

Abstract

The Falklands War was shrouded in symbolism and permeated with imperial rhetoric, imagery and memories, bringing to the fore divergent conceptions of Britishness, kinship and belonging.

The current dispute, moreover, is frequently framed in terms of national identity, and accusations of imperialism and neo-colonialism persist. Thus in dealing with the conflict, historians and commentators alike have often made references to imperial legacies, yet this has rarely been afforded much careful analysis. Views on this matter continue to be entrenched, either presenting the war as a throwback to nineteenth-century imperialism or as almost entirely devoid of imperial significance.

This thesis proposes a way out of this stalemate, by looking at the conflict through the transnational lens of Greater Britain. The evidence suggests that neither the dispute, nor the war - nor, indeed, its aftermath - can be entirely divorced from the legacies of empire. Taking decolonization as a starting point, this thesis demonstrates how the idea of a 'British world' gained a new lease of life vis-à-vis the Falklands, as the Islanders adopted the rhetorical mantle of 'abandoned Britons'. Yet this new momentum was partial and fractured, as evinced by the developments triggered by the Argentine invasion in 1982.

Despite the apparent firmness of the British government's commitment to the Islands, cracks and fissures over the meaning of Britishness were simultaneously magnified. The perceived temporal dislocation of defending loyal Britons from a remote colony was later joined by the memory of 'dominating imperialism', associated with gunboats, military exploits and bellicose rhetoric. The divisions caused by these latent imperial factors not only affected Britons in the UK (at a time of emergent devolutionary pressures in the 'Celtic nations'), but also in the Falklands and Argentina.

This thesis thus not only sheds new light on the Falklands War itself, but also the lingering purchase of the idea of Greater Britain into the post-imperial era, replete with its multiple contradictions.