

The Importance of Being ‘British’? Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the Cultural Economy of Empire in the Interwar Era.

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Summary

Throughout the interwar period, Canada, Australia and New Zealand ran intensive marketing campaigns designed to sell their produce to British consumers. Using the very latest in marketing techniques, money from their respective governments, and advice from Britain’s leading advertising agencies, the dominions created films, advertisements, radio talks, recipe books, shop-window displays and street parades to persuade British consumers to buy Canadian apples, New Zealand lamb or Australian butter. These varied campaigns shared a single message: British consumers should buy their products because, the Dominions, like their produce, were British. These campaigns were surprisingly large: one Australian promotional film screened to more than 3 million people in month. But despite its scale, dominion marketing has largely escaped historical attention. However, it offers a new approach to what historians Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson have recently termed the ‘cultural economy’ of empire. Their work emphasizes the role of ‘co-ethnic British networks’ in shaping patterns of trade and migration. This paper interrogates the idea of co-ethnic networks, moving beyond their function to suggest trade not only benefited from such networks but mobilised ideas about race, especially whiteness, to create them.

I Introduction

In April 1935, a little-known publicity body launched a very large publicity campaign. The Australian Trade Publicity Committee (ATP) was an Australian operated, London-based marketing organization dedicated to selling more Australian produce to British consumers. Funded by a collection of producer boards, with assistance from the Australian government, the committee began work in 1926, representing Australian dairy, wine, and fruit interests.¹ With a permanent team of eight to ten sales representatives, they actively canvassed retailers and wholesalers throughout the United Kingdom, selling on behalf of these producers. The committee was also responsible for all publicity and advertising, and the 1935 campaign gives some idea of the scale of these activities. To launch the new apple

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¹ National Archives of Australia (NAA), A461 I323/1/2, Trade publicity general representations, ‘Australian Overseas Trade Publicity’.

season, the trade publicity team arranged for advertising on more than 1000 buses and 1000 van sides.² Advertisements ran in the major dailies; 90,000 retail posters were dispatched, and 15 temporary salesmen were employed.³ Advertising even appeared on railway indicators.⁴ But the centrepiece of their activities was a brand-new promotional film, starring the Australian Prime Minister, and booked to play in 160 cinemas in enough sessions to reach an audience of three and half million in a month.⁵ The film's title reinforced the key message of the entire campaign: Australian apples were 'British to the Core.' (Figure 1)

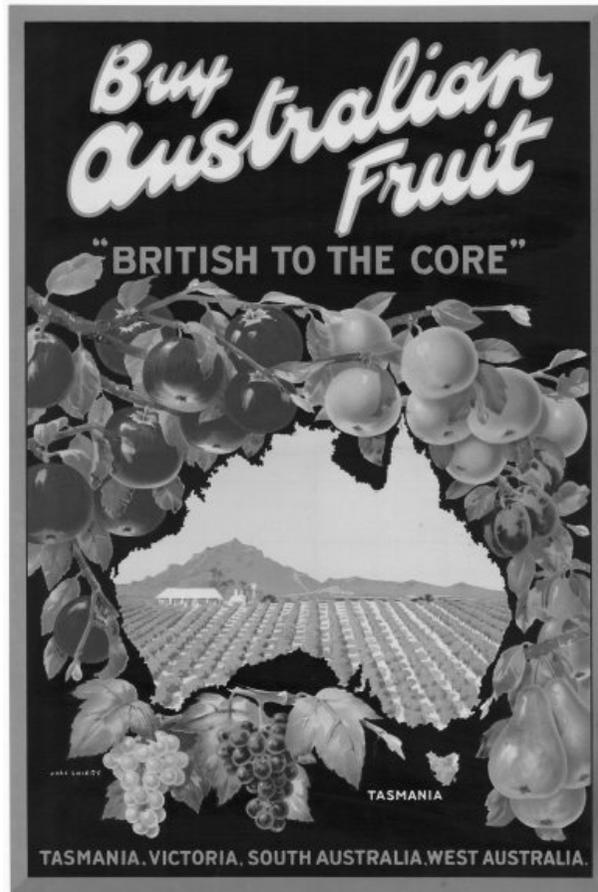


Figure 1. *'Buy Australian Fruit', Chas Shiers.*

Source: 5056565, National Library of Australia.

² NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 10, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for May 1935, p. 20.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵ Ibid.

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On its own, a campaign of this size would be hard to ignore. But it was just part of the organisation's usual round of activities. Whilst the April apple campaign obviously diverted some of their resources, the ATP's permanent staff continued to promote butter, along with dried and canned fruit, that month, making more than 1700 sales calls, opening 29 new accounts, and dispatching more than 15,000 sets of general promotional material, and screening trade films to around 80,000 people.⁶ Their team of 18 female demonstrators carried out 46 week-long demonstrations in retailers across the country, from the Birmingham Co-operative Society to the giant retailer Lyon's staff shop in Hammersmith, London.⁷ A number of window display competitions were run, including one for Williams Brothers, a London-based retail chain with two hundred stores, which concluded with a prize-giving reception for store managers and their wives at Australia House.⁸ Nor was this the biggest reception held that month. On 30 April, the ATP hosted the 'largest assembly ever gathered together in London of Australia's customers'.⁹ Amongst the 460 guests invited to lunch were the Chairman of Selfridges, Harrods' food manager, the Director of Allied Suppliers, which controlled over 3000 stores included the well-known Lipton and Maypole brands, along with representatives from key co-operative stores, railway companies and hotels.¹⁰ Once again, the Prime Minister was the star turn, and he raised a toast to 'Australia's Customers'.¹¹ Perhaps it should have been best customers: by this time, Britain was taking a growing share of Australian exports, and trade in direct-to-consumer produce like fruit and dairy had not only become a larger proportion of that trade, it was virtually completely dependent on the British market. In April 1935, it was not merely Australian apples that were British to the core: much of its commodity trade was too.

Australia's trade campaigns were not the only show in town. Other white settler colonies also had commodity trades built upon British consumers, and they too inaugurated mass marketing campaigns in Britain in the interwar period. From the mid 1920s, New Zealand lamb and dairy products filled shop windows, while instore demonstrators offered shoppers a taste of the dominion, serving up roast lamb sandwiches and samples of butter and cheese. Butchers dressed themselves, their bicycles, and even their vans in New Zealand meat wrappers to compete in fancy dress parades, while British children went to special cinema shows promoting meat and dairy products.¹² (Figure 2) Others received letters and birthday cards from 'Uncle Anchor', courtesy of New Zealand's Anchor butter club.¹³ Meanwhile, cheese, apples, bacon, and even macaroni were plugged in specialty Canadian 'Empire' shops, complete with cooks from the Empire Home-makers' Institute giving lessons on how to cook with Canadian products.¹⁴ Planes flew overhead towing banners reading 'Canada Calling', while back on the ground, British soldiers received gift packs of Canadian products, and a stuffed buffalo labelled 'A Visitor from Canada' was pulled through the streets of London.¹⁵

⁶ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 10, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for April 1934, pp. 5, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Barnes, *New Zealand's London*, p. 136.

¹³ Webber, *The Anchor Story*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Hill, *Canada's Salesman to the World*, p. 356.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 360, 357.



Figure 2. *British butchers and their bicycles, decorated in New Zealand lamb marketing material.*

Source: New Zealand Meat Producers Board, *Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1935*, Wellington, 1935, n.p.

Despite their spectacular nature, these dominion publicity campaigns in the interwar metropolis have received little historical attention. This paper examines Australia's campaigns, along with some examples from New Zealand and Canada not just to rematerialise a lost part of their cultural past, but to contribute to a wider debate about the nature of dominion identity and imperial culture – the importance of being British – in the interwar period. For whilst these campaigns have been largely forgotten, the nature of the dominions' economies in the interwar era has been the subject of considerable historical debate. Trade and tariffs, protection and preferences, have been co-opted from their conventional role in economic history and pressed into service to argue the dominions were more or less 'British'. Older nationalist histories of these settler colonies prefer a 'less British' past, emphasising early signs of independence and relegating any lingering ties to the Motherland as faintly embarrassing relics. Conventional analyses of empire, which depict the interwar period as a 'time when the imperial economy fragmented' favour such readings, with Britain cast as weary Titan and the dominions as eager inheritors of nascent independence.¹⁶ The story plays out slightly differently in each dominion. For Canada, the economics of empire was another arena to test its fledgling national arm, with Prime Minister Mackenzie King, like Laurier before him, taking 'great pride in fighting off imperial advances', while bureaucrat Oscar Skelton, a quiet yet powerful influence on external affairs, 'regarded imperialists with somewhat less affection than he did the bubonic plague', and instead strategized endlessly to free Canada from its colonial past.¹⁷ For

¹⁶ McKenzie, 'Trade, Dominance, Dependence and the End of the Settlement Era', p. 465. British revisionism includes Thompson and Magee, 'A Soft Touch?', pp. 689-717.

¹⁷ Thompson, 'Canada and the Third British Empire, 1901-1939', p.98; Bothwell, Drummond, and English,

Australia too, preference debates have become a site to flex a little colonial muscle. Once considered evidence of colonial servility to British interests, trade negotiations like Ottawa have been recontextualised as occasions where politicians rationally 'asserted the autonomy of the nation state'.¹⁸ No longer British bootlicks, Australian politicians were recast as 'hard and devious bargainers with little sentiment towards empire except where it suited their national interests.'¹⁹ New Zealand on the other hand, suffered by comparison, with its greater economic dependence and tractability earning it the not entirely flattering sobriquet of 'dutiful dominion.'²⁰

These nationalist 'creation myths' have prompted an energetic response, especially from British World scholars who instead draw on the economics of empire to reassert the importance of British sentiment and identity in the dominions through this period and beyond.²¹ Central to this 'more British' idea is James Belich's concept of recolonization, which describes an economics-based reintegration of the dominions with Britain that also served to regenerate cultural ties. Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, the recolonization phenomena runs directly counter to the nationalist narrative of gradually evolving independence: instead 'Dominion Britonism seems actually to have *increased* in the early twentieth century.'²² It would also prove remarkably persistent. In the case of Australia, Stuart Ward has argued that British sentiment was a defining force in Anglo-Australian commercial relationships until well after the Second World War era, and, just as Belich has argued for New Zealand, it was Britain's decision to enter the EEC, rather than any strident local nationalism, that saw the demise of the 'imperial ideal' in Australia.²³ Though the 'British embrace' may have loosened a little sooner in Canada, Carl Berger's work recognised earlier than most that imperialism was not incompatible with Canadian nationalism; more recent work has emphasised the continued importance of Britishness amongst English Canadians up into the 1960s.²⁴

Thus, for some considerable time, albeit in very different ways, dominion historians have been interested in what metropolitan historians now describe as the 'cultural economy' of empire. Just as Ward and others have suggested sentiment helped maintain dominion connections to Britain, so this new work is interested in the extent to which a shared 'British' cultural identity may have influenced imperial economic patterns and behaviour. In their recent examination of the British world economy to 1914, Andrew Thompson and Gary Magee have argued for the power of 'co-ethnic British networks' in shaping patterns of trade and migration: others have begun to implicate culture in the construction of financial and investment networks.²⁵

So far, this 'cultural turn' in imperial economic history has principally been concerned with mapping empire's impact, showing its role as an enabler of trading networks, or demonstrating the enduring nature of imperial sentiment in national settings. However,

Canada 1900-1945, p. 299; Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton*, p. 182.

¹⁸ Tsokhas, *Markets, Money and Empire*, p. 3; Kosmas, *Making a Nation State*, p. 108.

¹⁹ Drummond, *Imperial Economic Policy*, quoted in Ross, 'Australian Overseas Trade and National Development Policy 1932-1939', p. 184. For a recent assessment see Mackenzie, *Redefining the Bonds of Commonwealth*, p. 23.

²⁰ Ross, 'Reluctant dominion or dutiful daughter?', pp. 28-44.

²¹ Thompson, 'Canada and the Third British Empire', p. 90; Ward, 'Sentiment and Self-interest', pp. 91-108.

²² Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, p. 461.

²³ Ward, 'Sentiment and Self Interest', p. 96; see also Bolton, 'Money, trade investment and economic nationalism', p. 231; Belich, *Paradise Reforged*; Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace*, p. 4.

²⁴ Berger, *The Sense of Power*; Buckner, ed., *Canada and the End of Empire*.

²⁵ Thompson and Magee, *Empire and Globalisation*; for a summary of others see Attard and Dille, 'Finance, Empire and the British world', pp. 1-10.

trade did not simply benefit from culture: it also helped produce it. This shift in emphasis is more than semantic. Reconsidering imperial trade networks as producers, rather than products, of culture recreates empire as a dynamic and contingent cultural force. Though Thompson and Magee note Britishness was not static, ‘co-ethnic networks’, based on migration suggest a shared and stable Britishness. Imperial sentiment, similarly, appears largely as a natural, if misguided, consequence of co-ethnic networks. In response, some have claimed the British world’s cultural economy can seem all too ‘cosy’, underplaying the tensions between its various elements.²⁶ However, as the first part of this article will argue, the dominions’ marketing suggests the cultural economy functioned rather differently. In the interwar period, imperial networks of trade and consumption were creators as well as beneficiaries of Britishness; marketing helped make the imperial sentiment it hoped to profit from. Though this of course was underwritten by migration, the ‘global chain of kith and kin’ was also the product of consumer advertising

Repositioning Britishness as, at least in part, constructed through trade, makes the idea of co-ethnicity rather less than cosy for a further reason. Research on social networks, which underpins the economic cultural turn, is, naturally enough, focused on inclusivity. Work has revolved around family networks like the Rothschilds, or business ties based around religion like those formed by Quakers or Jews, to demonstrate culture’s role in facilitating the economy. Accordingly, it has spawned neutral, and inclusive-sounding terms like ‘co-ethnic networks’, and ‘non-market advantages’ to describe these cultural formations.²⁷ But the economics of empire was never neutral. Scholars applying these ideas in the imperial setting are therefore quick to warn that British co-ethnic networks played a role in the dispossession of indigenous groups.²⁸ Yet recognition never rises above an obligatory obeisance to the idea of empire’s dark side. Dispossession therefore remains a consequence of these networks. In the second part of this article, I argue dispossession and discrimination are instead a condition of them. A co-ethnic network is, by its very nature, also an anti-ethnic network. Current economic writing occludes the powerful exclusionary dynamics at play in constructing imperial identities through trade in the interwar period. But pursuing the ‘non-market advantages’ of Britishness required mobilizing those familiar standbys of imperial cultural power; race and gender. Dominion marketing makes a case in point: their press campaigns, promotional films and publicity produced a form of ‘British’ identity that was both white and masculine. Paradoxically then, the dominions’ modern marketing produced versions of Britishness that relied on much older gendered and racial hierarchies of empire.

II Making a sentimental empire?

An outwardly resurgent culture of imperial sentiment forms the backdrop to the implementation of dominion campaigns. After nearly a century of free trade, by the 1920s, imperial protection was beginning to attract serious attention in Britain. Though tariff reform in the pursuit of a united empire had seemed a lost cause in the years immediately preceding World War I, afterwards, the idea of imperial economic unity in some form, gained a new momentum.²⁹ During this time, a rash of new organisations ready to promote

²⁶ Dilley, *Finance, Politics and Imperialism*, p. 5; Howe, ‘British Worlds’, pp. 699-701.

²⁷ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, p. 6; Magee, ‘The Importance of Being British?’, p. 344.

²⁸ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, p. 38.

²⁹ Thompson, ‘Tariff Reform’, p. 1033-1054; Rooth argues for fresh momentum from 1925. Rooth, *British Protectionism*, p. 42.

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various permutations of empire trade, imperial preference, and empire shopping, joined the usual cast of imperial evangelists like the Victoria and Primrose Leagues.³⁰ Some, like the British Empire Producers Organization (BEPO) had begun before the war. Founded in 1916 as a sugar lobby, the BEPO had come to see imperial preference as 'the development of the family property for the benefit of the whole family' and by 1924, was campaigning 'in favour of empire products.'³¹ That same year, a group known as the Empire Industries Association for the Extension of British Preference and the Safeguarding of Home Industries Organisation (EIA) was formed and by 1926 had launched a campaign almost as exhaustive as its title. Like the Self-Supporting League, they started with public meetings, holding over a thousand, with a special focus on free trading strongholds in the Midlands and Manchester; 'each Sunday in summer meetings were held in nine London parks' as well.³² The EIA had its roots in the Conservative party, and by 1928, 'protectionist sentiment was a dominant force' within the party's rank and file.³³ Imperially-inclined producers and politicians were joined by manufacturers, like carmakers Austin and Morris.³⁴ Some were imperial apostates, wary of the impact of curbing free trade, but when chemical magnate, Lord Melchett, formed Imperial Chemical Industries in 1926, 'the choice of name ...[was] a deliberate statement of policy.'³⁵ By 1929 he had joined forces with Leo Amery to launch the Empire Economic Union.³⁶ At the same time press baron Lord Beaverbrook, had begun a noisy empire free trade movement, that would not only inspire his competitor, Lord Rothermere, to promote empire trade, but would culminate in the creation of the United Empire Party.³⁷

Campaigning for imperial preference spread beyond politicians and businessmen. As Frank Trentmann has observed, a new form of 'consumer imperialism' developed after the war, which valorized 'buying empire' as a patriotic duty.³⁸ The Empire Marketing Board, with its focus on slogans like 'Empire Buyers are Empire Builders' is the best-known example, but there were plenty of other imperial lobby groups pushing the 'Buy Empire' barrow, like the British Empire League and the British Empire Union.³⁹ Some even predate the better-known EMB activity: the first 'Empire Shopping week celebrating Empire Day was inaugurated by the British Women's Patriotic League in 1922'.⁴⁰ Women, particularly middle class, Conservative housewives, were at the forefront of this movement. They were key targets of empire shopping campaigns, with advertisers urging women to 'ask in your daily shopping for empire produce.'⁴¹ But women were activists as well as consumers: throughout this era, they turned their domestic expertise to promoting the imperial cause, holding empire cake competitions, running empire produce stalls and fetes, creating Empire 'surprise boxes' and badgering shopkeepers to stock empire products.⁴²

This metropolitan efflorescence of imperial sentiment was part of the rationale for the

³⁰ Hendley, *Organised Patriotism*, pp. 211, 217-219.

³¹ 'Editorial Notes', *Production and Export*, 44, April 1920, pp. 1-5, quoted in Lee, 'Imagining the empire', pp. 139, 158.

³² Rooth, *British Protectionism*, p. 325. See also Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 325.

³³ Witherell, 'Sir Henry Page Croft', pp. 357-381; Garside, 'Party Politics', p. 52.

³⁴ Rooth, *British Protectionism*, p. 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Boyce, 'America, Europe, and the Triumph of Imperial Protectionism', p. 55.

³⁷ Rooth, *British Protectionism*, p. 55.

³⁸ Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 229.

³⁹ Lee, 'Imagining the empire', pp. 356-357.

⁴⁰ Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 230.

⁴¹ *The Tatler*, 9 April 1930, p. xiii.

⁴² Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 231.

dominion marketing and it certainly held the promise of some commercial advantage for their produce.⁴³ But despite the best efforts of housewives, well connected businessmen and Conservative politicians, it was by no means enough to ensure success. Imperial preference remained more a principle than a practice: the salesmen of empire had to contend with the actual buying preferences of retailers and wholesalers, and here it appears, sentiment was in short supply. In 1926, Australian produce could be found in just 12-14,000 British shops, out of a total of approximately 200,000: roughly 7%.⁴⁴ Retailers and wholesalers were less concerned with the imperial origins of commodities than they were with its price, quality, distribution and supply. They were, as one representative put it, 'shrewd'.⁴⁵ 'British people have been accustomed for generations to pick and choose from the best of every land... keen merchants ...are constantly flooding Great Britain with the best goods of every kind that the world produces and no newcomer, not even the Australian, favoured as he is by a warm fraternal feeling, can hope successfully to attack the British market unless his goods are of good quality and of consistent quality...'.⁴⁶ Sentiment did not prevent Australian goods being 'cold shouldered because of their unreliability'⁴⁷. Australian butter, with its variable quality and supply, was a notorious culprit. But the well-known biscuit manufacturer Crawford and Sons had also preferred to continue using 'Mediterranean [sic] fruit as 'Australian fruit did not seem so good',⁴⁸ and as late as 1933 a sales report bemoaned the 'prejudice which many traders have for the Californian Fruit', a prejudice only reinforced by Australia's lower packing and grading standards.⁴⁹ Nor was this prejudice restricted to retailers: much to the bewilderment of an ATP sales rep, it seems cash-strapped consumers in the depressed areas of 1930s Lancashire and Yorkshire wouldn't buy Australian fruit at any price: 'I do not know where they get their money from, but at present they will only have the best that that money can buy'.⁵⁰

Shopkeepers were not inclined to be sentimental about Canadian products either. When surveyed around 1927, Harrods complained Canadian canned fruits were inferior to American, while hams were also of 'very poor quality'.⁵¹ Home and Colonial stores concurred; they had no use for Canadian canned fruit as it was 'very inferior', whilst a consignment of butter 'went bad within a few days of receipt'.⁵² The buyer for John Irwin and Co, with 150 branches was 'very scornful of Canadian pears' and found the salmon expensive.⁵³ 'Mr Stafford frankly described our Canadian canned fruits as poor quality, was rather lukewarm in reference to Canadian canned salmon' and 'would not consider Canadian butter... and Canadian cheese he described as being like leather'.⁵⁴ As a later

⁴³ NAA, A461 H323/1/2 Part 1, Trade Publicity - UK pt.1, Sec. Australian House to Sec. Prime Minister's Department, 30 December 1925.

⁴⁴ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Publicity - Australian Trade Publicity Reports Australian Trade Publicity Monthly Report, August 1933, p. 9; NAA, A461 H323/1/2 Part 1, Trade Publicity - UK pt.1 'Advertising Australian Products. Interesting Report', pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 4, Australian Trade Publicity Report for August 1931, p. 9.

⁴⁶ NAA, A461 H323/1/2 Part 1, Trade Publicity - UK pt.1 'Advertising Australian Products. Interesting Report', pp. 1-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 1, Australian Publicity in the United Kingdom - Copies of Miscellaneous Memos between Official Secretary and Director of Trade Publicity, Hyland to Trumble, 22 February 1930.

⁴⁹ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity Monthly Report, June 1933, p. 12.

⁵⁰ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 4, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for August 1931, p. 9.

⁵¹ Libraries and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 20 517, File 2: Department of Trade and Commerce Special Report \$100,000 scheme for advertising Canadian food products in Great Britain, Mr E. D. Arnaud, Trade Commissioner Bristol, pp. 15-16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

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survey conceded, 'although there is of course no suggestion of ill-will towards Canadian products, we must recognize that we are not generally accorded preferential treatment...'.⁵⁵ Neither housewives nor trade would be interested 'in an empire product purely for its own sake: it must come up to the proper standard.'⁵⁶

An existing imperial sentiment then was not enough to guarantee dominion sales. One approach to this problem was to work on the quality of the produce. New Zealand led the way here, implementing producer boards which helped to deal with some of its own quality problems, like shipments of tainted butter, or market issues like persuading a dubious public to eat frozen meat. (Here they were almost too successful: 'Canterbury', New Zealand's best quality lamb, became a generic term for frozen meat, meaning the New Zealand Meat Producers Board was constantly forced to defend the reputation of its lamb against other, lower quality, meat masquerading as a New Zealand product.)⁵⁷ Australia was quick to follow suit, forming boards for most of its exports by the mid 1920s, although Canadian producers, for a variety of reasons, never managed to form any coordinating export body. But all three would adopt the second approach to the problem of sentiment: manufacturing it through marketing. Once again there would be some variation between the dominions. New Zealand, first with the producer boards, was also first to launch large scale campaigns: Canada, though last, would undertake them on the greatest scale. However, differences were largely limited to size and timing. The campaigns themselves shared techniques, themes, advertising agencies and even slogans. Australia and New Zealand sometimes cooperated to market 'Empire butter', whilst Australian and Canadian apples were marketed under the same 'British to the core' slogan. With these similarities in mind, what follows will largely focus on the work of the Australian Trade Publicity Committee to demonstrate the dominions' active construction of empire sentiment through commodity making.

Giving commercial substance to empire's rhetorical bonds of kith and kin, the ATP made the personal touch central to their work, with representatives regularly making over a thousand sales calls per month. These were a thousand opportunities to emphasise the connections between Australia and Empire, connections that were not 'natural' products of sentiment. After one visit, Salmond Fleming, a 'high class' grocery firm in Dundee, was persuaded to 'do the best we can to push Australian goods more especially now that we have some knowledge of the conditions and aspirations of the settlers. We shall certainly do the best that we can for Australia.'⁵⁸ A more formal education in empire was also on offer: members of the Institute of Certificated Grocers could enter an essay competition on the topic 'Selling Australian products to help British settlers; to strengthen the empire; and to provide more business for British merchants'.⁵⁹ Even point of sale material helped develop a sense of empire, exerting 'a constant moral pressure on the shopkeeper to stock our goods'.⁶⁰ Nor was this unwelcome with retailers: on receipt of his pack of display material, the proprietor of Cave Austin and Co, at St Leonards on Sea, sent his 'Thanks for the advertising material. It is always a pleasure to us to push your Empire lines.'⁶¹

ATP staff rallied the idea of empire to Australia's commercial cause in an almost

⁵⁵ Department of Agriculture, *The British Market and the Canadian Farmer*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Higgins, "'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?'"', pp. 161-184.

⁵⁸ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 6, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for April 1934, p. 4.

⁵⁹ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for January 1933, p. 6; Australian Trade Publicity, Report for August 1933, p. 7.

⁶⁰ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for August 1933, p. 7.

⁶¹ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 6, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for July 1934, p. 6.

ceaseless round of Rotary meetings, Chamber of Commerce gatherings and Empire lunches and dinners. Toasts were to the 'Trade and commerce of empire',⁶² and the speeches were on such subjects as Anglo-Australian trade, or Australian trade with the Motherland.⁶³ Not all of these were warmly received: according to ATP's chief, A. E. Hyland, free traders at one meeting in Wales were 'not altogether in sympathy with my subject'.⁶⁴ However the ATP continued their empire building, incorporating events like 'Australia night', a lavish event for grocers and their wives, held in 'about the largest space in London', complete with dancing, into the annual meeting of British grocery presidents.⁶⁵

Some of the campaigns capitalized on wider promotional activities undertaken by various empire leagues which also aimed to generate imperial sentiment. Australia, along with the other dominions, used frequent 'Empire Shopping Weeks' to promote their produce. In May 1930, 'between fifty and sixty of the very largest shops, notably in the West End, went out of their way to stage miniature exhibitions.'⁶⁶ In 1931 Australia took 'advantage of the "Buy British" atmosphere to obtain editorial publicity for our products'.⁶⁷ But perhaps the most important supporting activities were run by the Empire Marketing Board. Established in 1926 and funded by the British Government until its demise in 1933, the EMB was charged, amongst other things, with persuading British shoppers to buy more empire produce. Working with one of Britain's leading advertising agencies, the EMB spread their imperial message through extensive advertising, in the press, on the radio, in shop windows, and most impressively, by developing a unique series of outdoor billboards. Although much existing literature on the EMB focuses on its portrayal of the dependent empire, the dominions were central to their work.⁶⁸ Dominion representatives made up a quarter of the members of the executive board, Australia's representative being that energetic imperialist and sultana king, Frank McDougall. (by contrast the entire dependent empire was represented by just one member). The dominions were also the main subject of the EMB's advertising, appearing in more than 30% of the billboard campaigns, and again, thanks to McDougall, Australia was particularly prominent.⁶⁹

Australia can also take the dubious credit for initiating one of the interwar period's most persistent symbols of empire cohesion, the Empire Christmas pudding. Giant puddings, complete with celebrity stirrers, also obsessed the Empire Marketing Board from 1927 – they even produced a spectacularly unsuccessful feature film about an empire pudding – but the ATP claimed to have promoted the first version in 1926.⁷⁰ Yet the empire could always strike back. In 1934, the Australian Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, made a speech announcing protection for the tiny Australian cotton industry. In the process, he sparked perhaps the only boycott ever held in favour of empire, as grocers in Bolton, Lancashire, on behalf of their customers employed in the cotton industry, retaliated by refusing to sell Australian goods. After backtracking on both sides, the boycott was suspended, but the

⁶² NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for January 1933, p. 5.

⁶³ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for April 1933, p. 6.

⁶⁴ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 7, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for June 1934, p. 6.

⁶⁵ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 7, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for September 1934, p. 7.

⁶⁶ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 1, Australian Publicity in the UK, Misc Memos between Official Secretary and Director of Trade and Publicity, 29 May 1930.

⁶⁷ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 4, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for November 1931, p. 7.

⁶⁸ See for example, Buck, 'Imagining Imperial Modernity', pp. 940-963; Meredith, 'Imperial Images', pp. 30-37. For dominion representation see Barnes, 'Bringing Another Empire Alive?', pp. 61-85.

⁶⁹ Barnes, 'Bringing Another Empire Alive?', p. 65.

⁷⁰ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 4, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for December 1931, p. 11. For a different origin story, see O'Connor, 'The King's Christmas Pudding', pp. 127-155.

'quarrel' lasted.⁷¹ Lancashire grocers declined to attend 'Australia Night'. Months afterward, the ATP were still in damage control, screening slides in sixty cinemas emphasising 'Australia is Lancashire's second-best customer'.⁷²

The ATP's activities in this period shed a different light on arguments that stress Australia's assertive economic nationalism. In metropolitan shops, if not always in imperial conference rooms, Australia's interests were best served by being British 'to the core'. That the same could be said for New Zealand is perhaps not surprising: however, it was also, eventually, true for Canada too. Though legendarily allergic to empire, a 1937 report by the Department of Agriculture castigated Canada's marketing efforts as having done 'little to impress retailers or consumers, in Britain, especially compared with the other dominions...'.⁷³ That verdict came from the edited version of the report: the first version was considered too critical to be released. More significant though, Australia's example also strongly suggests trade's role in building, not simply benefiting from, any cultural economy of empire. ATP salesmen could not rely on the power of co-ethnic networks to sell their sultanas: instead, they had to work to create a shared sense of Britishness.

The second part of this paper extends this idea. As suggested earlier, new work on the cultural economy has tended to consider the social formations which underpin trade networks as relatively stable and benign bodies, the post-mortems of which revolve around their economic effectiveness. The experience of dominion commodities in the British marketplace is at odds with such a reading. Co-ethnicity in this case was contingent, not just congenital, and its construction was less dependent on any long-established links of family or faith, but on the mobilisation of ideas around race and gender. As we will see, these ideas relied on exclusion as much as the inclusion implied in the idea of co-ethnicity.

III Constructing Co-ethnic Networks

The clearest indication of the construction of co-ethnicity was in the dominions' constant appeal to Britishness. New Zealand advertising constantly referenced Britishness, and even Canada overcame its imperial squeamishness in some campaigns, even reifying the ties of empire across the ether when one promotion when the Canadian Minister of Trade and Commerce telephoned the Lord Provost of Glasgow 'during a luncheon for civic and other dignitaries'.⁷⁴ Once again, however, Australia is the exemplar. In extensive press advertising, Australian produce was 'British and Best', or 'All British',⁷⁵ even 'picked and packed ...by fellow Britons'. Australian sultanas were 'grown on British soil', a claim which was, at best, only technically true: no doubt a similar stretch of the geographical imagination inspired a logo featuring the map of Australia labelled 'All-British'.⁷⁶ (Figure 3) No detail was too small to be overlooked in establishing Australia's British credentials: at one promotional cinema screening, a short film of seals in the Melbourne Aquarium caused official concern because the announcer had 'a pronounced American accent. It is an amusing little item from Movietone news but the American accent is undesirable and it will be cut out of all future shows.'⁷⁷

⁷¹ NAA, A2910/1430/1/98, Part 10, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for February 1935, p. 6.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Department of Agriculture, *The British Market and the Canadian Farmer*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ O. M. Hill, *Canada's Salesman to the World*, p. 360.

⁷⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 May 1927, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9 June 1927, p. 6; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14 July 1927, p. 3.

⁷⁷ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 4, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for August 1931, p. 5.

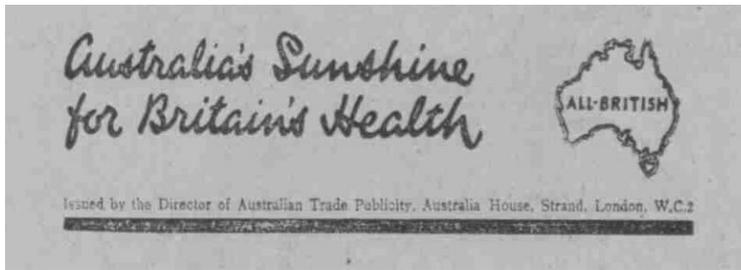


Figure 3. “All-British” Australia.

Source: *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 May 1928, p. 9.

The commodities themselves reinforced the idea of Britishness; apples, butter, and even sultanas were familiar British foods, not exotic produce of the dependent empire. Advertising emphasized this: one dried fruit advertisement noted, ‘Australian food is all British food. Australia is an all British land’.⁷⁸ That familiarity was reinforced as Australian products were positioned as suitable ingredients for traditional British cooking, like puddings or fruitcakes. Perhaps keen to set a new empire marketing trend, in December 1932 the ATP put an all-Australian Christmas cake on display at Australia House in London. Weighing three quarters of a ton, it was decorated with a match in progress at the Sydney Cricket Ground, complete with a scoreboard reading “one up for England”.⁷⁹ Indeed Australian fruit, butter and eggs could make those familiar foods more British. Consumers could ‘Put a union jack in your fruit cake’ by throwing in a handful of Australian sultanas or follow the example of the king and use ‘no other sultanas in their Christmas pudding’.⁸⁰ (Figure 4) Australian commodities therefore went beyond simply appealing to Britishness: in a creative twist, buying Australian was positioned as a way for metropolitan shoppers to perform their own Britishness. In the ATP’s hands, a ‘British shopping basket’ was one filled with Australian food.⁸¹

Similarly, ‘empire buying’ in general was reconstituted as buying Australian. Since 1926, the Empire Marketing Board had been working to stress ‘a vital mutual dependence between the Empire at Home and the Empire overseas’.⁸² Australian advertising recast this vague sense of imperial solidarity as a direct dependence between Australian and Britain. Press



Figure 4. *Summoning the spirit of empire.*

Source: *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 June 1932, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 July 1932, p. 3.

⁷⁹ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity, Report for December 1932, p. 7.

⁸⁰ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23 November 1928, p. 6.

⁸¹ *Western Morning News*, 10 November 1933, p. 5.

⁸² Constantine, ‘Bringing the Empire Alive’, p. 216.

advertising explained that 'Every pound you spend on Australian produce enables Australia to spend a pound more on British goods.'⁸³ To encourage consumers to 'Help Australia to help you', advertising once again constructed, and naturalized, bonds of kinship: 'Buy from those who buy from you...Australia has a marked preference for British goods because 98% of the population of the Southern Dominion are the sons and daughters of the motherland with a genuine affection for the old country'.⁸⁴

Australian claims to Britishness were however, contrived in other, more subtle ways. Publicity downplayed the otherness of the Australian landscape, emphasizing Home-like orchards over the exotic outback. This domestication of the colonial landscape in favour of a more 'British' looking environment was the EMB's strategy for all dominions, and it also shaped the dominions' own advertising. From time to time, a little local colour was allowed to creep in, but usually only to give products some identifiable difference when they competed against other white dominion producers. Australian butter, for example, which competed against New Zealand butter, adopted the kangaroo as a grading symbol. Australia's most prominent symbol of otherness, the kangaroo was an unlikely choice for promoting butter, but it was also occasionally pressed into other advertising, including the ATP's own *Kangaroo Kookbook*, which was produced 'to assist Australia's countless friends amongst the housewives of Great Britain in the still more satisfying use of Australia's food products'.⁸⁵ Cooking kangaroos, however, were no match for the fighting variety. Boxing kangaroos were also recruited to promote Australian products, most spectacularly, in a 1932 exhibition at Olympia, when Australia's High Commissioner, Sir Granville Ryrie, went a few rounds with one to promote Australian butter.⁸⁶ But this outlandish icon had to share space with a new, domesticated symbol of Australian-ness: Melba XV, the 'wonder cow', world champion producer of butter fat and star of point of sale material in shop windows throughout the UK.⁸⁷ In these windows, Australia was constructed not only as British but as rural. The same set of ideas would be set in motion in cinemas across the country in ATP-organised film shows that featured epics like 'The Romance of the Cattle Industry' and 'Dairying in Queensland' and attracted thousands of British housewives and schoolchildren every month.

So far, so co-ethnic. In an object example of the kind of inclusiveness valued by such networks, Australian Britishness, like dominion Britishness generally, emphasised the similarities between former colony and imperial centre. But just as important, obtaining 'non market' advantages required the erasure of difference. Consequently, commodity advertising made dominion indigenous populations disappear. Just as New Zealand's commodity campaigns made little use of Maori motifs, and Canada's avoided their first nations people, there was no hint of Australia's aboriginal inhabitants in ATP advertising. It seems not all dominion inhabitants could be reimaged as British 'kinsfolk'. Further, assertions of racial affinity (a rather less neutral term than co-ethnicity) also worked to separate the dominions from the black, or colonial, empire. Once again, this difference was subtly, but consistently, contrived. As noted, dominion rural spaces looked more English than exotic. At the same time, they were also clearly differentiated from those of other empire producers. What we might call 'colonial' commodity landscapes, like Indian tea plantations, or African harvest scenes, bustled with labourers, their promotional images as

⁸³ *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 July 1927, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Western Morning News*, 18 May 1928, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Director of Australian Trade Publicity, *The Kangaroo Kook Book* (London 1932), p. 1.

⁸⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 June 1932, p. 13.

⁸⁷ *Northern Advocate*, 14 August 1924, p. 7.

tightly packed as their bales of cotton or chests of tea. Contrarily, Australian landscapes, like dominion landscapes generally, were depicted as empty spaces, home only to livestock and the occasional white settler. Imaginatively cleared of their original native occupants, their landscapes could stand in quiet contrast to the teeming activity of the colonial empire. The differentiation between imperial colony and dominion is clearest in the artistic approaches adopted by contemporary Empire Marketing Board work.⁸⁸ But it is also evident in the dominion's own campaigns. Here even the sunshine was different. An important strand of such promotion, sunshine was emphasized for a number of reasons: it reflected developing scientific interest in vitamins, and it gave dominion dairy producers a competitive advertising edge over countries like Denmark who raised cattle in stalls over winter.⁸⁹ However, Australia's sunshine was not the dangerously debilitating tropical kind still feared by Europeans as degenerative into the interwar period. Instead it was a sturdy Anglo Saxon sun that could perk up 'pale faces' in Britain.⁹⁰ (Figure 5)

The construction of racial difference was not limited to empire: race was also used to fend off competition from outside it. This was of course made easier by the fact that some of their main rivals - Greek and Turkish dried fruits, Californian canned fruit and Danish butter could be considered 'foreign' even if they were also longstanding and familiar suppliers of food to British consumers. Indeed, in order to capture some of their market share, Australian campaigns capitalized on and constructed the idea of foreignness. Ads frequently and querulously demanded 'Why pay more money for foreign butter'.⁹¹ They also regularly associated Australian food with cleanliness, implying food from other less 'British' sources might be suspect. Australian sultanas, for example, were 'cleanest' because they were 'never touched by hand from the moment they're picked till they reach the shop', a claim undoubtedly intended to inspire unease about the way Greek or Turkish fruit was handled.⁹² A similar approach was also used to differentiate white colony from black in EMB advertising: Indian rice was harvested by hand, Australian sultanas were graded and



Figure 5. *Selling sunshine.*

Source: *Gloucestershire Daily Echo*, 10 September 1937, p. 11

⁸⁸ See Barnes, 'Bringing Another Empire Alive?', pp. 68-76.

⁸⁹ The Bodleian Library (BL), John Johnson Collection, Emigration, Box 3, New Zealand Dairy Produce Board, *The Empire's Dairy Farm: Country Life in Zealand* (London, n.d.), p. 3; BL, John Johnson Collection, Emigration Box 1,(10)c, *Australian Butter for the Homeland*.

⁹⁰ *Gloucester Echo*, 10 September 1937, p. 11.

⁹¹ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 10 February 1933, p. 6.

⁹² *Liverpool Echo*, 12 October 1928, p. 6.

packed 'by machinery under Government Supervision.'⁹³

Gender joined race in differentiating dominions from the dependent empire. It is hardly novel to reveal that colonial commodity advertising, like so many other parts of the colonial project, constructed a feminised exotic other. Empire Marketing Board advertising abounded with 'scantly dressed female rice growers' and pliant, smiling, natives working under white supervision.⁹⁴ . As I have argued elsewhere, the dominions, looked very different. For example, whilst women workers were common in those colonial commodity landscapes, labour in dominion settings was almost exclusively male. Further dominion workers were always depicted fully clothed in what appears to be an unofficial dominion dress uniform of long sleeves, trousers and hat. Workers in the dependent empire were signified instead by 'native' dress.⁹⁵ Australia's own advertising reinforced this gendered division in campaigns that adopted the figure of the male 'settler' as a key symbol. Dressed in that dominion uniform, and on occasions, looking strikingly like the EMB's archetypal Australian, the 'settler' graced numerous advertisements for butter and sultanas. By 1932, he could be found in 'the best class shops the country' as the ATP developed 'a new and striking display piece which represent[ed] an Australian settler, practically life size, standing behind a table carrying cut outs representing dishes of sultanas, currants, canned fruit, and butter.'⁹⁶ (Figure 6)

Yet there is some dissonance between the use of a male symbol and the very domestic nature of Australia's produce, a dissonance heightened by the fact that one of Australia's major competitors, California's Sunmaid Raisins, had created the highly successful 'Sunmaid Raisin girl'. Advertisers did deploy men in food advertising, but usually as figures of entitlement and authority: women cooked for men, and for their approval.⁹⁷ The settler figure fulfilled neither of these roles. Yet Australia was not alone in adopting the dissonant male settler symbol: Canada also developed 'the masculine figure of a robust Canadian farmer' for its contemporaneous commodity campaigns. Stephen Constantine has suggested that in Canada's case, the development of a male symbol for British markets represented growing Canadian nationalism, but it is more likely the opposite is true. The development of male symbols in Canada and Australia reflected the need to differentiate white dominions from the rest of the colonial empire.

However, the life-like settler, at home in a 'better class store', reminds us that the masculine dominions were not only produced in relation to



Figure 6. *The 'settler'.*

Source: *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 4 May 1928, p. 7.

⁹³ The *Times*, 7 February 1927, p. 13; *ibid.*, 28 August 1929, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Meredith, 'Imperial Images', p. 33.

⁹⁵ Barnes, 'Bringing Another Empire Alive?', p. 76.

⁹⁶ NAA, A2910 430/1/98 Part 5, Australian Trade Publicity Report, September 1932, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Parkin, *Food is Love*, pp. 126-134.

the dependent empire. They were also constructed directly through their commodity relationship with Britain. In this relationship, Australia was a land of producers, clearly symbolised by the settler figure. Britain, was, on the other hand, the land of consumers, and the archetypal consumer was the housewife. Consequently, ATP advertisements both featured, and targeted, female consumers, and were often found nestling cosily in the women's section of the paper. In a happy conjunction of the standard depiction of consuming women as homemakers, and empire advertising's wider obsession with kith and kin, ATP ads imagined women as mothers, shown in kitchens or around the family dining table.⁹⁸ (Figure 4) Predictably these advertisements carried messages about ensuring the family's health and wellbeing, a strategy that is also reflected in advertising trends more broadly in this era. But dominion advertising also charged women with responsibility for the empire's health. Buying British could 'bring back prosperity'.⁹⁹ Indeed 'family' and 'family of empire' were sometimes explicitly linked. 'Every housewife wants her husband to be in good employment with steady wages and so he will be if Britain's factories are busy and prosperous. Help to make them busy and prosperous by increasing the buying power of their best customers – notably Australia.'¹⁰⁰

IV Conclusion

Australia's miscellany of wonder cows, giant puddings, and boxing kangaroo bouts have been all too easy for traditional economic literature to ignore. But they are evidence of the importance of being British. Examining the ATP's campaigns reveals the extent to which imperial sentiment had to be invented, not simply appealed to. Equally, dominion campaigns reveal the ways the supposed inclusiveness of a shared Britishness was underwritten instead by mobilizing exclusionary discourses of race and gender. Co-ethnicity implies inclusion: in dominion advertising being British equally required exclusion. Such a reading challenges the current picture of largely benign networks, instead making their role in constructing imperial hierarchies explicit. In the imperial context, it is simply not enough to note the presence of power: we need to unpack its operation. And here, examining the cultural work of the dominion campaigns is revealing in another way. They remind us that in an era still seen as the twilight of empire, new strategies for its maintenance and reconstruction remained in play. Dominion myths about nationalism notwithstanding, when it came to forging identity in the interwar period, and perhaps even beyond, the white dominions commodity marketing to remain 'British to the core'.

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⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹⁹ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 2 November 1931, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Western Morning News*, 1 June 1928, p. 8.

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