

## Taking the Measure of the Commonwealth: A Review Essay

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*The Empire's New Clothes: The Myth of the Commonwealth.* By Philip Murphy. London: Hurst and Company, 2018.

Commonwealth Now. *Griffith Review* 59. Edited by Julianne Schultz and Jane Camens. South Brisbane, Queensland: Griffith University. 2017.

*The Empire's New Clothes* is the most important book ever written about the Commonwealth and its history, and about the relationships that history has both to imperial and colonial history. Even though the form and presentation of the book may strike some readers as unconventionally personal, there is clear precedent for such an approach by a serious historian to an important subject of contemporary public interest,<sup>1</sup> and they will not prevent the book from having a formative influence on future Commonwealth scholarship and, very possibly, an influence on the future of the Commonwealth, too.

The book is cleverly constructed, well-written, eminently readable, anchored to some of the major twists and turns over the last half century in how scholars have tried to think about the meaning and significance of the history of the former British Empire and its colonies for the modern Commonwealth,<sup>2</sup> and displays here and there a quite delightful and often iconoclastic wit. The analysis in the book makes use of the Commonwealth Oral History Project, an online database of interviews with more than seventy people who have been leading figures in the development of the Commonwealth since 1965.<sup>3</sup>

This is also, as its title proclaims, a book that lays bare the myth that the Commonwealth has accomplished much of enduring significance since the end of the Second World War. And, as such, it is a book arguing that, if it maintains its present trajectory, the Commonwealth has no meaningful future, either as a happy, globe-

spanning family of once colonial but now independent and freely associating nations, or as a beacon for the advance of humane and progressive values in the world. This deeply critical appraisal of the Commonwealth has earned the book and its author, Philip Murphy, some opprobrium.<sup>4</sup>

But nowhere in the book does Murphy say that the Commonwealth should be scrapped. Indeed, as will be noted below, the discerning reader can see Murphy suggesting that there is important and worthwhile work the Commonwealth could be doing in the world, and perhaps should be doing, and likely would be doing if it had a keener understanding of both its own past and of its future potential to shape human affairs.<sup>5</sup>

One cannot imagine, of course, that any rehabilitation of the Commonwealth as a significant international actor, or even and much less plausibly as a useful expression of British foreign policy, could be accomplished without both structural reform of the institution and a reallocation of the resources that support its work. These are both themes that David McIntyre, an earlier notable and serious historian of the Commonwealth has repeatedly tried to drive home in works that look, perhaps against the odds, for a silver lining in the history of the Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup> And depending on how Brexit unfolds there may be no appetite for either the kinds of structural reform or resource reallocation that would substantially benefit the Commonwealth and lay the groundwork for its viable future.<sup>7</sup>

These are not policy issues Murphy rehearses at length in this latest book,<sup>8</sup> where there is a clear and consistent focus on understanding how the Commonwealth came to its present pass. But they are issues that quite naturally arise from a reading of the book.

It is, in fact, a book that makes such questions unavoidable. And that will stand as a remarkable achievement.

In the beginning, Murphy was struck by the air of unreality attaching to the depictions of the Commonwealth that found their way into public discussions of the desirability and feasibility of a British exit from the European Union. The policy suggestion was “that the Commonwealth had the potential to represent, for a free-trading UK, an alternative market to the EU” (x), and that the time was therefore right, particularly in the aftermath of the June 2016 Brexit referendum and with a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in the offing in London in the Spring of 2018, to revisit questions about what the Commonwealth had accomplished, what the organization stood for, and what good it might realistically achieve in the future.

Behind these policy relevant questions, however, lay another and much more challenging and profound one for Murphy as a professional historian, and a relevant question for everyone else interested in Britain’s colonial history; namely whether there existed “a really penetrating, critical analysis of the organization” (x). There did not.

Indeed, there was “a gap in the [scholarly] literature about the Commonwealth” because “it tends to be [only] supporters who feel it is worthy of study” (x). So, what might a professional historian discover if he or she decided to explore “the gulf between the Commonwealth’s lofty rhetoric and its actual achievements”? (xii).

The first step Murphy took along the road to answering this question was to situate his work in the context of the debate among scholars of colonialism and colonial history about “the depth and durability of the imprint made by Empire on British society”(3). His base marker was the publication in 1978 of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*,<sup>9</sup> “one of the most influential academic studies of the post-war era” and a book in which Said traces “a process whereby, from the eighteenth century onwards, a variety of explorers, missionaries, traders and administrators sought to make the East explicable to the West by immersing themselves in ‘Eastern’ cultures, languages and religions” (3), the better to understand and to control subaltern societies.

The fly in this ointment was that Orientalists, far from faithfully and impartially recording an external reality, filtered their understandings of the societies they encountered

“through the distorting mirrors of Western self-interest and self-perception...[such that] if Western society was rational, scientific and orderly, and imbued with ‘manly values,’ the Orient was irrational, superstitious, despotic and effeminate” (3). Orientalists thus laid the basis for the West to impose its will on the East, “the better to cure it of its manifold ills,” and they helped “imbue in Western European populations the sense that the imperial ambitions of their rulers were part of the natural order of things” (4).

It was clear enough what this meant for scholars. Said’s *Orientalism* laid the basis upon which “hundreds of scholars [could build] careers in the field of Saidian post-colonial studies” (5) by exposing “the reality that Western culture, from top to bottom, was run through with traces of the imperial project” (4). And those who couldn’t contribute by buttressing the evidence for this proposition just “hadn’t looked hard enough” (4). Two research strands followed.

In one case, John MacKenzie<sup>10</sup> started an “academic cottage industry” (4) in British imperial history, albeit without the theoretical encumbrances of orthodox Saidian discourse, to look for signs that from the late nineteenth century onwards the Empire had real meaning in the daily lives of the people of Britain, even shaping electoral outcomes by affecting the votes of those who could vote.

Bernard Porter disagreed, and in 2004 began a contrasting line of inquiry when he published *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*<sup>11</sup> arguing that Britain’s penchant for doing Empire on the cheap, by co-opting local elites to do the heavy lifting of tax collection and law enforcement, for example, meant that the impact of Empire on British culture and society was small and that “only a... fraction of the British population...drawn heavily from what we might call the ‘ruling class’” (5) was touched by Empire in any meaningful way. Their identification with the Empire of the past might plausibly have translated itself into an enthusiasm for the Commonwealth of the present.

But, as Murphy points out, the scholarly participants in the “great MacKenzie-Porter debate” (6) would never be able to settle the question of whether either Empire or Commonwealth had substantive meaning for the people of Britain, or even for that elite

subset of them “who had close personal or family associations with the now Commonwealth countries,” because both Empire and Commonwealth are “‘floating signifiers,’ untethered to personal experience,” meaning that their relevance for and impact upon British people and policy makers is hard [perhaps impossible] to measure [precisely] and that they change over time “in line with broader ideological undercurrents” (10).

It is easier, however, to establish that whenever “the projection of a stable [and positive] image of the Commonwealth to the British public” has been attempted as a political exercise “it has...been hindered by the fact that Britain’s rulers have so frequently been unsure precisely what to do with it” (13), or even, we might add, what it is:

[During the post-war period, the Commonwealth] moved from being seen as an essential prop of Britain’s ‘great power’ status to representing a puzzle, then an irritant, and finally a source of disappointment. It has maintained a loyal band of supporters, mostly concentrated in a series of London-based affiliated organizations. Yet even they often seem at a loss to explain the reasons for their enthusiasm (13).

So, while it is far from obvious “how the Commonwealth, composed of countries which display widely varying attitudes towards things like religious and press freedom, LGBT rights and the death penalty can serve as an effective instrument of British soft power...[and while] it doesn’t help [to establish its contemporary relevance in Britain] that the Commonwealth is seen by many as merely a relic of British imperialism” (15), it is not at all difficult to imagine how a positive image of the Commonwealth might first be cultivated and then appropriated to fend off arguments that, if it exited the European Union, Britain would be left alone and without influence in global trade and power politics. The notion that it makes sense to imagine that the Commonwealth could be mobilized to fend off this isolation is, unquestionably, the biggest myth about the Commonwealth that Murphy is at pains to dispel.<sup>12</sup>

Along the way, he helps his readers to re-examine and discard other myths, as well. There is a chapter in Murphy’s book dealing, for example, with the background to and the fallout from the CHOGM held in Sri Lanka in 2013 (ch. 7). It is a detailed and fascinating case study of the inability of the Commonwealth Secretariat and several

member states to confront the myth that there is no glaring discrepancy between the Commonwealth's much vaunted values, treated at length in the preceding chapter (ch. 6), and the nepotism, authoritarianism and corruption of the Rajapaksa regime that came to power in Sri Lanka in 2005. The episode may be too recent to be of great interest to readers of the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*. The same may be true of the chapter (ch. 8) in which Murphy devastates the myth that the Commonwealth, imaginarily reincarnated as a sort of Empire version 2.0, can or will materially mitigate the grievous damage that will surely be done to Britain's economy and international relations by Brexit.<sup>13</sup>

There is, however, some serious food for thought for students of colonialism and for colonial historians in other parts of the book. Murphy advances early on, for example, a counter to the proposition that the development of the Commonwealth was masterminded by the British government as part of a "grand geopolitical strategy... to guide the Empire's dependencies towards self-government in a spirit of friendship" (55) - that the modern Commonwealth can, if you like, be both understood and dismissed as a manifestation of neo-colonialism. It is rather the case, as Murphy began to suggest earlier,<sup>14</sup> that the development of the modern Commonwealth owes much more to "consumer demand" than it does to "any template devised in London" (55).

If there was consumer demand for the Commonwealth, and for the institutions created in the mid-1960s to give it substance (28-42), where and why did the demand originate? Was the motivation for it the same in former colonies in Africa as it was, say, in Asia or the Caribbean? And, since the material benefits of Commonwealth membership for former colonies and dependencies are now and have always been meager, and are unlikely to increase in the foreseeable future, why have so many member states, "governed after independence by generations of colonial nationalist leaders, whose lives had been devoted to freeing their countries from British imperial rule and who had often suffered prosecution and imprisonment as a result" (56), voluntarily chosen to retain their connection to the Commonwealth?

Why, for that matter and to extend the analysis, has what Murphy calls “the natural process of shedding a colonial legacy” (90) been so slow and faltering across the member states of the Commonwealth when it comes to shunning attachments to the British monarchy? How much between-country variance has there been in this process, and what explains it? Murphy advances the hypothesis that “the endurance of the British monarch as shared sovereign [in the Commonwealth Realms and as Head of the Commonwealth overall] is virtually entirely down to local factors” (93), thus raising the possibility that within-country variance accounts for most of the observable differences in the ways in which former colonies and dependencies, and dominions too if we stretch the analysis back before 1949,<sup>15</sup> have sought to shape their Commonwealth relationships.

That is a provocative hypothesis, as is the corollary that in some post-colonial political systems, even those where significant republican sentiment is plainly evident, the role of the governor-general has been enhanced to the point that he or she is now treated in effect as head of state (96), thus obviating the perception that the Queen fills that role. Whether local factors in former colonies have always governed attachments to the monarchy, and whether governors-general now play a different role in the domestic politics of former colonies than they did before independence was achieved, are both questions that it seems to me future contributions to this *Journal* might very well explore.

And then at another stage in his analysis (ch. 5) Murphy turns to issues that I think colonial historians are going to find not only provocative but well-nigh irresistible. He observes early on that the dissertation topic he chose was an examination, based on archival materials from the 1950s and 1960s, of “the way in which the British Conservative Party reacted to the decolonization of Africa” (7).<sup>16</sup> So, it was as an archive rat in the late 1980s that Murphy “became familiar with the idea of the Commonwealth as a great, soothing blanket for the [Party’s] dwindling band of post-war imperial enthusiasts” (7-8).

His professional working assumption was that as the archival record expanded to include documents related to the Macmillan government’s decolonization policy,

responsive in the 1960s to the winds of change, the morally infused question that seemingly obsessed older generations of historians, about whether the Empire was a good or a bad thing, would fall away, and that historians would then be able to get on with the much more mundanely empirical but nonetheless professionally productive and rewarding job of figuring out how the imperial system of government actually operated in the various dominions, colonies, and dependencies, and how it came to an end.

In fact, Murphy's assumption about how things would play out for historians who were archive rats, as well as for the many others in and out of the scholarly community who relied (perhaps naively?) on their archival work to shape wider perceptions of the value and meaning of Britain's colonial past, proved incorrect. This was a particular problem for those hoping to develop an understanding of how the British, relatively few in number, finessed the obviously puzzling problem of hanging on to their substantially populated but globally dispersed colonies and dependencies for as long as they did.

The main reason he got it wrong, Murphy observes, is that while "Violence was a central underlying feature of British colonial rule," and "the implicit threat of racially-inflected violence by the colonial authorities was ever present" (107), the use of violence in the colonies to assert the legitimacy of British rule and deny the legitimacy of those who claimed to speak for nationalist movements "was not something that UK imperial governments were keen to highlight" (107). Indeed, it was something they would prefer to forget, to the point of making "conscious efforts to destroy or hide evidence of the darker elements of colonial rule" - an official forgetfulness that "greased the wheels of post-independence Commonwealth relations," not only for Britain but also for the colonial nationalists who in most cases after 1949 and despite the violence, which some of them experienced first-hand, led their countries to join the Commonwealth, after leading their countries to independence.

This official forgetfulness was, thus, instrumental in sustaining the myth that "in spite of all that had happened [in the colonies], Britain was essentially one of the good guys" (108) and that the happy Commonwealth family could move on to a brighter and better

future without having to confront the question of who had moral responsibility for the legacies of colonialism (128-129), and how that responsibility might be discharged.

Murphy goes to some lengths to recall the background to the compensation claim filed in 2009 against the British government by five elderly Kenyans who alleged they had been detained and tortured during the Mau Mau rebellion, also known as the Kenya Emergency (108), a claim that eventually resulted in a successful out of court settlement of some twenty million pounds to more than five thousand alleged victims (112). He traces the outlines of the controversy stirred by journalists and historians, the latter including David Anderson<sup>17</sup> and Caroline Elkins,<sup>18</sup> about what really happened in colonial Kenya and whether the archival evidence that might be used to substantiate claims for compensation for what happened had been doctored. Quite clearly, evidence had been withheld, not just in the case of Kenya but also involving “thousands of additional files [in the Hanslope Park government document repository in Buckinghamshire] relating to dozens of other former British colonies” (109).<sup>19</sup>

Murphy then broadens the discussion of compensation for colonial abuses to encompass reparations for slavery (114-116), and perhaps for the economic damage inflicted by British rule in India (116).<sup>20</sup> He notes the controversies that have arisen over the memorialization of figures associated with imperialism and the slave trade, focusing on objections to monuments to Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town and at Oriel College, Oxford, which Rhodes generously endowed (116-122). And he comments on Bruce Gilley’s ‘The Case for Colonialism’ article in *Third World Quarterly*<sup>21</sup> as a preface to discussing the firestorm of academic controversy, chiefly but not exclusively among historians, sparked by Nigel Biggar’s announcement of a five year project on ‘The Ethics of Empire’ at Oxford’s McDonald Center for Theology, Ethics and Public Life (122-126).<sup>22</sup>

All very interesting, one might say, but what does this highlighting by Murphy of current and still ongoing controversies about the nature and meaning of Britain’s colonial and imperial history tell us about the development of the Commonwealth?

What the controversies tell us, first, is that difficult, normative questions about the British Empire, and about the Commonwealth as its decolonizing successor, remain both relevant and urgent. Imperial and colonial history research have not reached the new level of empirical normalcy Murphy once imagined, because the presumptively reliable archival evidence on which much of that scholarship would be based has been tampered with and remains tainted. So, although “the Hanslope ‘revelations’...did not prompt a major re-evaluation of the role of colonial violence—neither among the historical community, nor in broader British society,...they emerged at a time when there was already a renewed focus on the negative impacts of British imperial expansion...and simply reinforced already widespread perceptions that [the British government] was continuing to evade moral responsibility for [the] past” (113-114).<sup>23</sup>

And what the controversies tell us, secondly, is that there remains “an urgent need for a candid yet nuanced resolution of the debate over Britain’s colonial guilt” (126). It is Murphy’s view, moreover, that “In many ways, the Commonwealth is the ideal forum for a debate at the highest levels about the impacts and legacies of colonialism” (134):

All of its members have been profoundly shaped by that history—from the UK as colonial hegemon to the tiniest of colonial dependencies; from countries shaped by British imperialism over centuries to those where its impact lasted little more than a generation... [I]n the years to come these issues will likely gain yet further significance in the discourse of international relations. The Commonwealth has a rare ‘competitive advantage’ in its ability to air and possibly to help reconcile wildly conflicting points of view (134).

So, why hasn’t the Commonwealth taken responsibility for such a serious and high level international dialogue?

In answer to this question Murphy tells the story of an appearance by Prince Charles at a reception and lunch in London in June 2017 to mark the dissolution of the Overseas Service Pensioners Association, an organization created to defend the pension rights of members of the British Colonial Service, later the Overseas Civil Service (129-132). Charles told his audience that he recalled meeting former Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta forty-seven years previously and then asking him the wrong question about whether he had ever visited Lake Rudolf, now Lake Turkana. The question, Charles remembered, evoked an ominous silence, but then Kenyatta roared with laughter and

said that yes, he had been a guest of Charles's mother there for some time. Kenyatta was sentenced in 1953 to seven years at hard labor, followed by indefinite detention, in Lokitaung, a place a few miles inland from Lake Turkana and a place where in 1958 the British located a prison for captured Mau Mau insurgents. Kenyatta was their leader.

Charles may have thought it was a suitably amusing recollection to share with colonial pensioners in 2017, because it showed how, despite the treatment they received decades before at the hands of colonial officials, the Mau Mau prisoners who survived Lokitaung could forgive and forget. Telling such a story ostensibly did no violence, therefore, to the myth that the great and lasting achievement of Britain's colonial civil servants, in Kenya and elsewhere, was that they guided the colonies to political maturity much as a mother might tend her growing children to adulthood.

Murphy's point, then, in retailing the ostensibly amusing anecdote Charles told the pensioners about Kenyatta is that the viability of the Commonwealth has long rested on "a personal commitment by those representing former colonies at the Commonwealth to uphold a collective amnesia" (133) about the past, and about how some of them were mis-treated as that past unfolded. It will take courage, imagination, and leadership to get beyond the numbing effects of that amnesia to the sort of dialogue Murphy imagines might be possible and ought to be attempted.

But are such qualities likely to emerge in the Commonwealth?

Murphy makes very shrewd assessments of the mixed leadership qualities displayed by secretaries-general of the Commonwealth (31-42; 217-224). Although he notes the media controversies about expenditures of funds and the (mis)management of staff that have swirled around the current incumbent, Patricia Scotland, he seems inclined nevertheless to think she has been "more sinned against than sinning" (223),<sup>24</sup> given that Buckingham Palace (presumably meaning the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, and her immediate entourage) has had long-standing concerns [pre-dating Scotland's tenure] that the leadership of the Commonwealth was "risk-averse and rudderless" (222), given the additional but unspecified pressure Scotland is under from

Whitehall (perhaps meaning the Prime Minister's office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)) to "shake-up" the Secretariat (223), and given the "scathing" criticisms from the Department for International Development (DFID) in multi-lateral aid reviews in 2011 and again in 2016 that the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation is not delivering value for money and needs a sharper "strategic focus" (223-224) in deciding where and why to spend its modest budget.

I think this is the point at which Murphy runs up against the limitations of his decision to look at the impact of the Commonwealth from the perspective of British society (3), a necessary choice and a wise one to keep his work within reasonable bounds, but one that often resolves itself into an insider's attempt to unravel for other insiders the dynamics of relationships between the people and organizations making up the Commonwealth community inside what he calls the London bubble (52). One wonders how many people outside that bubble really care whether a Secretary-General mends fences with the Palace or with DFID and the FCO, or think it would make any real difference if she did? Do people outside the bubble but inside Commonwealth countries think about the Commonwealth's problems and prospects in much the same way Murphy does?

These are not questions I would have expected Murphy to address in his latest book. But they are questions worth raising here in conclusion, because even if the Commonwealth found new leadership and that leadership showed the kind of courage that surfaced now and then in the Commonwealth's "golden age" of institution building in the 1960s (28-35), and in its three decade engagement with South Africa and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) (66-72), it has failed to connect itself in any meaningful way to the people of the Commonwealth, clinging instead to "an oddly corporatist model, in which a variety of profession- or even sports-based groups...are supposedly represented by their corresponding affiliated organizations" (51). That failure is, more than anything else, a failure of imagination, and it is one that prevents the people who run the Commonwealth and who provide it with the resources it needs to stay alive from tapping into the energy, vitality and creativity of the ordinary people who live in Commonwealth countries.<sup>25</sup>

There was, as it happens, an admittedly singular but quite remarkable demonstration of that vitality and creativity in “Commonwealth Now,” published as issue 59 of the *Griffith Review* and developed by its editors in anticipation of the 2018 London CHOGM. It appeared just prior to the release of Murphy’s own book. The collection features the work of contributors from twenty-five countries scattered widely across the Commonwealth. And what it shows is that the major themes Murphy articulates resonate deeply throughout the Commonwealth and have already found some expression, whether it be in works of history or politics or memoir or poetry or fiction.<sup>26</sup> Murphy argues that the Commonwealth can manage and ought to stimulate a dialogue about difficult issues, such as the costs of colonialism and restitution.<sup>27</sup> That will strike some people as an audacious proposition. But “Commonwealth Now” is at least preliminary evidence that outside the bubble and down at the grassroots the conversation has already started. I hope that when he reads the work it gives Murphy confidence that he is on the right track. And signals to the Commonwealth that, if it wants to be in touch and in tune with what the people of the Commonwealth have on their minds, it has some catching up to do.

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<sup>1</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). As an appendix, he reprints an autobiographical essay, David Cannadine, “An Imperial Childhood?” *The Yale Review* 86 (April 1998): 28-46. See also the observations made by David Armitage in Martine van Ittersum and Jaap Jacobs, “Are We All Global Historians Now? An Interview with David Armitage,” *Itinerario* 36 (2012): 7-28.

<sup>2</sup> Orthodox thinking dates the modern Commonwealth from 1949, when India, set to become a republic in 1950, agreed to the London Declaration and accepted “the King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such Head of the Commonwealth.” Amitav Banerji, “The 1949 London Declaration: Birth of the Modern Commonwealth,” *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* 25 (1999): 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> The searchable database of interviews is online at <https://commonwealthoralhistories.org> (last accessed 3 January 2019). For an introduction see Sue Onslow, “Voices of the Commonwealth: An Oral History of the Modern Commonwealth 1965-2012,” *The Round Table* 106 (2017): 47-59.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Krishnan Srinivasan, “The Empire’s New Clothes: The Myth of the Commonwealth - A Review,” *The Round Table* 107 (2018): 381-383; Stuart Mole, “Exploring Commonwealth Myths,” *Imperial and Global Forum* (31 May 2018, in a blog from the Centre for Imperial and Global History, University of Exeter, online at <https://imperialglobalexeter.com/2018/05/31/exploring-commonwealth-myths/> (last accessed 3 January 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Other recent book length treatments that see some value in the Commonwealth, albeit for different reasons in each case and without the intellectual ambition Murphy articulates, can be found in Krishnan Srinivasan, *The Rise, Decline and Future of the British Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Timothy Shaw, *Commonwealth: Inter- and Non-State Contributions to Global*

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*Governance* (London: Routledge, 2008); James Mayall, ed., *The Contemporary Commonwealth: An Assessment 1965-2009* (London: Routledge, 2010); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2013); Shridath Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life* (Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); W. David McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth, 1965-90* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> An important clue to the appetite for positive change will come from the much-delayed report of the High Level Review (HLR) group, commissioned at the 2015 CHOGM in Malta to make a wide-ranging assessment of the functioning and effectiveness of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The terms of reference for the HLR are accessible from the website of the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organizations at <https://www.ifco.online/ifco-intranet>.

<sup>8</sup> Previous work includes Philip Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization: The Conservative Party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa 1951-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Philip Murphy, *Monarchy and the End of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government, and the Postwar Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); John MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> It is a myth undergirded intellectually, perhaps, by the notion that the Commonwealth is, as the Empire once was, the hub of a thriving and viable geopolitical network, a notion which intrigues proponents of the new imperial history. Alan Lester, "Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire," *History Compass* 4 (2006): 124-141. It is not clear, however, that the notion has much empirical substance. David Howell, *Old Links and New Ties: Power and Persuasion in an Age of Networks* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> The same point is made more memorably, perhaps, by recalling what *The Economist* wrote about the prospect of an Empire 2.0 after an "underwhelming" CHOGM in Perth in 2011: "Talk of the Commonwealth forming the dynamic, like-minded, free-trading core of a new British global network for prosperity is, to use the technical term, cobblers. The Commonwealth is many things: a talking shop, a useful place to exchange best practice on everything from education for girls to fighting malaria, an occasionally effective forum for putting pressure on regimes to clean up their governance or face the embarrassment of suspension. But it is also seriously dysfunctional." Julianne Schultz, "Ties That Still Bind: Enduring Tendrils of Empire," *Griffith Review* 59 (2017): 11.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Murphy, "Britain and the Commonwealth: Confronting the Past—Imagining the Future," *The Round Table* 100 (2011): 267-283.

<sup>15</sup> This is a conclusion one can fairly draw, I think, from McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, Parts 1 and 2.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization*.

<sup>17</sup> David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: W.W. Norton, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Badger, "Historians, a Legacy of Suspicion and the 'Migrated Archives,'" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23 (2012): 799-807; David Anderson, "Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's 'Migrated Archive,'" *History Workshop Journal* 80 (2015): 142-160.

<sup>20</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Hurst and Company, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Gilley, "The Case for Colonialism," was initially published in *Third World Quarterly* 38 (2017) but subsequently withdrawn by the publisher. It was republished online in May 2018 by the National Association of Scholars and is now at [https://www.nas.org/articles/the\\_case\\_for\\_colonialism](https://www.nas.org/articles/the_case_for_colonialism) (last accessed 6 January 2019).

<sup>22</sup> The project is described at <https://www.mcdonaldcentre.org.uk/ethics-and-empire> (last accessed 6 January 2019), where the "ethical questions of urgent public importance" that colonial and imperial history might illuminate are said to include: "complicated questions of rights and responsibility... [such as whether] contemporary British Government is responsible for the effects of slavery almost two centuries after its

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abolition, [and] how... that responsibility [is] to be shared with the descendants of the Africans who profited from selling their own people to the slave-traders?"

<sup>23</sup> The perception that moral responsibility is being evaded assumes that the right way to determine where culpability for the negative impacts of empire lies, as well as what if anything should be done about it, is to examine the empirical evidence about who did what to whom and why at the time harm was inflicted, but without trying to weigh those costs against benefits that may have accrued at some later point. By contrast, the Ethics and Empire project opens the prospect of shifting to a moral calculus where there will be no culpability for past harms, and therefore no case for compensation or restitution, if it can be shown that the costs inflicted can be justified on utilitarian grounds.

<sup>24</sup> The judgments entered by the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal against Scotland in April and September 2018 in the case of Ram Venuprasad, mentioned in passing by Murphy (223), have been followed by a judgment in December 2018 for Dr. Josephine Ojiambo, a former deputy secretary general. The judgments are published in full at <http://thecommonwealth.org/tribunal> (last accessed 6 January 2019).

<sup>25</sup> This is the lesson David McIntyre was trying to drive home in *The Significance of the Commonwealth, 1965-90*. It is an issue Amanda Shah also grappled with in "Joining up the Commonwealth: A Response to Governmental Calls for Increased Coordination with Civil Society" (London: Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, August 2002), but her recommendations were not followed. See also Richard Bourne, "The Commonwealth and Civil Society," in Mayall ed., *The Contemporary Commonwealth* (2010):122-136.

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly and I assume coincidentally one of the contributions has the same main title as Murphy's book. Stuart Ward, "The Empire's New Clothes: Come to Britain and See the Crisis," *Griffith Review* 59 (2017): 125-130.

<sup>27</sup> One of those issues, which Murphy does not mention but may well provide a specific and productive way to move forward is the restitution of cultural heritage. It has come to the fore in Europe in a report recently submitted to the President of France and through the recent re-opening of the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium. Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics" (Paris, November 2018), available online in English at [http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf](http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf) (last accessed 6 January 2019), It arises in the Commonwealth context because of the collapse in 2012 of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, raising the question of whether and how and by whom it should be replaced. For background see Corinna McLeod, "Negotiating a National Memory: The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2 (2009): 157-165.