

**A POST-IMPERIAL FRONTIER?  
BRITISHNESS, THE FALKLANDS WAR, AND THE MEMORY OF SETTLER  
COLONIALISM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**JOEL HEBERT: A Post-Imperial Frontier? Britishness, the Falklands War, and the Memory of Settler Colonialism**  
(Under the direction of Susan Pennybacker)

In April 1982, after Argentina's invasion of the British-administered Falkland Islands and its quick rout in the short war that followed, the British public reveled in an unbridled demonstration of nationalism. Many scholars have sought to explain away the public's deeply passionate response to the Falklands War as anything but jingoistic. This thesis, however, argues that British politicians and the press successfully popularized the war effort by appealing to old imperial nationalisms that had united the British nation in the past. They emphasized both the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of a global "Greater Britishness" linking Britain to the bucolic Falkland Islands and, in deeply racialized language, they "othered" the Argentine military. Ultimately, the political discourses and representations of the Falklands War illustrate how at a time of alleged British decline, ideal Britishness was conveniently found abroad in the former empire. Indeed, well into the so-called "post-colonial" period of the 1980s, settler communities continued to have an important bearing on domestic British politics and identity.

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## INTRODUCTION

On April 27, 1982, after the Falkland Island Association's public call to "Help us to help the Falklands," G.R. Moore of Maryport in northwest England wrote to donate to the cause. Just three weeks prior, the Argentine military had invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands, an archipelago some 400 miles off the coast of Argentina and home to nearly 2,000 British-descended settlers. The Argentines did not consider the invasion of the islands, which they called the *Malvinas*, to be hostile, but as the legitimate reassertion of Argentine administration over their own sovereign territory. In their view, the British<sup>1</sup> had infringed that sovereignty in 1833. Moore appended a special request to his donation to the Falkland Islands Association. "I would be grateful if you would send me a price list of any T-shirts, stickers and badges displaying pro-Falklands slogans that you have available," Moore wrote, "especially the T-shirts with the slogan 'The Falklands are British and Beautiful.'" Indeed,

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\* This text builds on research conducted over the past three years for various projects. My undergraduate honors thesis, "War and the Evolution of Britishness," written at the University of Alaska Anchorage under the direction of Dr. Bill Myers, focused on the evolution of British national identity and its inherent linkage to war, with a section on British press coverage of the Falklands War. Two seminar papers written at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill served as a further framework for this research. "Fond of the Bottle?" The Anglo-Argentines, Sport, and the Rationale for War in the Falklands," written for Dr. John Chasteen, sought to rationalize Argentine motivations for invading the Falkland Islands in 1982 by looking at the place of the large Anglo community in Argentine society through the lens of sport, particularly soccer. "Thatcher's War, Thatcher's Monument: British Popular Memory and the Commemoration of the 1982 Falklands War," written for Dr. Daniel Sherman, traced divergent and competing narratives of the war, and their impact on its commemoration in the late-1980s and 1990s. Lastly, this text draws on archival research conducted in England in May 2012 at the Imperial War Museum, the UK National Inventory of War Memorials, and the Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel on the campus of Pangbourne College in Pangbourne, Berkshire.

<sup>1</sup> While conscious of the clear cultural and political divides between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, notably during the 1970s and 1980s, I refer primarily to "Britain" in this text. I use this term discursively, unless otherwise noted, and do not mean to apply a monopolized understanding of the United Kingdom that disregards internal cleavages.

almost all donors who wrote to the Association, a Westminster-based lobbying group, made similar requests for Falklands-stamped items. “I am a wholehearted supporter of the islanders,” Moore added, “and would like to display my sympathy.”<sup>2</sup>

A small cottage industry of Falklands paraphernalia—from kitschy bumper stickers to pocket maps to t-shirts boasting cartoonish penguins—proliferated during the three-month conflict. At the very least, this trinket industry signaled the expectation by people like Joseph Elton, who produced over 200 Falklands bumper stickers at his leather goods shop in Harrogate, that people desired to display their support for the British war effort. Not surprisingly, given the war’s popularity, Elton’s stickers quickly sold out.<sup>3</sup> As tensions escalated, 65% of respondents in a London Weekend Television opinion poll said they would accept the wholesale sinking of the Argentine navy to recover the Falklands.<sup>4</sup> By late May, after both sides had suffered substantial casualties at sea, another poll published in the *Guardian Weekly* showed that, in the likely event that ongoing ceasefire negotiations broke down, only 7% of respondents favored withdrawing the British naval task force, which had been deployed to retake the islands. Indeed, 68% of those questioned supported some form of ground invasion.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, despite her prewar unpopularity, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher received positive reviews for her management of the crisis; by war’s end, an astounding 84% of respondents approved of the Tory Prime Minister’s Falklands policy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> G.R Moore to the Falkland Islands Association, 27 April 1982, Private Papers of the Falkland Islands Association, Item 1154, Misc. 76, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>3</sup> “Sticking up for Britain!” *Harrogate Herald*, 10 May 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Langdon, “British public supports Thatcher policy,” *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 18 April 1982.

<sup>5</sup> “Tories have 15-point lead,” *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 23 May 1982, 3.

<sup>6</sup> “Patriotism has worked its old magic,” *Guardian*, 16 June 1982, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/1982/jun/16/thatcher.uk/print> (accessed 24 November 2012).

Over the last thirty years, many scholars have argued that this ebullient popular response had nothing to do with Britain's imperial history. The wartime spirit was not jingoistic, historian Bernard Porter argues, because the British were "proud of defending the Falklands; but none was particularly proud of having them to defend."<sup>7</sup> Historian Richard Weight argues that people's reactions to the war had nothing to do with imperialism because the conflict "was *not* imperial in intent."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, some argue that, the so-called "imperial spirit" meant little to Thatcher herself, as a solidly middle class grocer's daughter from provincial Lancashire.<sup>9</sup>

Stuart Ward has dubbed these historians, who consistently downplay the impact of empire on the metropole, the "minimal impact" theorists, while he and others constitute its antithesis—the "maximal impact" school of thought.<sup>10</sup> Maximalists argue that empire, even at its end, had a significant impact on British society. In his idea of "postcolonial melancholia," the social theorist Paul Gilroy, an important maximalist voice, argues that the general British failure to confront or even tacitly to accept the end of empire intermittently fires a dormant and subconscious imperialism amongst the public, making the restoration of British greatness seem vital. From the 1960s on, Gilroy argues, this latent imperialism often took the form of attacks against the "inhuman political body of the immigrant" and its descendants.<sup>11</sup> One widely publicized example of this ugly imperial impulse in society was

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-2004*, Fourth Edition (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd, 2004; first published 1976), 342-43.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000* (London: Macmillan, 2002), 612.

<sup>9</sup> Porter, 342-43; for comments on Thatcher's apparent lack of "imperial spirit" due to her identity as a woman, see Stephen Haseler, *The Battle for Britain: Thatcher and the New Liberals* (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 1989), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 90-110.



the unprovoked 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young British man of Jamaican descent, by a gang of white youths in southeast London.

As a further outgrowth of the end of empire, the critic Patrick Wright argues that British people in the 1980s overtly attempted to rationalize the chaos of ordinary life in a post-colonial world through an obsession with national heritage. From country houses to raised Elizabethan shipwrecks, Wright argues that these historical objects acted as familiar comforts in troubling times.<sup>12</sup> Wright also specifically addresses the Falklands War, arguing that it demonstrated a “resonance and continuity with the past” in a particularly imperial way. The war, he argues, “proved that ‘we’ [were] still powerful, still capable of rallying to one flag with confidence and moral righteousness.”<sup>13</sup> Gilroy and Wright make clear that in various ways, the British continued to think of themselves and their lives through imperial narratives in the 1980s and beyond.<sup>14</sup> These identity frameworks did not necessarily require every British person to react with jingoistic fervor at a whim—though some did. Nevertheless, for many, the memory of empire—and, specifically, of settler colonialism—remained a fixed part of British national identity.<sup>15</sup>

Given the rapidly changing dynamics of the postwar world, many British people became convinced that “true” Britishness could no longer be found at home. Britain’s lagging relative economic performance fueled a sense of “declinism,” or an institutionalized

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; first published 1985), 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-149.

<sup>14</sup> See Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire*, Vol. I: *The White Man’s World* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

fixation with Britain's alleged post-imperial decline.<sup>16</sup> The onset of this national obsession with decline, which both Labour and Conservative governments understood as a *fait accompli* after the late-1950s, paralleled the increase in West Indian and South Asian immigration, especially to British cities, further challenging some understandings of what it meant to be British. As a result, many British people looked with longing upon former white settler colonies as the last preserve of a "pure" Britishness that they felt could no longer be found at home. Indeed, substantial waves of British emigration to the empire were not simply a phenomenon of decades past, as some 590,022 British people left for new futures in the Commonwealth between 1946 and 1949, while another 1.3 million followed over the course of the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> But even to those who stayed in Britain, areas of the former empire with large white settler populations—from Australia to the Kenyan Highlands, southern Africa, and beyond—retained the allure of allegedly being "more British" than Britain. For the influential Tory MP Harold Soref, a member of the right-wing Monday Club, Britishness was clearly alive and well in Southern Rhodesia in the 1960s, a land that for him, "[represented] Britain in its halcyon days: patriotic, self-reliant, self-supporting, with law and order and a healthy society." For Soref, Southern Rhodesia, with its strict racial hierarchy, was simply "Britain at its best."<sup>18</sup>

During the Falklands War, politicians and the press tapped into this idea that Britishness was somehow better abroad by propagating an idealized representation of the

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<sup>16</sup> For discussions of declinism, see: Richard English and Michael Kenny, eds. *Rethinking British Decline* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Postwar Britain* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Constantine, "British Emigration to the Empire-Commonwealth since 1880: From Overseas Settlement to Diaspora?" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31, no. 2 (2003), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Soref, quoted in Bill Schwarz, "'The only white man in there': the re-racialization of England, 1956-1968," *Race & Class* 38, no. 1 (1996), 72.

Falkland Islanders. “The Falkland Islanders are strong, independent and interdependent,” proclaimed the Social-Democrat MP Eric Ogden after the Argentine invasion, and “have the best of British qualities and characteristics. . . They do not live in the past,” he concluded. “They are more aware of the world in which they live than are many people in Liverpool, Llandudno or many other places in Britain.”<sup>19</sup> The Conservative David Crouch wholeheartedly agreed. “They are a small community but. . . an ideal community where there is no unemployment, no poverty and no crime.”<sup>20</sup> Largely shepherds leading a rural lifestyle, the islanders quickly became Britishness at its bucolic best.

By analyzing the discourses and representations of the Falklands War, I argue that politicians and the media popularized the conflict by reasserting imperial nationalisms that had unified British society in the past. First, by stressing the affinities between Britain and the Falklands in geography and rural culture, politicians and the press sought to create a shared understanding of Britishness linked to the 19<sup>th</sup> century imagined community of “Greater Britain”—the idea of a global umbrella identity that linked the British at home with their settler brethren on the frontiers of empire. At the same time, politicians and journalists explicitly mobilized the convenient figure of the Argentine soldier as a racialized external other.<sup>21</sup> Against this so-called swarthy and “uncivilized” fascist *gaucho*, the British could

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<sup>19</sup> Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 1031.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1035.

<sup>21</sup> For important discussions of “otherness,” see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1847*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005; first published 1992) and Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (Oct. 1992): 309-329. In *Britons*, Colley argues that Britishness cohered into a unified identity shared by a landed ruling elite during the long 18<sup>th</sup> century, largely based on the strategy of othering Britain’s chief enemy: Catholic France. Britishness was “forged” to mask deep internal divisions because of the perceived external threat to Protestantism. In her article, “Britishness and Otherness,” Colley points out that the subject peoples of the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries later acted as a particularly strong other. The constituent nations of the British state could feel united in their shared imperial enterprise, namely the subjugation of indigenous peoples around the world. The end of empire, she argues, renewed national divisions within Britain, leading to a crisis in Britishness. Colley has been rightly critiqued on

distinctly identify the purity, goodness, domesticity, and whiteness of the Falklanders and, ultimately, themselves. Thus, despite the protestations of the minimalist historians, the public euphoria surrounding the Falklands conflict was “imperial” in nature because it was fueled by reasserted imperial nationalisms and the hagiographic memories of settler colonialism. Even after the war, this potent discourse of Greater Britishness continued to have an impact on British society, shaping examples as disparate as citizenship debates in Parliament, the way the war was commemorated and remembered, and even backyard gardening in the British countryside.

Settlers and their influence on postwar British politics and society remain an often untold chapter in the narrative of the end of empire, especially of the 1980s. “Post-colonial” Britain is often cast as making a clean break with its imperial past, with Margaret Thatcher as the first Prime Minister to show little interest in the old empire. Thatcher’s dogged pursuit of the “special relationship” with the United States and her total fixation in later years on the matter of Europe, many argue, came at the expense of the Commonwealth, an organization that she allegedly saw as more of an annoyance than a potential asset.<sup>22</sup> Yet, this pining for a hyper-idealized settler world of the past occasioned by the Falklands War demonstrates empire’s lingering impact. Indeed, settlers remained central to the way British people understood their own national identity and belonging in 1980s Britain.

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this point by Stuart Ward who argues that it was not the absence of an imperial other that challenged Britishness, but the absence of a global ethnic “sameness” afforded by empire, namely in the dispersal of white British settlers all around the globe. Stuart Ward, “The End of Empire and the Fate of Britishness,” in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 242-258.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom, 1970-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 44; Weight, 612.

## CHAPTER I

### The Contested Politics of Decline in Postwar Britain

In February 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan famously announced to the South African Parliament that his government recognized the “wind of change” blowing through Africa. The move towards independent Black African statehood was an undeniable political fact, proclaimed Macmillan, and one that had to be accepted, “whether we like it or not.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that Britain would still be grappling with imperial issues, like South Africa itself, for decades to come, Macmillan seemed finally convinced that the great costs of empire outweighed its benefits in 1960, especially after Britain’s taxing imperial boondoggles in Kenya, Malaya, Cyprus, Palestine, and Suez in the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the markets of Europe, long established as a lucrative region for British business, offered more economic promise than those of the old empire.<sup>25</sup> Macmillan unsuccessfully sought to join the European Economic Community in 1963, an aspiration that would only become reality a decade later under a different Tory government. At the same time, the 1960s also saw the

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Macmillan, “Tour of South Africa: Harold Macmillan delivers his 'wind of change' speech at the Cape Town Parliament,” BBC Archive, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/apartheid/7203.shtml> (accessed 5 October 2012).

<sup>24</sup> See Benjamin Grobb-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain's Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire* (Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 32-34.

formation of so-called “new nationalisms” in the former Dominions, as Britishness became more tailored to regional and not global roles and identities.<sup>26</sup>

While Britain sought to break quickly with the costly burden of its overseas commitments, the Falkland Islands helpfully complicate this narrative of the end of the British Empire. As they proved impossible to shake off, the Falklands show that London’s supposedly clean break with its imperial possessions was, in many places, drawn out and contested. The fewer than 2,000 white British descendants on the Falklands, in spite of the 8,000 mile gap between the capital, Port Stanley, and London, passionately wished to remain the Queen’s subjects and would accept no formal relationship with Argentina.<sup>27</sup> Yet from 1968 until as late as February 1982, successive British governments, both Conservative and Labour, attempted to settle the sovereignty dispute with reference to the islanders’ wishes by negotiating a deal to transfer the territory to Buenos Aires. In 1971, the Heath government signed a Joint Communications Agreement that linked Port Stanley to Buenos Aires more closely, leaving the islanders almost wholly reliant on Argentina for transport, mail, and freight services.<sup>28</sup> This plan was designed to slowly ameliorate the Falklanders’ image of the Argentines. But the gap between the British government’s actions and the islanders’ wishes left the latter supremely mistrustful of London. According to the Conservative MP David

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<sup>26</sup> Curran and Ward, 9.

<sup>27</sup> For a comprehensive history of Britain’s South Atlantic and Antarctic empires, see: Klaus Dodds, *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); for a detailed history of the Falkland Islands written by an islander, see: Mary Cawkall, *The Falkland Story, 1592-1982* (London: Anthony Nelson, Ltd., 1983).

<sup>28</sup> Dodds, 145-48.

Crouch, the Falklanders had long been “a sad and angry people, who felt that the British Government did not take them seriously and did not support them sufficiently.”<sup>29</sup>

British declinism can clearly be linked to this official effort to abandon the Falklands. There is a broad historiographical consensus that British decline, in its early years, was a political invention. Historian Jim Tomlinson argues that declinism entered political discourse as a point of consensus among mainstream British politicians and journalists in the late-1950s.<sup>30</sup> Despite rising wealth and a growing consumer culture, a spate of popular writings concerned with the so-called dire “state of Britain” spread the idea amongst a concerned British public that national decline was irreversible.<sup>31</sup> While the idea of British decline in the 1950s may have been an invention, by the 1970s, it had clearly developed into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Britain experienced flagging relative economic performance judged against comparable Western European powers who had suffered even more physical destruction between 1939 and 1945 than the United Kingdom. Stagflation, the previously unknown correlation of slow economic growth, high inflation, and rising unemployment, coupled with repeated strikes by trade unions forced Ted Heath to implement a record five “states of emergency” between 1970 and 1974.<sup>32</sup> This economic crisis, of course, had a global scope, especially after OPEC’s 1973 oil embargo; however, in Britain, by 1976, the situation was so grave that Harold Wilson’s Labour government was forced to go to the

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<sup>29</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 1035.

<sup>30</sup> For a historiographical discussion of declinism that focuses on economic history, see Jim Tomlinson, “Thrice Denied: Declinism as a Recurrent Theme in the Long Twentieth Century,” *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 2 (2009): 227-251.

<sup>31</sup> Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-war Britain*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> For full coverage of Heath’s tenure, see Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

International Monetary Fund for a \$4 billion bailout—funds usually reserved for developing countries.<sup>33</sup> It was this economic turmoil that motivated the British Foreign Office to try to create savings by ridding itself of the administration of the Falkland Islands. The dire climax of the 1970s came in 1978-79, better known as the “winter of discontent,” when strike action by London sanitation workers left heaps of garbage festering in the imperial capital’s majestic parks and squares. Further strikes by gravediggers in Liverpool left bodies unburied in morgues; local councils even considered burial-at-sea as a legitimate solution.<sup>34</sup> These dramatic strikes became psychologically symbolic of British decline and were rhetorically important in bringing Margaret Thatcher to power.

Declinism in the 1960s and 1970s fueled social unrest, and these growing tensions in society resulted in an endless cycle of pessimism and malaise. Much of this tension focused on race. On April 20, 1968, the influential Tory Enoch Powell delivered a notorious speech in Birmingham, which prophesized that in two decades, the British would be overtaken by non-white immigrants. “The black man,” Powell warned, “will have the whip hand over the white man.” As immigration from the Commonwealth increased, Powell argued that natural imperial relationships would be inversed in Britain, as the colonizer quickly became the colonized. Continued immigration predestined racial warfare on the streets. “As I look ahead,” Powell remarked, “I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood.’”<sup>35</sup> Powell received a massive popular response for

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<sup>33</sup> For the IMF bailout, see Kathleen Burke and Alex Cairncross, *“Goodbye Great Britain” The 1976 IMF Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> Alan Travis, “National archives: Fear of fights at cemetery gates during 1979 winter of discontent,” 29 December 2009, *Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/dec/30/liverpool-gravedigger-strikes> (accessed 5 October 2012).

<sup>35</sup> “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech,” *Telegraph*, 6 November 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html> (accessed 25



his racialized remarks. This is perhaps best illustrated by the hundreds of thousands of letters he received between 1968 and 1972, forcing the postal service to allocate a separate van for his mail alone.<sup>36</sup> The response to the so-called “Rivers of Blood” speech reflected the growing uneasiness many British people felt about immigrants. Indeed, a decade later, Margaret Thatcher famously invoked these Powellite sentiments. Arguing that the annual number of immigrants should be lowered, Thatcher spoke of those British people who felt “swamped” by black immigration, deliberately using highly charged rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> “I can’t bear Britain in decline; I just can’t,” Thatcher later commented in a separate interview.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, the thorny issues of economics and immigration reflected and contributed to British declinism.

In this tense economic situation and declinist environment, successive British governments repeatedly attempted to settle the Falklands sovereignty issue as a way to cut costs to the exchequer. After winning the 1979 election, Thatcher began a radical fiscal program based on the supply-side economic theories of Frederick Hayek and the Austrian school. In the 1981 defense review, she made drastic cuts to the navy, including the icebreaker HMS *Endurance*, the only Royal Navy vessel making rounds in the South Atlantic. *Endurance* extended a symbolic show of British force over the Falklands and

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November 2012). Powell famously declined to put his name forward in the February 1974 election. Claiming that he could no longer support Heath’s Conservative Party, Powell signaled his intent to vote for his local Labour candidate. When that election returned a hung Parliament and a minority Labour government, a second general election in the same year was virtually assured. Subsequently, at the October 1974 general election, Powell was returned to Parliament as an Ulster Unionist MP for South Downs in Northern Ireland, where he sat until his loss at the 1987 general election.

<sup>36</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, 39-43.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Thatcher, interview with Gordon Burns, Granada World in Action, ITV, 27 January 1978, <http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/103485> (accessed 4 December 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Thatcher, interview with Michael Cockerell, *Campaign ’79*, BBC, 27 April 1979.

Britain's Antarctic territories. Ending its regular rounds, however, coupled with the passage of the 1981 British Nationality Act, which created new and separate categories of citizenship for the Falkland Islanders, raised a red flag to the Argentine government, a signal that Britain was no longer fully committed to the islands' defense.

The British failed to account for their own policy errors when considering Argentine motivations for invading the Falklands, instead pinning the blame on facile, racialized explanations. When British intelligence finally alerted Thatcher that an Argentine flotilla was at sea, steaming towards the Falklands, she quickly telephoned her political ally, Ronald Reagan. Reagan expeditiously phoned General Leopoldo Galtieri, the leader of Argentina's military junta, a regime known as the *Proceso*, which, after toppling the civilian government of Isabel Perón, had been in power since 1976.<sup>39</sup> Galtieri, who was reported to have been drunk when Reagan called him, was in turn widely portrayed as irrational by British politicians and the press. He became simply a Latin warmonger with no sane justifications for his actions. In her memoirs, Thatcher noted that "we knew that [the Argentines] were unpredictable and unstable, and that a dictatorship might not behave in ways we would consider *rational*." She later continued that Britain's only hope lay with the Americans: "people to whom Galtieri, if he was still behaving *rationally*, should [have] listen[ed]."<sup>40</sup> Reagan's appeal to Galtieri to halt the invasion was unsuccessful. But Thatcher's largely uncritical analysis of Argentine motives for the Falklands invasion failed to take into account the long history of the sovereignty dispute between the two countries and, given Argentina's

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<sup>39</sup> María José Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol: Armed Struggle, 1969-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 41.

<sup>40</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 179. The italics are mine.

diverse composition as an immigrant nation, the fact that tens of thousands of people of British descent had called the Latin American nation home for decades.<sup>41</sup>

In truth, Galtieri hoped that the invasion would distract an increasingly discontented Argentine public. After toppling Perón's government, the junta waged war against its own citizens for nearly seven years in an effort to root out supposed leftist guerrillas in the cities. The military government, with the help of covertly sponsored right wing militias, imprisoned and executed any Argentine suspected of militant leftism, or indeed anyone simply caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, in a period of violence subsequently called the Dirty War. By the spring of 1982, ordinary Argentines were disgruntled by this martial heavy-handedness, and also by skyrocketing inflation.<sup>42</sup>

Galtieri's invasion of the Falklands capitalized on the same populist sentiments first stoked by Juan Perón. From the early 1950s, the Argentine government drilled into every schoolchild, including the children of the Anglo community, that the British occupation of the *Malvinas* was an affront to Argentine sovereignty. This created generations of nationalists fully committed to the islands' return. After the initial invasion, Martin Garvey—an Argentine headmaster of an English-language school in Buenos Aires—told the *Los Angeles Times* that there was no doubt in his Anglo pupils' minds of whom to support in a contest between Britain and Argentina. Despite their British heritage, he implored, “ask them

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<sup>41</sup> For the Anglo-Argentines, see Deborah Jakubs, *A Community of Interests: A Social History of the British in Buenos Aires, 1860-1914*, unpublished dissertation, Stanford University, 1986, and David Rock, “The British of Argentina,” in *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons Over the Seas*, ed. Robert Bickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 18-44.

<sup>42</sup> For discussions of the Dirty War, see David Rock, *Argentina: 1516-1987* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 1987), and Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol*.

and they won't hesitate—Argentina. . . Ask them if that means they would shoot at their fathers and they'll tell you to get the old man out of the way.”<sup>43</sup>

When millions of Argentines poured into Buenos Aires's *Plaza de Mayo* upon hearing of the successful reestablishment of Argentine administration over the islands, Galtieri's nationalist gamble seemed to have paid off. Some 8,000 miles away, however, Thatcher ordered the Admiralty to deploy a naval task force capable of taking the islands back. The flotilla's three weeks of sailing time led to a period of what Thatcher called “diplomacy backed by strength,” which ultimately failed. What followed, beginning in late May, was a perilous dogfight that would claim the lives of 655 Argentines, 252 British, and three Falkland Islanders.<sup>44</sup> While Argentines clearly held a specifically constructed view of the *Malvinas*, an image they learned in grade school, in Britain's case, the war prize—the Falkland Islands and the islanders—would quickly be given a distinct image, clearly shaped by the legacy of empire.

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<sup>43</sup> Dial Torgenson, “Anglo-Argentines Abandon Old Ties,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 May 1982, B2; for a detailed history of Argentina's Anglos, see: Andrew Graham-Yooll, *The Forgotten Colony: A History of the English-Speaking Communities in Argentina* (Buenos Aires: L.O.L.A, 1999; first published by Hutchinson 1981).

<sup>44</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands* (Barnsley: Pen & Swords Books Limited, 2003; first published by Viking, 1989), 282-283.

## CHAPTER II

### “We are all Falklanders now:” Constructing an Image of the “Kelpers”

After six weeks at sea—over half of that time spent perilously under enemy fire—on May 21, 1982, over 4,000 British marines and paratroopers landed at San Carlos to establish the main British bridgehead in the occupied Falkland Islands. Several journalists and photographers, embedded in various combat units, also came ashore and began interviewing the small population of islanders in San Carlos, a humble sheep station some 60 miles west of Port Stanley. It was in this village, as Argentine Pucarás and Mirages whizzed overhead, strafing the British naval escort with heavy fire, that Tom Smith, the *Daily Express*’s correspondent, snapped a seemingly casual and modest photograph of these islanders, whom Charles Laurence in the *Telegraph* called “the world’s most phlegmatic, unflappable people.”<sup>45</sup> Smith’s photo would become one of the most widely publicized images of the entire war and would help to construct the popular understanding of the islanders (Fig. 1). In Smith’s photo, Sergeant Major Laurie Ashbridge chats over a slated white picket fence with five islanders, a woman and—one presumes—her four children. Fair-haired, pale-skinned, and ruddy-cheeked, the smiling children—all boys—surround their cheerful mother, who has dutifully served Ashbridge, in quintessential British fashion, a hot mug of tea. The islanders are completely enamored of the Sergeant Major. Dressed head to toe in his camouflage kit, a sub-machine gun slung under his shoulder, he is the embodiment of British masculinity.

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Laurence, “Tea and mutton broth welcome assault troops,” *Telegraph*, 25 May 1982, 1.

While reams of photographs and hours of film are now available to researchers of the war, at the time, the Falklands War was distinctive in the sense that it provided the consummate example of how a democracy could most effectively censor a free press—at least before the Internet. From day one, government censors heavily restricted the type of information that embedded reporters could relay back to London. Their print copies were censored by layers of military bureaucracy, and, citing the navy's priority use of satellite capacity, reporters could rarely transmit images to London. This meant that British newspapers were unable to publish genuine photographs of the South Atlantic campaign until May 18, almost six weeks after the initial Argentine invasion.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, because of their wide distribution in a news cycle craving images, the few pictures like Smith's to be published hold a great importance to analyses of popular British understandings of the war, of the islands as a space, and of the islanders as a people.

While pictures of the bombed out HMS *Ardent* and HMS *Antelope*, both hit during the British landing, were delayed by the Ministry of Defense, Smith's photo was deliberately rushed to publication, gracing the front covers of the *Independent on Sunday* and the *Daily Mirror*, among others.<sup>47</sup> The image simultaneously evoked the domesticity of the Falkland Islanders and the hyper-masculinity of British soldiers. Caroline Brothers even argues that the white picket fence subtly helped to justify British ownership of the islands.<sup>48</sup> But most importantly, one brief glimpse of this image drove home the ethnic and cultural similarity

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Harris, *Gotcha: The Media, The Government and the Falklands Crisis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 56.

<sup>47</sup> Dodds, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography* (London: Routledge, 1997), 208. For a helpful discussion of visual representations of war, including photographs, see Daniel Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 49-64.

between the Falkland Islanders and the British—between this mother and her children and Ashbridge. This photograph could have been set anywhere in rural Britain.

The whiteness of this representative Falklands family played a foundational role in the Falklands conflict. Descriptions of the islanders and of British soldiers and their alleged racial purity were contrasted to the incivility, irrationality, and unprofessionalism of the Argentines. The Falklanders, or “kelpers” as they were known colloquially, were described in the same language of “blood” and “kith and kin,” employed since the empire’s heyday. From the very first emergency debate in the House of Commons, the first sitting on a Saturday since the 1956 Suez crisis, Margaret Thatcher described the islanders as “British in stock and tradition.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, they were a fellow “island race.”<sup>50</sup> For the Conservative Bernard Braine, “The very thought that our people, 1,800 people of British blood and bone, could be left in the hands of such criminals [was] enough to make any normal Englishman's blood—and the blood of Scotsmen and Welshmen—boil, too.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, despite the Falkland Islanders’ largely Welsh and Scottish roots, the conflict was usually painted as a British cause, not one simply for Celtic nationalisms. For the Scottish Tory Michael Ancram, the matter was simple. He reported: “Over this weekend I was struck by the number of telephone calls that I received from people all over Scotland who had relations in the Falkland Islands.” These callers “reminded me,” he continued, “of the origins of the Falklanders who, by and large, were sheep farmers from Scotland.” After some reflection, he asked himself: “Would I stand back from using whatever means were necessary to try to protect them?” No, he

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<sup>49</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 634.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 638.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 659.

declared, because “those people are our [British] family.”<sup>52</sup> Backing all this political rhetoric, in the *Telegraph* columnist Peregrine Worsthorne wrote that if the Falklanders “were British citizens with black or brown skins, spoke with strange accents or worshipped different gods,” the British would never have roused themselves to dispatch a naval Task Force. The Falklands were part of the settler family. It was simple, added Worsthorne: “blood is thicker than water; even oceans of water.”<sup>53</sup>

Politicians and the press helped to build an image of the kelpers’ rural culture and their sleepy capital, Port Stanley, which stressed these deep ethno-cultural bonds between the British mainlanders and the Falklands settlers. “With its clapperboard and gaily painted corrugated roofed houses,” *Times* correspondent Michael Frenchman mused, Port Stanley “is rather like a waterside village in the West Country.” Frenchman, who had visited the islands before the war, added, “there is the same easy-going feeling about the place. The shops look as if out of the late 1920s; the Woodbine signs; the double flight of steps up to the West store; the old fire station in a dilapidated garage; the Edwardian pillar boxes and fire hydrants.”<sup>54</sup> At war’s end, while the British negotiated for the Argentine surrender at Port Stanley, embedded journalist Max Hastings took off his army fatigues and wandered into the battle-torn capital, past enemy lines, becoming the first Briton into Stanley. He headed for the famous Upland Goose Hotel. “It was like liberating a pub in East Surrey or Kent,” he later reported. Hastings received a rousing cheer from the pub’s assembled patrons, or as he noted, “Falklanders, as I suppose I must call them, although they might have been any saloon

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<sup>52</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 1026.

<sup>53</sup> Peregrine Worsthorne, “Blood is thicker than oceans,” *Telegraph*, 23 May 1982, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Frenchman, “A bitter taste down at the Mucky Duck,” *Times*, 5 April 1982, 8.



bar group in England.”<sup>55</sup> But descriptions of the Falklands could also have a notable “settler” flair, as well. For example, the *Observer* correspondent Colin Smith declared after the war that the islanders’ accent was a “peculiar hybrid of West Country and Australasian.”<sup>56</sup>

The cultural affinity between the Falklands and rural Britain became a much discussed trope during the war. Lucy Noakes argues that politicians and the press successfully used the outbreak of the war to portray the Falkland Islands as “Britain ‘lost in time’, Britain as it used to be.” It was a Britain before “the ‘foreign’ impositions of contemporary life.”<sup>57</sup> The *New Statesman*’s Graham Creelman, who was not embedded but who had previously visited the islands, took a critical view of this mythologized image of the Falklanders. In his denunciation of the war, he gave a full description of the established image of the kelpers in Britain, which he highlighted as a façade. “Television has filtered our view of the islanders and their islands: British faces and British accents in a landscape reassuringly like the Western Isles of Scotland,” he stated. To the public at large, spoon fed the government’s daily propaganda, he contended, the Falklands were nothing more than “a little piece of the Old Country accidentally dropped in the Southern Ocean.”<sup>58</sup> The small rural communities of the Falkland Islands, some—like San Carlos—nothing more than sheep shearing stations, became model countryside villages, and the islanders’ pastoral lifestyle entered political discourse as perhaps their most identifiable shared description. Fearing the economic and cultural impact of the occupation, the Social Democrat, Eric Ogden,

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<sup>55</sup> Max Hastings, “Into Stanley with the victorious paratroopers,” *Telegraph*, 16 June 1982, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Colin Smith, “Britain’s very own South Atlantic kibbutz,” *Observer*, 19 May 1985, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Lucy Noakes, “Gender and Nationhood: Britain in the Falklands War,” Occasional Paper, Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex Library, no. 5, 1996.

<sup>58</sup> Graham Creelman, “No great love for Britain,” *New Statesman*, 30 April 1982, 14-15.

commented that in some way, normal life on the islands had to go on. “Normal,” he explained, meant that “peat has to be dug and gathered, food obtained, services maintained, schools, medical and social services conducted.” He added, “Farming and the feeding of sheep and cattle has to continue.”<sup>59</sup>

The Falklands countryside—the “camp” as it was known locally, interestingly, after the Argentine *campo*—revolved around the yearly regime of sheep shearing and came to represent a communal and democratic way of life. The Conservative MP Michael Shersby, recounting a visit to the Falklands, sought to convey to “the House what it is like to live in those isolated settlements.” The camp was a place of solitude and of direct democracy, “where perhaps 25 people live together, farming their pastures and keeping their sheep.” He reported that these interdependent people, living in close quarters, came together under one roof to express to the Parliamentary delegation their desire “to continue their peaceful life as loyal subjects of the Crown.”<sup>60</sup> The Falkland Islanders were “passionate believers in parliamentary democracy,” declared Labour MP Ted Rowlands. Indeed, they were exemplary, almost prototypical, citizens of a democracy. “They listen to and watch everything that we say and do in the House,” he continued. “It is one of their most remarkable characteristics. Even the most obscure written parliamentary question is followed and debated in the Falkland Islands.”<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Shersby assured (and perhaps warned) his fellow parliamentarians that “by one means or another, [the islanders] will be listening to every word spoken in this debate.” The islanders were resourceful with radio communication,

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<sup>59</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 1032.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1163.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 649.

and Shersby noted with confidence “that whatever sanctions may have been imposed on them by the Argentine aggressors will not prevent their hearing these words from Britain.”<sup>62</sup>

This bucolic lifestyle was popularly framed as ideal in comparison to the gray doldrums of urban and even suburban life in modern Britain. When, after the invasion, a small minority of MPs suggested buying out the islanders, resettling them in Scotland or New Zealand, and surrendering the Falklands to the Argentines, Eric Ogden was disgusted. “Disregarding everything else, even if the Falklanders were for sale, which they are not,” Ogden began, “£30,000 in the Falkland Islands would buy 40,000 acres, 10,000 sheep and independence. . . What could one buy in Salford, North London or Liverpool for that sum?”<sup>63</sup> For Ogden and many British people, given the choice, Salford offered no compensation for a life of rural bliss in the Falklands. This sentiment had been similarly expressed by those of earlier generations, including the famous imperial mandarin, Lord Baden-Powell, who had wondered “why any Briton continue[d] to live in say, Wigan, when South Africa [was] open to him.”<sup>64</sup>

These attempts to tie metropole and settler together fueled the reassertion of a historical discourse of “Greater Britain,” an imperial imagined community that had gained favor during the 1860s and held sway in some quarters of British and settler society for over a century. Encouraged by quicker means of traversing the empire, increasingly instantaneous communication systems like the telegraph, and the advent of photojournalism and newsreels, advocates of Greater Britain held that settlers and the British in the metropole were linked

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<sup>62</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 1163.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1011.

<sup>64</sup> Tim Jeal, *Baden Powell* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 418-19.

under one unified political entity with a single transcolonial identity.<sup>65</sup> Referring to three Victorian writers who helped collate this idea of Greater Britain—Charles Dilke, J.A. Froude, and J.R. Seeley—Bill Schwarz argues that this was an imagined community founded on race. In their interactions with the “other” on the frontiers of empire, settler communities had forged archetypal white man’s countries. In turn, these settler colonies had helped define and codify the whiteness of British identity at home.<sup>66</sup>

With the Falklands War, British politicians could emphasize the imagined community of Greater Britain and a lost sense of ethnic sameness that had, for many, become disconcertingly challenged by multiculturalism. As the *Times* famously editorialized on April 3: “We are all Falklanders now.”<sup>67</sup> Coopting the Falklanders’ identity was a way of anchoring a flailing Britain to a community of Britishness in the South Atlantic, which—according to the British image of the islands—had been unaffected by postwar decline and transformation.

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<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Schwarz’s discussion of the importance of photojournalism and newsreels in creating an imagined community of empire: Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, 224.

<sup>66</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, 84. For the foundational texts of “Greater Britain,” see Charles Dilke, *Greater Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2009; first published 1868); J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1922; first published 1883); J.A. Froude, *Oceana, or England and her Colonies* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1912; first published 1886). See also J.G.A. Pocock, “British History: Plea for a New Subject,” *Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 4 (Dec. 1975): 601-621; Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> “We are all Falklanders now,” *Times*, 5 April 1982, 9.

## CHAPTER III

### “Yomping”

The physical landscape and geography of the Falkland countryside was just as important to the imaginary of “Greater Britain” and “Greater Britishness” as the ethno-cultural discourse that described the kelpers and their rural culture. First, the land was represented as lucrative. Dr. Colin Phipps, a former Labour MP and petroleum geologist, sought to highlight the material value of the region in a May 1982 editorial in the *Sunday Telegraph* when he predicted that “if there is ever to be another British Empire, the South Atlantic is where it could be.”<sup>68</sup> While Phipps simply foresaw a British Antarctic Empire, some viewed the Falklands conflict as an occasion for more concrete imperial measures. Philip Goodhart, a Conservative MP, called for a new defense arrangement in the southern hemisphere with former Dominions. To combat future attacks, “we should think in terms of a joint force with our Australian and New Zealand friends,” Goodhart argued. “I regret the way in which the ties between our own defense forces and those of Australia and New Zealand have tended to loosen,” he added. “I believe that the time has come to reverse this regrettable trend.”<sup>69</sup>

It is of note that this sentiment had currency in some of the old Dominions. The government of New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon was most proactively (and

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<sup>68</sup> Colin Phipps, “South Georgia—the big prize,” 9 May 1982, *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 May 1982, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 1158.

provocatively) engaged in this idea of a rejuvenated Greater Britain, centered—as Muldoon concluded—on the “mother country.” Muldoon waxed poetic to the press about his frequent visits to his cousins’ farm in Suffolk near Wickham Market.<sup>70</sup> Given these family ties that tightly bound, Muldoon signaled that he might even mobilize troops in support of the British Task Force. He decried the “barbaric acts” of the Argentine, declaring that New Zealand “would consider a request [for troops] very seriously indeed,” though adding the caveat that “on the face of it, I don’t think Britain needs it.”<sup>71</sup>

Most politicians, however, were less overt than Goodhart about any imperial ambitions in the South Atlantic. When the Argentine invasion was announced to the public on April 2, 1982, leading politicians from all mainstream British political parties supported the government’s plan to deploy a large naval task force to recover the islands. Yet they provided varying justifications for this policy. The Liberal David Steel and Labour’s Denis Healey justified British action on moral grounds. “What matters is our responsibility to those people, and not to any isolated territory,” declared Steel. For Healey, Margaret Thatcher’s decision to deploy a naval armada to back diplomatic efforts with strength was different from Suez, which “was about property rights.” Instead, he declared, “the Falkland Islands is about human rights.”<sup>72</sup> But for Thatcher, the issue of land was no less important. “We are talking about the sovereignty of British territory,” she proclaimed to that first Saturday sitting in the Commons, over the general heckling of disgruntled backbenchers from both the left and

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<sup>70</sup> Peregrine Worsthorne, “Blood is thicker than oceans.”

<sup>71</sup> “Australia promises support” and “New Zealand cuts ties with Argentina,” *Telegraph*, 6 April 1982, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 965. For a discussion of the contemporary discourse of “human rights,” see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

right.<sup>73</sup> “It is the Government's objective,” she proclaimed, “to see that the islands are freed from occupation and are returned to British administration at the earliest possible moment.”<sup>74</sup>

In her view, any sovereign British territory was worthy of a vigorous defense.

The Falkland landscape became an important motivating factor in Britain's war efforts, and it helped that these relatively temperate islands could be easily tied to Britain. In an attempt to co-opt the cultural purity of the Falklands as more thoroughly British than Britain, these islands in the South Atlantic, from the craggy peaks of Tumbledown to the soggy peat fields of Lafonia, became, in the national spotlight, extensions of the British countryside. The war also gave the British, particularly servicemen, but later emigrants, the opportunity to master nature—an important component of British identity. As opposed to the American valorization of the wild, open frontier of the West, the British generally sought to rationalize and control the natural world.<sup>75</sup> The Falkland Islands, and the occasion of the war itself, gave the British the opportunity to exercise control over nature in a rugged, yet tamable, land. Moreover, on occasions when the Falkland countryside did not meet British expectations after military action—for instance, the islands had no trees—the British, as the masters of nature, were quick to try to rectify it.

This concern for rationalizing the wilderness had deep roots in the empire. Indeed, the idea that authority had to be extended over the environment was a central motivator of Victorian informal imperialism in Argentina, where a large British expatriate presence had a

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., col. 636; for the audio recording of the debate, see: “HC S: [Falkland Islands] [audio],” available from the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104910> (accessed 23 October 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 634.

<sup>75</sup> David Lowenthal, “The Island Garden: English Landscape and British Identity,” in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 144, 146.

great bearing on 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Falklands history.<sup>76</sup> Historian Adrian Howkins argues that, in Argentina, the British exerted total “environmental authority” over the rolling South American *pampas* in an effort to “civilize” the countryside. The construction of railways over the untamed inner plains of Argentina allowed the Argentine ruling elites, then Britain’s allies, to deal brutally with the “Indian problem” in the 1870s and 1880s in their so-called “War on the Desert.”<sup>77</sup> Similar environmental imperatives can be seen in other parts of the empire. The creation of well-ordered hill stations in 19<sup>th</sup> century India, for example, sought to mimic the landscape, organization, and domesticity of middle England in picturesque mountainous enclaves of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>78</sup>

In the Falklands War, British soldiers—the masculine representatives of empire—were quickly cast in this traditional imperial role of exerting authority over nature. Along with the famous image of Sergeant Major Ashbridge and the archetypal Falklands mother discussed earlier, another iconic image of the Falklands War was the “yomper.” When Argentine pilots sank the British container ship *Atlantic Conveyor*, the Task Force lost almost all of its Chinook transport helicopters. Soldiers were forced to trek 60 miles from the San Carlos bridgehead across the boggy plains of East Falkland to liberate Port Stanley and end the war. This trek, or “yomp,” which is Royal Marine slang for an expedition held at “your own marching pace,” took on a distinct mythology at home. If the images of the Blitz and the Spirit of Dunkirk were the major cultural influences on Britishness to come out of the Second

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<sup>76</sup> Adrian Howkins, “A Formal End to Informal Imperialism: Environmental Nationalism, Sovereignty Disputes, and the Decline of British Interests in Argentina, 1933-1955,” *British Scholar* 3, no. 2 (Sept 2010), 249.

<sup>77</sup> Howkins, 249.

<sup>78</sup> See Dane Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).



World War, then the yomper was undoubtedly the masculine hallmark of the Falklands War.<sup>79</sup>

In June 1982, Petty Officer Peter Holdgate, the Commando Forces Photographer, introduced the British public to the notion of yomping with a single photograph (Fig. 2). In it, we see the backs of a chain of soldiers as they walk single file along a deserted Falklands jeep track through a snowy grassland. The soldiers carry rucksacks, laden with 120 pounds worth of weaponry and equipment.<sup>80</sup> Tied to the radio antennae on the pack of the nearest man, a bright Union Jack flutters majestically in the stiff austral winter breeze. This image was highly publicized on television and in the press, implanting the yomper who “soldiered on” through adversity in loyalty to Britain (or indeed Greater Britain) firmly in the public consciousness.

But of equal importance in Holdgate’s photo is the landscape that surrounds the troops. In the mythology of yomping, the countryside, as depicted in this famous photo, must be considered just as much a character as the soldiers themselves. The moorlands of East Falkland, with their sloping heather-covered fells and peat bog valleys, could easily have been mistaken for vistas in Wales, Yorkshire, or Scotland. Bisecting this dramatic landscape, the rough, yet skillfully plowed jeep trail became a conduit for British soldiers who hastened through it as if they were on training—not a very real war against a well-positioned enemy. The Falklands countryside, when entering the British consciousness through the widely distributed yomper photo, allowed the British public to embrace the islands as a distant land

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<sup>79</sup> Until the Falklands War, to “yomp” specifically referred to the Royal Marines. The equivalent term for the Army was to “tab,” but “yomping” soon entered British popular and political culture as symbolic of the hard-fought efforts of *all* British servicemen, regardless of branch. It is now frequently applied to non-military situations.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Lawrence, “Yompers surprise the enemy,” *Telegraph*, 3 June 1982, 1.

similar to parts of their own, but still possessing a genuine ruggedness. It encompassed part of global Greater Britain.

On June 3, 1982, as the yompers made their way slowly towards Stanley to liberate the islanders, Charles Laurence—embedded with the soldiers—wrote in the *Telegraph* how the British hit the trek at a near gallop. “Always in the cold light of the Falklands dawn,” wrote Laurence, “the boot-neck Marines and their equally hardy officers have been ready to ‘yomp on’ for the next stage of the journey.”<sup>81</sup> In large part thanks to Walt Disney nature documentaries on the Falklands penguin, these men were well aware of the difficult terrain they were about to face from the moment the Task Force pushed off from Portsmouth. These Disney films were regularly shown to large audiences, which included Prince Andrew, in HMS *Invincible*’s mess hall.<sup>82</sup> When hard-pressed, however, British soldiers were not averse to embracing traditional islander methods to cross the boggy terrain of the Falklands. Indeed, the stretch they crossed was said to be *the* boggiest in the entire territory.<sup>83</sup> *Times* correspondent Alan Hamilton reported that, in the immediate postwar, the dearth of helicopters had forced the British soldiers to show their ingenuity and guile by “[calling] up for active service” Falkland ponies” as “[t]hey [were] the only practical transport for shepherds over the boggy, trackless moors.” According to Captain Alyn Cooksley, to seek out hard to reach surveillance stations, “You don’t need to guide a Falkland horse across its own countryside. . . .Point it in the general direction and it will pick its own way through the

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<sup>81</sup> Charles Lawrence, “Yompers surprise the enemy.”

<sup>82</sup> A.J. McIlroy, “Fleet runs into Force 7,” *Telegraph*, 4 April 1982, 5.

<sup>83</sup> P.J. Stewart, “Trees for the Falkland Islands,” *Commonwealth Forestry Review* 61, no. 4 (1982), 220.

bogs.”<sup>84</sup> When faced with the challenges of nature, British soldiers simply coopted the local islander techniques.

By contrast, the British press portrayed the Argentines as completely unprepared for the unique Falklands terrain. “Our intelligence indicates that [Argentina] attempts to move around the islands, too boggy for most military vehicles, has exhausted them,” wrote Laurence.<sup>85</sup> While the British embraced the Falklands pony, the Argentines’ heavily laden vehicles easily became trapped in the peaty soil of the Falklands. Whereas the Argentine was no match for the rugged sub-Antarctic landscape, the marines and paratroopers, in typical British fashion, were almost completely at home. They embraced kelper methods when necessary to make order out of chaos.

The effort to shape the Falklands landscape into, in effect, a tamed British garden continued into the years immediately after the conflict. After the war, there was a sense of urgency to develop the islands as a potential deterrent to further Argentine aggression. Indeed, Thatcher herself fully committed the government to “rebuild and rehabilitate and develop” the Falklands.<sup>86</sup> But for many British visitors, their first sighting of the Falklands was one of apparent surprise as the islands’ ostensible similarities with Britain did not always live up to reality. Suddenly, Graham Creelman’s complaint in the *New Statesman* that the Falklands Islands were “an alien place” which even “smells different” began to make sense.<sup>87</sup> What followed were efforts to mold the physical geography of the Falklands to fit the image that had been constructed during the war.

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<sup>84</sup> Alan Hamilton, “Helicopter challenged: Ponies pick up the Falklands burden,” 21 April 1983, *Times*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Laurence, “Yompers surprise the enemy,” *Telegraph*, 3 June 1982, 1

<sup>86</sup> Nicholas Ashford, “Thatcher wants increase in Falklands population,” *Times*, 4 June 1982, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Graham Creelman, “No great love for Britain.”

For P.J. Stewart, lecturer in the Department of Forestry at Oxford, the poverty of Falklands vegetation and soils were the islands' one stumbling block to "[becoming] a miniature New Zealand."<sup>88</sup> This was evident in the absence of indigenous trees. In a November 1982 letter to the editor of the *Times*, Lawrence Hills, director of the Henry Doubleday Research Association, a national charity for organic horticulture, highlighted the concerns that "we are now hearing from our members in the Falklands" who want to "correct the image of their islands as 'barren rocks.'" Hills's solution was the experimental introduction of various tree species, including snow gums and sea blackthorns. He wrote of a eucalyptus tree that thrived in Britain: "large quantities of seed could be gathered by schoolchildren under supervision of foresters between now and March." To this he added optimistically that surely "there are plenty of Falklanders who would gladly raise the trees that would grow them a better climate and a prosperous future."<sup>89</sup> The Oxford forestry expert, Stewart, agreed with Hills's sentiments, laying out a specific process for the introduction of tree farms in the 1982 volume of the *Commonwealth Forestry Review*. "Properly used, trees could help to enrich this little country," he argued, "and to provide for an increased and self-reliant population."<sup>90</sup> Indeed, several tree farms were planted on the islands, although few succeeded.

Thatcher's idea of development included emigration, and when pressed to clarify her thoughts on who should populate the islands, she bluntly remarked: "I am not talking about

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<sup>88</sup> Stewart, 219. See also J.H. McAdam, "Recent Tree Planting Trials and the Status of Forestry in the Falkland Islands," *Commonwealth Forestry Review* 61, no. 4 (1982): 259-266.

<sup>89</sup> Lawrence D. Hills, "Falklands Planting [letter to the editor]," *Times*, 10 November 1982, 13.

<sup>90</sup> Stewart, 225.

Argentiniens.”<sup>91</sup> Average middle- and working-class British people were encouraged to emigrate to the Falklands, or what the *Observer* correspondent Colin Smith called Britain’s “South Atlantic kibbutz.”<sup>92</sup> Having fought for the islands, some senior NCOs in the British army also considered making the Falklands their permanent home. While perhaps initially unnerved by their long South Atlantic deployments at the newly constructed Mount Pleasant military station west of Stanley, a handful of soldiers admitted to Smith that they were “so charmed by the islands that they [were] seriously thinking of emigrating here.”<sup>93</sup> Quite suddenly, colonial nostalgia was no longer a simple cultural pining for an imperial past; for some, it had become reality.<sup>94</sup>

Many were attracted by the advertisement of cheap land sales. One hundred acre land plots in remote parts of East and West Falkland could be purchased by April 1983 for just £1,500, and 50-acre plots for as little as £1,000.<sup>95</sup> Carol Cant, a former hotel receptionist from Gloucestershire, pregnant with her first child, was one of these early post-colonial settlers to the Falklands. Her husband Martin Cant, according to Colin Smith, “a tall young man with a full Saxon beard,” had taken up employment in the local mill in Fox Bay. Martin spent his days working with his hands in the typical masculine image of the empire, while Carol looked forward to raising her child in such a pristine land where the only thing she missed was birdsong in the morning. The Cants made their trek to the Falklands out of pocket, discovering that the Thatcher government’s inducement to emigrate was little more

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<sup>91</sup> Nicholas Ashford, “Thatcher wants increase in Falklands population,” *Times*, 4 June 1982, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Colin Smith, “Britain’s very own South Atlantic kibbutz.”

<sup>93</sup> Colin Smith, “Down in the Falklands bumbling, yomping and bopping with the Bennies,” *Observer*, 26 May 1985, 14.

<sup>94</sup> See also, Colin Randall, “Hundreds eager for fresh start in the Falklands,” *Telegraph*, 17 June 1982, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Rosemary Collins, “Hopeful Falkland Settlers Warned,” *Guardian*, 14 April 1983, 4.

than simple encouragement. Nonetheless, Smith's archetypal new emigrants were thrilled with their move to the small settlement of Fox Bay. Reflecting on England, Martin concluded that the Falklands "[remind] me of Bodmin Moor." "I know it is 8,000 miles away," he added, "but it never feels that far." Carol was wholly content in the islands, declaring "I feel I live the way you are supposed to live here."<sup>96</sup> For the press, the Cants came to represent the prototypical imperial emigrant family.

The image of Greater Britain, so well evoked in the political discourse of the Falklands War, was founded on overemphasized geographic and cultural similarities between the Falkland Islands and Britain. When that idealized rhetoric conflicted with the geographic and cultural realities of the islands, attempts were made to shape them to that image. But the imagined community of Greater Britain became even more potent when coupled with a clear external other. The British were fortunate to have such an easily illustrated and caricatured enemy in Argentina's conscript army and in its military junta.

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<sup>96</sup> Colin Smith, "Britain's very own South Atlantic kibbutz."

## CHAPTER IV

### Sombreros, Comic Opera Uniforms, and Banana Republics

He was known as the “Butcher of Cordoba,” a particularly efficient cog in the Argentine junta’s authoritarian machine, which for seven years had waged the Dirty War against its own people. Moreover, immediately following the invasion of the Falklands, he became the perfect villain to a British nation hungry for a tangible face to hate. Notorious for maintaining a “reign of terror” in Cordoba province, which led to the deaths of “several hundred people,” General Luciano Menendez was so fanatical and unhinged, warned the *Telegraph*, that in 1979 he organized a failed revolt of 1,600 soldiers because he felt the military junta had gone soft.<sup>97</sup> Those actions had forced him into early retirement. But now, the British press claimed, the military junta had apparently rehabilitated Menendez and given him the governorship of the newly reclaimed *Malvinas*. The hapless Falkland Islanders, a peaceful and innocent people, the *Telegraph* darkly conjectured, were bound to be leery of the Butcher’s reputation for imposing “law and order” on the mainland.

This exceptionally compelling story of Argentine wickedness, repeated so diligently by the British press, faced only one complication: it was completely false. Although the Argentine government had indeed tapped a General Menendez for the governorship, that general was Mario Menendez, Luciano’s nephew. Yet this convenient misidentification passed completely unnoticed by much of Fleet Street, and the press ultimately retracted it

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<sup>97</sup> John Miller, “Death squad veteran to govern isles,” *Telegraph*, 7 April 1982, 4. See also, “Man in the News: Menendez: Death squad veteran,” *Times*, 6 April 1982, 3.

with only the smallest amount of fanfare. As would quickly become apparent, in the Falklands conflict, the British people had gained a legitimate “external other” in easily caricatured men like Luciano Menendez. Some journalists lamented this easy scaremongering. Alan Rusbridger of the *Guardian*, for example, invoked the maxim that, in the Falklands, the “first casualty of war . . . [had been] truth.”<sup>98</sup>

The imagined community of Greater Britishness became even more compelling with a clearly conceptualized external other against which the British could easily define themselves. Before the invasion, Argentina did not loom large in the British imagination. British investment was extensive in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably, in railroads; however, Juan Perón nationalized all foreign owned companies in that industry in the 1940s. By the 1980s, British understandings of Latin America, apart from the Caribbean, were generally caricatured or the entire region was simply ignored. As the *Telegraph* defense correspondent R.H. Greenfield noted, just two days after the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, the British had a tendency to dismiss “all South American states as ‘banana republics’ and their armed forces as laughable nutfits whose soldiers sleep under sombreros while officers in comic-opera uniforms make political speeches and form endless juntas.”<sup>99</sup> Greenfield’s larger point was that this endemic British underestimation of Latin Americans had led directly to the loss of the Falklands. However, far from delivering a wake-up call about the geopolitical capacity of Latin America, this deliberate humiliation of the world’s once greatest empire further bolstered the British judgment that Argentina with its military dictatorship was supremely uncivilized.

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<sup>98</sup> Alan Rusbridger, “Diary,” *Guardian*, 8 April 1982, 15. The *Guardian* did not publish the original story.

<sup>99</sup> R.H. Greenfield, “Army far from a comic opera,” *Telegraph*, 4 April 1982, 4.



In the press, Argentine soldiers became the primary representation of the enemy. A political cartoon by the *Telegraph*'s Nicholas Garland, printed on the April 5 editorial page, underlines one of these representations of Argentines (Fig. 3). In the cartoon, from the back of a rearing black stallion, a menacing *gaucho* on the Argentine mainland, dressed in a draping poncho, his face masked by a bandana, lassos an innocent Falklands lamb just across the water. The strangled white lamb, caught by the neck, bug-eyed, and bleating, has no means of escape. The cartoon, published just three days after the invasion, was representative of one constructed image of the Argentine soldier—as an irrational and uncivilized South American desperado who sullied the innocence of the people of the Falkland Islands.

After their landing at San Carlos, as British forces moved throughout East Falkland, pushing the Argentines into a quick retreat towards Stanley, press reports began to trumpet the harsh treatment some islanders had experienced at the hands of the occupier. In at least two villages, Argentine troops forcibly imprisoned Falkland Islanders. For example, Charles Laurence detailed how Douglas's 22 residents were "imprisoned in their schoolhouse for four days" prior to the British advance.<sup>100</sup> Those under shared house arrest included five people over 80 years old and one child, aged two. Laurence reported that Argentine soldiers came for Elizabeth Morrison, aged 79, barging into her room as she lay half-dressed. "They tried to pull me out," Morrison told Laurence, but "I would not leave until I was ready and refused to go."<sup>101</sup> Others in Douglas recalled how the Argentines "were all very nervous and bristling with weapons."<sup>102</sup> Argentine corporals forced two young men to drive them to Stanley to relay news and receive commands. At one point, suspecting that the islanders were

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<sup>100</sup> Laurence, "Islanders held in school as homes were looted," *Telegraph*, 1 June 1982, 5.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

deliberately taking a longer route to the capital, “the corporal pulled out a grenade, put his thumb in the pin and threatened to blow us up,” recounted 23 year-old Clive Newman. “They said something would happen to our families in the school house,” he added.<sup>103</sup> In anticipation of the British advance from San Carlos, the Argentines withdrew, looting every home in Douglas. It was reported that “in one house they left excrement over the floor, in the basins and in the bath.”<sup>104</sup> This was in marked contrast to British troops at San Carlos, who when forced to requisition islander buildings, “[had been] careful to pack personal belongings and furniture in waterproof crates which [were] stored in sheltered positions.”<sup>105</sup> The larger settlement of Goose Green, however, fared even worse than Douglas, as all 114 residents were locked in the community hall for over a month.<sup>106</sup>

The British media was inundated by similar depictions of Argentine soldiers as reckless tyrants. At sea, Argentine pilots were criticized by the BBC’s Brian Hanrahan for their “almost Kamikaze attitude,” as the plane that hit HMS *Antelope* brushed the ship’s mainmast as it sunk.<sup>107</sup> Commenting on the unorthodox bombing runs of the Argentine air force, Hanrahan noted how “a Hercules transport plane came over a British ship and the crew threw bombs out of the back door.”<sup>108</sup> Argentine ground troops were accused of a similar lack of professionalism. It was reported that “at least one British officer was killed at Goose

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<sup>103</sup> Laurence, “Islanders held in school as homes were looted.”

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> A.J. McIlroy, “Children play as jets swoop in,” *Telegraph*, 30 May 1982, 2.

<sup>106</sup> Laurence, “Islanders held in school as homes were looted.”

<sup>107</sup> Brian Hanrahan, BBC, quoted in “‘Kamikaze tactics’: Mainmast clipped,” *Telegraph*, 25 May 1982, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Brian Hanrahan, BBC, quoted in “Bombs ‘thrown out of plane’ by Argentines,” *Telegraph*, 1 June 1982, 1.

Green when Argentine soldiers waved a white flag and then opened fire.”<sup>109</sup> Moreover, according to Richard Savill of the Press Association, British troops found thirty clearly marked Napalm tanks after liberating Goose Green. “The tanks,” Savill reported, “were stacked in the centre of the village, only yards from where the civilians were held hostage in the community hall,” and right next to a stash of “crudely welded home-made bombs.” They were not sophisticated explosives, said one British officer. These bombs were no more than the work of a “village blacksmith’s—a child could have made them.”<sup>110</sup>

Running parallel to this narrative in the British press of Argentine soldiers as warmongering simpletons was their casting as hapless victims of a ruthless military dictatorship. There was some truth to this account, as most of Argentina’s invasion force was made up of conscripted teenagers scooped off the streets of Buenos Aires.<sup>111</sup> In the midst of the Argentine occupation, before the arrival of British forces, some islanders chose exile in Britain, and were swiftly deported from the Falklands by the Argentine government. They brought with them accounts of an occupation force struggling with the harsh climate and geography of the islands. One exiled islander told the British press that “the [Argentine] soldiers are stealing everything they can lay their hands on. . . They stole all my chickens,” he continued, “because they are so hungry and they are pulling down fences and burning them to keep warm.” Another islander reported that “they are stealing cats and eating them and

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<sup>109</sup> “White flag shooting by Argentines,” *Telegraph*, 2 June 1982, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Savill, quoted in “‘Napalm cache’ found,” *Telegraph*, 2 June 1982, 1.

<sup>111</sup> For the condition of conscripts in and around Port Stanley during the Argentine occupation, see John Smith, *74 Days: An Islander’s Diary of the Falklands Occupation*, 2nd Ed. (Old Basing, England: Quetzal, 2002).

they are picking up scraps from rubbish dumps.” He concluded, “They can’t be in any condition to fight.”<sup>112</sup>

At the same time, while the press lambasted the Argentine government for the treatment of its own conscript army, it valorized the British military for going out of its way to provide exceptional treatment to the Argentine injured and to prisoners of war. This benevolence received prime coverage. Two days after Britain’s initial landing at San Carlos, for example, the cover of the *Telegraph* boasted a large picture of wounded sailor John Dillon from south London aboard the troopship *Canberra* (Fig. 4). As Dillon received medical treatment for a wound sustained in battle, an unnamed Argentine soldier lay next to him, receiving diligent attention from British doctors.<sup>113</sup> Thus, in the British press, there was a mixed representation of Argentine troops, as either madmen, barbarians, or wretches.

In addition to ordinary soldiers, however, the military junta acted as a particular strong other. When not portrayed as inebriated, Galtieri simply became an abstraction of 1930s fascism. The fascist angle was an image that allied various political interests in Britain towards a relatively common cause—from Thatcher, whose worldview was shaped wholly by the Second World War, to Labour leader Michael Foot, who was happy to rally against a military regime that had been so proactive against the Argentine left. Noting the junta’s lengthy Dirty War, Foot argued that “we can hardly forget that thousands of innocent people fighting for their political rights in Argentine are in prison and have been tortured and debased.” He continued, “We cannot forget that fact when our friends and fellow citizens in

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<sup>112</sup> “Islanders clash over ‘hungry’ invaders,” *Guardian*, 30 April 1982, 26; see also, Ian Glover-James, “Argentine troops beg for food,” *Telegraph*, 16 April 1982, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Untitled photograph, *Telegraph*, 24 May 1982, 1.

the Falkland Islands are suffering as they are at this moment.”<sup>114</sup> The leading Social Democrat David Owen reminded the House that “only a few days ago, 3,000 political prisoners were taken [in Argentina], only to be released amid the euphoria of the invasion of the Falkland Islands.”<sup>115</sup> The Falkland Islanders, considered by many to be model citizens of British democracy, now found themselves under the thumb of a dictator, “a repressive and Fascist regime,” commented the former Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan. The kelpers “have been threatened with 60 days’ imprisonment without trial if they show disrespect,” he added.<sup>116</sup> The Conservative MP Michael English, however, perhaps best evoked this sentiment when he declared that the Thatcher government, in dealing diplomatically with the “crooks” in Argentina, could never be considered at fault. The Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, who resigned immediately after the Argentine invasion, along with his junior ministers at the Foreign Office, simply “fell into the problem of being honest, decent English gentlemen. . . They did not realize,” he continued, “that they were dealing with the sort of officer—not a gentleman—who literally is capable in some cases of putting an electric soldering iron up the anus of a fellow citizen and switching it on to extract information.” Even the German military, he argued, sought to divorce itself from some of the cruder actions of the Nazis. “We should remember that we are not dealing with law-abiding people,” he concluded.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 639.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 646.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 976.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1023-24.

British politicians and journalists were fortunate that, as they constructed an image of the enemy other, there was some truth to their narrative.<sup>118</sup> But often, as has been noted with the mistaken identity of General Menendez, Fleet Street engaged in blatant misrepresentation. Indeed, far from a death squad veteran like his notorious uncle, and much to the chagrin of Galtieri, General Mario Menendez declared a preemptive ceasefire for fear of needless civilian casualties in Stanley.<sup>119</sup> But British politicians and the press were especially diligent in characterizing the sometimes menacing, sometimes pitiful Argentines as a highly effective external other, the perfect counter to the purity, domesticity, and wholesomeness of the Falkland Islanders.

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<sup>118</sup> For a gripping (and graphic) prison memoir by a noted newspaper editor and Argentine Jew, Jacobo Timerman, held for two years during the Dirty War, see: Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

<sup>119</sup> Neil Tweedie, "The Welsh Argentine who fought the British," *Telegraph*, 28 March 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/argentina/9169222/The-Welsh-Argentine-who-fought-the-British.html> (accessed 4 December 2012).

## CONCLUSION

### Bestowing Non-Citizenship and Planting “Small Peat Treats”

The idealized discourse venerating the Falkland Islanders and islands in an attempted reconstruction of the imagined community of Greater Britain played a formative role in ramping up popular support for Britain’s imperial war in a post-imperial world. But the reassertion of this imperial language and mindset continued to resonate in British society even after the cessation of hostilities, producing various—though seemingly disparate—impacts on British politics and culture. First, the reassertion of imperial nationalisms laid bare the tensions surrounding the definition of Britishness—tensions that had already been exacerbated by the passage of the British Nationality Act of 1981. As the war progressed and ended, it became increasingly difficult for the Thatcher government to maintain one of its most hypocritical policies. In reconfiguring British citizenship, the Act had denied some 400 Falkland Islanders the automatic right to live and work in, or even to enter, the United Kingdom without a visa. In order to claim British citizenship outright, Falkland Islanders had to prove that they had a British-born parent or grandparent. If they could document this, they were classed both as citizens of the United Kingdom and as citizens of a British Dependent Territory. Those 400 islanders who, in general, had longer lineages in the Falklands, and thus had no immediate family in the British Isles, were classed solely as citizens of a British

Dependent Territory and were, in effect, stripped of their full legal rights of citizenship. The act was due to go into effect on January 1, 1983.<sup>120</sup>

But given the wartime image and rhetoric surrounding the Falkland Islanders, MPs from all parties began to wonder how a people who were described as so inherently British could be excluded from full and automatic UK citizenship. In April, Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw assured concerned MPs that “in the present circumstances no Falkland Islander, whether he has the right of abode or not, will have any difficulty over admission to this country.”<sup>121</sup> Whitelaw argued that informal measures were in place to accommodate all islanders if they sought entry and settlement in Britain. This informal policy was driven by the precarious status of Hong Kong and its 2.6 million residents. As they anticipated negotiating the end of their 99-year lease on Hong Kong from the People’s Republic of China, the British government was seemingly responsible for millions of loyal Hong Kongers; yet in restructuring citizenship, they did their best to shirk all obligations. The Home Office feared a sudden onslaught of immigration from Hong Kong if British Dependent Territory citizens of the Falklands, a category to which the Hong Kongers had also been designated, were given free right of entry into Britain. Moreover, the British clearly failed to recognize the uncanny similarities between the situation in Hong Kong and that of the recently liberated Falklanders. In Hong Kong, as in the Falklands, an island people nominally under British protection lived in the shadow of their imposing neighbor—Red China. The only clear difference between Hong Kongers and Falklanders was their race.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ian Glover James, “Nationality Act bar to Falklanders coming to Britain,” *Telegraph*, 5 April 1982, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Deb.*, H.C., 6th ser., vol. 21 (1982), col. 421-22W.

<sup>122</sup> “Various ways of being British,” *Guardian*, 29 November 1982, 10.



Unsatisfied with the British government's posturing over the Falklanders' legal status, on June 23, 1982, Labour's Robert Kilroy-Silk introduced a private members bill in the House of Commons designed specially to reincorporate the 400 excluded islanders into full British citizenship.<sup>123</sup> On July 10, however, after Kilroy-Silk moved his bill in the House, three government whips and two additional Conservative MPs registered their objections—in effect, killing his proposed bill. According to the *Guardian*, Kilroy-Silk denounced the injustice that “a task force had been sent to the South Atlantic to defend British interests and yet the Government was not prepared to give full citizenship rights in law to the Falklanders.”<sup>124</sup>

Finally, in November, after months of utilizing the Falkland Islanders for political capital while repeatedly neglecting their interests, the Thatcher government folded to pressure, abandoning its untenable position on the 400 kelpers' citizenship. Yet, the government managed to do so in the most understated way possible in a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy. When the Conservative Peer Baroness Vickers sponsored the *British Nationality (Falkland Islands) Amendment Act* in the House of Lords, the Thatcher government merely agreed not to oppose it. A junior Home Office minister, Lord Elton, however, was sure to register the government's reservations: “We must be very clear that to make one category of former citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies a special case must not establish a misleading precedent.” Elton continued, “The Government take the view, on immigration grounds, it is quite out of the question to alter the citizenship categories either of the other British dependent territories citizens or of British overseas citizenship

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<sup>123</sup> “Plea for islanders,” *Guardian*, 23 July 1982, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Julia Langdon, “Attempt to amend Nationality Act for 400 islanders fails: Whips block citizenship bill for Falklands,” *Guardian*, 10 July 1982, 2.

citizens.”<sup>125</sup> With the implementation of the law, which was passed through the Commons without objection, the government sought to head off any protests from Hong Kong by duplicitously granting residents of that territory the distinction of “British” in their passports; however, this simple placation extended no additional legal status, including no right of entry or abode in the United Kingdom. In summarizing the outcome, the *Guardian* pointedly commented that “the Falkland Islanders, who are white, are to have their nationality restored,” while “the Hong Kong British, who are yellow, are to have a meaningless change that will still leave them in the lurch.”<sup>126</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Thatcher government could no longer tenably go about invoking the imperial discourse of a Greater Britain, which incorporated the Falkland Islanders into a global understanding of Britishness, while maintaining an insular citizenship policy that excluded both the islanders and the peoples of other Dependent Territories. In dismissing Hong Kongers’ concerns through dubious passport control changes, the British government did its best to avoid confronting the issue head on.

Along with this important impact on the politics of Britishness, the reconstruction of the imagined community of Greater Britishness during the war, especially in its abovementioned valorization of the Falklands’ physical geography, influenced how British people worked the land in their own backyard gardens. In her 1986 “In the Garden” feature, the *Times*’ gardening correspondent, Francesca Greenoak, extolled the benefits of “small peat treats” to English gardens, or the local importation of Falklands-style peat gardening. She praised the virtues of indigenous peat, which made for “an *ideal* if unusual model” for

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<sup>125</sup> “Falklanders special case, says minister,” *Guardian*, 30 November 1982, 4.

<sup>126</sup> “Various ways of being British,” *Guardian*, 29 November 1982, 10.

gardening.<sup>127</sup> Peat, she argued, “opens the way to growing an interesting range of plants which would not succeed in most ordinary types of soils.” To make a “Falklands garden,” one needed to put together equal parts sand, soil, moss, peat, and leaf mold, surrounding the mix with “a line of rocks to emulate the strange stone runs of the Falklands where large boulders lead for miles over the tussocky landscape.” To create the right effect, a plastic water tray had to be sunk into the peaty mixture to prevent moisture from seeping out. In this fertile and unique South Atlantic garden, one could grow “elegant” Falklands shrubs. Indeed, Greenoak cited an expert on New Zealand shrubbery, from whom Falklands varieties could be acquired in the United Kingdom, as he was “building up a Falklands specialty.” Given politicians and journalists’ emphasis during the war on the geographic similarities between Britain and the Falkland Islands, Francesca Greenoak and the other advocates of peat gardening seemed to be crafting that shared space—some four years later, molding British backyards to the wartime representation of the Falklands.

The most famous Falklands-inspired garden in Britain, however, was built to serve a commemorative purpose. The Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel, erected in 2000, sits on the campus of Pangbourne College, formerly a naval boarding school, in wealthy suburban Reading.<sup>128</sup> In the rolling green Berkshire hills, which flow seamlessly into freshly clipped tennis lawns, campus and countryside merge into one another. Outside the memorial chapel, landscape designers created a commemorative garden as a place for reflection on the war (Fig. 5). Yet this garden has a distinct South Atlantic flair. Mounds of grasses native to the Falkland Islands surround a recessed seating area, where visitors to the chapel can sit

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<sup>127</sup> Francesca Greenoak, “In the Garden: Small Peat Treats,” *Times*, 1 November 1986, 9.

<sup>128</sup> I thank Mr. Robin Brodhurst, head of the History department at Pangbourne College, for giving me an informative tour of the chapel and surrounding areas in May 2012.

reassuringly enveloped by foliage. At the head of the circular garden, water flows over a black granite map of the Falklands. Again, showing the peculiar British proclivity for trees, the designers of the garden incorporated Antarctic beech trees, which they felt were appropriate to commemorate the war, even though no trees grow in the Falklands. Further, to accent this contemplative space, they had originally planned, according to former Pangbourne headmaster Anthony Hudson, to “go collect some boulders from the very ridge where men had died” on the islands, but this idea proved to be too expensive. The designers found instead hard rock from the Scottish highlands, which, they deemed, suitably represented the Falklands landscape.<sup>129</sup>

From the trees to the shrubbery and boulders, to the Falklands inspired stained-glass windows and kneelers inside the chapel itself, the intent was to recreate the islands—or, at least, British conceptions of the islands. The architects and landscape designers seemed to have succeeded as, according to Falkland Islander Sadie Clare, “In that beautiful chapel, you had so much to convey the atmosphere of the Islands.”<sup>130</sup> The geographic affinities between the Falkland Islands and Britain, so deeply stressed during the three-month conflict through the language and representations of Greater Britishness, have become a fixture of the way the war is remembered. In this idyllic little corner of rural Britain, the Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel, especially in its landscape architecture, attempts to recreate the islands themselves as a living testimony to the attempted 1982 reassertion of a Greater Britain.

These various examples show that the discourses and representations of Greater Britishness during the war had a deep resonance in British politics and culture. Indeed, while

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<sup>129</sup> Anthony Hudson, *Just to See His Name* (Reading: Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel Trust, 2002), 67.

<sup>130</sup> Sadie Clare, quoted in Anthony Hudson, *Just to See His Name: A History of the Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College* (Reading: Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel Trust, 2002), 88.

they may seem like a somewhat random collection, in their wide variety alone, the late-1982 amending of the British Nationality Act, the popularity of Falklands-inspired peat gardening, and efforts to commemorate the war by recreating the geographic “feeling” of the islands in rural Berkshire, demonstrate the potency and effectiveness of imperial nationalisms in attempting to shape diverse facets of British culture and society years after the war’s end.

In discussing the reassertion of Greater Britishness and otherness in popularizing the Falklands War, this essay has sought to draw a line under the hackneyed argument that the conflict was somehow disconnected from Britain’s imperial history and identity. The Falklands War reasserted imperial nationalisms that had long unified the diverse British nation into a cohesive whole, namely the symbiotic relationship of “otherness” and “sameness.” This nationalist discourse, from both British politicians and the press, emphasized that the variant of Britishness in the Falkland Islands was more pure than the supposedly diluted multicultural Britishness on offer in the United Kingdom. Thus, even in the 1980s, the hagiographic memories of settler colonialism were used by the British as a filter for understanding the world around them—one afflicted by declinism and challenges to racial understandings of Britishness.

Indeed, contrary to the established historiography, “empire”—meaning, in this case, nostalgia for settler colonialism—was a central component of Thatcher’s Britain and must be fully accounted for in discussions of Thatcherism. Not only was Margaret Thatcher’s tenure in Downing Street dominated by imperial issues—the resolution of the Rhodesia crisis, hunger strikes in Northern Ireland, the patriations of the Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander constitutions, the Falklands War, Grenada, negotiations over Hong Kong, and her controversial Apartheid policy—British understandings of national identity during this

period, as has been shown, often hinged on the imaginary of an idealized settler identity. In other words, somewhere abroad, in the white enclaves of the former British Empire, Britishness was often imagined as inherently more pure than the variant at home. To understand Britain in the 1980s, we must consider the role of settlers at the end of empire and their place in the British imagination.

## FIGURES

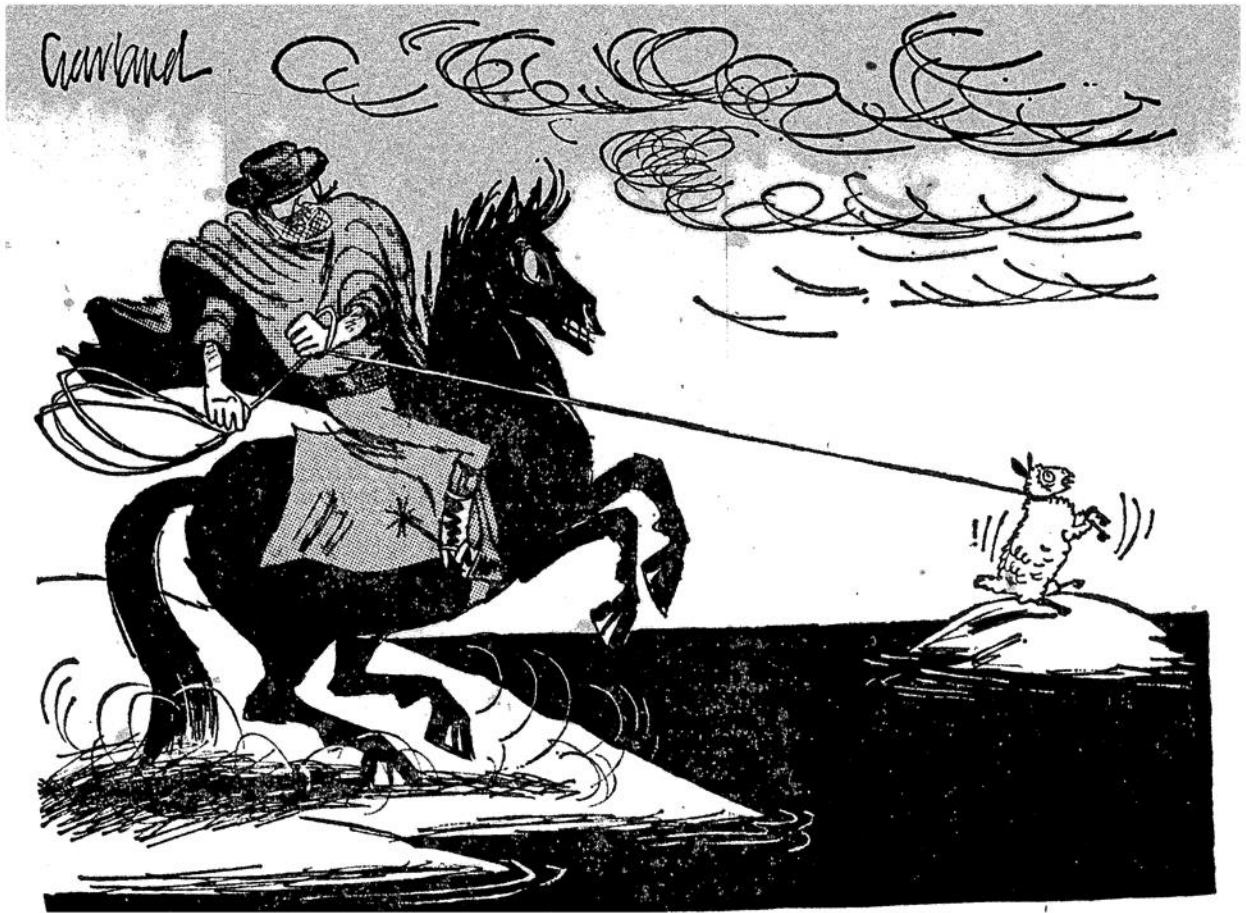


**Figure 1.** Tom Smith, Sergeant Major Laurie Ashbridge of 3rd Battalion, Parachute Regiment, enjoys a cup of tea with Falkland Islanders in San Carlos, 21 May 1982. Imperial War Museum. <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205192919>. Accessed 4 December 2012.

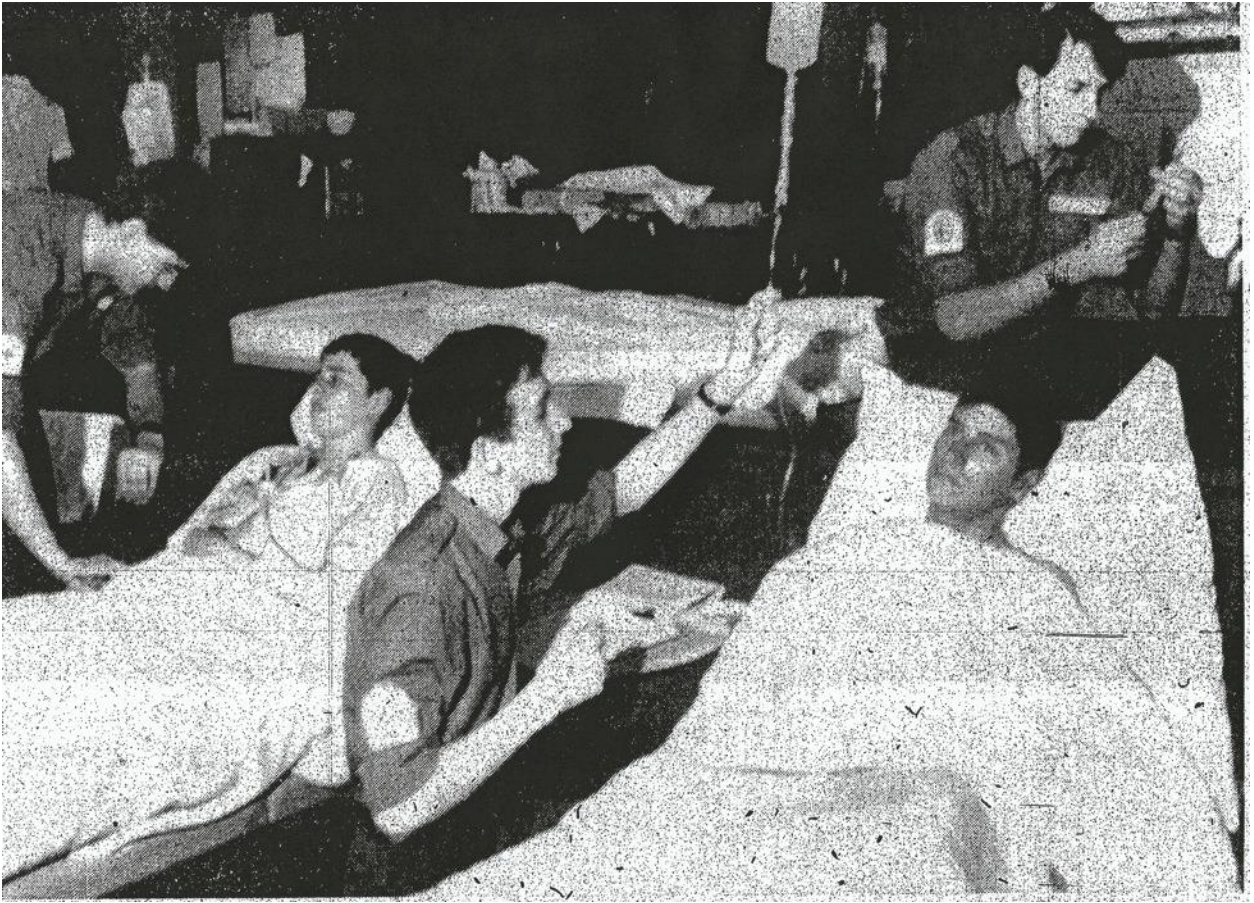


**Figure 2.** Peter Holdgate, “The Yomper.” Reprinted in “Afghanistan death toll passes Falklands War milestone as three more British soldiers die ahead of big offensive.” *Daily Mail*. 9 February 2010. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1249540/Afghanistan-death-toll-passes-Falklands-War-milestone.html>. Accessed 4 December 2012.





**Figure 3.** Nicholas Garland, “Argentine gaucho lassoing a sheep.” *Telegraph*, 5 April 1982, 16.



**Figure 4.** British sailor John Dillon, left, and an Argentine prisoner of war, right, receive medical treatment aboard the troopship *Canberra*. *Telegraph*, 24 May 1982, 1.



**Figure 5.** Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel, Front exterior of the chapel with memorial garden in the right foreground. <http://www.falklands-chapel.org.uk/>. Accessed 4 December 2012.

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