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Robert Saunders

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# Brexit and Empire: 'Global Britain' and the Myth of Imperial Nostalgia

Robert Saunders

Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

## ABSTRACT

In the wake of the 2016 referendum, the idea that 'imperial nostalgia' motivated the Leave vote became a staple of academic commentary. Yet such claims suffer from four important flaws. They are usually polemical in character; they suggest, at least implicitly, that only Leave voters are subject to imperial patterns of thought; they fail to differentiate between Commonwealth and imperial loyalties; and they conflate 'nostalgia' with 'amnesia'. This article deploys a longer historical perspective to offer a new reading of the relationship between Brexit and Empire, focusing on the ways in which empire is remembered and articulated. It shows how imperial modes of thought shaped the views of pro-Europeans, as well as their opponents, and explores the changing uses of the Commonwealth. It pays particular attention to the views of Black and Asian voters – a cohort that disrupts many conventional assumptions about Brexit – and shows how empire was excised from histories of 'Global Britain', in a manner that minimises the significance of decolonisation. As such, it presents the legacies of empire, not as a disorder to which only half the population is subject, but as a common cultural inheritance through which all sides of the European debate think and argue.

## KEYWORDS

Brexit; empire; Commonwealth; imperial nostalgia; postcolonial melancholia; postcolonialism; European Union; European economic community; European integration

In the days and months after the 'Brexit' vote in 2016, as media outlets across the world struggled to make sense of what had happened, one explanation quickly became entrenched in international commentary. The *New York Times* called the vote 'England's Last Gasp of Empire': the diseased reaction of a nation 'sickened by nostalgia' (July 13 2016). The Australian *Daily Telegraph* blamed 'nostalgia for imperial certainties', and its front page featured a Union Jack flying proudly beneath the headline, 'The Empire Strikes Back' (June 25 2016). Broadcasters followed suit: the American network CNN claimed that 'Leavers talk ... with tub-thumping pride, of how "we used to have an Empire"' (June 22 2016), while a Canadian station hosted a discussion of Brexit that focused explicitly on 'nostalgia for the bygone glories of the

British Empire' (CBC, June 25 2016). Two of the most insightful writers on race and identity in the British media, Gary Younge and Afua Hirsch, reached similar conclusions. The 'echoes of empire', thought Younge, 'reverberated through the campaign', producing a result that was 'underpinned by a melancholic longing for a glorious past' (*Guardian*, February 3 2018). For Hirsch, 'the ghosts of the British Empire are everywhere in modern Britain, and nowhere more so than in the dream of Brexit'.<sup>1</sup>

What the *Washington Post* called Britain's 'nostalgia for empire' has also been a theme of academic commentary on Brexit (December 2 2016). David Olusoga, author of a celebrated study of Black British History, saw in the Leave vote 'a nostalgic yearning for lost colonies' (*Guardian*, March 19 2017), while Onni Gust, a scholar of imperial thought, argued 'that nostalgia for empire ... played a considerable role in swaying people's vote'. The imperial historian Dane Kennedy accused the Leave campaign of making 'nostalgic appeals to the past' and to the 'glory they associated with the British Empire'. Robert Gildea, a historian of modern France, called Brexit 'the revenge of colonial nostalgia', while Marc-William Palen, a scholar of imperialism and globalisation, concluded that 'Imperial nostalgia motivates the pro-Brexit protectionist pipedream'.<sup>2</sup>

Such accounts offer an important corrective to the 'Peterhouse' style of much Brexit commentary, focusing, as it does, on the manoeuvrings of a small political elite in the months before the referendum.<sup>3</sup> The debate in 2016 stirred powerful emotions of fear, loss and betrayal, with deep roots in British history. Its signature issues – immigration, 'sovereignty', citizenship and trade – spoke to diffuse and sometimes inchoate ideas about identity, nationhood and Britain's place in the world. Campaigners on both sides invoked contested memories of the past and made normative claims about Britain's 'natural' allies and markets. In all these respects, the campaign was closely interwoven with the histories of empire and with the imaginative possibilities to which it gave rise.

Yet the emphasis on 'imperial nostalgia', as one of the core engines of the Leave vote, obscures more than it reveals. The Leave campaign brought together an unusually broad coalition of forces, stretching from George Galloway on the Left to Nigel Farage on the Right. Its 17.4 million voters constituted the largest electoral alliance ever constructed in Britain, and it would not be difficult, amidst such a cacophony of discordant voices, to find some who were nostalgic for empire. Yet we should be wary of erecting this into a general explanation of the Leave vote, for four main reasons.

First, it carries an obvious polemical charge. The very language of 'nostalgia' – a term inherited from the vocabulary of the medical sciences – marks out the Leave vote as a psychological disorder: a pathology to be *diagnosed*, rather than an argument with which to *engage*.<sup>4</sup> It is advanced almost exclusively by those (like the present author) who backed Remain in 2016, whose interests it clearly

serves. In the absence of compelling evidence, beyond vague appeals to 'Global Britain' or 'Empire 2.0', scholars should be cautious of arguments that so directly suit their own political preferences.<sup>5</sup>

*Second*, such accounts suggest, at least implicitly, that it is only Leave voters who are haunted by the ghosts of Empire.<sup>6</sup> Yet if we are to grapple seriously with the notion of Britain as a 'post-colonial society' – steeped, in Catherine Hall's words, in 'a history *which implicates us all*' – then postcolonialism cannot be something that happens only to other people. One of the great insights of postcolonial scholarship has been its insistence on the ubiquity of post-imperial 'habits of thought' and its sensitivity to their manifold forms of expression; a recognition that, as the cultural theorist Stuart Hall argued, 'We – all of us – are still [empire's] inheritors'.<sup>7</sup> Applying that insight to the Brexit debate requires us to recognise post-imperial patterns of thought, not as a psychological affliction to which only half the population is subject, but as a common cultural inheritance through which all sides think and argue. That, in turn, requires a closer attention to imperial modes of thought among supporters of European integration and to the uses of *anti*-colonial rhetoric in Brexit ideology.

*Third*, we should not conflate 'nostalgia' for *Empire* with enthusiasm for the *Commonwealth* – two ideas that carry different political charges and appeal to different cohorts. To take an obvious example: Black and Asian voters often feel a strong affinity with the Commonwealth, but they are not, as a rule, 'nostalgic' for 'Empire'. Appeals to Commonwealth sentiment require further disaggregation: evoking, for some, the white 'Dominions' of Canada, Australia and New Zealand; for others, the multiracial states of the 'New' Commonwealth.<sup>8</sup> More recently, terms such as 'CANZUK' and 'the Anglosphere' have gained currency: ideological formations that draw upon, but are not coterminous with, the legacies of either Commonwealth or Empire.

*Finally*, historians must be careful not to confuse *nostalgia* with *amnesia* – the *forgetting* of empire with the *longing* for it. The two are not, of course, mutually exclusive: indeed, it is probably only possible to be 'nostalgic' for empire if one 'forgets' much of its history.<sup>9</sup> Nostalgia and amnesia are both pathological forms of memory, based on curated versions of the past, but they work to different ends. What Stuart Hall called 'the gaps and lacunae – the plug-holes – down which so many troubling things about ... colonialism have disappeared' could encourage complacency, as well as regret, about the passing of empire: facilitating a conviction that a swashbuckling, global role remained possible for Britain, without the sinews of imperial power.<sup>10</sup>

In short, empire has loomed both too large and too small in our understanding of Brexit: deployed as a totalising explanation for one half of the voting public, yet dismissed as an irrelevance for the other. A reliance on terms like 'nostalgia', as a placeholder for any relationship with the imperial past that can be regarded as pathological, has come at the expense of analytical clarity,

occluding the many different ways in which empire can be remembered and the different political projects which those memories can serve. Redressing that problem requires a greater attention to the case for membership; a more disaggregated approach to the different forms and modes of the imperial connection; and a shift in emphasis from *nostalgia* to *amnesia*. It also requires a longer historical perspective, attuned to the uses of imperial rhetoric in earlier phases of Britain's European debate.

This should be underpinned by a more cautious use of evidence, that heeds Stephen Howe's advice to scholars not 'simply to assume what they purport to be investigating'.<sup>11</sup> The rhetoric of 'Empire 2.0', for example, has acquired an explanatory weight that the evidence cannot readily bear. The term first appeared in *The Times* in March 2017, inspiring such a blizzard of critical commentary that it was easy to miss an important fact: that the label had been 'coined by sceptical officials', *not* by their Brexit-supporting masters. There is no evidence that ministers saw their project in this light; indeed, the International Trade Secretary, Liam Fox, called the term 'offensive' and told Sky News that it was 'not a phrase I would ever allow [officials] to use'. The controversy offered a useful window into *anti*-Brexit thought, illustrating how Brexit was seen by its *critics*; but claims that 'Ministers Aim to Build "Empire 2.0"' (*Times*, March 6 2017) or that Brexiteers 'believe ... exiting the EU will bring about "Empire 2.0"' (*Civil Service World*, March 13 2017) outrun the available evidence.

Likewise, too much weight has been placed upon a 2014 YouGov poll on public attitudes towards empire.<sup>12</sup> It is undoubtedly significant that 59% of those polled thought empire 'something to be proud of' (to 19% who felt 'ashamed'); that 49% (to 15%) thought that former colonies were better off for having been part of the Empire; and that over a third said they would 'like Britain to still have an empire'.<sup>13</sup> Yet the correlation with the Leave vote is not self-evident. Public figures who have expressed pride in the empire have included Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Niall Ferguson, all of whom backed Remain in 2016. By contrast, some of the most vocal criticism of empire has come from Leave-supporters such as George Galloway and Kwasi Kwarteng.<sup>14</sup> The poll did not discriminate between different forms of imperial pride, each of which could nourish different political positions. As Priyamvada Gopal has noted, celebratory accounts of empire often focus particularly on its *end*, applauding a largely mythological version of decolonisation in which Britain gently guided its colonies to independence. A celebration of the *loss* of empire is likely, at the very least, to bend nostalgia into unusual forms.<sup>15</sup>

This article offers a new reading of the relationship between Brexit and imperial memory, focusing on four main lines of argument. It begins by showing how imperial modes of thought could shape the views of supporters, as well as opponents, of European integration, focusing especially on the idea of

‘postcolonial melancholia’. It demonstrates how accession could be integrated into a history that celebrated the colonial past, and that saw in Europe a new vehicle for Britain’s imperial ambitions. Imperial sentiment, it is argued, was not simply a force underpinning Euroscepticism; it also shaped the arguments in favour of membership, loading it with expectations of British leadership that were always likely to be disappointed.

A second section explores the role of the Commonwealth in the European debate. References to the Commonwealth in Eurosceptic rhetoric are too often treated as a euphemism for ‘Empire 2.0’; yet the imaginative possibilities bound up in the Commonwealth idea have made it a resource for the anti-colonial Left as well as the neo-imperial Right.<sup>16</sup> Its resonance in the European debate has changed across time. After 1990, developments in the international climate facilitated a new embrace of the Commonwealth by Conservative Eurosceptics. Yet even for the Right, the Commonwealth’s imperial past rendered it a problematic resource, encouraging new histories of the organisation that substituted ‘enterprise’ for ‘empire’ as its connecting bond. From here, it was but a step to alternative formations that broke the imperial connection altogether, sparking a series of neologisms such as ‘CANZUK’ and ‘the Anglosphere’.

During the referendum campaign in 2016, the most powerful appeals to the Commonwealth were addressed to Black and Asian voters – a cohort that has received curiously little scholarly attention in Brexit commentary. As a largely Remain-voting constituency, with complex attitudes towards both Commonwealth and European identities, a focus on BAME voters disrupts many assumptions about the referendum. For this reason, a third section explores the influences shaping BAME thinking on Brexit, showing how different visions of the Commonwealth could be activated both for and against membership.

The article closes by exploring the histories told by leading ‘Brexiters’, focusing particularly on the idea of ‘Global Britain’. ‘Memory’ is not an unmediated product of experience: it is constructed and given meaning in the stories told about the past. In the years around the Brexit vote, figures such as Boris Johnson, Liam Fox and Jacob Rees-Mogg constructed visions of British history that actively minimised the significance of empire, establishing a heroic vision of the past that was *global*, rather than *imperial*. The story they told was not of a great empire that no longer existed – required to cut its cloth differently for a post-colonial age – but of a small island that had always punched above its weight: a ‘swashbuckling’, ‘buccaneering’ people, winning out against the odds.

The effect was to detach a history of British greatness from the imperial power structures that had made it possible, while rejecting the importance of decolonisation as a rupture. Smallness and separation were cast, not as a reduction in power that required new policy choices, but as the historic conditions for national greatness. From this perspective, it was the decision to

join the European Community in 1973, not the end of empire, that formed the breach in Britain's global history, interrupting a national story in which empire played only an expressive role.

### Imperial Europeans and 'Post-Colonial Melancholia'

The charge that critics of European integration were nostalgic for empire has a long pedigree. As early as 1961, the *Daily Mail* (then an advocate of British membership) lamented that Britain had forfeited 'the leadership of Europe ... because she continued to regard herself as an Imperial and oceanic power' (January 27 1961). Tony Benn, who led the Labour Leave campaign in 1975, was mocked in *The Sun* as 'the last British imperialist rampant, still inhabiting a world in which the poor countries sell us their food and raw materials on the cheap and gratefully purchase our manufactured goods' (June 4 1975). The Australian statesman Gough Whitlam, who endorsed British membership, deployed the same trope at a news conference in 1975, urging the United Kingdom not to 'lapse into the position of Spain – looking to a mighty empire in the past and a peripheral influence for the future'.<sup>17</sup>

Such remarks, when not simply polemical, embodied two distinct ideas. The first was that Britain had backed the wrong horse after 1945, by privileging its declining imperial and Commonwealth networks over the resurgent European market. The second bit deeper into the national psychology, alleging that a sense of imperial entitlement had blinded the British to their shrunken status. On this reading, it took the collapse of the empire, the decline of the sterling area, the trauma of devaluation and the retreat from East of Suez to compel the British to come to terms with their post-imperial decline. The result, however, was to make Europe a symbol, not of hope, but of loss. Empire featured in such accounts chiefly through 'the chronic, nagging pain of its absence', making Europe a focus for what the cultural critic Paul Gilroy would later call 'postcolonial melancholia'.<sup>18</sup>

Though Gilroy himself rarely commented on the European question, critics of the Leave vote in 2016 have treated it as 'an exemplar episode of postcolonial melancholy'. That condition – defined as the 'morbid culture of a once-imperial nation', consumed by 'an unhealthy and destructive post-imperial hungering for renewed greatness' – was thought to have manifested itself in three main forms. The first cast entry into the European Community as a moment of national surrender, fuelling 'a deep sense of loss of prestige', when Britain abandoned a heroic, global identity for a diminished, Continental role.<sup>19</sup> A second saw EEC membership as not merely an expression of Britain's shrunken status, but as actively responsible for it. Britain, on this view, had been wrenched from its 'natural trading partners', feeding a resentment at 'being led by others, when in our minds we should be the ones explicitly leading'.<sup>20</sup> A third insisted that withdrawal (often couched as 'liberation') was necessary to restore Britain to



its rightful status, for ‘only by distancing itself from Europe and re-embracing Britain’s imperial values could the British people reignite the flame of greatness that had been extinguished’.<sup>21</sup>

All three strands could be found in Brexit ideology, especially among Leavers of an historical bent. Daniel Hannan, the Leave campaign’s most effective historical polemicist, saw in accession a moment of national defeat, which had confined a global power to ‘a cramped and declining customs union’. Such a choice, he concluded, could only have been conceivable at Britain’s ‘lowest moment as a modern nation’. Brexit, by contrast, would enable the British to ‘raise our eyes to more distant horizons and rediscover the global vocation that our fathers took for granted’.<sup>22</sup> Andrew Roberts, likewise, saw Brexit as a chance to ‘pick up where we left off in 1973’, reanimating ‘the dream of the English-speaking peoples that was shattered by Britain’s entry into the EU’ (*Daily Telegraph*, September 13 2016). Echoing the lament of Nigel Farage (*Daily Telegraph*, June 10 2016), Jacob Rees-Mogg complained that the British ‘ship of state has been moored in harbour since 1973’. Outside the EU, it could ‘once again take to the high seas and look at the whole world rather than the narrow European sphere’.<sup>23</sup>

For critics of imperial nostalgia, that ‘hungering for renewed greatness’ – or, as Anne Deighton put it, Britain’s ‘craving for a leadership’ role – has been one of the most destructive legacies of its ‘post-imperial political culture’.<sup>24</sup> Yet that craving has never been peculiar to Eurosceptics. On the contrary, for some supporters of membership, it was precisely this appetite for leadership that underpinned the case for entry. As Roy Jenkins discovered, during his time at the Treasury in the 1960s, it was possible to combine an enthusiasm for the European cause with ‘an attachment to imperial commitments worthy of ... Joseph Chamberlain, Kitchener of Khartoum and George Nathaniel Curzon’. The problem, for Jenkins, was not simply an enthusiasm for expensive military installations; it was a mindset that viewed Europe as a new vehicle for Britain’s imperial mission. George Brown, a former Labour Foreign Secretary, wrote in 1971 that Britain must become ‘the leader of ... a new European bloc which would have the same power and influence in the world as the old British Commonwealth’, while *The Sun* told readers that membership offered ‘an unrepeatable opportunity for a nation that lost an empire to gain a Continent’ (March 10 1975). Even pro-Marketeers of a less expansionist bent found this a useful argument for membership. As Shirley Williams put it, in an interview for the BBC in 1975: ‘Once upon a time the Commonwealth, now Europe’.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1970s, in particular, supporters of membership made no bones about their vision of Europe as a vehicle for British *imperium*. Patrick Ground, a future Conservative MP, told reporters in 1975 that ‘it was natural for our country – with its record as a colonial power ... to want to exercise some influence on the future development of Asian and African countries’. The Common Market, ‘far from reducing’ that influence, ‘had actually enhanced it’.<sup>26</sup>



*The Liverpool Daily Post* predicted that entry would facilitate ‘a new upsurge of British influence’ and ‘set us on the road to a new era of greatness’. Withdrawal, by contrast, would ‘consign us to the role of a small island nation with no voice in the councils of power’ (June 4 1975). The argument was most perfectly expressed by a correspondent to the *Daily Mail* in 1975: ‘Since it is no longer possible to win empires with arms, the matter has to be dealt with more cleverly. The EEC must become the new British Empire’ (June 4 1975).

In this respect, there was some truth in Tony Benn’s complaint that ‘the myth of Empire had been replaced by the myth of Europe’.<sup>27</sup> It might be more accurate to say that the two myths had fused: that, for some enthusiasts for entry, membership was the logical next stage of Britain’s imperial vocation. As Margaret Thatcher put it, in a speech to students in 1975:

A century ago, we had the jewel of India, while enterprising Britons carried our flags, our trade, our culture and our justice to the corners of the earth. Our Empire in turn grew into the British Commonwealth – a unique partnership of nations with us at its centre. ... And so it is, in this decade, that the pursuit of this traditional outward-looking role has brought us to exert our influence within the growing European Community.<sup>28</sup>

Thatcher bowed to no one in her enthusiasm for the empire, which she considered ‘a fantastic thing’.<sup>29</sup> Yet for most of her career, she invoked memories of empire not as an *alternative* to ‘Europe’ but as part of a common European heritage. Speaking in Rome in 1977, she hailed the ‘story of our Continent’ as the history of ‘the explorer and the trader, the missionary and the settler’, who had carried European civilisation ‘across every sea and continent’. ‘Europe’, she declared, was ‘the source of history’s greatest endeavour’, driven by a shared impulse to reach ‘outwards and upwards’.<sup>30</sup> Even her notorious Bruges Speech in 1988, usually remembered as a Eurosceptic oration, paid tribute to Europe’s ‘common experience’ of colonial endeavour: ‘the story of how Europeans explored and colonised – and yes, without apology – civilised much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage’.<sup>31</sup> Years later, one of her former ministers would invoke the same ethic, insisting that the ‘spirit that built the Empire would be out there using [the] EU to further British influence’.<sup>32</sup>

Such attitudes were not merely a historical relic, propagated by the last of the imperial generation. Gilroy’s seminal text on *Postcolonial Melancholia* was, in part, a commentary on the New Labour governments of 1997–2010 – comfortably the most pro-EU since the Heath years – and its themes reverberated through New Labour’s rhetoric. Tony Blair, for example, promised in the 1997 manifesto to provide ‘the leadership in Europe which Britain and Europe need’, putting Britain ‘once again ... at the centre of international decision-making’. Britain, he told Commonwealth Heads of Government, had resumed its ‘true role’ as a ‘pivotal’ power. His successor, Gordon

Brown, called his book on the 2016 referendum *Leading, Not Leaving*, telling voters that Britain should be ‘not just a member – but a leader’.<sup>33</sup> Both presented a renewed leadership position in Europe – after a period of alleged insularity – as a *return* to Britain’s traditional world role, a role that it should ‘celebrate ... rather than apologise for’ (*Daily Mail*, January 15 2005). Likewise, when David Cameron launched the Remain campaign in 2016 – requiring him, for the first time, to articulate a position in support of European membership – it was to this theme that he instinctively turned. Britain, he told the *Independent*, should aspire to ‘shape the world’s future as well as its past’, placing ‘a big, bold, brave Britain at the heart of [the world’s] institutions’ (March 19 2016).<sup>34</sup>

That desire to *lead* Europe has as strong an imperial pedigree as the desire to *leave* it. Indeed, the fear of irrelevance outside the EU – the suspicion, memorably articulated by Roy Jenkins, that an isolated Britain would be consigned to ‘an old people’s home for fading nations’ – suggests that ‘postcolonial melancholia’ has haunted the supporters of membership as much as their opponents.<sup>35</sup> If the British have often felt disappointed in the EU, this may owe something to the extravagant expectations with which membership was loaded, which cast Britain in a role it was no longer well-suited to play.

By contrast, Eurosceptics were often suspicious of the imperial motivations that they saw as underpinning membership. Campaigning for a Leave vote in 1975, *The Spectator* blamed ‘nostalgia for the days when Britain was the greatest of the world powers’ for its readiness ‘to abandon an identity that seems no longer lustrous for part of the identity of something bigger’ (June 7 1975). Enoch Powell, reflecting in 1991 on his youthful enthusiasm for empire, lamented the ‘gigantism’ it had left behind, spawning a ‘delusion that big is great’ and a ‘bullfrog mentality, [which] has haunted Britain ever since’.<sup>36</sup> As a critic of Commonwealth and Common Market alike, Powell urged his country to ‘come home again from years of distant wandering’. What Britain needed, he believed, was not ‘a surrogate for Empire’, but ‘a new patriotism ... to replace the old, imperial patriotism of the past’.<sup>37</sup> For Bruce Anderson, the resurgence of Tory Euroscepticism in the 1980s marked the fading of a generation that ‘saw Europe as a replacement for Empire’. ‘Most younger Tories’, he wrote in 1988, ‘are happy to be little Englanders, especially now that England does not seem so little’ (*Daily Telegraph*, September 21 1988).

Euroscepticism could even be cast in the language of colonial resistance. In the 1970s, in particular, both the Bennite Left and nationalist parties such as Sinn Féin, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party adopted the rhetoric of colonial liberation, presenting the EEC as a collection of white, post-colonial states, working to maximise their power and influence. Campaigning against membership in 1975, Sinn Féin denounced the EEC as ‘an attempt to resurrect the old European empires’ and urged voters not to be ‘enslaved by the new Empire’. The SNP, likewise, blamed membership on ‘absurd dreams of

renewed English imperial greatness'. The 'idea of empire', it proclaimed, was 'at the heart of the EEC'.<sup>38</sup> Likening VAT to the tea duties that sparked the American Revolution, Tony Benn urged voters to make the referendum 'Britain's independence day', while a statement by the Labour 'out' campaign framed the cause explicitly in the language of decolonisation:

25 years ago Britain dismantled a vast empire in the belief that no country has the right – or the wisdom – to govern another. Now we demand for ourselves what we freely conceded to the 32 members of the Commonwealth: the right of democratic self-government.<sup>39</sup>

Over the decades that followed, attacks on the 'European empire' found a new home on the Conservative benches, tracking the broader trajectory of Euroscepticism from Left to Right.<sup>40</sup> The Bruges Group, a mostly-Conservative ginger group founded in 1989, published papers on 'Tackling the EU Empire', while Andrew Roberts saw in 'the Brussels economic empire' the same tendency to overstretch that had destroyed previous empires (*Financial Times*, May 18 2012).<sup>41</sup> The historian and founder of UKIP, Alan Sked, described Euroscepticism as 'a demand for decolonisation from Brussels', not as an example of 'imperial nostalgia'. The 'Brexit argument', he insisted, was 'about empire', but 'certainly not the British one' (*Financial Times*, May 27 2016). It is not necessary to accept such claims to recognise their emotive power. During the 2016 campaign, Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and *The Sun* would all use the trope of 'Independence Day', in an unlikely echo of an earlier, Bennite rhetoric (*Daily Express*, May 23 2016; *BBC News*, June 24 2016; *Sun*, June 23 2016).

### **From Commonwealth to 'Anglosphere'**

The turn to Europe as a vehicle for Britain's leadership ambitions reflected, in part, a disillusionment with the Commonwealth as an instrument of British power. The idea that Britons faced a choice between Commonwealth and Common Market – with one looking backwards to empire, and the other forwards to a post-imperial future – oversimplifies the complex relationship between the two. For much of the post-war era, the Tory Right was scarcely less hostile to the Commonwealth than to the European Community, while Eurosceptics of the Left prized the Commonwealth precisely for its deviation from the imperial idea. Even after 1990, when it became possible for the Right to reimagine its relationship with the Commonwealth, its colonial ancestry remained a source of embarrassment, fuelling the popularity of futurist projects such as 'CANZUK' and 'the Anglosphere'.

Historians of modern Britain have rarely given the Commonwealth the attention it deserves, treating it variously as a modesty screen, that concealed from the British public their own post-imperial nakedness; as a 'painkiller',

that dulled its postcolonial hangover; or as the ‘grin’ left behind when ‘the Cheshire Cat of Empire’ faded.<sup>42</sup> Yet in the decades after 1945, it served as a repository for some of the most extravagant hopes and ideals in British politics. For some, it offered a platform for economic reconstruction, providing ‘all the foods and raw materials’ needed to ‘supply and sustain’ the British economy.<sup>43</sup> For others, its appeal was principally moral, offering ‘the greatest effort at a multi-racial society of nations the world has seen’, and ‘mankind’s only way forward to universal peace’ (*Times*, April 4 1964). During the Cold War, it could be viewed either as a bulwark against Soviet influence or as a ‘third force’ between East and West.<sup>44</sup> A 1956 Conservative report hailed it as a new basis for British power, which had ‘only to develop its resources to match the power of the United States of America or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’.<sup>45</sup>

Such hopes were swiftly disappointed. Far from acting as a pliant instrument of British power, the Commonwealth quickly became less white, less deferent and less amenable to British direction. The ‘New’ Commonwealth states, in particular, moved sharply to the left, while the organisation as a whole found a directing purpose in opposition to the white settler regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia – precisely those states which, to many on the Right, upheld ‘the true spirit of empire’.<sup>46</sup> Under the leadership of Sonny Ramphal, its Secretary-General from 1975 to 1990, it became a point of pride that the ‘Commonwealth’ had ‘lost its “Britishness”’, and would never again ‘become the creature of Britain or any other single member country’.<sup>47</sup>

For successive governments, Commonwealth summits became ‘an ordeal to be endured’, rather than ‘an opportunity to advance UK interests’. Even Harold Wilson, who boasted of his enthusiasm for the organisation, complained in 1966 that Britain was being treated ‘like a bloody colony’.<sup>48</sup> In the 1970s and 80s, in particular, the Commonwealth featured in Conservative debate chiefly as a ‘problem’: a body that was ‘asking too much and costing too much’: responsible either for mass immigration and the ‘race problem’ or for the menacing of British interests in Southern Africa.<sup>49</sup> The organisation was criticised in terms strikingly similar to those later applied to the EU, as an instrument through which ungrateful foreigners fleeced Britain of cash, interfered in its affairs and undermined its nationhood through mass immigration. A Foreign Office Report in 1972, written as Britain prepared to join the EEC, complained that Britons had ‘paid a high, and perhaps an excessive price’ for the Commonwealth connection, adding that it would be ‘important to avoid doing so in the future’.<sup>50</sup>

By the late-1960s, governments of both parties had largely lost faith in the Commonwealth as a vehicle for ‘world influence’, offering ‘comparable opportunities to membership of the European Community’.<sup>51</sup> Its economic value was also declining: in the early 1950s, the Commonwealth had accounted for nearly half of UK exports and imports, yet by 1972 – the last year *before* accession to

the EEC – that had dropped to less than a fifth.<sup>52</sup> The moral case, by contrast, proved more durable – especially on the British Left. Hugh Gaitskell told an American audience in 1957 that ‘We are proud that out of a colonial Empire there has been and is being developed an association of free, independent, self-governing states, containing many different races, colours and religions’. Five years later, he delivered a memorable address to the Labour Party Conference, lauding ‘this remarkable multi-racial association’ as ‘of immense value to the world’. His successor, Harold Wilson, thought it ‘the greatest multi-racial association mankind has known’, and promised that Labour would reassert Britain’s ‘abdicated leadership in the Commonwealth’. Reflecting on ‘the end of colonialism’ and the reordering of ‘a white colonial empire into a multi-racial commonwealth’, the Labour manifesto in 1964 boasted that ‘No nobler transformation is recorded in the story of the human race’.<sup>53</sup>

In some cases, this reflected the strength of Labour’s own imperial traditions. More often, however, it cast the Commonwealth as the *antithesis* of imperialism; a vehicle for a new politics of anti-racism, overseas development and anti-colonialism.<sup>54</sup> Writing in 1960, Labour’s former Commonwealth Secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker, hailed the organisation as the ‘negation of imperialism’, based not upon the ‘predominance of British power’ but on equality and partnership. For Gordon Walker, the ‘ending of Britain’s special status’ was precisely what made the organisation so valuable. ‘Every step away from an Anglo-centric Commonwealth’, he concluded, marked progress towards the ideal.<sup>55</sup>

The result was a vision of the Commonwealth that was determinedly anti-imperial. Harold Wilson, for example, was at pains to distinguish the ‘imperialist yearnings’ of the Conservative Party from Labour’s enthusiasm for the Commonwealth, an organisation fit for ‘the post-colonialist age in which we live’. John Hatch, likewise, told the House of Lords in 1979 that it was quite wrong to believe that the Commonwealth had ‘arisen out of the British Empire. I would say rather that it has arisen *despite* the British Empire’. For Hatch, who had served as Labour’s Commonwealth Secretary during the 1950s and as Commonwealth correspondent for the *New Statesman*, ‘the imperial ethic’ was founded on ‘domination by the great Powers’. The Commonwealth, he believed, embodied a different principle: a partnership of equals across the lines of race, religion and political alignment.<sup>56</sup>

The implications for the European debate were not straightforward. For those who saw in the Commonwealth the *negation* of empire, it was tempting to view accession to the EEC as a reversion to imperial type: in which Britain sacrificed the needs of poorer nations to its own power interests. Entry, thought Gaitskell, would mean ‘the end of the Commonwealth’, whose transformation into a body ‘predominantly represented by coloured Prime Ministers’ had once been the ‘pride’ of the Labour movement. A year earlier, Harold Wilson had told MPs that ‘we are not entitled to sell our friends and kinsmen down the river for a problematical and marginal advantage in

selling washing machines in Dusseldorf.<sup>57</sup> During the referendum campaign in 1975, it was Labour Leavers, such as Peter Shore and Tony Benn, who made most of the Commonwealth connection. Judith Hart, the Minister for Overseas Development, and Barbara Castle, the first holder of that office, both joined the Leave campaign in 1975, while the anti-colonial Left also opposed membership.

Yet this moral vision of the Commonwealth could equally be channelled into support for the European cause. As Commonwealth trade diversified, it was argued that Britain could best 'serve the Commonwealth' by representing its interests in Brussels: in particular, by securing access to European markets and by co-ordinating aid and development initiatives.<sup>58</sup> The Lomé Convention of 1975 signalled the opportunities, marking what even Judith Hart described as 'a dramatic ... step forward'.<sup>59</sup> In a diplomatic coup for Harold Wilson, 32 Commonwealth Heads of Government signed a memorandum in 1975 backing British membership. For Dickson Mabon, the Labour MP who chaired the Scotland in Europe campaign, 'A "No" to Europe was a "No" to the Commonwealth'. Anti-Marketeers, he argued, could offer nothing but a neo-colonial relationship in which the Commonwealth itself had no interest (*Scotsman*, May 30 1975).

For the Right, the Commonwealth was a more problematic reference. Enoch Powell, the high priest of the Eurosceptic Right, was as hostile to the Commonwealth as he was to the Common Market, deriding it as a 'myth', a 'humbug' and a 'farce'.<sup>60</sup> Over the 1970s and 80s, its association with left-wing politics, multiracial immigration and anti-colonialism made it scarcely less of a bogey than Brussels. David Adamson, the *Daily Telegraph's* longstanding foreign correspondent, concluded in 1989 that most Conservatives saw it as 'a Third World organisation', whose 'hallmarks' were 'hypocrisy and bankrupt socialism'.<sup>61</sup> The same year, the journalist and Thatcher confidant Peregrine Worsthorne published an appeal to 'Abolish the Commonwealth', calling it 'an undesirable institution' which had inflicted on Britain 'a multi-racial society' (*Sunday Telegraph*, October 22 1989).

Yet even as Worsthorne was writing, the context of Commonwealth debate was changing in ways that made it a more useful resource for the Right. The collapse of apartheid removed the longest-running sore in Commonwealth relations, while enabling some who had once supported the apartheid regime to trumpet the role of British and Commonwealth diplomacy in bringing it to a close.<sup>62</sup> Successive Commonwealth Immigration Acts had already choked off large-scale inward migration, with the result that the two most offensive features to the Right lost much of their salience. Instead, the EEC – or the EU, as it became in 1993 – inherited both roles, becoming the major source of controversy over immigration and the most visible challenge to Britain's sovereignty. By 2016, hostility to 'multiculturalism' and 'immigration' no longer drove right-wing animus against the Commonwealth; instead, they were among the strongest predictors of a vote to leave the EU.<sup>63</sup>



In consequence, it became possible once again to imagine the Commonwealth as an alternative to European integration – one that imposed no costs or obligations, but was allegedly more in tune with ‘Anglo-Saxon’ values. The speed and significance of that change should not be overstated. Even in the 1990s, the historian and future Leave-supporter Andrew Roberts – an enthusiast for the unity of the ‘English-speaking peoples’ – could mock the ‘absurd’ ‘fervour and naïveté’ once invested in ‘the Commonwealth ideal’. A collection of Eurosceptic writing, published in 2002, did not even have an index entry for the Commonwealth, and leading Brexit campaigners made little of the organisation in the years preceding 2016. Despite odd spasms of enthusiasm for Australia, Boris Johnson’s newspaper columns treated the organisation as an object of derision, which existed to supply the Queen with ‘cheering crowds of flag-waving piccaninnies’ (*Daily Telegraph*, January 10 2002).<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, the decoupling of the Commonwealth from ‘coloured immigration’, the closing of the apartheid controversy, and, perhaps, the death of Enoch Powell in 1998, expanded the imaginative possibilities for those on the Right who were impatient of European constraints. UKIP, in particular, increasingly presented the Commonwealth states as ‘family’, whose wartime sacrifice made them ‘more worthy of our friendship’. A ‘reinvigorated Commonwealth’, it suggested in 2014, was ‘a real alternative to ... the European Union’.<sup>65</sup> Nigel Farage, too, cheerfully admitted his preference for ‘our kith and kin in the Commonwealth’ (*Daily Telegraph*, June 10 2016). Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, in 2013, Boris Johnson denounced the ‘infamous’ decision to join the European Community in 1973 for ‘betray[ing] our relationships with Commonwealth countries such as Australia and New Zealand’, with whom the British were ‘more deeply connected ... than with any other country on earth’ (*Daily Telegraph*, August 25 2013).

In the aftermath of the Leave vote in 2016, appeals to the Commonwealth provided a useful shield against claims that Britain was retreating from the world. The organisation became a particular touchstone for the new Department of International Trade, tasked with showing that Britain was ‘open for business’ as it left the EU. Yet encomia towards the shared history of the Commonwealth disguised a curious reticence about the nature of that history – and, in particular, its roots in empire.

A striking example was provided by the Secretary of State, Liam Fox, in a speech to the inaugural conference of Commonwealth Trade Ministers in 2017. The existence of this event – the first of its kind – was a mark of the importance Fox placed upon the Commonwealth, which he hailed as an association of ‘some of the world’s oldest and most resilient friendships’. Yet he seemed rather coy about the origin of those friendships, making the striking suggestion that what bound the Commonwealth together was a shared history of free trade. Britain, he proclaimed, had



long been associated with both the concept and practice of free-trade. A small island perched on the edge of the European continent became a leader of world trade. For over a century the terms 'Britain' and 'free trade' were virtually synonymous. ... Those of us, represented here today, have, through our shared history and experience, witnessed the transformation that trade can bring and have a duty to ensure that the benefits that we enjoy today are made available to future generations.<sup>66</sup>

Speaking at the same event, Priti Patel hailed the Commonwealth as an 'exemplar' of 'free markets, private enterprise and liberal economies'. Like Fox, Patel offered a curiously dehistoricised vision of the Commonwealth, bound together, not by its common experience of empire, but by a shared commitment to market economics.<sup>67</sup>

A few months before the referendum, Fox had described the United Kingdom in a tweet as 'one of the few countries in the European Union that does not need to bury its 20th century history'.<sup>68</sup> Yet his own rhetoric was rich in omissions and evasions. Addressing a gathering of business leaders in September 2016, he offered an account of Britain's rise to power that excised the empire altogether:

The global influence Britain enjoys today is largely down to our proud trading history, a history steeped in innovation and endeavour. 250 years ago we pioneered canal networks and invented railways so we could move goods faster than ever before. Steam engines transformed the textile industry and led to the sprawling growth of our great northern cities. We were, quite simply, the workshop of the world. A small island perched on the edge of Europe became the world's largest and most powerful trading nation.<sup>69</sup>

Such evasions served a number of important functions. They established a heroic vision of British history that was *global*, rather than *imperial*, serving to detach a memory of British greatness from the sinews of imperial power. They cast the Britain that ruled the waves, not as a coercive military empire, but as a champion of 'free trade'; and in so doing, rendered entrepreneurialism – rather than empire – the golden thread connecting past and present. At their root was not, as Anthony Barnett has suggested, 'the longing for empire', but the longing for a past from which empire could be excised, in a manner that minimised the significance of decolonisation and rendered the past a subject not for lamentation but for imitation.<sup>70</sup>

Yet despite the best efforts of Fox, Patel and others, the Commonwealth would always bear the stigma of its imperial parentage.<sup>71</sup> From that recognition, it was but a small step to abandoning the Commonwealth model altogether, in favour of such notions as 'CANZUK' (an association between Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) or 'the Anglosphere'. As Ben Wellings and Helen Baxendale suggest, these were attempts to rework the Commonwealth 'for a global, rather than imperial, era', by stripping it of its unfashionable colonial regalia. Leading proponents of the idea were at pains to distance themselves from the imperial past: James Bennett, for example, described CANZUK

as ‘precisely the reverse’ of empire, while Andrew Lilico dismissed the notion that it was ‘some reheated latter-day British Empire’. Crucially, its membership could be edited according to taste, judged not by any former imperial bond but by a commitment to free markets. Like sports fans, earnestly drawing up their fantasy football teams, enthusiasts for the Anglosphere transfer India, Singapore and the United States in and out of their squads and organise them into different tactical formations: whether ‘a devolved network of allied nations’ (Daniel Hannan), a ‘deep geopolitical partnership’ (Andrew Lilico) or ‘the largest country on the planet’ (Andrew Roberts).<sup>72</sup>

As Duncan Bell, Michael Kenny and Nick Pearce have shown, terms like ‘CANZUK’ and ‘the Anglosphere’ may have been new coinages in the 1990s but they stood in a long intellectual tradition. Anglospheric thought has deep roots in the imperial past, manifested in such Victorian and Edwardian projects as ‘Greater Britain’, ‘Imperial Federation’ and ‘the English-Speaking Peoples’.<sup>73</sup> Yet such ideas are not straightforwardly backward-looking or nostalgic, despite their roots in imperial modes of thought. As the examples of Joe Chamberlain, Charles Dilke, W.E. Forster and J.R. Seeley remind us, ‘Greater Britain’, ‘Imperial Federation’ and the union of the ‘English-Speaking Peoples’ were always futurist projects: they sought to build, or at least to formalise, something that did not currently exist. Though steeped in imperial assumptions about race, the virtues of Britishness and Britain’s peculiar destiny to global leadership, each aspired to create something different to actually-existing imperial structures. Likewise, advocates of the Anglosphere do not simply look backwards; rather, they seek forms of association in the present that offer Britain international leadership, commercial advantage and global reach, while detaching those benefits from the stigma of empire.<sup>74</sup>

## Black and Asian Voters and the Commonwealth

During the 2016 referendum, the most powerful appeals to the Commonwealth were directed at Britain’s 4 million Black and Asian voters. The idea that Britain should ‘build connections with the Commonwealth, rather than Europe’ was widely ventilated by Leave campaigners, with figures such as Kwarsi Kwarteng and Priti Patel pitching a Leave vote as ‘a chance to rejoin ... the Commonwealth countries with which we are so strongly culturally and historically tied’ (*Voice*, April 21–27 2016; *Eastern Eye*, March 18 2016). Though both Kwarteng and Patel hailed from the Right, neither could readily be accused of imperial nostalgia. Kwarteng, the son of Ghanaian immigrants, had published a critical volume on the *Ghosts of Empire*, in which he rebuked the imperial revisionism of historians such as Niall Ferguson (who backed Remain). The British Empire, wrote Kwarteng, had ‘openly repudiated ideas of human equality’ and was ‘not merely undemocratic’ but ‘anti-democratic’, making it ‘a bizarre model’ for the modern world.<sup>75</sup>

That view chimed with a longstanding tradition of left-wing Euroscepticism. George Galloway – once described in *The Voice*, despite his white skin, as ‘Britain’s finest black politician’ (January 29 2012) – thought pride in the Empire ‘a matter of ... shame’, and identified his ‘anti-imperialist family’ among his most profound political influences. Yet he accused his country of having ‘shamefully turned its back on the Commonwealth’, insisting that ‘We need to remake our relations with the Commonwealth and we need a new deal for Commonwealth citizens’ (*Voice*, June 16–22 2016).<sup>76</sup>

The role of Black and Asian voters in 2016 has drawn remarkably little scholarly attention, as have Black and Asian visions of the Commonwealth. For obvious reasons, writing on 2016 has focused overwhelmingly on the motives of Leave voters; yet research suggests that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) voters backed Remain by 68% to 31%, with even higher figures for those identifying as Black, Chinese, Muslim or Hindu.<sup>77</sup> This owed something to a structural misalignment with the wider Leave campaign. Among the white population, three characteristics correlated strongly with a Leave vote: (i) a tendency to identify as ‘English’, rather than ‘British’; (ii) hostility to immigration and multiculturalism; and (iii) a set of what might be termed ‘Farageiste’ anxieties about the loss of cultural homogeneity.<sup>78</sup> Yet BAME voters are more than twice as likely as whites to identify as ‘British’ rather than ‘English’; they are more comfortable with overlapping identities (the idea that one might be British *and* Asian, or British *and* European); and it is reasonably common, especially in Asian households, to speak more than one language within the home.<sup>79</sup> While attitudes to immigration are not always liberal, BAME voters are more likely to associate it with positive outcomes and to prize its cultural, as well as economic benefits. Crucially, as the Runnymede Trust reported in 2015, such voters tend to view any attack on immigration as a threat to themselves, and to be wary of politicians associated with ‘nativism’.<sup>80</sup> This is augmented by a greater awareness of the EU’s legal protections against discrimination, a point emphasised by Operation Black Vote and in a front-page editorial in *The Voice* (*Voice*, April 21–27 2016, June 16–22 2016).

In all these respects, the Leave campaign was poorly aligned with Black and Asian voters; yet the advantage was not all on the side of Remain. BAME voters are even less likely than the white population to identify as ‘European’:<sup>81</sup> a term that often carries negative racial associations.<sup>82</sup> They are less likely to work and travel in Europe, or to speak another European language.<sup>83</sup> Muslim voters, in particular, report high levels of concern about Islamophobia and racial prejudice in Continental Europe, especially in the Eastern European states from which much recent immigration has come (*Financial Times*, May 19 2016). Above all, there is a strong tendency to view EU immigration rules as racially discriminatory, granting freedoms to white Europeans that are denied to migrants from Asia and the Caribbean (*Daily Telegraph*, March 14 2016). In consequence, the EU is associated less with ‘freedom of movement’ than with

a prejudicial immigration system that ‘discriminates against Commonwealth citizens’. A public letter, signed by 20 ‘MPs from Commonwealth backgrounds’, called this ‘an immigration system with discrimination and prejudice at its core’ (*Voice*, June 2–8 2016).

Until the 1990s, Black and Asian voters had been viewed chiefly as a Leave constituency. During the first referendum, in 1975, the Indian Workers’ Association distributed 10,000 leaflets in the Midlands urging ‘a massive “No” vote’. The Pakistani Workers’ Association followed suit, while a range of eminent West Indian figures backed a ‘No’ vote in papers like *West Indian World*. This was especially striking, given the prominence in the Leave campaign of Enoch Powell, whose tirades against Commonwealth immigration had made him a hate figure in the Black and Asian press. By contrast, those politicians who were most liberal on race and immigration tended to back staying in; notably Roy Jenkins, the Home Secretary who had piloted the Race Relations Act, and Shirley Williams, who had taken the fight to Powell on non-white immigration.<sup>84</sup>

This owed something to the socialist critique of membership, at a time when ‘Black’ politics was closely aligned with the radical Left. It also drew on a suspicion of Europe as a racialized employment zone, that would privilege white European workers over Black and Asian migrants. Above all, however, it marked the continuing pull of ‘the Commonwealth ideal’, not as the heir to empire but as a ‘monument to inter-racial co-operation and partnership’. As a contributor to *West Indian World* put it, there remained a powerful feeling ‘that we should stay out of the Common Market and that Britain should continue to trade with the black countries’ (*India Weekly*, June 12 1975; *West Indian World*, April 25 – May 1 1975; May 30 – June 5 1975).

In 1975, Pro-Marketeers responded with a campaign pitched strongly to Commonwealth interests. Groups such as ‘Asians for Europe’ and ‘Commonwealth for Europe’ distributed material in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu, urging the trading benefits for the Commonwealth if Britain could act as a bridgehead into European markets. Supportive statements were published by the Jamaican Ambassador to the United Nations, while the thirty-two Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed British membership at the Kingston summit in May 1975.<sup>85</sup>

With exceptions such as the Labour MP Khalid Mahmood and the novelist Dreda Say Mitchell, Black and Asian Leave campaigners in 2016 came mainly from the Right. Conservative Leavers included Adam Afriyie, James Cleverly, Kwasi Kwarteng and Priti Patel, while Steven Woolfe of UKIP featured in *The Voice*. Conversely, the most vocal advocates for Remain were Labour figures such as Rushanara Ali, David Lammy, Rupa Huq and Chuka Umunna. Both sides appealed strongly to Commonwealth loyalties. Leave campaigners focused particularly on immigration, condemning a system that ‘discriminates against ... the Commonwealth’ while giving ‘special treatment’ to

Europeans (*Voice*, March 10–16 2016, *Eastern Eye*, February 26 2016). ‘For far too long’, said Patel, ‘those from the Commonwealth have been sidelined and discriminated against in favour of EU migrants’. Voting Leave, she insisted, would enable ‘a fair immigration policy which would bring in the best from countries like India, Bangladesh, Australia and New Zealand’. She also backed a ‘Save our British Curry’ campaign, endorsed by the Bangladesh Caterers’ Association, which promised to ease the shortage of curry chefs once Britain was no longer ‘forced to turn away talented people from the Commonwealth’ (*Eastern Eye*, June 17 2016; *Financial Times*, May 19 2016).

For UKIP, in particular, such arguments served a useful rhetorical purpose, providing cover against the charge that it opposed immigration in all its forms. Even Nigel Farage, an unlikely apostle of multiracial immigration, claimed that Brexit would facilitate a non-discriminatory system, under which ‘more black people would qualify to come in’ (*Daily Mail*, June 8 2016). Yet the utility of such appeals assumed that they did indeed resonate with voters. A striking feature of this rhetoric was its invocation of a historic debt to the Commonwealth, forged in wartime service. An open letter signed by 20 MPs ‘from Commonwealth backgrounds’ – including Afriyie, Cleverly, Kwarteng, Patel and Nadhim Zahawi – complained that their ‘ancestors ... fought alongside the British in two world wars, but are now forced to stand aside in favour of people with no connection to the United Kingdom. This is unfair’ (*Voice*, June 2–8 2016).<sup>86</sup> Another, signed by 80 ‘patriotic Britons of Commonwealth background’, protested that ‘The descendants of the men who volunteered to fight for Britain in two world wars must stand aside in favour of people with no connection to the United Kingdom’ (*BBC News*, February 17 2016).<sup>87</sup> Shortly after the referendum, Priti Patel reminded a meeting of Commonwealth trade ministers that ‘In some of the darkest days in world history, it has been our friends and allies in the Commonwealth who have remained steadfast on the side of freedom’. Saqib Bhatti, who sat on the board of Vote Leave, told journalists that ‘South Asian immigrants have ancestors who fought in the world wars, they sacrificed a lot ... But they find it hard to come in compared to other individuals from Europe’.<sup>88</sup>

The Remain campaign recognised the power of Commonwealth sentiment and responded in kind. It pointed out that the first barriers to Commonwealth immigration were erected before Britain joined the EEC; that Nigel Farage was a doubtful champion of non-white immigration; and that the government’s pledge to reduce immigration ‘to the tens of thousands’ left no scope for increasing inflows from outside the EU, which already stood at more than 180,000 *per annum*. As campaigners rightly predicted, there would be less talk of entry permits for curry chefs, kabaddi players and religious leaders once the referendum was safely over. As in 1975, Remainers also pressed the benefits of membership for the Commonwealth. In an interview for the Black newspaper *The Voice*, David Cameron professed his commitment to ‘our

Commonwealth allies' in Africa and the Caribbean, insisting that 'Britain's leading role in the EU' had improved the terms of trade for countries like Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria (*Voice*, June 16–22 2016). On referendum day, the "StrongerIn" campaign published a full-page advertisement in *The Voice*, insisting that membership was 'GOOD FOR THE COMMONWEALTH', and that 'the EU amplifies Britain's ties with Commonwealth countries' (*Voice*, June 23–29 2016). As in 1975, Commonwealth leaders had mostly backed British membership, or had come as close to doing so as decorum permitted. In the Asian press, in particular, much was made of remarks by the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on Britain's role as India's 'entrypoint ... to the European Union'. Cameron and George Osborne hailed Modi's support in speeches at Bhaktivedanta Manor in Watford and the Swaminarayan temple in Neasden, as did Barry Gardiner, of the Labour Friends of India (*Eastern Eye*, June 17 2016, June 24 2016). A joint letter signed by Diane Abbott, Rushanara Ali, David Lammy and others rejected the 'false choice' between Commonwealth and Continent. 'Our participation in both is important. Why else have Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth ... argued Britain is stronger in the EU?' (*Voice*, May 19–25 2016)

The Leave campaign probably underperformed with BAME voters in 2016, a fact that owed much to the racially-charged rhetoric of some of its leading members. When Boris Johnson blew the racial dog-whistle in April, mocking the 'part Kenyan' President Obama's 'ancestral dislike of the British Empire', the group 'Africans for Britain' immediately disaffiliated from the Leave campaign, with senior figures claiming to have been treated like 'house negroes' (*Buzzfeed*, April 24 2016). The Labour MP Khalid Mahmood, who had joined the Leave campaign from a desire 'to end EU visa discrimination against our Commonwealth Citizens', defected to Remain, describing Johnson's remarks as 'totally racist' (*Independent*, 26 May 2016). Johnson's jibes also angered voters with links to the Keynan Asian diaspora (*Eastern Eye*, April 29 2016). Yet repulsion from the Leave campaign did not necessarily fire support for membership. At 57%, BAME turnout was significantly lower than that of whites (74%), suggesting that voters who disliked the EU chose to stay at home rather than vote with Johnson and Farage.<sup>89</sup> Commonwealth loyalties remained an asset to the Leave campaign, but were not sufficient to overcome its problematic racial politics.

### **'Global Britain' and Forgetting Empire**

In the aftermath of the 2016 referendum, a number of commentators held up Britain's global past as an inspiration for the future. Like the Anti-Marketeers of the 1970s, who marched under the banner 'Out of Europe and Into the World', Brexiteers presented withdrawal as a chance to steer the ship of state out of the backwaters of Europe and into the open seas of the wider world:



an arena allegedly more appropriate to Britain's history and identity. This was encapsulated in the idea of 'Global Britain', a concept that has drawn considerable critical fire. Anthony Barnett called it 'a formula ... that echoes the longing for empire', while Oliver Turner identified it as a 'narrative of empire' that harkened back 'to eras in which it was taken for granted that the UK, by virtue of its empire, exerted extensive international authority and influence'. 'Empire', on this reading, was 'the still-beating heart of Global Britain, giving its bombastic rhetoric logic and meaning'.<sup>90</sup>

Yet the use of this term by leading Brexiteers suggests something more complex: a heroic vision of British history in which empire barely featured, pushed aside by a history centring on trade, enterprise and the gravity-defying achievements of a small island. For its advocates, 'Global Britain' was not a 'narrative of empire' but a narrative of *greatness*, which relegated the empire to a purely expressive role. It was sustained, not by 'knowledge of past imperial "successes"', but by amnesia and apathy: a way of thinking that vested so little in the imperial past that it was untroubled by decolonisation.<sup>91</sup>

This drew on a wider cultural phenomenon: a forgetting of empire, to which scholars have repeatedly drawn attention.<sup>92</sup> Writing in 1998, Catherine Hall noted that the 'legacy of ... empire is all around us and yet there is great reluctance to think about it or acknowledge its place in our history'. Paul Gilroy, in 2004, complained that 'Once the history of the Empire became a source of discomfort, shame and perplexity ... that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten'. More recently, Afua Hirsch has argued that 'the empire was never mourned or buried. Neither its problematic life nor its sudden death has ever been truly acknowledged'.<sup>93</sup>

Such acts of suppression come at a cost: in Catherine Hall's words, the process of 'turning a blind eye', of 'knowing and not knowing', acts 'to disrupt and unsettle our present'.<sup>94</sup> Yet this 'forgetting' fulfilled two important functions in Brexit ideology. First, it established a continuity between past and present that was uninterrupted by the loss of Britain's colonies. It created a useable history of British success – bound up most visibly in the language of 'Global Britain' – anchored not in vanished imperial structures but in a set of timeless national characteristics that required only liberation from 'Brussels' in order to flourish. As such, it rejected the importance of decolonisation as a rupture, that might require a recasting of Britain's geopolitical ambitions or a more bounded, regional identity.

Second, it enabled a synthesis between two visions of British history that might otherwise seem at odds: one that cast Britain as a global titan; another that viewed it as a 'small island', punching 'above its weight' in the world. It cast the empire as an *expression* of British power, rather than as its *source*; as something Britain *did*, not as something Britain *was* (and is no longer). It reimaged imperial history as an achievement against the odds; the story, as David Cameron told the Conservative Party Conference in 2011, of 'a small country



that does great things'.<sup>95</sup> In so doing, it cast smallness as an essential ingredient in Britain's historic success, not as a condition to which it had been reduced by the withdrawing of the imperial tide.

Like so much of Brexit ideology, this owed a debt to the godfather of the Eurosceptic Right, Enoch Powell. Powell was an early proponent of the idea that 'all history is myth' – not in the sense that it was untrue, but in that the stories told about the past carry political meanings, which exert power in the present. The 'greatest task of the statesman', Powell believed, was 'to offer his people good myths and to save them from harmful myths'.<sup>96</sup> Whether those stories were strictly accurate mattered less than the political charge they carried and the programmes to which they gave their support.

For Powell, post-war Britain was in the grip of an especially pernicious myth, which he called 'the myth of empire': the 'illusory notion that Britain was once great because she had an Empire and is now small and weak because she has one no longer'. The conviction that Britain was 'powerful *because* of her Empire', or that its power had been 'sustained by colonies and dependencies which were in fact a net burden', had caused 'grave psychological damage'.<sup>97</sup> For Powell, its legacy was evident in two contradictory tendencies: one, a pervasive sense of 'decline' that had sapped the British of self-confidence; the other, a longing for empire-substitutes, such as the Commonwealth or the European Community, in which Britain could submerge its nationhood in return for global power.

To counter these 'myths', Powell set out to write a 'new history' of Britain: not quite 'Britain without empire', but 'Britain with the imperial episode in parenthesis'. As early as 1957, he had concluded that 'the Tory Party must be cured of the British Empire'; and in a series of books, articles and speeches, he set out to establish 'a new patriotism' that could replace the 'imperial patriotism of the past'. The keynote of that patriotism was the essential continuity of British history before and after empire. Unlike other countries, he insisted, 'England underwent no organic change as the mistress of a world empire', and was not diminished by empire's close.<sup>98</sup>

Powell came not to praise the empire but to bury it, and his efforts had a lasting effect on the political memory of the right. The empire would be written out of Britain's 'island story', and, in particular, from the memory of World War Two: a memory that focused increasingly on the Battle of Britain, the heroism of 'the few' and an image of Britain (not, as in Churchill's rhetoric, 'Britain and the British Empire') 'standing alone' against Nazi tyranny.<sup>99</sup> Within a few short years, colonial ex-servicemen who had fought for Britain would be cast as 'invaders' themselves, in the racialized rhetoric of Powell and his acolytes. Where empire featured in Powell's historical vision at all, it was as a manifestation of something deeper: a 'national will', embedded in the national character, that had 'given and preserved to us the Empire'.<sup>100</sup>

Yet the story was to take a turn that Powell had not anticipated. For while Powell had sought to slay the demon of ‘gigantism’, calling the British ‘home again from years of distant wandering’, his inheritors would send Britain back out into the world to recapture the glories of the past – untroubled by the loss of an empire that Powell had taught them never mattered in the first place. They would do so, armed with a vision of British history that decoupled the achievements of the colonial past from the imperial power structures that had made them possible; confident that the very smallness Powell so prized offered a platform for renewed greatness.

This was particularly evident in the thought of Margaret Thatcher. Hailing Britain’s victory in the Falklands in 1982, Thatcher rebuked the ‘waverers and the faint-hearts’ who thought ‘that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world’. Here, again, the empire appeared as something Britain *did*, not as something Britain *was*, enabling Thatcher to dismiss the significance of decolonisation. ‘The lesson of the Falklands’, she declared, ‘is that *Britain has not changed* and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history. This generation can match their fathers and grandfathers ... When the demands of war and the dangers to our own people call us to arms – then we British are as we have always been’.<sup>101</sup>

This was not about mourning the end of empire; still less about attempting to reverse it. It was a denial that decolonisation mattered at all: an insistence that a small nation – stripped of its colonies, its military power and its dominance of the global financial system – could remain ‘as we have always been’, if it only had the courage to believe. That made it possible at once to disclaim empire and to invoke the lessons of the imperial past. As Boris Johnson put it, in 2018, the challenge was ‘to rediscover some of the dynamism of these bearded Victorians: *not to build a new empire, heaven forbid*’, but ‘to go back out into the world in a way that we had perhaps forgotten over the past 45 years: to find friends, to open markets, to promote our culture and our values’ (*Daily Telegraph*, July 15 2018).

In such tellings, ‘Global Britain’ and ‘Little Britain’ served as complementary, not competing versions of the national story. This was neatly illustrated by Jacob Rees-Mogg’s 2019 memoir on *The Victorians*, in which the exemplar episode of empire was the last stand of General Gordon at the siege of Khar-toum. ‘The scene’, he writes, was

one common enough in the annals of Empire: the valiant British officer leading his troops ... in the face of surely insurmountable odds. Sometimes, these odds prove to be in fact surmountable and a story of valour is forged in the heat of battle and victory. At other times, the context and setting prove too much, even for the toughest of warriors. The officer falls in the face of superior numbers and victory becomes defeat. Glory is equally possible and with death comes a story of heroism.<sup>102</sup>

It would be hard to detect, from this account, that Victorian Britain was a military superpower, commanding the largest fleet on the planet and enjoying a staggering technological advantage over its subject peoples. The result was a curious act of historical alchemy, transmuting one of the most formidable empires in history into a heroic underdog, somehow finding a way against ‘insurmountable odds’. This made it possible for Rees-Mogg both to celebrate Britain’s ‘wonderful’ imperial past and to disclaim the notion ‘that we have some neo-imperial vision and are going to become a superpower’.<sup>103</sup>

That same revisionism underpinned the work of Daniel Hannan, whose best-selling books and columns in the *Daily Telegraph* have made him one of the most influential popular historians of the European question. Hannan took pride in Britain’s imperial history, but viewed its former colonies more as a burden than as a source of power. As he wrote in 2011, ‘I’m not sentimental about the British Empire: we’d have been better off running trading posts and informal protectorates than assuming responsibility for vast tracts of land’ (*Daily Telegraph*, May 24 2011). His books centred explicitly on the nation-state: a small island that ‘made up in enterprise what she lacked in territorial advantages’; that fought the Second World War for the principle that ‘democracy and national self-determination are the same thing’. In his introduction to Hannan’s 2012 book, *A Doomed Marriage*, the Eurosceptic entrepreneur Tom Kremer presented the colonies almost as an accidental accretion. ‘Britain’, he wrote, ‘*may in her time have accumulated an overseas empire*’, but her ‘consistent support of the smaller countries against central hegemony in Europe can only be explained in terms of a deep, instinctive distrust of overbearing, centralised political structures’.<sup>104</sup>

A similar vision was apparent in Boris Johnson’s thought, not least in his 2016 manifesto for the Leave campaign. Denouncing the influence of ‘Nanny in Brussels’, Johnson reminded readers that ‘*We* used to run the biggest empire the world has ever seen, and with a much smaller domestic population ... Are *we* really unable to do trade deals?’ (*Daily Telegraph*, March 16 2016, my emphasis). Strikingly, the ‘*we*’ was assumed to be the same in each case – a ‘*domestic* population’ that was larger in 2016 than in the age of empire. The empire stood in Johnson’s rhetoric as a mark of virility; evidence of what Britain could still achieve if it recovered its national mojo.

For Johnson, decolonisation did not break the essential continuity between past and present, or diminish what Britain could achieve in the future. At the Conservative Party Conference in 2016, he called the end of empire ‘a profoundly good thing’, describing it as ‘good for Britain and good for the world that ... those responsibilities have been taken away’. Lest anyone confuse ‘responsibility’ with ‘power’, he proceeded immediately to a triumphant celebration of Britain’s twenty-first-century might. ‘Global Britain’, he proclaimed, was ‘a soft power superpower’; even on the seas, its ships were tackling Somali pirates ‘with all the courage and decisiveness of our nineteenth century

forebears'. Those 'tempted to despair' about Brexit were invited to learn from the 'pessimists' of an earlier generation, who had predicted the worst 'when we unbundled the British empire'.<sup>105</sup>

As Wendy Webster has noted, decolonisation was commonly viewed in Britain 'as a disaster for the former colonized', rather than for the metropole. Johnson seems to have shared that view: in a notorious article on Africa in 2002, he told readers that 'The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more'. In the tradition of 'the white man's burden', the colonies feature in Johnson's writing as a field for British enterprise, not as a source of British strength. In this view, Britain had an empire because it was powerful; it was not powerful because it had an empire. That power was assumed to have rested less on material underpinnings or an unsustainable balance of trade than on the psychological attributes of the British people.<sup>106</sup>

A similar vision was expressed by Grant Shapps, a former minister and Conservative Party Chairman, in the weeks after the referendum. Having rashly backed Remain in 2016, Shapps swiftly pivoted to the winning side, publishing a programme a week after the vote designed to restore Britain's place as 'the world's greatest trading nation'. 'As an island', he declared, 'we need to rediscover the swashbuckling spirit of the nineteenth Century when we practically owned the concept of free trade'. At least one commentator has found 'clear imperial undertones' in these words; yet what was most striking about Shapps' account was the *absence* of empire.<sup>107</sup> Like Johnson, Shapps showed no awareness of the role that empire actually played in the nineteenth century, in breaking open new markets, protecting the sea lanes and enforcing British commercial superiority. His argument rested on a vague appeal to a 'swashbuckling spirit', resonant of plucky little Britons singeing the beards of mightier powers. Indeed, a key part of Shapps' argument was that the size of the EU made it commercially immobile, lacking the agility of smaller trading nations like Norway, Vietnam or, perhaps, the 'swashbuckling' traders of the imperial age (*Huffington Post*, June 30 2017).

Words like 'swashbuckling' and 'buccaneering' peppered the rhetoric of Conservative Brexiteers. Campaigning for the party leadership in 2019, Dominic Raab called on the British to resume their historic role as 'buccaneering free traders' (*Guardian*, 10 June 2019). David Davis, likewise, told the makers of *Brexit: The Movie* in 2016 that 'Our history is a trading, buccaneering history – back to Drake and beyond. That's what we're good at'. As the reference to Drake suggests, such rhetoric evoked an Elizabethan ideal of pirates, privateers and derring-do, not the battleships of the high Victorian age. It actively suppressed the scale of British power in the past, to facilitate the comparison with the present.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has offered new readings of the relationship between Brexit and the imperial past, but it does not pretend to exhaust the role of empire in Britain's long European debate. It does not address the material or cultural legacies of empire: for example, its influence on the development of the City of London and the character of British capitalism; the impact of decolonisation on particular localities (some of which became detached from their former global networks);<sup>109</sup> or its role in recasting understandings of race and Englishness. It does not compare the colonial experience of other member states, or consider the role of Ireland in the Brexit debate (a subject with its own specialist literature). Instead, it focuses on the use and abuse of imperial memory, exploring the ways in which empire has been remembered, articulated and forgotten in arguments for and against European integration.

Memories of the imperial past have exerted a powerful influence on Britain's European debate. Yet terms like 'imperial nostalgia' do scant justice to the complex relationship between Brexit and Empire, or to the reach of imperial modes of thought beyond critics of membership. As this article has demonstrated, mind-sets forged in empire could animate the supporters, as well as opponents, of integration, in a way that loaded membership with unrealistic expectations. Appeals to the Commonwealth have never been reducible to 'Empire 2.0', but drew on a wide imaginative repertory that could nourish different positions in the European debate. Black and Asian voters, for example, were usually hostile to empire but sympathetic to the Commonwealth, a position that was compatible with strong support for a Leave vote in 1975 and for Remain in 2016. While 'the age of empire' has figured prominently in Brexit ideology, empire itself has often been absent. Leading Brexiteers have frequently played down the significance of empire in British history, casting European integration, not decolonisation, as the point of rupture with Britain's global past.

A history of Brexit that is sensitive to the legacies of empire must engage with its impact on pro-EU thought, distinguish between different visions of empire and Commonwealth, and pay closer attention to the views of Black and Asian voters. It must engage with the omissions and evasions of political mythmaking, and with narratives of British history that substitute a global trading nation for an imperial hegemon. Above all, it must resist the temptation to project uniquely irrational motives onto those who voted for Brexit, or to view the legacies of empire as weighing solely on one section of the electorate. As Anthony Barnett has written, the vote in 2016 needs to be 'respected as a conscious judgement ... not "explained" as if it was a mental disturbance'.<sup>110</sup> The ghosts of empire hang heavy over British political culture, and it cannot only be Leave voters who walk in their shadow.

## Notes

1. Hirsch, *Brit(ish)*, 270.
2. Olusoga, *Black and British*; Gust, “Brexit Syllabus”; Kennedy, *Imperial History Wars*, p. 149; Gildea, *Empires of the Mind*, 231; Palen, “Britain’s Imperial Ghosts”. For similar arguments from other fields, see Virdee and McGeever, “Racism, Crisis, Brexit,” 1805, 1809; Ashe, “UKIP, Brexit”; El-Enany, “Things Fall Apart”; Dorling and Tomlinson, *Brexit and the End of Empire*.
3. The outstanding example of this approach, and of its merits, is Shipman, *All Out War*.
4. Becker, “Meanings of Nostalgia,” 234–50.
5. In the interests of full disclosure: the author voted Remain in 2016, marched and argued for a “People’s Vote” in 2019, and would have voted Remain in any subsequent referendum.
6. For nostalgia as a pathology to be “observed and criticized in others,” see Becker, “Meanings of Nostalgia,” 246.
7. Hall, “Turning a Blind Eye,” 33 (my emphasis); Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, 21. Bill Schwarz defines “the postcolonial critique” as “the insistence that the internal mental structures of colonial power outlive their epoch. Habits of thought, from the most inconsequential practices of everyday life through to the most highly formalised system of philosophical abstraction, still reproduce inherited and often unseen colonial mentalities”. Schwarz, “Actually Existing Postcolonialism,” 16.
8. Namusoke, “Divided Family,” 464.
9. This should be understood as a social or collective “forgetting,” expressed in what is taught, commemorated and represented in popular culture; an individual may never have known this history in the first place. For the relationship between “remembering” and “forgetting,” and for “not caring to remember,” see Schwarz, “Forgetfulness”.
10. Hall, “Culture and Freedom”.
11. Howe, “Internal Decolonisation?,” 298.
12. Kennedy, *Imperial History Wars*, 6; Gildea, *Empires*, 235.
13. YouGov Survey Results, 24–25 July 2014, [http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus\\_uploads/document/6quatmbimd/Internal\\_Results\\_140725\\_Commonwealth\\_Empire-W.pdf](http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/6quatmbimd/Internal_Results_140725_Commonwealth_Empire-W.pdf).
14. Tony Blair is said to have wanted to include the words “I am proud of the British Empire” in a speech in 1997 (Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, 4). Gordon Brown claimed in 2005 that “the days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over” (January 15 2005), while David Cameron said in 2013, “I think there is an enormous amount to be proud of in what the British empire did and was responsible for” (*Guardian*, February 20 2013). A year earlier, Cameron had restored the award of the British Empire Medal for citizens of the UK, which had lapsed since 1993.
15. Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 3.
16. Hirsch, “What is the Commonwealth”.
17. Whitlam, “Prime Minister’s Press Conference,” May 4 1975.
18. Gilroy, “Why Harry’s Disoriented”; Gilroy, *After Empire*.
19. Virdee and McGeever, “Racism, Crisis, Brexit,” 1806, 1811.
20. Hannan, *Doomed Marriage*, 96; Lis, “To the Commonwealth”.
21. Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 6–7.
22. Hannan, *Doomed Marriage*, 82, 84, 101.
23. Rees-Mogg, “My vision”.
24. Deighton, “Past in the Present,” 100–01, 120.
25. Jenkins, *Life at the Centre*, 224–25; Brown, *In My Way*, 209; quoted in Cotton, “Labour Party,” 63.

26. Press cutting, [Slough] *Evening Mail*, May 19 1975, Britain in Europe Papers, Parliamentary Archives, BIE 26/9.
27. Benn, *Against the Tide*, 143 (April 25 1974).
28. Speech to London University Conservative Association, House of Commons, March 7 1975, Conservative Central Office News Service, 206/75.
29. Interview for *Sunday Express*, 30 June 1989, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107497>.
30. Speech to the Centro Italiana di Studio per la Conciliazione Internazionale, Rome, June 24 1977, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103403>.
31. "Speech to the College of Europe," September 20 1988, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>.
32. Tweet by Lord Deben (John Selwyn Gummer), January 29 2015, <https://twitter.com/lorddeben/status/560708292469850112>.
33. Labour 1997 manifesto, <http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1997/1997-labour-manifesto.shtml>; Deighton, "Past in the Present," 284; Brown, *Britain: Leading Not Leaving*; "Britain: Leading not Leaving".
34. See also Wellings, *English Nationalism*, 95.
35. Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins*, 46.
36. Powell, "Commentary," 14.
37. Powell, "Imperial Sickness," *Spectator*, 12 September 1968, 13–14; Speech to the St George's Day Banquet, April 22 1961, Powell Papers, POLL/4/1/1/6.
38. *Republican News*, June 7 1975, 1, 4, 8, *Northern Ireland Political Literature: Periodicals*, 1966–89 (Linen Hall Library: Belfast, 1993), fiche 21; "Common Market: Stop the Sell Out," no date (1971?), SNP Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 7295/24; *Scots Independent*, June 1975, 1.
39. "The Common Market: Why We Object. Statement by Dissenting Ministers," 17 March 1975, MS Castle 306, f. 217.
40. For an exception, see Jeremy Corbyn, "Which Direction for Europe?" *Morning Star*, June 8 2005, 7; Speech by Jeremy Corbyn, February 2009, <https://www.theredroar.com/2019/02/exclusive-corbyn-branded-eu-military-frankenstein-and-trashed-second-irish-referendum-in-uneearthed-footage>.
41. Coughan, "Tackling the EU Empire".
42. For the Commonwealth as a "painkiller," see Turner, "Global Britain," *passim*; for the Cheshire cat, see Gladwyn Jebb, quoted in Schofield, *Enoch Powell*, 158.
43. Home, *Great Britain's Foreign Policy*, 9.
44. Home, *Great Britain's Foreign Policy*, p. 9.
45. *Expanding Commonwealth*, 3.
46. Murphy, *Empire's New Clothes*, 12.
47. Ramphal, *One World*, 208–09, 229, 237.
48. Adamson, *Last Empire*, 10; Torrent, "Commonwealth Approach," 356.
49. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 505.
50. Quoted in Thackeray and Tøye, "Debating Empire 2.0," 25.
51. Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, 261.
52. Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, 41, 260.
53. Kenny and Pearce, *Shadows of Empire*, 77; Gaitskell, Speech to Labour Party Conference, October 3 1962; Wilson, *Relevance of British Socialism*, 83; *Labour and the Common Market*; Dale, *Labour General Election Manifestos*, 119. For the evolution of Labour's Commonwealth thought, see Catterall, "Plural Society".
54. See Cotton, "Labour, European Integration," 149–72; Alexander, "Tale of Two Smiths," 304.



55. Gordon Walker, *Commonwealth*, 15, 181, 198, 382.
56. Wilson, *Relevance*, p. 81; *HL Debates*, March 12 1979, 399: 433. My emphasis.
57. Gaitskell, Speech to Labour Party Conference; *HC Debates*, August 3 1961, 645:1665.
58. Harold Macmillan, *HC Debates* 645, August 2 1961, 1484–85. See also May (ed.), *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe*, 144–45.
59. Hart, *New Realities*, 6.
60. *Times*, 2 April 1964, p. 13; Schofield, *Enoch Powell*, 101, 113, 172, 198.
61. Adamson, *Last Empire*, pp. 3, 10.
62. Murphy, *Empire's New Clothes*, p. 34.
63. In Lord Ashcroft's referendum day poll of 12,000 voters in 2016, 81% of those who thought multiculturalism "a force for ill" and 80% of those who thought this of immigration voted Leave. "How the United Kingdom Voted".
64. Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, 216, 224, 241; Holmes, *Eurosceptical Reader 2*. Johnson is said to have described the media scrum outside his house, when he declared for "Leave" in 2016, as an "imperial goatfuck," suggesting that even for him the empire did not carry entirely positive connotations. Shipman, *All Out War*, 175.
65. Mott, "Saluting the Commonwealth"; Namusoke, "Divided Family," 468, 470–71.
66. Fox, Speech to Commonwealth Trade Ministers.
67. Patel, Speech to Commonwealth Trade Ministers.
68. Tweet, March 4 2016, [https://twitter.com/LiamFox/status/705674061016387584?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/LiamFox/status/705674061016387584?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).
69. Fox, Speech in Manchester Town Hall.
70. Barnett, *Lure of Greatness*, 39.
71. Hirsch, "What is the Commonwealth?"
72. Wellings and Baxendale, "Euroscepticism," 123; Bell and Vucetic, "Brexit, CANZUK," 369, 378–79. My emphasis.
73. For important studies, see Bell, "Anglospheres"; Bell and Vucetic, "Brexit, CANZUK"; Kenny and Pearce, *Shadows of Empire*; Wellings and Baxendale, "Euroscepticism"; Wellings, "Anglosphere".
74. Kenney and Pearce, *Shadows of Empire*, 131.
75. Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire*, 7–8.
76. Tweet by George Galloway, 20 January 2016, <https://twitter.com/georgegalloway/status/689767900153004032>. For the idea of "political blackness," applied in Galloway's case to "a pale-skinned brother," see Waters, *Thinking Black*.
77. "How Britain Voted in the 2016 EU Referendum," *Ipsos MORI*, September 5 2016, <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2016-eu-referendum>. According to Ashcroft's referendum day poll, 73% of those identifying as "Black," 70% of those identifying as "Chinese" and 67% of those identifying as "Asian" voted to Remain. So did 70% of Muslim and Hindu voters, compared to 42% identifying as Christian. "How the United Kingdom Voted".
78. In Ashcroft's referendum day poll, those who identified as "English not British" or as "More English than British" backed Leave by 71.2% to 28.8%. Those who identified as "British not English" or as "More British than English" backed Remain by 61.3% to 38.7%. Voters who thought multiculturalism or immigration "a force for ill" backed Leave by 81% and 80% respectively, while those who called them "a force for good" backed Remain by 71% and 79%. "How the United Kingdom Voted".
79. A poll of more than 20,000 adults in March 2018 by YouGov/the BBC found that only 13% of BAME voters identified as "more English than British," compared to 37% of white voters. 45% of BAME voters opted for "more British than English," more than

- double the white figure of 20%. While 85% of white respondents identified as “strongly English,” and just 15% did so “not very strongly” or “not at all,” the comparable figures for BAME voters were 45% and 49%. YouGov/BBC, “English Identity” (June 2018), [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/re4ybugrnl/BBC\\_EnglishIdentity\\_March18\\_Results\\_for\\_website.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/re4ybugrnl/BBC_EnglishIdentity_March18_Results_for_website.pdf). “How the United Kingdom Voted”. For the emergence of “British” as an identity considered more multicultural than “English,” despite its previous imperial connotations, see Fortier, “Pride Politics,” 559–78; and Hirsch, *Brit(ish)*, 267. On the speaking of different languages: a study in Portsmouth found that 73% of BAME children were classed as having “English as an Additional Language”: Portsmouth City Council, *Education: Ethnic Minority Achievement Service* (2015/16), p. 3, <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/edu-ema-guidelines.pdf>.
80. Khan and Weekes-Bernard, *This is Still About Us*, esp. chapter 4.
  81. In the YouGov/BBC survey, 25% of BAME voters strongly identified as “European,” 68% did not. The comparable figures for white voters were 27% and 71%; YouGov/BBC, “English Identity”.
  82. CLR James memorably spoke of Caribbean immigrants as being “in, but not of, Europe,” an insight developed by Stuart Hall in an article of the same name. In the 1950s, signs reading “Europeans only” seem to have been more common than the more famous “No Coloureds” or “Whites Only”. See Glass, *Newcomers*, 59; Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, 83; Davis, “Containing Racism?” 130. For the idea of Europe as “the creation of the Third World,” see Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 81.
  83. Khan and Weekes-Bernard, *This is Still About Us*, 3.
  84. Saunders, *Yes to Europe*, 272–75.
  85. Saunders, *Yes to Europe*, p. 276.
  86. “BAME MPs Join EU Vote Leave Campaign,” *The Voice* (2–8 June 2016), p. 8.
  87. Signatories included the singer Rachel Kerr; the President of the Bangladesh Caterers Association UK, Pasha Khandaker; and the founder of Veetee Rice, Moni Verma.
  88. Patel, Speech to Commonwealth Trade Ministers.
  89. Ipsos Mori, “How Britain Voted”. This suggests a 17-point turnout gap, compared to 11 points in 2017 and 2019. Dempsey and Johnston, “Political Disengagement”; see also “How Britain Voted in the 2019 Election,” *Ipsos Mori*, December 20 2019, <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2019-election>.
  90. Barnett, *Lure of Greatness*, 39; Turner, “Global Britain,” 3, 5.
  91. Turner, “Global Britain,” 2.
  92. See, for example, Gopal, “Redressing Anti-Imperial Amnesia,” 18–30; Schwarz, “Forgetfulness,” 56–58; Khan, “Refugees,” 130; Donnington, “Relics of Empire,” 149.
  93. Hall, “Turning a Blind Eye,” 31; Gilroy, *After Empire*, 98; Hirsch, *Brit(ish)*, 270.
  94. Hall, “Turning a Blind Eye,” 31.
  95. David Cameron, Speech to the Conservative Party Conference, 5 October 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/oct/05/david-cameron-conservative-party-speech>.
  96. Powell, Speech to the 1964 Committee.
  97. Powell, “Myth of Empire”; *Hansard*, 889, April 9 1975, 1302; Powell, speech at Birmingham, 2 June 1975.
  98. Schofield, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 48–49, 162; Speech at the St George’s Day Banquet, 23 April 1961, Powell Papers POLL/4/1/1/6.
  99. *House of Commons Debates*, vol: 362, 18 June 1940, 52. Writing in 1991, Powell insisted that “the Britain which defeated Germany in 1940 was this Britain here, it was these islands”; see Powell, “Commentary,” p. 14.

100. Schofield, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 48–49.
101. Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Rally in Cheltenham. My emphasis.
102. Rees-Mogg, *The Victorians*, 290.
103. Rees-Mogg, “My Vision”.
104. Hannan, *Doomed Marriage*, ix, 30–31, 39. My emphasis.
105. Johnson, Speech to the Conservative Party Conference, *PoliticsHome*, 2 October 2016, <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/boris-johnson/news/79519/read-full-boris-johnsons>.
106. Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 147. For Johnson’s psychological view of history, see Johnson, *The Churchill Factor*.
107. Hazzard, “Empire 2.0”.
108. Raab, “A Vision”; *Brexit: The Movie*, written and directed by Martin Durkin (WAG TV: London, 2016), at 1 hr 03 mins; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCATXCgC0kSWQDOQLtgP5Mbg>.
109. See, for example, Tomlinson, “Deglobalisation”.
110. Barnett, *Lure of Greatness*, p. 99.

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