation in significant ways. Missionaries redeployed their energies in a range of geographic and employment fields: many returned to posts in small, rural English parishes; others travelled to evangelise in Communist countries in Eastern Europe; some took up posts working with immigrant congregations in English cities; while others became involved in social activism such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement and in humanitarian organisations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid.

⁶ Paul Gifford, ed., *Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Brian Stanley, ed. *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003); John Stuart, ‘Race Politics and Evangelisation: British Protestant Missionaries and African Colonial Affairs, 1940–1963,’ (PhD diss., University of London, 2003); John Stuart, ‘Scottish Missionaries and the End of Empire: The Case of Nyasaland,’ *Historical Research* 76 (2003): 411–30.

⁷ Sarah Stockwell, ‘“Splendidly Leading the Way”? Archbishop Fisher and Decolonization in British Colonial Africa,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36,3 (2008): 545–564.

Stockwell's work emphasises the ongoing importance of dense networks linking the Church at home to the work of overseas missions. For Archbishop Fisher, this network of contacts allowed him to make empathetic personal connections with the concerns of individuals of all political persuasions and kept him abreast of the situation in overseas missions.⁸ But we know little about what these networks looked like beyond the upper echelons of the Church. As discussed in the Introduction, Catherine Hall begins her rich account of Baptist ties between Birmingham and Jamaica in the mid-nineteenth century, *Civilising Subjects*, by describing how religious networks shaped her own childhood:

At home the sense of a Baptist family stretching across the globe was always part of domestic life: missionaries from 'the field', on 'furlough', bringing me stamps for my collection; African students studying at the university who were invited for Christmas or Sunday tea; the small concerns we held to raise money for 'good causes' both near and far.⁹

As this chapter will show, many others shared similar experiences with Hall. Yet aside from biographical vignettes in forewords and introductions such as the above, religious networks and activities have been the subjects of little focused analysis. John Stuart's inquiry into the influence of religious institutions on public understandings of Mau Mau between 1945 and 1963 outlines some of the ways in which Christian projects sought to encourage (and also delineate) public engagement with Africa during decolonization, but it also points to the need for further detailed study, particularly in relation to post-war British Christianity as a whole.¹⁰

This chapter focuses on one aspect of this wider experience, offering a detailed analysis of the work of the humanitarian organisation Christian Aid. The organisation began its life as Inter-Church Aid in 1948 and operated as the humanitarian arm of the ecumenical British Council of Churches (BCC), which had been founded in 1942 to continue the work done by earlier bodies concerned with international friendship, social action and faith.¹¹ Like the BCC, Christian Aid was a

⁸ Stockwell, 'Splendidly Leading the Way,' 547.

⁹ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2002), 3.

¹⁰ John Stuart, 'Overseas Mission, Voluntary Service and Aid to Africa: Max Warren, the Church Missionary Society and Kenya, 1945-63,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 3 (2008): 527-543.

¹¹ *Area Secretaries' Manual Notes*, 5 (Christian Aid Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, (hereafter SOAS): CA2/I/18/1). Inter-Church Aid changed its name to Christian Aid in 1964. I refer to the organisation as Christian Aid throughout.

predominantly Anglican organisation, but its ecumenical reach also included Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, and Free Churches while also being well represented by the Society of Friends. Christian Aid's objectives were very similar to those of other humanitarian organisations working at the same time. The majority of the Christian Aid budget was allocated to two distinct needs: immediate, short-term relief in response to political crises and natural disasters, and long-term development projects to support ongoing growth. But Christian Aid also had a religious remit: throughout the decade a proportion of its funds was allocated specifically to 'aid churches or other Christian bodies' and 'train Christian Ministers, teachers and leaders.'¹²

The vast majority of development schemes supported by Christian Aid were administered on the ground by churches, missions, Councils of Churches and other ecumenical bodies. As an appeal via the BBC described, 'Because Christian Aid is rooted in the churches and because the churches are rooted in the developing countries we have something more than mere contacts in places where need exists—we have fellowship.'¹³ Christian Aid not only operated through religious networks, it also expressed itself in religious terms, anxious to relate its work to 'the biblical understanding of Christ's service to the church and world'.¹⁴ Alan Brash, Director of Christian Aid between 1968 and 1970, described the specifically Christian duty that the public owed to humanitarian work: 'Above all the pressure is from Jesus Christ Himself—found still as He said, in the hungry, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. It is His mission that we are about.'¹⁵

Yet despite being one of the largest and most public Christian organisations in Britain at this time, Christian Aid has been the subject of little historical enquiry. There are two likely reasons for this neglect. The first and more justifiable is that scholars have only recently begun to pay serious attention to the domestic institutional operation of humanitarian organisations and, in these early stages, have focused on the largest and most well known of these: Oxfam.¹⁶ Although Inter-Church Aid was the largest contributor to World Refugee Year in 1959 (raising

¹² Constitution for the Christian Aid Department, 1960 (SOAS: CA/I/1/4).

¹³ 'The Week's Good Cause Appeal on Behalf of Christian Aid' for BBC Home Service, 18 February 1968, (SOAS: CA/I/14/4).

¹⁴ *Area Secretaries' Manual Notes*, 21, (SOAS: CA2/I/18/1).

¹⁵ Alan Brash, Address to British Council of Churches, 1968, (SOAS: CA/I/1/1).

¹⁶ Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxfam: Oxfam Publications, 1992).

£1,253,500 to Oxfam's £755,900) this dynamic quickly shifted.¹⁷ Over the next few years, Oxfam established itself as a charity of international status, in large part because of its ability to mobilise support through schools and its early aptitude for advertising; its income soon exceeded that of Christian Aid. That said, though smaller than Oxfam, Christian Aid remained a well-known organisation, with its yearly Christian Aid Week becoming a regular part of the humanitarian calendar.

The second and more problematic reason for Christian Aid's neglect is the assumption often made about the irrelevance of religious organisations to 1960s Britain. Jeffrey Cox suggests that historians of twentieth-century Britain have, for the most part, adopted a secular outlook.¹⁸ With the exception of those writing explicitly about the 'crisis' or 'death' of Christian Britain, this diagnosis applies particularly to scholarship on the period after the 1950s. But if, as Callum Brown describes, Christian Britain died in 1963, why should we not adopt a secular approach?¹⁹ In unprecedented numbers, the British public stopped going to church, confirmation rates plummeted and, according to Brown, 'the British people stopped absorbing Christianity into their lives.'²⁰ Simon Green argues that local religious classes 'lost heart' in the 'associational ideal' of Christianity back in the 1920s, while Frank Prochaska describes how contemporary 'intellects no longer relate to the lost world of parish life.'²¹ Meanwhile, the declining societal influence of conservative sections of the Church can be seen in the erosion of constraints on civil liberties such as censorship and criminal laws against abortion, homosexuality and gambling.²²

Despite the apparently increasing marginality of religion within 1960s life, there are important reasons to include a specifically religious case study within this wider analysis of Britain's engagement with the declining empire. Christian Aid represents part of a much longer history of religion, missionary work and imperial interaction and therefore allows us to consider how established patterns of

¹⁷ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, 61.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Cox, 'From the Empire of Christ to the Third World: Religion and the Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century,' in Andrew Thompson, ed. *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 83.

¹⁹ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁰ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²¹ Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 2, 4, 11; Simon Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 381-88.

²² Callum Brown, 'What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?' *Journal of Religious History* 34, 4 (2010): 468-479.

engagement changed in the face of imperial decline. Moreover, the church has always been about more than religion. There are other, broader ways of thinking about the role of the churches, in which an apparent decline in religiosity need not be seen as evidence of the irrelevance of those institutions to British life. As Cox critiques, studies of the role of the church are often hampered by the assumption that they are concerned only with something narrowly defined as ‘religion’ and understood to be distinct from things that are social or political.²³

Rather than adopt a rigid definition of Christianity, we need to be more attentive to the ways in which individuals shaped religious belief and practice to their own needs.²⁴ In recent years the narrative of post-war secularisation has come under increasing scrutiny.²⁵ Rather than focusing on what has allegedly been lost, historians have begun to shift their attention to the ways in which religion was being transformed, taking account of its changing visibility in political and public life and identifying how the institutions, practices and discourses of the church continued to play a meaningful role in the lives of many Britons.²⁶ As Jeremy Morris observes, ‘it is a strange death that leaves churches amongst the largest voluntary organisations in the country’.²⁷ It is worthwhile contemplating if any other voluntary institution that was able to attract so many people to an ordinary weekly meeting would be judged a failure.²⁸ Although the pervasiveness of religion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century would never be regained, religious motivation and church activity nonetheless continued to have bearing on postwar British associational life. Christian Aid reveals how the changing role of religion in 1960s civic society interacted with legacies of religious activity in the British Empire to shape the public’s engagement with imperial decline.

By introducing an explicitly Christian case study of humanitarian intervention in addition to the secular Freedom from Hunger Campaign already discussed, it is not my intention to segregate Christian and non-Christian responses to the end of empire.

²³ Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 48.

²⁴ Jeremy Morris, ‘The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularisation Debate,’ *The Historical Journal* 46,4 (2003): 970.

²⁵ Jane Garnett et al, eds. *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (London: SCM Press, 2006).

²⁶ Holger Nehring, ‘“The Long Night is Over” The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, ‘Generation’ and the Politics of Religion,’ in Garnett, ed., *Redefining Christian Britain*, 138.

²⁷ Morris, ‘The Secularisation Debate,’ 976.

²⁸ Jeffrey Cox asks this of the late nineteenth century, but the question remains relevant to 1960s Britain. Cox, *English Churches*, 5.

For one, as John Stuart argues, disaggregating the interests of British Christians from those of the British public at large is not an easy task.²⁹ Christian Aid could not claim to represent all British Christians, as much as its use of generalised pleas to Christian morality might seem to suggest. Other religious organisations also joined the attack on Third World poverty and Christian Aid was just one of many to participate in the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. Others included the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development and The Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund (TEAR), which appealed to many of those unwilling to support Christian Aid because of its association with the theologically more liberal British Council of Churches.³⁰ Yet neither did the Church delimit Christian Aid; as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, many of those who gave money were not churchgoers at all. Janet Lacey, Director of Christian Aid between 1952 and 1968, spoke of the ‘compulsion of ordinary men and women’ who, ‘while unable to accept the Christian faith in a “package deal” or as a philosophy of life, are in large numbers occupied with caring for the refugees, the persecuted, the homeless and all in need.’³¹

This was not, therefore, a closed network. Throughout the 1960s both Christians and the a-religious acted within, across and outside the boundaries of Christian Aid, revealing multiple affiliations and multiple enthusiasms. A number of key figures in Christian Aid were also members of the Royal Commonwealth Society, for example, many hailing from backgrounds in colonial administration. One such man was Bryan Dudbridge, who worked as a District Officer and Provincial Commissioner in Tanganyika before taking up the post of Associate Director of Christian Aid in 1963.³² Perhaps more importantly, religious believers were everywhere, not just in Christian Aid. Religious figures who were members of the Royal Commonwealth Society but not actively involved in Christian Aid or the British Council of Churches included Reverend John Baker, general secretary of the Church Overseas Council from 1955 to 1963 and Reverend Canon Peter Bostock, Chairman of the Christian Council of Kenya from 1957 to 1958 and Assistant Secretary of the Missionary and Ecumenical Council of the Church Assembly from

²⁹ John Stuart, ‘Overseas Mission,’ 539.

³⁰ Gerald Parsons, ‘From Consensus to Confrontation: Religion and Politics in Britain since 1945,’ in Parsons, ed. *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), 131.

³¹ Janet Lacey, *A Cup of Water* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 35.

³² ‘DUDBRIDGE, Bryan James’, *Who Was Who* (online edn: Oxford University Press, 2007) [<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U178116>, accessed 2 March 2011].

1967 to 1970.³³ Charles Chislett was an active member of his Church and superintendent of the local Sunday school but not, apparently, involved in Christian Aid. These examples make clear that Christian Aid was not the only way in which a religious member of the British public might engage with the former empire.

Many churchgoers also supported secular humanitarian organisations including Amnesty International, War on Want, Oxfam, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and Shelter.³⁴ In an effort to indicate the breadth of Christian influence in post-war Britain, recent work documents the key roles played by self-identified Christians in organisations such as Oxfam and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Jeffrey Cox has noted that Christians concerned with global affairs were often less likely to work in explicitly Christian institutions.³⁵ Meredith Veldman goes so far as to suggest that the ‘Christian witness’ flourished not inside but outside institutional Christianity in campaigns such as CND and in organisations such as Oxfam.³⁶ But how meaningful is it to talk of these organisations as Christian? In this period, Oxfam was heavily reliant on Christian agencies to distribute their relief funds. Studying Oxfam’s annual reports, Cox reveals that the organisation distributed its funds through ‘a vast ecumenical array of foreign mission projects’. Money went to the Salvation Army, the United Free Church of Scotland, the Baptist Missionary Society, the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, and even the World Council of Churches.³⁷ Yet if Oxfam was religious in origin and even in practice, it was certainly secular in its rhetoric. Its consistent use of such rhetoric made the organisation’s origins invisible to many of its contributors and supporters.³⁸ More work needs to be done on the role of Christianity within these avowedly secular organisations, but such a broad study is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Instead, this chapter uses the case study of Christian Aid to think about how self-consciously Christian engagements related to secular ones. It maps the intricate interplay between changes in the patterns of domestic religious and associational life

³³ ‘BAKER, Rt. Rev John Gilbert Hindley’, *Who Was Who*, [http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U161681, accessed 24 Feb 2011];

BOSTOCK, Rev. Canon Peter Geoffrey’, *Who Was Who*, [http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U177032, accessed 8 Sept 2011]

³⁴ Parsons, ‘Consensus to Confrontation,’ 132.

³⁵ Cox, ‘From the Empire of Christ,’ 106.

³⁶ Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160.

³⁷ Cox, ‘From the Empire of Christ,’ 109-10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

and changes in Britain's relationship with the outside world. Christian Aid took shape at the nexus of three wider trends, each of which influenced its ideology, objectives and practice: the post-war effort to redefine Christian Britain according to ideals of active Christian citizenship and social responsibility; the simultaneous transition that many humanitarian organisations made from a 'relief' model of intervention to a 'development' model (as discussed in the previous chapter) and from working primarily in European post-war reconstruction work to working in a more international field; and the changing role of the church overseas, and in particular the role of missionaries in imperial settings. This chapter addresses each of these in turn before evaluating how supporters of Christian Aid understood these practices in relation to the declining empire. The final section asks how Christian Aid was experienced in the parish. To what extent did participants in Christian Aid buy into its institutional discourses? How, in real terms, did the organisation connect the public to the outside world?

Redefining Christian Britain

As the previous chapter described, 1960s Britain was a society in flux. For conservative members of the Church many of these changes were seen as battlegrounds on which the moral condition of Britain needed to be defended. Public debates centered on sexual permissiveness, obscenity and moral decline. Key events in the first half of the decade included the Lady Chatterley trial in 1960, what Bernard Levin called the 'holy rage' over a naked woman at a literary conference in 1963, the Profumo scandal in 1963 and Mary Whitehouse's ongoing campaign against sex and nudity on British television.³⁹ Yet morally conservative Christians did not represent the full spectrum of religious participation. For many, the conservative preoccupation with moral standards came at the expense of real Christian action. In the House of Lords in January 1960, Lord Winterton complained that the Church spent a great deal of time in discussing questions of divorce and remarriage, 'almost to the exclusion' of

³⁹ Brown, 'What was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?' 472; Mark Roodhouse, 'Lady Chatterley and the Monk: Anglican Radicals and the Lady Chatterley Trial of 1960,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59, 3 (2008): 475-500.

factors that seemed to him more important from a Christian point of view: slaughter on the roads, refugee problems and the appalling amount of crime.⁴⁰

In the 1960s the issue of Christian social responsibility was at the heart of debates about secularisation, pluralism and religious change. Increasing emphasis was placed on active Christian citizenship across the denominations. This was, in part, the continuation of a long-term growth in liberal Protestantism, quietly on the rise since the inter-war period and focused on action rather than theology. More fully, it represents the politicisation of a specific form of benevolent humanistic Christianity that took place in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. Bebbington attributes this transformation to the mushrooming of sociology in British universities at this time—a trend that was ‘bound to have consequences in a movement strongly moulded by graduates’—while McLeod sees the formation of a movement of ‘pragmatic Christians’ who triggered theological innovation and church modernisation alongside the formation of Christian political movements.⁴¹ Such reform was also clearly influenced by the haemorrhage of people from organised Christianity. Despite a hope-inspiring rise in church attendance figures in the 1950s, this was followed by a sharp drop in the 1960s. This apparent ‘crisis’ of Christianity prompted many to re-evaluate the church’s role in British life.

Holger Nehring’s work on Christian CND protestors between 1957 and 1964 reveals how ‘religion was no longer linked to the Church as an institution, but focused on the distinction between “political” and “unpolitical”.’ Christian protestors sought to bring a set of moral beliefs and community back to the centre of British politics which, they felt, had become absent from more mainstream religious theories and practices.’⁴² The Christian subgroup of CND saw its task as not only working for unilateral disarmament but also leading the church back to its rightful mission. While more leftwing than most, their views were nevertheless representative of a widespread belief that the social and political implications of Christian faith required more explicit expression within 1960s Britain.⁴³

The British Council of Churches (BCC)—of which Christian Aid represented the humanitarian arm—was at the centre of this transformation. In 1961, its General

⁴⁰ Kenneth Sansbury, Letters Page, *The Times*, 1 February 1960.

⁴¹ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989) 264.

⁴² Nehring, ‘The Long Night is Over,’ 144.

⁴³ Parsons, ‘From Consensus to Confrontation,’ 131.

Secretary Kenneth Slack responded to Lord Winterton's aforementioned complaint of church ineffectuality with a letter to *The Times*:

The British Council of Churches, which contains almost all the Churches of the British Isles save the Roman Catholic has in the past year published a report *Priority for Road Safety*, the result of four years' work, which was considered sufficiently serviceable to be sent by the Post Office to all its transport depots. In the 15 months to September 30, 1959, almost £500,000 was raised by the Churches within the Council for refugees and other stricken people. [...] The Council at the present time is closely cooperating with the Home Office on help that the Churches can give in the prevention of crime and the rehabilitation of the criminal

By 1968 this political intent had become an explicit part of Christian Aid's remit. Speaking to the BBC, Alan Brash explained how Christian and national responsibility were intertwined: 'To cut off individual and church response from involvement in the national response,' Brash warned, 'is to make ourselves increasingly irrelevant—of fiddling not while Rome burns but while the world falls apart.' From now on, Christian Aid would see it as its own personal failure if the nation ceased to care. This decision was emphasised in a 1969 report that described the 'renewed emphasis on our foundation in Jesus Christ on the one hand and the stressing of the challenge for a total response, by individual, church and nation on the other.'⁴⁴ Working through the World Council of Churches (of which the BCC was a member), ideals of Christian citizenship were extended to require individuals to act as members of an international as well as national community.

While much of its politicisation was focused on securing development aid for the needy poor overseas, Christian Aid also felt a responsibility to the ecumenical movement as a whole. By working towards political and humanitarian ends, Christian Aid not only sought to provide leadership for the nation's Christian conscience, it also aimed to rehabilitate the image of the Church in British public life. Janet Lacey in particular was concerned about the growing gap between ordinary people and the church.⁴⁵ 'If a door was slammed in a collector's face because the word Christian was on the envelope,' Lacey warned, 'then there was something wrong with the image of the Church. We hoped this would be an opportunity to engage in a dialogue

⁴⁴ Christian Aid Report to 54th Meeting of the British Council of Churches, 1969 (SOAS: CA/I/1/4).

⁴⁵ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 34.

about people's needs and for the Church to be seen to care.⁴⁶ Lacey was vocal in her criticism of the 'narrowness' of those she saw as 'obsessed' with institutional affairs, arguing that the official ecumenical organisations were becoming irrelevant to contemporary British society.⁴⁷ Christian Aid became a way to redefine, reassert and make relevant the role of religion in the lives of 'ordinary people'. As an early report described, 'It is our hope that not a few caught a fresh vision of the real meaning of Christian charity and its significance as an essential part of the growing together of the divided Church.'⁴⁸ Committee reports throughout the 1960s were rife with suggestions on how to inspire ecumenical enthusiasm. One on training and education sought to 'liberate people of all kinds [...] to feel that [the work of Christian Aid] is not a chore, but a living response to the Christ that we recognise in our fellow men.'⁴⁹

Christian Aid aimed not just for informed religious engagement on the part of the public but also for lively ecumenical cooperation. It was hoped that the organisation would get the churches 'working together inter-denominationally and encourage their members to become permanently interested in Inter-Church Aid as their own ecumenical agency.'⁵⁰ As Brash put it rather bluntly,

If the congregations of every church are not activated by their own Christian beliefs to the point where they jointly provide the nucleus of all initiative in Christian Aid Week, then the help given by us to the world's needy is something less than inter-church aid, however impressive it may be in terms of money.⁵¹

Reflecting on the ecumenical impact of Christian Aid in more positive terms, a report on an early Christian Aid Week celebrated the fact that 'some local Councils of Churches will never be the same again' because they found in Christian Aid 'new fellowship and fresh impetus in their overall activities.'⁵² The organisation was also understood as a potentially powerful recruitment tool. When Christian Aid Week was first introduced in 1957, the organisation hoped that it would 'prove to be a positive part of the total evangelistic task of Christians everywhere'.⁵³ Christian Aid felt that

⁴⁶ Letter from Janet Lacey to Area Secretaries, April 1965 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3).

⁴⁷ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 34.

⁴⁸ Inter-Church Aid report to 31st Meeting of the British Council of Churches, 1957 (SOAS: CA/I/1/4).

⁴⁹ 'Training and Education: The Present Picture and our Opportunities for Development' (SOAS: CA/I/5/3).

⁵⁰ *A Guide for Organisers of Christian Aid Weeks*, pamphlet for 1964 campaign (SOAS: CA/I/4/1).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Inter-Church Aid Report to 33rd Meeting of the British Council of Churches, 1958 (SOAS: CA/I/1/4).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

they ‘perhaps more than any other Christian organisation [were] are able to be a bridge between the Church and the community.’⁵⁴ As one report described, ‘many people not in active touch with a local Christian community have first been put in touch with the work of the Churches because they have cared for the hungry and the outcast and have helped Christian Aid.’⁵⁵ But how did it put these communities in touch with the wider world? The next two sections discuss how the work of Christian Aid represents a shift in both the field and the type of interest that domestic churches showed towards the outside world. They consider how and why these changes took place as well as asking how they informed the public’s relationship with the spaces of the declining empire.

Neighbours in Need: The Geographical Reach of Christian Aid

In 1968, ten years after the first Christian Aid Week, the Joint International Department of the British Council of Churches released a policy statement declaring the ‘business’ of the churches ‘to draw attention to the moral aspects of political, economic and technical problems’.⁵⁶ This statement adopted an international outlook, drawing particular attention to nuclear disarmament, domestic race relations, Rhodesia, the Nigerian civil war, and Vietnam. The appendix on Christian Aid also spoke in global terms, declaring that the organisation was involved in ‘world development’, committed to ‘world-wide economic justice’ and accepted responsibility in the face of ‘human need round the world’.⁵⁷ This represented a significant expansion of the organisation’s initial remit.

Christian Aid’s objectives had always been closely tied to those of the British Council of Churches. Until the early 1950s the Council’s main preoccupations lay within Europe, absorbed in particular with the work of Christian reconstruction through service to European refugees.⁵⁸ The scale of post-war reconstruction was

⁵⁴ ‘Training and Education: The Present Picture and our Opportunities for Development’ (SOAS: CA/1/5/3).

⁵⁵ *Area Secretaries’ Manual Notes* (SOAS: CA2/1/18/1), 12.

⁵⁶ British Council of Churches Joint International Department Policy Statement, 1968 reproduced in Ernest Payne, *Thirty Years of the British Council of Churches, 1942-1972* (London: British Council of Churches, 1972), Appendix V.

⁵⁷ A Policy Statement by the British Council of Churches on Christian Aid and World Development, October 1968, reproduced in Payne, *British Council of Churches*, 55.

⁵⁸ Payne, *British Council of Churches*, 13.

immense. Bombing created widespread homelessness; over twelve million people who had been displaced during the war needed repatriation; and the redrawing of boundaries in the East in the second half of 1945 created millions of refugees all in need of food, clothes and housing. Christian Aid's origins are strikingly similar to Oxfam's and both were born out of the same need. Formed in 1942 to provide wartime famine relief, Oxfam initially raised money for the Greek Red Cross before responding to Victor Gollancz's call to 'Save Europe Now' and joining the European Relief Appeal in 1945. Heavily involved in post-war reconstruction, Oxfam lobbied the British Ministry of Food to allow rations to be donated to starving German children and sent shoes and clothing to refugees across Europe.⁵⁹

In a similar pattern, Janet Lacey, who would go on to be the first Director of Inter Church Aid, was directly involved in the BCC's early work in European reconstruction. In 1946 she went to Germany with the YWCA to develop educational programmes for demobilising soldiers, but at seeing 'suffering beyond description' among the German population and in refugee camps vowed to get involved.⁶⁰ Lacey's conviction that she 'must be in a position to fight for the right of man to be free wherever he was' echoed the human rights discourses developing at this time.⁶¹ Once Inter-Church Aid was established in 1948 the organisation supported the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration's (UNRRA) work with refugees, sending relief teams overseas and finding sponsors for those refugees who were accepted for resettlement.⁶²

In the mid-1950s in close association with the Council for British Missionary Societies, the BCC set out a policy for action that reaffirmed these European objectives while also extending their field of action. While members of the Royal Commonwealth Society had imagined European involvement as a move away from the empire and Commonwealth, neither the BCC nor Christian Aid regarded the two geographical fields as in competition with one another. In this period, Oxfam, Save the Children and Christian Aid all began to respond to disasters beyond the bounds of

⁵⁹ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, 23, 25-29. See also Mark Mazower, 'Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues,' *Past and Present* Supplement 6 (2011): 17-28; Jessica Reinisch, 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA,' *Past and Present* Supplement 6 (2011): 258-289.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 28.

⁶¹ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 28; For a discussion of internationalism, human rights and post-war reconstruction see Tara Zahra, "'A Human Treasure": Europe's Displaced Children Between Nationalism and Internationalism,' *Past and Present* Supplement 6 (2011): 332-50.

⁶² Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 49.

Europe, gradually filling in the map of overseas relief.⁶³ BCC activity was expanded to include support of the United Nations, negotiation with the People's Republic of China, opposition to racial discrimination in Britain and more widely, and assistance to underdeveloped peoples.⁶⁴ By 1963 Christian Aid's remit was described as 'a potential witness of the Churches working together for all in need, regardless of creed.'⁶⁵ A pamphlet on the Politics of Aid reminded young Christian Aid supporters that 'these trapped people are not a different species even though their emaciated bodies may sometimes suggest that they are.'⁶⁶

Refugee work remained hugely important to Christian Aid as it established itself within the international humanitarian field. World Refugee Year (1959-1960) was the first major campaign for Christian Aid Week. The total funds raised during the third and fourth Christian Aid Weeks represented a dramatic increase in the organisation's revenue: from £90,000 in 1958 to £253,729 in 1959 and £600,000 in 1960. The boost given to Christian Aid by externally-funded World Refugee Year promotional material helped to establish the organisation as a regular fixture in the humanitarian calendar. In the first half of the 1960s, however, as the geographical reach of Christian Aid shifted from Europe to the Third World, their focus also began to move away from refugee work and towards development initiatives instead. In 1960, £126,500 of the total £213,420 distributed by Christian Aid had been allocated to World Refugee Year projects, while £12,000 went to 'emergencies' in the Congo, Philippines, Cameroon, Yugoslavia and Ruanda-Urundi and a further £69,920 to other African countries, in particular to support projects dealing with the long aftermath of the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya. Four years later the distribution of Christian Aid's £1,086,256 project expenditure was even more heavily weighted towards agricultural programmes within Africa.⁶⁷

This transformation was encouraged in part by their participation in the development-focused Freedom from Hunger Campaign; £572,271—over half of the organisation's expenditure in that year—went towards agricultural schemes in Uganda, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, Nigeria, Madagascar, Pakistan, India,

⁶³ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, 36.

⁶⁴ Payne, *British Council of Churches*, 15.

⁶⁵ Memorandum on Christian Aid Week and the BBC, c.1963 (SOAS: CA/I/12/3).

⁶⁶ Memo Youth Against Hunger: The Politics of Aid, 1965 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3).

⁶⁷ Allocation of Funding, 13 July 1960 (SOAS: CA/I/1/5b); British Council of Churches Christian Aid Department Balance Sheet, 30 September 1964 (SOAS: CA/I/3/1).

Sarawak and Korea.⁶⁸ Other projects funded in the 1960s included a lay centre in Northern Rhodesia that trained people in social work, and a grant to purchase water-pumping sets in Vadala, northwest India. By 1967, in response to criticisms that the ecumenical movement had ‘become part of the whole attempt of the churches to escape facing up to realities’, Kenneth Sansbury told readers of *The Times* that the British Council of Churches had brought together Christians ‘to do some hard thinking about such things as apartheid in South Africa, British responsibility in Rhodesia, the control of nuclear weapons, Vietnam, [and] immigrants.’ Their purpose was not escape, he argued, ‘but a more effective Christian witness in a strife-ridden and perplexed world.’⁶⁹

This was not first time that the ecumenical movement was thinking in international terms; indeed, there were long antecedents to the ideas of international Christian witness that Christian Aid promoted. Ideas of universal brotherhood and sisterhood stretch back to the discourses of the anti-slavery movements in the late eighteenth century where campaign slogans imagined fundraisers and victims as part of an international community (albeit one that was strictly ordered by racial hierarchies). More genuine attempts at Christian partnership took place at the end of the nineteenth century and continued into the interwar period. The World Young Women’s Christian Association, for example, was founded in 1894 to coordinate national activity and foster ‘a right public conscience such as shall strengthen all the forces which are working for the promotion of peace and understanding between classes and races.’⁷⁰ This work expanded during the inter-war period when Willoughby Dickinson, one of the earliest supporters of the League of Nations, founded the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Prevailing scholarly interpretations of internationalism are secular, but work on Dickinson has revealed important links between progressive politics and ecumenical internationalism in the inter-war period.⁷¹ As Daniel Gorman describes,

⁶⁸ Report on Christian Aid for 41st Meeting of British Council of Churches, Autumn 1962 (SOAS: CA/1/1/2).

⁶⁹ Kenneth Sansbury, letter to *The Times*, 3 August 1967.

⁷⁰ Cited in Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organisations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002) 17.

⁷¹ Daniel Gorman, ‘Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship Among the Churches,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, 1 (2010): 51-73.

instead of being created in response to a particular humanitarian ill, the World Alliance was created to preserve peace and prevent future international problems.⁷²

In comparison to the popular discourses of people-to-people internationalism embraced by those supporting the Freedom from Hunger Campaign—and indeed by members of the Royal Commonwealth Society and Women’s Institute who spoke about international understanding in terms that stretched beyond humanitarianism—this earlier ecumenical internationalism remained an elite rather than popular project. In its early years the movement failed to establish much in the way of a grass roots reception; few local councils were successfully encouraged to straddle the Free Church/Anglican divide.⁷³ It was not until Christian Aid that the BCC was able to become a more successful means to ecumenical international engagement as aid proved to be a much firmer foundation for international engagement than friendship alone. As discussed in greater detail below, Christian Aid established forms of grass roots ecumenicalism at the same time that they introduced members of the British public to humanitarian issues in the outside world.

Why did Christian Aid’s overseas humanitarian work develop in this way and to what extent can this transformation be related to the declining empire? There are clear parallels between the work of Christian Aid and the wider international development movement. As described above, Christian Aid’s transition from a European to international field of action mirrored the expansion of a number of other humanitarian organisations working at this time. Christian Aid functioned as part of an expanding web of international networks and organisations working in the developing world, playing its part and affirming its membership by speaking the shared language of development discourse. By the 1960s for example, the organisation spoke in broad terms about global need, adding a religious gloss to the key tropes of international development discourse when they stated that ‘Although, to our shame, there are many earthly reasons, there is not one heavenly reason why sixty per cent of the world’s population is without sufficient means of sustaining life.’⁷⁴ There are also larger parallels to be drawn in relation to the changing membership of international institutions. As was taking place at the UN and within the New Commonwealth, the balance of membership to the World Council of Churches—to

⁷² Gorman, ‘Ecumenical Internationalism,’ 57.

⁷³ David Carter, ‘The Ecumenical Movement in its Early Years,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49, 3 (1999): 482.

⁷⁴ ‘Christian Aid Week’, St James Church Report (c. 1965).

which the British Council of Churches belonged—shifted towards the ‘Third World’ in the decades following the Second World War. As newly independent countries joined the Council the prominence of ‘Third World’ issues, in particular racism and support for liberation movements, also increased. This pressure undoubtedly influenced the priorities of Christian Aid.

On the one hand, therefore, the organisation’s developing international remit followed wider trends towards internationalism that were exemplified by the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and discussed in the previous chapter. But Christian Aid also continued to raise funds for a number of crises or humanitarian crises and by the end of the decade had provided aid in response to emergencies in East Pakistan, India, Vietnam, Turkey and Biafra. While some of these crises were the result of natural disaster and crop failure, others were a direct result of decolonization, exposing the organisation to some of the political and military dimensions of imperial decline. For example, Christian Aid was involved in violent aftermaths and humanitarian crises arising from French and Belgian decolonization. Janet Lacey headed fundraising activities for the Congo after Belgium’s retreat in 1960, and Christian Aid later funded relief in Algeria in the bitter winter months following the cease-fire of ‘one of the bloodiest episodes of the post-colonial era’.⁷⁵ The extent to which Christian Aid provided commentary on these events will be discussed in more detail below.

‘The Heroic Age of the Christian Missions is Over’: Redefining Church Aid

Christian Aid may have started life as a relief agency in war-ravaged Europe, but the organisation was also keen to lay claim to a much longer history of religious international intervention. Speaking in a BBC radio broadcast in 1963, William Clark told audiences that it was in fact missionaries who ‘were the first form of Christian Aid, and indeed usually the first form of British technical assistance in developing countries.’⁷⁶ A pamphlet published by Christian Aid on the politics of aid described how missionary societies had worked for 250 years to see that ‘schools, hospitals and agricultural projects were part of the “new life” promised in the gospel.’⁷⁷ As Lacey

⁷⁵ Lacey, *Cup of Water*, 92.

⁷⁶ William Clark, ‘Lift Up Your Hearts’ BBC Home Service, 1963 (SOAS:CA/I/14/3).

⁷⁷ Memo Youth Against Hunger: The Politics of Aid, 1965 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3).

argued, these societies were the ‘the real pioneers of the service agencies.’⁷⁸ Much as the UK National Committee for the Freedom from Hunger Campaign had appropriated 300 years of imperial administrative expertise to explain Britain’s unique ability to contribute to the development movement, so Christian Aid aligned itself with a long history of missionary work in order to claim seniority and experience in the humanitarian field. Supporters were reminded that ‘the Churches are not just starting from scratch in this field’, while Lacey acknowledged that ‘without the overseas expertise of the Missionaries, it would have been difficult for the Christian Service Agencies to have made anything like the large contribution to world need which they have been privileged to do.’⁷⁹

While Christian Aid was happy to claim *experience* based on a long history of missionary work, it also worked to differentiate itself from the contemporary missionary movement, particularly as the western idea of the overseas mission became increasingly difficult to justify. In 1957 Max Warren, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, warned that much was said ‘about foreign missions being a form of cultural or even spiritual imperialism, as being a survivor of the colonial era.’⁸⁰ The relationship between missionaries and empire has always been ambiguous.⁸¹ As Cox describes, the ‘empire of Christ’ had never coincided exactly with the British Empire, but missionary work had nevertheless been concentrated in the areas of imperial control and influence.⁸² From a church and missionary point of view, the advance and retreat of British rule had been seen as both a source of and also a solution to worldly sin.⁸³ While religious groups regularly condemned violent imperial acts, they also acknowledged the extent to which missionary activity was supported and made possible by imperial infrastructures and colonial presence. By the 1960s, however, the problems raised by this association seemed to outweigh its usefulness.

Speaking to the Church Missionary Society in 1959, Sir Kenneth Grub acknowledged the advantage the missionary cause had reaped from the British connection but worried that it had now become a cause for embarrassment: ‘when those who organised the colonial society and those who preached the Heavenly

⁷⁸ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 186.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ John Stuart, ‘Overseas Mission,’ 537.

⁸¹ Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 13.

⁸² Jeffrey Cox, ‘Empire of Christ,’ 103.

⁸³ Bebbington, ‘Atonement, Sin, and Empire,’ 14-31.

society arrived on the same ship and formed part of the same civilizing enterprise there was naturally some confusion amongst the recipients of their attentions.⁸⁴ As Thorne argues, even at their most antagonistic Victorian missionaries seldom questioned the moral validity of Britain's imperial domination.⁸⁵ Trevor Huddleston, a member of the Community of the Resurrection and key figure in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, confirmed that the contribution made by the early missionaries to the development of Africa was 'not a fashionable thing to emphasise at the moment.'⁸⁶ As Grub summarised in a letter to *The Times*, 'the heroic age of the Christian missions is over [...] there was a directness and simplicity about the labours of his predecessors which cannot easily belong to his own, for the world to which he goes out has changed.'⁸⁷

Sensing this potentially hostile environment, Brash made attempts to distance Christian Aid from the ongoing fundraising efforts of missionary societies. In 1968 he proposed a leaflet entitled 'Missions or Christian Aid or Both?' which outlined the differences between Christian Aid and the missions. While the Mission Board sent out missionaries, maintained hospitals and schools and ministered to need, the proposed leaflet explained, Christian Aid responded to disasters, served refugees, contributed to development projects and sent out volunteers. Brash wanted to ask donors to 'think before you give' and 'sort out' their priorities. Not unsurprisingly, Hugh Sampson a member of Christian Aid's publicity team replied to Brash's suggestions by saying 'I would have thought this is not the way to do it.' According to Sampson, the missionary societies had a traditional suspicion and jealousy of Christian Aid and for a time there was ill-feeling between the missions and Christian Aid.⁸⁸ Yet he also worried that putting the two in opposition distorted the nature of Christian Aid's own work, reminding Brash that 'Christian Aid spent nearly half a million pounds on British Missionary Society projects during the Freedom from Hunger Campaign.'⁸⁹

Sampson was right to stress the links between Christian Aid and the longer missionary infrastructure, but his objections do not reveal the extent to which the

⁸⁴ 'Missions in a Changed World,' *The Times*, 6 May 1959.

⁸⁵ Thorne, *Congregational Missions*, 156.

⁸⁶ Trevor Huddleston, 'The Christian Churches in Independent Africa,' *African Affairs* 68, 270 (1969): 45.

⁸⁷ 'Missions in a Changed World,' *The Times*, 6 May 1959.

⁸⁸ John Stuart, 'Overseas Mission,' 536.

⁸⁹ Hugh Sampson to Alan Brash, c. 1968 (SOAS: CA2/I/46/1).

missionary endeavour was changing in this era. When William Clark told a BBC audience that he did not ‘think that the day of the missionary is over’, he was describing a church in Africa and Asia that was changing rather than retreating: ‘In Africa and Asia the people want to run their own nations and their own schools and their own health services.’⁹⁰ Responding to these desires for independence the transition from a ‘mission’ to an ‘indigenous’ Church in Africa often took place in parallel with the process of decolonization by which colonies became independent nations. As Stockwell has shown, Archbishop Fisher was convinced of the necessity of moving with the ‘wind of change’ in Africa and encouraged the Church to pursue its own decolonization project.⁹¹ But how did Christian Aid fit into this picture of decolonization? While missionary-based agencies struggled to fundraise and recruit, church-based humanitarian organisations were clearly thriving—so much so that Max Warren worried the mission was being subsumed into the provision of overseas aid and relief to African people.⁹² Significantly, some mission officials criticised the BCC for ‘sponsoring secular activity under Christian auspices’ rather than ‘giving the cup of water in Christ’s name’.⁹³

In short, the nature of the game had changed. Gone were career missionaries and opportunities for ‘glittering careers with a governor’s plumed hat at the end of the avenue’ and in their place came aid workers, relief agencies and short-term volunteers. Christian Aid was the new face of Christian intervention and it affirmed its commitment to these new forms of service by offering support to the newly-established Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). In fact, for the first three years of VSO’s life (between 1958-61) Christian Aid administered the organisation from offices at the Royal Commonwealth Society. Once VSO found its feet and secured government funding, Christian Aid continued to conduct their own youth volunteer programme through VSO and sent candidates out to participate in projects in various parts of the Commonwealth. In 1964-5 this represented one-fifth of VSO volunteers, many of whom worked on projects established by missionaries. While acknowledging the legacies and structures associated with colonialism that made its own interventions possible, therefore, Christian Aid also represented a new—or at least reframed—way of engaging with the spaces of the former empire.

⁹⁰ William Clark, ‘Lift Up Your Hearts’.

⁹¹ Stockwell, ‘Splendidly Leading the Way,’ 553.

⁹² Stuart, ‘Overseas Mission,’ 537.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 536.

Christian Conscience, the Commonwealth and Postcolonial Critique

Jeffrey Cox has argued that in the post-war period ‘Third Worldism’ replaced the imperial focus that the churches had shown in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For Cox, this ‘Third Worldism’ encompassed a large spectrum of international religious activity, including the growth of non-missionary humanitarian organisations described above as well as the much more radicalised protests of the Student Christian Movement, which in the 1960s promoted nationalist resistance movements and forms of popular revolt.⁹⁴ Yet while Cox accurately identifies the broad transition that took place from a mission to development model of intervention, he provides little detail on exactly how an organisation such as Christian Aid recast imperial theatres as the ‘Third World’ and offers little explanation of the relationship between radicalised and humanitarian manifestations of ‘Third Worldism.’ As the previous chapter makes clear, humanitarian campaigns could sustain multiple models of internationalism, not all of which marked a break from earlier imperial traditions. Cox’s characterisation of Christian ‘Third Worldism’ overlooks a number of striking continuities with other parallel forms of imperial intervention. He does not, for example, acknowledge how the ‘development’ work of an organisation such as Christian Aid was also closely related to the discourses of late-colonial welfare, nor does he recognise that many of the volunteers Christian Aid supported through VSO spoke about their work in the former empire in terms of imperial (as opposed to missionary) traditions of service. The next two sections of this chapter complicate Cox’s characterisation of ‘Third Worldism’ by disaggregating the different ways in which the Third World was conceptualised. Was ‘Third Worldism’ manifestly anti-colonial? Did it engage with imperial legacies or move on from the imperial past through the act of selective amnesia? The processes of decolonization clearly influenced Christian Aid’s work, but to what extent did the organisation engage explicitly and publically with these contexts?

In 1969 Christian Aid sent a memorandum to each Commonwealth Prime Minister outlining the role that they felt the Commonwealth ought to be playing in global economic development. The memorandum argued that development required

⁹⁴ Cox, ‘Empire of Christ,’ 103.

the cooperation of both developed and less developed nations and suggested that ‘the Commonwealth provide[d] a unique context in which [this] might be attempted on a large scale.’ With its emphasis on cooperation and understanding, this statement is strikingly similar to discourses in play at the Royal Commonwealth Society at this time: it stresses the exceptionalism of Commonwealth collaboration (as distinct from the aftermaths of other declining empires), while also implying that the Commonwealth might serve as an example to the rest of the world. But whereas members of the Royal Commonwealth Society were more inclined to emphasise the threads of tradition and kinship that linked the modern Commonwealth to its longer imperial history, Christian Aid took pains to stress that this ‘cooperation’ needed to be emphatically different from a traditional colonial relationship. In a statement that could be read as both a celebration of the achievements of the New Commonwealth and also a critique of what had gone before, Christian Aid suggested that the Commonwealth ‘could demonstrate to the world a pattern of creative cooperation between developed and less developed nations which was free from the taints of exploitation, racism, paternalism and neo-colonialism.’⁹⁵ Christian Aid critiqued these and other similar issues throughout the 1960s. Whereas, as the previous chapter shows, most public discussion of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign was apolitical in nature—offering little critique of either colonialism or the power structures inherent within the development movement—Christian Aid much more readily considered the postcolonial dilemmas raised by the newly configured ‘Third World’.

Gerald Parsons describes how in the decades after the Second World War the relationship between religion and politics shifted from one based on consensus to one of confrontation.⁹⁶ Most work on Christian activism has focused on the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the important role played by ‘turbulent priests’ like Michael Scott, Trevor Huddleston and Canon John Collins. Rob Skinner has shown how the activism of these charismatic public figures played a crucial role in the development of the broader language of anti-apartheid.⁹⁷ But the shift towards confrontation can also be seen across a wider range of social interventions made by the church in this period, including in the work of Christian Aid. Although the

⁹⁵ ‘The Commonwealth and Economic Development,’ Memo to Commonwealth Prime Ministers January 1969, (SOAS: CA2/I/46/3).

⁹⁶ Parsons, ‘From Consensus to Confrontation,’ 123-160.

⁹⁷ Rob Skinner, ‘Facing the Challenge of ‘Young Africa’: Apartheid, South Africa and British Decolonization,’ *South African Historical Journal* 54, 1 (2006): 54-71.

development movement cannot be distilled into a single unifying goal or point of conflict, and although it never stirred the same sense of international solidarity as the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Christian humanitarian aid nevertheless became a focal point for politicised debate.

While the politics of aid and decolonization would never become *the* central issue of Christian Aid's public campaigning—this remained 'need before creed'—the organisation did not shy away from these issues either. Speaking in 1966 Alan Brash argued that 'it is important to relate opinions about development and political goals to the aspirations of those whose development we are seeking.' To achieve this understanding, he suggested that it would be useful for local Christian Aid committees to make contact with 'militant "Black Power" groups' within Britain.⁹⁸ This suggestion is striking for a number of reasons. First, it acknowledges members of the black population in Britain as political agents rather than simply as either immigrant workers or Commonwealth students in need of a warm welcome and a cup of tea. This differs significantly from the WI's more tame hospitality discussed in Chapter Two. Second, it describes these militant groups as a 'valuable stimulus' rather than a threat. Third, it blurs the neat binaries of home/away and giver/receiver usually reinforced by humanitarian aid, emphasising instead a sense of global interconnectedness and partnership. By engaging with these Black Power communities Christian Aid participated in a wider international movement in which African-American influences intersected with British Caribbean and Afro-British politics, transcending international borders. Where the WI had tended to segregate Commonwealth hospitality from international aid, Christian Aid's efforts linked overseas need and political struggle to racial tension within the UK. Although Christian Aid remained an overwhelmingly white organisation, these efforts show some parallels with the more radical Anti-Apartheid Movement, which brought together coalitions of black and white activists, many of whom were practicing Christians.⁹⁹

Christian Aid also took a stand on paternalism and neo-colonialism. Speaking to the BBC in 1963, William Clark told listeners that 'Aid is one of the clichés of

⁹⁸ Alan Brash, 'Christian Aid and World Development,' 23 October 1966 (SOAS: CA2/I/46/3).

⁹⁹ Håkan Thörn, 'Solidarity Across Borders: The Transnational Anti-Apartheid Movement,' *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 17, 4 (2006): 285–301; Rob Skinner, 'Facing the Challenge of 'Young Africa': Apartheid, South Africa and British Decolonisation,' *South African Historical Journal* 54, 1 (2006): 54–71.

politics today. No speech on national purpose is complete without a peroration on the question of aid to underdeveloped countries.¹⁰⁰ The narratives of British exceptionalism discussed in relation to the FFHC would certainly attest to this characterisation, but Clark was also keen to emphasise that aid was about more than clichéd national purpose. ‘Aid to developing countries is not just a hobby,’ he argued, ‘nor is it just a form of conscience money to old colonies, or [*sic*] is it just a clever man in the cold war, or a form of trade promotion’. His awareness of the potential pitfalls of humanitarian aid within the context of the Cold War and decolonization was shared by Janet Lacey, who stressed that it would be ‘tragic’ if recently independent nations were ‘forced to accept offers of economic aid with hidden political strings attached, either from the East or the West, before they have time to begin to develop independent political maturity. In moving from one particular kind of colonialism they will perforce take on the mantle of another.’¹⁰¹ As the previous chapter discussed, this sense of self-awareness was almost entirely absent from the UK Freedom from Hunger Campaign committee. By contrast, Lacey was at pains to make clear that Christian Aid was not a passive participant in a form of neo-colonialism—a middleman for passing on funds from the wealthy West to the poorer countries of the world. Instead, by working to promote the indigenisation of Christian councils and development staff in newly independent countries, Christian Aid saw itself as an active part of the long-term process of decolonization.¹⁰²

These statements tie in with some of the ideas about constructing a new world order discussed in the previous chapter, a world order that would do away with the uneven power structures of colonialism. Christian Aid was much more explicit than Freedom from Hunger discourses about the need for significant change in the global economic system. They condemned as immoral ‘an economic system which enables rich nations to enjoy enormous wealth at the expense of the poor’¹⁰³ and described how their ‘responsibility extends beyond the provision of a tractor or the equipment of a hospital. We must be concerned about international agreements on commodity prices.’¹⁰⁴ Yet this belief was not necessarily shared by all who Christian Aid sought to convert to their cause. Recounting an address given at a North Norfolk

¹⁰⁰ William Clark, ‘Lift Up Your Hearts.’

¹⁰¹ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 150.

¹⁰² Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 106.

¹⁰³ Alan Brash, ‘Christian Aid and World Development,’ 23 October 1966 (SOAS: CA2/I/46/3).

¹⁰⁴ Memo Youth Against Hunger: The Politics of Aid, 1965 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3).

Conservative Party Political Conference in 1969, Christian Aid Area Secretary J.H.

Bowman described how

speaker after speaker rose to his or her feet and said that they were surprised that I had the courage to come and give this address to such an audience, and one of them even wondered if I had come to the right political meeting. They made it clear that they had no use for aid and thought it should all be abolished, that the blacks who had kicked us out of their countries should be left to stew in their own juice etc. etc.¹⁰⁵

These complaints were representative of a wider trend that also played out in the letter pages of *The Times*. The old saying ‘Charity begins at home’ was brought into a new context in a series of complaints that criticised giving ‘handouts to those who largely misuse them and are certainly not grateful for them.’¹⁰⁶ It was nothing new to suggest that Britain should prioritise its own. A questionnaire conducted by the Freedom from Hunger committee in Manchester showed that respondents in the over-45 age group consistently prioritised national charities over those with international remits, with many stating ‘charity begins at home’ as a reason.¹⁰⁷ But the specific complaint about the alleged ungratefulness of recipients of British assistance was certainly amplified by decolonization.

For Lacey, moving on from old imperial systems was as much about attitude as it was about exploitation. Simply raising money was not enough; Christian Aid wanted those who gave to give for the right reasons. As Lacey described, ‘Whenever anyone says to me “but you see, I love people”, I shudder. It usually means an attitude of paternalism or a form of therapy for overwrought men and women.’¹⁰⁸ Christian Aid felt a responsibility to see that supporters were not paternalistic and this meant that their promotional material needed to be informative rather than merely persuasive.¹⁰⁹ Care was taken to be sure that the right message was being shared. In a letter written to the schools secretary Sylvia Usher, for example, concern was raised that Christian Aid’s educational school material used too many ‘e.g.s from Africa’.

¹⁰⁵ J.H. Bowman, Regional Organisation Report of Hampshire, September 1969 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/1).

¹⁰⁶ Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 8 January 1971.

¹⁰⁷ By contrast 25% of the 16-24 age group put hunger and famine at the top of the list, compared to just 8% of the over-45 group. *Freedom from Hunger Campaign Opinion Survey – Manchester Area* (Manchester: FFHC, c. 1963).

¹⁰⁸ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 105; ‘Area Secretaries Manual Notes’ (SOAS: CA2/I/18/1).

‘We are all too obsessed with Africa these days’ the letter protested, ‘and are in great danger of giving too simple a picture of the poor little Africans.’¹¹⁰

Christian Aid was clearly aware of the complexity of development work—and took steps to inform its donor constituency of the political implications of this work—but this does not mean that they necessarily related these broad concerns to specific events of decolonization. As was the case with the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, plenty of throwaway comments were made about the imminent or recent independence of countries requiring aid. Basutoland, for example, was described as suffering ‘all the problems of an emerging country’, while an account of the low standard of living and lack of industry in British Honduras briefly mentions that the colony is ‘expecting independence within a few years.’¹¹¹ A ‘Christian Outlook’ broadcast for the BBC explained that the needs of countries were being more dramatically projected to the world as they gained independence.¹¹² The events of decolonization trained a spotlight on these nations as their independence ceremonies played out on television screens and across newsstands. Independence celebrations may have caught the world’s eye and decolonization may have revived interest in the spaces of the former empire, but the statements above engaged little with the specific circumstances of empire’s end in different colonies. A more informed engagement seemed to occur only in relation to specific controversial events. The relative weight given to different aspects of decolonization within Janet Lacey’s autobiographical account of her time as director of Christian Aid gives a sense of which events registered most clearly: the Suez Crisis, the Mau Mau Emergency in Kenya and the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

For Lacey as for many others, Suez was an embarrassment. Lacey was in Geneva at the time of the crisis, working with Janet Thompson of the YWCA. The two women followed the events as they unfolded on the radio. As Lacey describes, they were ‘humiliated and worried’: ‘we suffered acutely all that day about Suez and found it difficult to look our international friends in the eye [...] Where would it all end?’ Suez was about more than a failed show of strength to Lacey: it was also a symbol of Britain’s skewed priorities. At the same time as British and French armies were attacking Egypt, Hungary was in the midst of a revolution and Hungarian

¹¹⁰ Anonymous letter to Sylvia Usher, 31 May 1966 (SOAS: CAI/5/5).

¹¹¹ Janet Lacey, *Meeting Human Need* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965), 19-20.

¹¹² Christian Outlook broadcast for BBC, 7 February 1962 (SOAS: CAI/14/3).

freedom fighters were crying for help that they would not receive. Lacey sat frozen in horror wanting ‘tear the radio from its socket with the rage of frustration that there was nothing I could do for these people killing each other’.¹¹³ The shame of Suez brought the plight of the Hungarians into sharp relief, but did not automatically encourage a broader critique of Britain’s late imperial activities or of the church’s potential complicity in these.

The ICA and Christian Aid stance on Mau Mau was rather more ambiguous. They provided aid to ‘victims of the Mau Mau revolution’ from the early 1950s and into the 1970s. In Lacey’s opinion, the basic problem in Kenya, and one which the churches had failed to fully address, was not hatred but indifference: ‘the multi-racial society desired by the British could only come about when sufficient people on both sides wanted to get to know one another.’¹¹⁴ This indifference set the stage for violent protest against colonial rule. While Lacey made no attempt either to acknowledge or condemn the violent acts committed by British officials during the emergency, she did note that Mau Mau should be understood as a declaration of independence by a people who had ‘lost their patience.’¹¹⁵ Christian Aid did not actively support violent struggles; indeed non-British members of the World Council of Churches came under harsh criticism in *The Times* for providing financial aid to violent nationalist groups in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.¹¹⁶ They did, however, recognise that calls for pacifism needed to be backed with political change. Such an interpretation was in line with the strong fear shared by many church figures at this time that a failure to address the concerns of African nationalists would fatally undermine Christianity within Africa.¹¹⁷ There was more at stake for the Church than the welfare of those affected by the emergency. In 1960 a special appeal was launched on the principle that although the most aggressive part of the Mau Mau movement was over, the emergency needs were still not met.¹¹⁸

Throughout most of Christian Aid’s promotional and archival material, the sense of responsibility that the organisation called upon was a duty of care and not an

¹¹³ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 60.

¹¹⁴ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 93.

¹¹⁵ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, 130.

¹¹⁶ ‘Churches and Terrorists,’ *The Times*, 15 September 1970.

¹¹⁷ Rob Skinner, ‘The Moral Foundations of British Anti-Apartheid Activism, 1946–1960,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, 2 (2009): 407.

¹¹⁸ Report on Christian Aid for 36th Meeting of British Council of Churches, Spring 1960 (SOAS: CA/1/1/2).

acceptance of British accountability for the situation prevailing in recently independent African nations. This distinction is clear in their discussion of a soil conservation project in Botswana that was funded in association with the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. The report mentioned an article published in the *Guardian* that attributed the country's current poverty to more than sixty years of British colonial neglect. But rather than agreeing with this accusation, Christian Aid avoided the issue, concluding that 'whether or not that statement was justified, the fact is that this new member of our Commonwealth of Nations is faced with serious economic problems and is in urgent need of help.'¹¹⁹ As was discussed in the previous chapter, Christian Aid's decision not to assign blame might in part be explained by the restrictive role of the Charity Commission and the pressure to retain neutrality. This focus on the present contrasts with the strongly-held belief at the end of the nineteenth century that Britain needed to make atonement for past evils (especially the slave trade). Speaking in 1885, Prebendary H.W. Webb-Peploe declared that 'we may ask ourselves whether we are not indebted to every race for some tremendous injuries inflicted in days gone by.'¹²⁰ Christian Aid spoke of national responsibility, certainly, but they spoke of a duty to the future rather than atonement for past sins.

'The Curate's Egg': Judging the Impact of Christian Aid in the Parish

To what extent were these institutional discourses reflected on the ground and in local church communities? Christian Aid ascribed great importance to notions of Christian responsibility and social commitment, to be sure, but were these the same ideals that guided parishioners' participation in Christian Aid-related activities, or did other motivations play a more important role? Janet Lacey's account of the organization speaks repeatedly of the responsibility of professionalised charities to convey their message to 'ordinary people'. To be successful, Christian Aid needed not only to raise money to support projects overseas but also to 'devise a method whereby the ordinary mortal in his or her daily living can relate to the task of world development.'¹²¹ The financial support and manpower demanded by the missionary project had always required missionaries to instil their cause in the religious life of

¹¹⁹ Report on Botswana Soil Conservation Project, no date (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3).

¹²⁰ Cited in Bebbington, 'Atonement, Sin, and Empire,' 19.

¹²¹ 'Notes on Adult Training and Education Programme,' December 1966 (SOAS: CA/I/5/3).

local congregations. Under constant pressure to justify their work to supporters at home, missions were dependent on their ability to penetrate grass-roots society; the same was true of Christian Aid.¹²²

Explicit religious affiliation may have limited the organisation's appeal to the wider non-religious community, but it also offered certain compensations. Julia Berger's analysis of religious NGOs emphasises that while secular NGOs must build their resource and support networks from the ground up, religious organisations already enjoyed access to networks and communities around the world.¹²³ Through reference to specifically Christian duty, Christian Aid was able to put pressure on its constituency in a manner not available to other secular organisations. Drawing on a language of duty and sacrifice, Alan Brash declared that 'anybody who does not give—in a costly and disciplined way—in answer to the cry of human agony today—that man cannot do anything relevant—and he certainly cannot preach the Christian Gospel—because manifestly he does not care.'¹²⁴

Despite the availability of this discourse, getting religious communities to care was by no means an easy feat. Lacey described the organisation's constant efforts to convince the Church that Christian Aid was 'not an optional extra' as a 'herculean task'.¹²⁵ Like the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Christian Aid depended on the enthusiasm of local committees to organise fundraising efforts across Britain. In its first three years the number of villages and local communities participating in Christian Aid Week grew from 316 in 1957 to 1200 in 1960.¹²⁶ Whereas Oxfam and the Freedom from Hunger Campaign were able to allocate a large budget to national advertising campaigns, Christian Aid's more limited resources obliged them to focus their efforts on their own church constituency. In 1962, for example, the vast majority of press publicity for Christian Aid came from provincial rather than national newspapers.¹²⁷ The importance of the local church community to Christian Aid—as both the location of ecumenical activity and as its main source of finance—prompted a system of supervision that was almost entirely absent from the

¹²² Andrew Thompson, 'Introduction,' in Thompson, ed. *Britain's Experience of Empire*, 28.

¹²³ Julia Berger, 'Religious Non-Governmental Organisations: An Exploratory Analysis,' *Voluntas* 14, 1 (2003): 20.

¹²⁴ Alan Brash, Address to British Council of Churches, 1968 (SOAS:CA/I/1/1).

¹²⁵ Janet Lacey, 'Christian Aid and the Churches' (SOAS: CA/I/1/1).

¹²⁶ Report on Christian Aid for 31st Meeting of British Council of Churches, 1957 and Report on Christian Aid for 37th Meeting of British Council of Churches, Autumn 1960 (SOAS: CA/I/1/2).

¹²⁷ Press Publicity in 1962 (SOAS: CA/14/70).

Freedom from Hunger Campaign. The country was broken down into regions and touring Area Secretaries were appointed to monitor the activities of existing local Christian Aid committees and encourage the establishment of new ones. In sharp contrast to the Royal Commonwealth Society, where the relationship between branch and headquarters was never particularly hierarchical—branches were responsible for reporting on their own affairs—Christian Aid established systems through which local participants could be supervised to support the campaign in the ‘right way’, according to the expectations and ideology of the central administration.

As will become clear, putting such a system in place by no means guaranteed that local religious communities would toe the party line. As Reverend L. Coates, Area Secretary for East and West Yorkshire summarised, ‘Christian Aid work is rather like the proverbial curate’s egg—“good in parts.”’¹²⁸ But the existence of these Area Secretaries’ reports does offer a glimpse into the local life of a fundraising organisation that is missing from Freedom from Hunger Campaign records. Reports commenting on ecumenical activity, fundraising efforts and the educational content of local meetings were heavily influenced by the preoccupations of each Area Secretary and, for the most part, offer the perspective of a floating outsider rating local activity according to the standards of the central administration. Through their complaints, their celebrations and their silences, these reports reveal tensions and harmonies generated between Christian Aid and local communities across Britain.

Christian Aid was part of a much longer history of humanitarian and welfare initiatives organised and conducted through local religious bodies. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, local parishes and chapels sponsored a wide range of social welfare institutions.¹²⁹ The chapel and the parish became a focal point for middle-class Christians who wanted ‘to do something’ with their spare time.¹³⁰ Through the provision of social services including mothers’ meetings, temperance societies, debating clubs, Boys’ Brigades, sports clubs and vocational education classes churches pervaded associational life and situated themselves as key providers of philanthropic assistance. Alongside clubs that encouraged ‘rational recreation’, parishes and chapels also provided poor relief, medical services and boot, coal and

¹²⁸ Rev. L. Coates, Regional Organisation Report of East/West Yorkshire, September 1966 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/6).

¹²⁹ Cox, *English Churches*, 59; Cox, ‘From the Empire of Christ,’ 82.

¹³⁰ Cox, *English Churches*, 57.

clothing clubs.¹³¹ The extent of churches' activity had diminished by the 1960s, but church-sponsored or organised activities nevertheless continued to exist alongside newer dimensions of associational life. Participating in this associational world, Christian Aid Week became a regular occurrence in the rhythm of the churches' year.¹³²

As well as supporting links of associational life *within* communities, church life also connected its members to the wider world. A radio programme on 'Christian Aid in a Parish' broadcast on the BBC Home Service in the early 1960s described the once parochial nature of Christian charity:

In the old days of Barchester, Christian Aid was just helping in the village. The parson visited, his wife took the calves-foot jelly, and the squire dipped into his pocket—if he was that sort of squire. The next village was ten thousand miles away over the hill, as remote as the man in the moon.¹³³

The broadcast contrasted this isolation with the present day when 'the magic mirrors of television and photography' and the 'magic carpet of modern transport' put the English parish in touch with the 'needs of all God's children.' Although this rather stark juxtaposition serves to emphasise a pervasive sense of connectedness that characterised humanitarian activity in the 1960s, it also obscures the way in which missionary activity had already breached the isolation of the parish and connected its members to the outside world for over two hundred years. Susan Thorne shows how even in the most isolated rural villages the colonies could be encountered on a regular basis through the local institutions of organised religion.¹³⁴ In order to secure the financial support and manpower necessary to fuel the missionary enterprise, missionaries had to ingrain their cause in the religious life of local congregations. Missionaries were dependent, therefore, on their ability to penetrate grass-roots society.¹³⁵ Missionary sermons and publications mapped the empire for their public, furnishing them with representations of people of different countries and shaping ideas of race, gender and nation. Eyewitness humanitarian narratives about the Hindu practice of sati and slavery generated sympathy and a route to action.¹³⁶

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 78-9.

¹³² Parsons, 'From Consensus to Confrontation,' 130.

¹³³ Unknown Author, 'Christian Aid in a Parish,' Radio Broadcast for BBC Home Service May 1963 (SOAS: CAI/14/3).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹³⁵ Thompson, 'Introduction,' in *Britain's Experience of Empire*, ' 28.

¹³⁶ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 304-7.

Magic carpets and magic mirrors were not, therefore, new to parish life but they had come to reflect a different image of the church's mission. Unsurprisingly, the terms in which the outside world was portrayed through missionary channels changed significantly over the course of more than two centuries. Whereas in the nineteenth century Africa had been imagined as a 'heathen nation'—'a great desert in the moral world' and 'shrouded in the gloom of barbarism'¹³⁷—the key motif of 1960s portrayals was hunger. The missionary was replaced by the aid worker or development expert, the Christian explorer by the young VSO volunteer. Even within Christian discourse the key needs of the Third World were understood to be material rather than spiritual. These discourses encouraged a diverse response in communities across Britain.

The same BBC broadcast on parish life provides an account of Christian Aid that differed dramatically from the pragmatic and sober pronouncements of the central administration.

English people find it astonishingly difficult to see beyond the Parish pump and so we try to look outward at the big world. We have visiting speakers to talk about outlandish places that I can't find on the map. We have a display at the back of our church: photographs of hospitals in unpronounceable parts of Africa, and of black doctors in white coats peering into highly technical microscopes. It is all very humdrum but occasionally we have our moments. Inter-Church Aid sent us a black priest from Africa for a month. He was supposed to learn from us but really we learned from him. This calm and courteous fellow Christian with frizzy hair that one wanted to stroke. This man of God one jump from the stone age, whose friends had just been murdered in a tribal massacre. This is what he wrote after he left us, I can hear his voice, smooth as black velvet, struggling with our outlandish English...¹³⁸

While the language of race used here may invoke a narrow range of ideological themes, its meanings are nevertheless complex.¹³⁹ This is clearly quite a different repertoire of representations to those that made up the daily diet of the missionary public in the nineteenth century, for example. Gone are descriptions of the 'horrible wickedness' and 'depraved character' of 'wretched men'.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the account reveals a lingering colonial mindset: Africa is exoticised as outlandish and unpronounceable; the black priest, 'one jump from the stone age', is situated in a

¹³⁷ John Angel James, 1819 cited in Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 302.

¹³⁸ 'Christian Aid in a Parish.'

¹³⁹ Thorne, *Congregational Missions*, 168.

¹⁴⁰ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 304-8.

different temporality to that of the English parish; and his physical difference emphasised through reference to his frizzy hair, black skin and 'black velvet' voice. By describing how the parish 'learned from' the 'calm and courteous' African, the broadcast drew on a long tradition of the noble savage. There are evident similarities with a contemporaneous account from a VSO volunteer in Nigeria:

They are allegedly 'primitive', 'backward', etc. but I feel that there is a lot in their life and attitude which our 'civilisation' has destroyed, for which we should be sorry. Their sense of humour is marvelous, their willingness and eagerness to learn, is something quite new to me, and their loyalty and completely overwhelming trust, friendship and hospitality something that we, unfortunately, seem to have lost.¹⁴¹

Whereas other Christian Aid material also represented interaction between Christian brothers as a learning experience, it did so in a way that emphasised the equal partnership of each encounter. In contrast, this broadcast offered praise to the point of being patronising.

This broadcast was also an account of fascination, emphasising the novelty and excitement of experiencing 'the other' at first hand and describing how these interactions broke the 'humdrum' of parish life. Unlike Christian Aid committee minutes, this broadcast willingly admitted the less than wholly philanthropic role that curiosity and fascination played in engagements with the outside world. It was unselfconscious about the fact that some of the appeal of meeting an African priest might be getting to touch his frizzy hair. The account's positive yet unapologetic tone and its focus on physical difference echoes the description by a Women's Institute member of a black nurse discussed in Chapter Two, both expressing the novelty of seeing difference at first hand. Like the Christian Aid broadcast, the WI description emphasised the contrast of black skin and white clothes ('her white uniform emphasised her colour vividly'). Similar racial language is more common the further removed from the central administration we look. In a play written for a harvest festival the distinction between developed and underdeveloped is expressed in racial terms: 'only in the white areas like Europe, America and Australia', the audience of school children were told, 'do people have enough food to eat.'¹⁴²

As well as expressing the novelty of international engagements, this broadcast also admits the importance of entertainment and sociability to parish fundraising:

¹⁴¹ Mora Dickson, *A World Elsewhere: Voluntary Service Overseas* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1964), 204.

¹⁴² 'Our Daily Bread: A New Look at Harvest,' c.1965 (SOAS: CAI/5/4).

We give from our regular income. Not enough, but we can't let the church roof fall in. We run a fete. Hoop-la, Punch and Judy and stalwart ladies doing cream teas in plastic dishes. We have the fun, and people who haven't got hospitals get the money – an excellent arrangement.¹⁴³

In this account there is no mention of the Christian duty to give and little sense of the Christian sacrifice that saturates committee files discussed above. If parishes were to use their leisure time for hospitals overseas, they wanted to 'have fun' while they did it. Perhaps, though Area Secretaries and the central administration would have preferred that it were not the case, the social elements of fundraising were more important to a parish than the cause itself. Moreover, some members clearly became involved in Christian Aid because it was a natural extension of their existing participation in the social life of the church/chapel. There are clear parallels between the crucial role that entertainment and enjoyment played here and in the activities of the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Women's Institute and Charles Chislett.

Was this an accurate portrayal of parish life? Who—aside from the stalwart ladies serving cream tea—got involved with Christian Aid? The focal point of the Christian Aid calendar was Christian Aid Week—the week in which the most fundraising activity took place, the most money was raised, and the most effort was made to promote the cause to the secular community. Each area that chose to support Christian Aid received the same promotional material. In 1960, for example, eight million envelopes and 300,000 posters were distributed across Britain by local church volunteers. The scale of Christian Aid Week varied significantly across the country, but at its most basic a typical programme included a public display of photographs and public meeting and/or film screening designed to inform the community of Christian Aid's purpose and house-to-house collections to raise funds. The organisation's use of film and photography to promote its cause continued a longer tradition of religious campaigning. Photographs taken by John and Anne Harris of their missionary work in the Congo between 1898 and 1905 were used in a nationwide scheme of lanternslide lectures protesting against the actions of Belgian authorities, for example, and campaigns against the practice of sati used lanternslides

¹⁴³ 'Christian Aid in a Parish.'

of a half-naked Indian woman on the point of being burnt to shock and thrill audiences at missionary society lectures.¹⁴⁴

The events put on in Ruscombe and Twyford, Berkshire, for Christian Aid Week in 1966 are indicative of how this typical programme could be supplemented with additional activities and scheduled across local community venues, associations and denominations:

Saturday	CHILDREN'S FILM SHOW, New Junior School REFUGEE LUNCH, St. John's Convent, Kiln Green
Sunday	UNITED SERVICE, St. Mary's, Twyford
Monday	WHIST DRIVE, Church Hall, Ruscombe
Tuesday	CHRISTIAN AID SALE, The Orchards, London Road CAKE BRING & BUY, Malvern Way Play Group
Wednesday	BUFFET SUPPER BRING & BUY, Congregational Hall
Thursday	UNITED ASCENSION DAY SERVICE, St. John's Convent, Kiln Green BINGO, Station Hotel, Twyford (PENN association)
Friday	"MESSIAH", Choral Society, St. Mary's Twyford BARBEQUE, Youth Club, Polehampton School Canteen
Saturday	COFFEE MORNING BRING & BUY, Ruscombe House JUMBLE SALE, Church Hall, Ruscombe
Sunday	VSO TALK—AID IN ZAMBIA, Colour photos by Anton Schooley, Church Hall, Ruscombe
All Week	EXHIBITION ON NIGERIA BY CHILDREN OF POLEHAMPTON SCHOOL, Court Room (next to library). ¹⁴⁵

Like the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Christian Aid encouraged a wide range of participatory fundraising activities and sent out a detailed list of suggested

¹⁴⁴ Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 222-3.

¹⁴⁵ Ruscombe and Twyford Christian Aid Week (SOAS: CA/I/4/2).

activities to all local area committees.¹⁴⁶ A report on Christian Aid Week in 1965 boasted that ‘every conceivable kind of effort was included’, citing examples from Hereford where ‘the whole town was captured by a “pram” race through the town’ and Milton Ernest where the ‘Great House’ invited everyone in the village of 500 to a party.¹⁴⁷ The organisation also promoted and became known for its use of sponsored walks, the first and largest of which took place in Halifax each year. Other communities quickly adopted the sponsored walk, an activity that tied in neatly with the title of Christian Aid’s touring promotional film ‘The Long March’ (seen by thousands over a four-year period). In Rotherham in 1967 1400 walkers registered to watch ‘The Long March’ before being dropped off by coach for a thirty-mile walk on the Yorkshire Moors.¹⁴⁸

In London, Christian Aid events were often much grander in scale and more likely to have been organised by the central organisation than by local committees. In 1965, for example, a Folk and Beat competition was held in Trafalgar Square, inviting amateur musicians to express the Christian concern for those in need. But as the Area Secretary for the Cotswolds reported, many felt that too much was made of London in Christian Aid bulletins. ‘London is a long way away’, she wrote, ‘and ninety percent of the Christian Aid supporters in my area are quite uninterested in what goes on there.’¹⁴⁹ Such a statement might be read as isolationist parochialism, but these communities were not distancing themselves from the wider world, just from London. This crucial distinction makes clear that experiences of the declining empire were not necessarily filtered through the capital; relationships between Britain and the world were formed from many local and often rural connecting points.

Across the country there were begging bowls, local MPs opening fetes, hunger luncheons and student fancy dress processions. Participation in fundraising events was often broad: 26,000 young people participated in 97 sponsored walks during Christian Aid Week in 1967, while a screening of ‘The Long March’ led by Anglican, Catholic and Free Church leaders in Normanton, West Yorkshire was attended by 400 members of the local community.¹⁵⁰ But those who did the

¹⁴⁶ Christian Aid Week Bright Ideas (SOAS: CA/I/4/2).

¹⁴⁷ Report on Christian Aid for 47th Meeting of British Council of Churches, August 1965 (SOAS: CA/I/1/2).

¹⁴⁸ Rev. L. Coates, East/West Yorkshire Monthly Report, July 1967 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/6).

¹⁴⁹ Rev. G. Bewley, South West Area Secretary Report, April to June 1965 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/5).

¹⁵⁰ Rev. L. Coates, East/West Yorkshire Monthly Report, January 1967 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/6).

organising were typically from a much smaller cohort. Reports from Area Secretaries confirm the importance of women to local Christian Aid efforts. A. R. Adams described how ‘the majority were ladies of mature years who are regular church goers and can be relied on to support an effort of this nature’; in Hampshire the organisation of Christian Aid Week was ‘left to single handed efforts of one old lady’; and J.R. Bowman revealed the female domination of Christian Aid participation when she declared that ‘the most remarkable fact about meetings this month is that I had no Mothers’ Union or women’s meetings!’¹⁵¹ By contrast, Christian Aid struggled to establish lasting connections with the young sections of the professional classes, a difficulty related to the broader context of church/chapel attendance and religious belief in the 1960s. Women had dominated the social and communal dimensions of Christianity since the early twentieth century and this dynamic continued into the post-war period.¹⁵² Only those who had traditionally been the most involved in parish life could be relied on to devote spare time to the cause.

There were, however, exceptions to this trend, indicating that Christian Aid worked to bring some ‘outsiders’ into this world of Christian sociability and service. Area Secretary A.R. Adams described three “surprises” at a local meeting in 1967:

a local resident who is a highly educated and qualified (and rich!) consulting engineer, who brought his wife and sister (expensive tweeds and pearls); the headmaster of the local primary school (an amateur cricketer of some repute and clearly a strong personality); and a large fully bearded sergeant of the newly amalgamated Devon and Cornwall Constabulary; all very different men of considerable local influence who never go to Church.¹⁵³

To this male professional cohort we could also add, at one end of the spectrum, the 120 ‘rich blasé Hampshire week-enders of both sexes’ who only turned up to a film screening of “The Long March” because they felt they ought to support ‘the dear old lady who organises Christian Aid single handed’ and at the other end, though similarly unenthusiastic, the disorderly gang of ‘local Teddy Boys’—poster children for disaffected youth and moral decline—who disrupted a meeting in Southbourne. While the Vicar described the boys as ‘a gang that went around breaking windows

¹⁵¹ A.R. Adams Regional Organisation Report of South West, October 1967 and February 1968 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁵² Cox, ‘From the Empire of Christ,’ 82.

¹⁵³ A.R. Adams Regional Organisation Report of South West, October 1967 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

and damaging cars', Mrs Bywater was hopeful that by sitting through half an hour's talk and a film strip 'they did take something of value away with them'.¹⁵⁴

We should also remember that while for some supporters Christian Aid was a vital window out onto the wider world, for other more mobile members it was just one more dimension of their existing international engagements. This more mobile cohort included religious figures who had returned from overseas, often in the wake of decolonization, but also men such as Robin Dixon whose experiences of travelling and working in Africa in the 1950s encouraged him, once back in England, to work for the BCC organising Christian Aid Week. In 1953 Dixon had decided to cycle around the world with a friend and ended up in Kenya, initially working as a printing estimator and then on a ranch as part of a multiracial staff where he witnessed the murder of a Mau Mau man who had stolen a prize animal.¹⁵⁵ Dixon's 'lived' experience of colonial and racial power hierarchies was a world away from the parish lives of many Christian Aid supporters, and indeed from the colonial administrative roles of other supporters. Christian Aid was a 'broad church'.

While we can assemble a picture of *who* attended Christian Aid meetings the Area Secretaries' reports are considerably less informative about *how* the public participated in the organisation, whether they did more than simply attend meetings, and whether they adopted the same discourses of Christian sacrifice and development as the central organisation or approached the campaign in a manner closer to that of the BBC broadcast. Some reports were critical of the lack of educational material provided—supporters in Croydon complained that 'there was too much GIVE and not enough factual information about what the churches are doing'—while others lamented the lack of action.¹⁵⁶ As one reporter suggested, some of the areas with the best fundraising had little in the way of an educational programme.¹⁵⁷ It was perfectly possible to donate money to Christian Aid and know little about the cause, since being informed was not the same as being motivated. In the southwest groups reportedly got together to have 'cosy "chats" in a philosophical and theological

¹⁵⁴ Mrs Bywater, Regional Organisational Report, May 1963 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3); J.H. Bowman, Regional Organisation Report, June 1969 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁵⁵ Robin Dixon, interviewee, Wellcome Trust Oral History Interviews, British Library Sound and Moving Image Catalogue, [<http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiisirsi/?ps=q0o7Vueofl/WORKS-FILE/111740074/9>, accessed 21 August 2012].

¹⁵⁶ Christian Aid Week Post Mortem, 1957 (SOAS: CA/I/1/2).

¹⁵⁷ 'Notes on Adult Training and Education Programme,' December 1966 (SOAS: CA/I/5/3).

atmosphere about some of the world's great problems and then do nothing.'¹⁵⁸ Area Secretary Miss B. Carpenter compared two meetings that she attended in Northampton in March 1963. The first, in which she spoke to the Women's Fellowship, she described as 'rather an unresponsive meeting'. The second, at which she showed the Christian Aid film 'Helping the Hungry' to the St Matthews over-twenties group, involved a 'very lively and interesting discussion.' St Matthews, Carpenter hoped, was the kind of group that 'may well undertake some study of the problems of hunger.'¹⁵⁹

There were inevitably differences between a community such as rural and isolated Gunnislake in Cornwall, which had long memories of very depressed years after the local mines closed down and 'nobody helped them', and a weekend retreat for wealthy city dwellers such as Hampshire.¹⁶⁰ Objections to the campaign were also likely to differ according to region. Though difficult to trace in any detail, we do know that some areas, for example, cited friction with Hungarian refugees, while others worried about unfair textile competition from Hong Kong.¹⁶¹ Key members of the community also determined the extent to which areas engaged with the outside world as they raised money for Christian Aid. In multi-racial areas, Brash encouraged groups 'to establish personal links with the "Third World" representatives who are living there.'¹⁶²

As the chapter on Charles Chislett made clear, in more rural areas and in those without immigrant populations, mobility was a key factor. The more mobile members of society acted as conduits for first-hand information, much like the missionary or colonial administrator home on furlough in the nineteenth century. There were therefore bound to be differences between a community whose vicar was born and bred in the local area and one such as Child Okeford in Dorset, whose Anglican Rector was an ex-Royal Marines Commando Chaplain with personal experience of the Borneo jungle and 'some knowledge of the lives and problems of the hill peoples of that country.'¹⁶³ Similarly, meetings attended entirely by 'old ladies' would likely differ from those in Burnham on Sea attended by a university-qualified agriculturalist who had spent time with VSO in Kenya, or those in Plymouth where a specialist on

¹⁵⁸ A.R. Adams, Regional organisation Report of South West, September 1967 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁵⁹ Miss B. Carpenter, Monthly Report, March 1963 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/4).

¹⁶⁰ A.R Adams, Regional organisation Report of South West, April 1968 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁶¹ Christian Aid Week Post Mortem, 1957 (SOAS: CA/I/1/2).

¹⁶² Alan Brash, 'Christian Aid and World Development,' October 1966.

¹⁶³ A.R Adams, Regional organisation Report of South West, April 1968 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

eye disease who had studied trachoma in Nigeria spoke about conditions from ‘personal first hand knowledge’.¹⁶⁴

Much like the Women’s Institute, Christian Aid drew on local networks of first-hand experience while also encouraging local groups to seek information from established lending bodies such as the Commonwealth Institute, missionary societies and the Overseas Development Institute. The organisation painstakingly compiled lists of expert speakers who might enrich local Christian Aid activities. The make-up of these lists is interesting for three reasons. First, it reveals the broad networks of specifically religious mobility to which Christian Aid had access. Speakers with experience overseas included those such as Canon Wittenbach, the Candidates’ Secretary for the Church Missionary Society who was recommended for his ‘lengthy experience of Asia’ and Rev. MacKenzie, who had extensive experience of nationalist movements in Central and East Africa. Second and relatedly, the list reiterates the multiple ways in which decolonization affected church and religious life, emphasising how alternative repatriate postcolonial trajectories might have intersected and fed into one another. On their return to England, many of those on the list became involved in the welfare of overseas students. Eva Auerbach, for example, returned to England to work as a chaplain for overseas students after time as a missionary in India, while others brought their experience with industrial missions in Nigeria and Northern Rhodesia to work in places such as Birmingham and Sheffield. Finally, the inclusion of speakers from the Movement for Colonial Freedom, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Amnesty International, the Student Christian Movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament affirms Christian Aid’s openness to more radical manifestations of Christian citizenship. The list even recommended Irene Jacoby from the Friend’s International Centre for her ‘good contacts with communist youth organisations.’¹⁶⁵

Another important pool of ‘experienced’ speakers was returned volunteers who had spent time abroad on Voluntary Service Overseas projects. Volunteers included people like Martin Garner, who was one of the first eight VSO volunteers and worked in schools in Sarawak and India before returning to Britain to be ordained into the Church of England. Garner’s time abroad was informed by a Christian ideology of duty and service, much like that employed by Christian Aid. For him, the

¹⁶⁴ Miss B. Carpenter, Regional Organisation Report, Midlands, April 1965 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁶⁵ Speakers on International Topics 1964/65, 30 September 1964 (SOAS: CA/I/13/5).

Gospel told the original VSO story: Jesus volunteered to leave the safety of home for those in need and there was ‘no greater thrill than following Jesus.’¹⁶⁶ Not all volunteers funded by Christian Aid saw their work in such explicitly religious terms, however, and many who worked in education projects returned to Britain to teach. These returning volunteers still spoke to Christian Aid committees and interested members of the public, but it seems likely that they framed their talks in the language of development rather than in the terms of Christian service.

Finally, Christian Aid in the parish was shaped as much by local rivalries, individual enthusiasts and incompetent committee members as it was by the discourses of the central administration. The organisation was one of many competing for time in a busy calendar. Poor attendance at one meeting was attributed to the bad weather and a “rival” meeting (plus apple pie contest) by the local Women’s Institute.¹⁶⁷ When baked goods were not luring people away from Christian Aid, parishes might be let down by their own Rectors, Ministers and Vicars. Little was achieved in Glastonbury, for example, where the Rural Dean Hugh Knapman insisted on remaining Christian Aid Secretary despite the fact that ‘his greatest interest seem[ed] to be keeping up the tradition of sending to Her Majesty the Queen a spray of the famous thorn tree once a year.’¹⁶⁸ Similarly, the Bishop of Winchester may have been ‘all smiles and affability’ about Christian Aid but would not ‘get down to brass tacks about what needed to be done’.¹⁶⁹ Area Secretaries also vented frustration about those who disliked committee work and formal group action on principle; those who took issue with Christian Aid itself; and those who simply did not get along—the Anglican Rector and Methodist Minister in Shepton Mallet, for example, were described as having ‘a remarkable facility for upsetting each other’.¹⁷⁰

Christian Aid Week also needed to fit in alongside local and national campaigns for a whole host of causes. For some this was simply par for the course and many chose to contribute to multiple campaigns throughout the year, seeing little contradiction in the aims of various humanitarian organisations. Others took to heart the fact that they had to compete for attention. Despite a public face of cooperation and collaboration with Oxfam there were constant rumblings about competition. Janet

¹⁶⁶ Michael Edwards, ed., *Arriving Where We Started: 25 Years of Voluntary Service Overseas* (London: VSO and IT Publications, 1983), 17.

¹⁶⁷ A.R. Adams Regional Organisation Report of South West, October 1967 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁶⁸ A.R. Adams Regional Organisation Report of South West, November 1968 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

¹⁶⁹ J. H. Bowman Quarterly Regional Organisational Report, 1 March 1969 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/1).

¹⁷⁰ A.R. Adams Regional Organisation Report of South West, September 1967 (SOAS: CA2/I/18/4).

Lacey might have been ‘firm friends’ with Oxfam director Leslie Kirkby, but not all Christian Aid members felt the same spirit of cooperation. Some were exasperated by Oxfam fundraisers who ‘quite shamelessly appeal to the churches around Christian Aid Week period’.¹⁷¹ In Haslemere representatives of other humanitarian organisations repeatedly called down the wrath of Area Secretary and local resident Margaret Bywater. She reported how a man from Oxfam had made himself known to the local clergy by asking if he could help with Christian Aid Week. As Bywater described, ‘that was his way of introducing himself—very subtle and disarming and clever. It ended by the Anglicans doing a giant jumble sale for Oxfam which raised about £150.’¹⁷² Bywater also reported that ‘a local committee of Help the Aged has been formed to help raise £2000 for Tibetan Refugees. As usual the clergy and the church people of the town have been roped in. [...] They are actually running a Gift Shop in Haslemere THIS week (Christian Aid Week) and have appealed to all the churches for help with goods and service.’ Mrs Bywater’s husband refused to make the announcement in their church, an act that does not seem in particularly Christian spirits.¹⁷³

Conclusion: Humdrum Internationalism

Such petty disputes may seem a world away from the discourses of Christian duty and critiques of colonial world systems that characterised the central administration and national public persona of Christian Aid. Yet however they were framed, these lived and local experiences were nevertheless important conduits to the outside world. The quotation that gives this chapter its title is taken from a letter written to *The Times* in August 1967 by the General Secretary of the British Council of Churches, Kenneth Sansbury. In an effort to explain to readers the relevance of the ecumenical movement to the contemporary global climate, Sansbury discussed the agenda for the upcoming Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Upsala in 1968. In his words, the meeting was ‘devoting the major part of its thought to the Church’s role in economic, social and international affairs’ and ‘Worship, Mission and unity [would be] considered only in relation to life in a shrinking world

¹⁷¹ Memorandum on Christian Aid Week and the BBC, 1962 (SOAS: CA/I/14/3).

¹⁷² Margaret Bywater to James E. Sexton, 7 May 1962 (SOAS: CA/I/14/3).

¹⁷³ Margaret Bywater, Area Secretary Report, 24 May 1968 (SOAS: CA2/I/19/3).

and a secular age.¹⁷⁴ The need to adapt to a shrinking world runs through each of the case studies in this thesis. In this chapter, it has informed institutional agendas, explained the importance of increased accessibility to far-flung peoples and places and, in the case of Sansbury's letter, described an unprecedented and pervasive sense of global interconnectedness. But this need is manifested not solely in the larger, grander processes of Britain's changing relationship with the outside world. While national, non-national and international institutions recognized and reacted to a world that was growing ever smaller, this same knowledge was also resonating within village halls, assembly rooms and homes across England. Indeed, one of the remarkable effects of the 'shrinking world' of the mid-twentieth century was that it could be shrunk so small as to slot neatly into the 'humdrum' of local associational life.

Christian Aid used humanitarian and Christian discourses of need, brotherhood and religious duty alongside networks of mobile speakers with 'first-hand' experience to bring this shrinking world into local communities across Britain. The petty rivalry and gossip discussed above were clear signs of parochialism. That is undeniable. But in this case, the parochial was not necessarily opposed or resistant to the international. Rather than thinking about parochialism and internationalism as necessarily competing for attention we must recognize that the parochial in fact provided the very structures through which the international entered into the quotidian discourses and practices of everyday life. The very same people who gossiped and competed—those stalwart ladies making cream teas—also made up the crucial local networks through which Christian Aid was able to function. The nature of the relationship between humanitarian organizations and their supporters would change in the 1970s—moving towards a more detached, cheque-book form of activism—but in the 1960s face-to-face participation remained fundamental to charitable fundraising.¹⁷⁵ In the 1960s, Christian Aid could not have functioned without being embedded in British associational life. It is not just in the institutional discourses of an organization that expanded its international remit and changed the shape of religious humanitarian intervention, therefore, but also in the 'humdrum' of associational life that surrounded Christian Aid in the parish that we can and should read Britain's internal globalization.

¹⁷⁴ *The Times*, 3 August 1967.

¹⁷⁵ For a discussion of this change see Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary.'

Conclusion:

Decolonization, Globalization and Social Responsibility

At its simplest, this thesis has asked how the British public's interactions with the peoples and places of the empire and Commonwealth changed as a result of decolonization. Its central concern has been to discover how issues relating to the empire and its decline became part of everyday 'local' experiences and to unpack how the ideological preoccupations of institutions and organizations interacted with the personal realities of international engagement as practiced 'on the ground.' By bringing together the previously segregated histories of domestic associational life, globalization and imperial decline it has aimed to shed new light on the public's experience of looking outwards onto the wider world in the 1960s. This conclusion reflects on two important questions that emerge out of this project: How does bringing empire into the more typical post-war domestic histories of affluence, youth culture and declining deference change how we talk about the history of the metropole? And what about how the public engaged with the empire and Commonwealth in the 1960s was distinct from the periods that preceded and followed it?

Time Well Spent: Virtuosity and the End of Empire

David Wainwright, author of an early history of Voluntary Service Overseas, described the 'mood' in the 1960s as one 'that required a perpetual assessment of Britain's place in the world.'¹ Over the course of the decade, successive governments were forced to (re)negotiate the nation's relationship with the Commonwealth, the European Economic Community and the United States. But finding a place in the world was not just a governmental concern. The combined processes of decolonization and globalization also prompted the various associations and

¹ David Wainwright, *The Volunteers: The Story of Overseas Voluntary Service* (London, 1965), 22.

individuals studied in this thesis to reflect on these issues, encouraging them to think through their particular responsibilities to the local community, to the British nation, to their Commonwealth compatriots (old and new) and to a broader global community. While empire no doubt played a role in determining their responses to this changing world, it is easy to overstate the importance of the ‘imperial factor’ in the everyday lives of British people at the time. One of the key arguments of this thesis is that, in most cases, imperial, Commonwealth and international engagements tended to form only one, albeit important, dimension in lives made up of complicated and various relationships. While the empire prescribed the boundaries of international efforts in many ways, the driving factor in encouraging many individuals to interact with the wider world was sociability over and above residual imperial notions of paternalism, etc. Educational, philanthropic and friendship-based engagements with the peoples and places of the declining empire almost always existed alongside multiple allegiances and identities, which were for the most part comfortably formed and performed without concerns about the ways in which they might intersect with and contradict one another.

But how did empire work its way into everyday associational life? How do we sensitively recreate the experiences of those who have little life within the archive? How are we to understand the drives and motivations of people like Mrs X, living in rural somethingshire, who may or may not have been on a cruise along the coast of East Africa, whose son may or may not have served in Malaya, whose daughter may or may not have spent time abroad with Voluntary Service Overseas, whose husband may or may not have worked within the colonial administrative structure, and who may or may not have turned on the television to watch a programme about Nigeria’s independence ceremony? More pressingly, how can we deal with the specificity of someone of whom we know nothing more than that they won second place in the Burythorpe Women’s Institute’s sock darning competition in 1958?

A central concern of this thesis has been to recognize the relationships between participants and instigators, consumers and producers, impassioned activists and habitual donors. While we cannot recreate whole lives, therefore, we can understand the various conduits through which people might have come to engage with the spaces and peoples of the declining empire. This project has revealed how the institutional objectives of the WI, the Rotary Club and humanitarian organizations such as the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and Christian Aid were crucial in

stimulating local international engagements, illustrating how these organizations provided an essential infrastructure through which their members made connections with the outside world. It has also shown that institutions themselves were incredibly reliant on the presence of enthusiasts at a local level to put their international objectives into practice. Unlike anonymous ‘participants’, enthusiasts and instigators such as Charles Chislett were much more likely to leave an archival trace. We know, for example, that instigators were typically the more mobile members of society who had some form of ‘first hand’ experience of the empire/Commonwealth, whether through missionary work, military service, colonial administration, volunteering or tourism. Their activities at a local level brought less mobile members of society into international networks, granting vicarious access to imperial and international concerns.

Of course, it is important to question not only how but also why the public came to engage with the outside world. This issue is central to our understanding of the relationship between the local and the global. What connections did the public see between the questions ‘What can I do on a Thursday night?’, ‘What is wrong with 1960s Britain?’ and ‘What is my place in the shrinking postwar world?’ The empire has always functioned as a field in which the British public have performed identities, acted out desires and determined social boundaries. This project reveals that in the 1960s, the spaces of empire played a central role in discourses of rational recreation and civic responsibility. Both imperial and international engagement became ways of performing the role of the worthy citizen, serving the needs of one’s own community by engaging in a respectable pastime that also contributed to the wider international and/or Commonwealth community. There is little doubt that enthusiasts took on such roles because they found them affirming and validating—that institutions developed international remits because they believed them to be important. As Chislett put it, they were ‘giving something back’ to their local community in the belief that their actions might also have a meaningful impact on the wider world, either through promoting friendship and understanding, or through providing money to support development projects overseas.

Visions of the Future in Associational Life: The Distinctiveness of the 1960s

Andrew Thompson has been vocal about the need for domestic imperial studies to engage with the complexity of the empire. In the wake of the ‘postcolonial turn’ scholars have often sought to sketch general patterns and describe national narratives rather than aiming to perceive differences and draw distinctions. Yet, and as Thompson suggests, ‘many people were influenced by one aspect of Britain’s imperial experience without necessarily being aware of or affected by others.’² The empire was not (just) one big thing: there was, Thompson argues, ‘no uniform imperial impact, no joined-up or monolithic ideology of imperialism, no single source of enthusiasm or propaganda for the empire, no cohesive imperial movement.’³ Individuals within Britain have always embraced selectively those dimensions of the empire that most suited their own desires and interests.

The same was true of decolonization. The domestic culture of empire was fragmented in ways that allowed distinct relationships to form with different parts of the declining empire. Indeed, each of the above chapters has made clear that it was possible to participate in activities relating to one or another dimension of decolonization and the empire without being fully aware of each distinct change in the political situation and without understanding how the puzzle of empire was put together (or indeed was being taken apart). In the 1960s there were many ways that different aspects of empire might be brought into individual’s lives: the new multiracial Commonwealth that the Royal Commonwealth Society promoted; the resilient ties of Old Commonwealth kith and kin nurtured by the Women’s Institute; the ‘newly emergent’, ‘underdeveloped’ countries of Africa and the Caribbean that attracted the attention of humanitarian organizations; and the disappearing ‘untouched’ civilizations that tourists such as Chislett sought out in distant imperial outposts. Within this broad range, there are two particularly distinctive features of British public engagement with the empire/Commonwealth in the 1960s: first, engagement was much more present-focused than the typically nostalgic performances of the late 1970s and 1980s; and second, while India would become the central location for later nostalgic imaginings, Africa was prioritized as the key site of intrigue and intervention in the 1960s. As Antoinette Burton has described, India

² Thompson with Kowalsky, ‘Empire in the Public Imagination,’ 253.

³ Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back?*, 241.

became disaggregated from the rest of Britain's colonial possessions and experiences by the late 1970s.⁴ In the 1960s, as this thesis has shown, the public's attention was elsewhere.

In most histories of the end of empire, decolonization and declinism seem to go hand in hand. But in the 1960s the moment of decolonization was also tied to a moment of opening up that encouraged forward-looking and future-oriented, conceptions of Britain's place in the world. The 1960s were distinctive not just for the rapid pace of decolonization, but also for the sudden boom in mobility and the concomitant surge in international agencies and organizations. Each chapter in this thesis has revealed that individuals and organizations focused their energies on affecting change in the present rather than dwelling on the past. In fact, it was precisely this nostalgic mode of imperial engagement that the Royal Commonwealth Society was working so diligently to shrug off in the 1960s. New futures, previously unavailable, were now being envisioned—ones that sought to tally the receding influence of Britain on a national level with the increased opportunities for international agency becoming available to the British public on an individual or associational level.

The paths that associational organizations navigated between the new international, the old imperial and the multi-racial Commonwealth were not simplistically a response to decolonization. Indeed, very few people engaged directly with the events of decolonization; they were also influenced by globalisation, increased mobility and a related faith in the potential for effective intervention in the 'underdeveloped world.' These parallel developments stimulated a redeployment of imperial energies that tied into ideas about modernity, cosmopolitanism and internationalism. While empire might have come to be seen to be out of step with modern Britain by the 1960s, intervention in the name of 'great powerdom' was not.⁵ The 1960s were about reframing these interventions to suit developing discourses of the new multiracial Commonwealth and/or a universal humanistic internationalism.

Making adjustments to the postimperial present inevitably entailed a complex interplay of remembering and forgetting, of moving on and looking back. Each of the

⁴ Burton, 'India, Inc.?' 230.

⁵ Thompson, 'Introduction' in *Britain's Experience of Empire*, 20. See also Murphy, 'Britain as a Global Power'; D. Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1990); A Jackson, 'Empire and Beyond: The Pursuit of Overseas National Interests in the Late Twentieth Century,' *Economic History Review* 123, 499 (2007):1350-66.

organizations discussed in this thesis was keen to present itself as at the vanguard of anything that seemed like it was moving forward and as willing to shed the weight of the imperial past. The Royal Commonwealth Society tried to shrug off racial colonial stereotypes by talking about the future of the multiracial Commonwealth, for example, while director of Christian Aid Alan Brash sought to distance the organization from increasingly controversial conventional missionary practices. More broadly, acts of selective erasure were performed in order to avoid dealing with the violent and controversial dimensions of Britain's imperial past. This was particularly evident in Chislett's touristic accounts where controversial or embarrassing dimensions of decolonization were overlooked in favour of an overarching narrative of trusteeship.

But the focus on the future was only ever partial. If the empire largely vanished in the 1960s, the complex networks that developed alongside it did not; the bonds of care that had informed long traditions of humanitarian intervention did not; the sense of a shared past that formed the backbone of old Commonwealth friendships did not; and, most importantly, the desire to intervene on an international stage did not. The empire was a convenient geography in which to act out new forms of international citizenship, a pre-established network of commitments and connections that could be put to uses that, if not always new, were reframed and repackaged for a changing world. At the same time, a wide range of imperial experiences also became touchstones used to justify contemporary tourism, friendship and humanitarianism. Christian Aid tapped into the missionary tradition of welfare provision, for instance, while the Freedom from Hunger Campaign claimed experience based on the exploits of colonial scientists and administrators.

If the 1960s was the decade of development, in which present actions were seen as working for a better future, the focus of that developmental attention was surely Africa. The British public engaged with a number of different versions of Africa in this decade: the continent was portrayed as a hotbed of nationalist protestors (with whom Christian Aid sympathized and Chislett saw as destructive, incompetent and influenced by outside pressure); it was home to educated elites, religious figures and new political leaders who visited Britain and could be invited home for a cup of tea, to give a talk in the local church, or to speak at the Royal Commonwealth Society about the challenges facing newly independent countries; it was a site of political controversy in which white settlers stridently resisted moves towards racial equality;

but most of all, Africa came to be seen as a continent of hungry people, underdeveloped and in need of external assistance. This concept of Britain's relationship with Africa tapped into older imperial discourses of trusteeship while securing the foundations of a humanitarian agenda that has endured to the present day. The Christian Aid representative who warned in 1966 of the 'great danger of giving too simple a picture of the poor little Africans'⁶ offered a prescient indictment of the risks involved in foregrounding in an image of Africa founded almost entirely on a comparative lack of agency, an Africa formed as a counter to the freedoms and abundance of fully industrialized Britain and perhaps most importantly, an Africa that serves as perfect fodder for the moral 'obligations' of a population searching for their purpose in the postimperial world.

By the 1970s, however, the seemingly unflappable faith in development as a panacea for world ills that had characterized the 1960s had finally begun to wane. Philanthropic fatigue was developing in the face of increasing advertising and the perpetual nature of humanitarian campaigns and the public began to lose faith in the ability of the United Nations and other international organizations to effect change. By the end of the decade, politics had begun to infringe on humanitarian campaigns. This can be seen most clearly in Biafra in the last two years of the decade where humanitarian organizations became implicated in disputes between the Nigerian government and Ibo leadership.⁷ Perhaps this lack of faith in the present played a part in encouraging people to retreat into the imperial past.

Colours and Palettes

As I have argued throughout, it is misleading and limiting to view the reverberations of decolonization solely through the lens of national narratives. I agree with Bernard Porter's criticism that 'national identity' often has very little to do with the '*realities* of national life'.⁸ Recognizing this distinction, each chapter of the thesis has teased out the tensions (and fluidities) between discourse and practice, between institution and individual, and between the gamut of local, national, rural, urban,

⁶ Unnamed Letter to Sylvia Usher, 31 May 1966, (SOAS: CAI/5/5).

⁷ See Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 133-147.

⁸ Bernard Porter, 'Further Thoughts on Imperial Absentmindedness,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 1 (2008), 101.

imperial, Commonwealth, global and age- and gender-based senses of belonging expressed by participants in associational life. But whereas Porter argued that the British population was little affected by the empire or its subsequent decline, this thesis has shown that the breadth and depth of imperial influences on the ‘realities’ of 1960s associational life was in fact varied and extensive. The practices of the Women’s Institute, the supporters of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and Christian Aid and individual enthusiasts such as Charles Chislett each reveal that empire resonated beyond the governing elite to affect middle-class communities in industrial towns, in isolated villages, in seaside expatriate havens, in churches, chapels, school assembly rooms, town halls, sitting rooms, and cine clubs across England. It is not necessary to read imperialism ‘between every line and beneath every brush stroke’ in order to account for its impact (a criticism that has been levelled at many cultural/postcolonial works),⁹ but simply to recognize that the ‘imperial factor’ was an important colour on the palette of British life, one which tinted—some might say tainted—many aspects of 1960s social activity.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Glossary

List of Commonly Used Abbreviations

a) Organisations and Institutions

ACCW	Associated Countrywomen of the World
BCC	British Council of Churches
CA	Christian Aid
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FFHC	Freedom from Hunger Campaign
NFWI	National Federation of Women's Institutes
RCS	Royal Commonwealth Society
UN	United Nations
WI	Women's Institute

b) Archival Abbreviations

DO	Dominions Office/Commonwealth Relations Office
ED	Department of Education
FO	Foreign Office
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
OD	Overseas Development
RA	Rotherham Archive
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
TNA	National Archives
YFA	Yorkshire Film Archive

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accessed 21 August 2012].

The National Archives, Kew

Files Relating to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign:

Dominions Office/Commonwealth Relations Office

Foreign Office

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food

Overseas Development Office

Files Relating to the Commonwealth Institute:

Department of Education

Dominions Office/Commonwealth Relations Office

Treasury

School of African and Oriental Studies

Christian Aid Archive

BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading

Travel and Features Programme List, T50.

Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York, York

Burythorpe Parish Women's Institute Minutes

Capricorn Africa Society

Yorkshire Federation of Women's Institutes International Committee

The Women's Library, London

National Federation of Women's Institutes

The Yorkshire Film Archive, York

Charles Joseph Chislett Collection

Rotherham Archive

Charles Chislett Papers

Distaff Club

University of Cambridge Library

Royal Commonwealth Society Archive

Boxes Used:

Cambridgeshire Branch

Cambridgeshire Branch Minutes

Hants and Dorset Branch

Branch Reports, Hants and Dorset

Jersey Branch

Liverpool Branch

Sussex Branch
Commonwealth Affairs Committee
Commonwealth Affairs Committee Agendas and Minutes
Commonwealth Studies Foundation
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Amateur Cine World
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Cornishman
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Guardian
Home and Country

Illustrated London News
Manchester Guardian
Rotarian
Rotary in the Ridings
Rotherham Advertiser
South Yorkshire Times
The Times
Western Daily Press
World (Council for Education in World Citizenship)

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