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Keywords

fill, shall, ships, shops, making, geographies, manufacturing, we

Disciplines

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Fill the ships and we shall fill the shops: the making of geographies of manufacturing

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Abstract

Alongside 'Dig for Victory', 'Make Do and Mend' is a well-known ideology from the austerity campaigns unleashed on Britain's home front in the Second World War. Less well known are the post-war prosperity campaigns. These campaigns mutated the moral economy created by wartime propaganda to encourage the British to become reacquainted with geographies of manufacturing and to focus again on imports and exports. Post-Second World War consumers were entreated to forego localism, embrace the global and 'export or die'. That the drive for the global was showcased in an equally compelling political campaign is particularly poignant. This article examines the processes by which the British were made to become part of the complex, distributed and far-spanning geographies of manufacturing prevalent today. It sheds light on a brief lapse from globalisation and addresses a critical need in geography for a historical survey of the making of present global production networks and global cultures of consumption.

Introduction

A research project on the future of manufacturing and global production networks led me to stumble upon a 1947 edition of the *Wide World Magazine* – a mid 20th-century version of the 'worldwide web', providing exciting adventure stories of different cultures and distant places to satisfy the wanderlust of those without the means to fulfil it. But alongside the exotic illustrations and stories of derring-do featured a small advertisement from the UK Board of Trade in the bottom corner of the page, proclaiming to readers: 'Fill the Ships and We Shall Fill the Shops'. Accompanying this slogan is a figure depicting a number of busy characters. At the top of the illustration is a map of Great Britain (an arrow tactfully obscuring Ireland). At slightly more than 90 degrees clockwise is a map of Africa and in-between the two is a cyclist making their way over the ocean to the continent in suitable shorts and socks. At the bottom of the illustration is another busy figure – this time only sporting a breechcloth – leaving Africa with a trolley filled with exaggerated cocoa pods. The arrow from Africa leads to a sketchy map of the United States of America, from which another more amply clad figure rushes, pushing a trolley filled with bales of textiles bound for the map of Britain. The illustration asks: 'How can cycles sent to Africa ... fetch us cotton from USA?' (Figure 1).

The Board of Trade notes that when Britain exports goods like bicycles, the money earned enables the purchase of imports of food and raw materials. And the principal, and at the time shocking, insight is: 'but we need not always spend the money in the country to which we send the goods'. So Africans buy bicycles for convenience and personal mobility, Americans buy cocoa for hot chocolate and cake and the British buy cotton for comfortable and fashionable clothes. By distributing commodities in surplus to places where they are in deficit a new form of global equality is imagined here through transoceanic shipping and borderless flows of luxury commodities. Moreover, finances flow in a borderless fashion as well in this ideology: 'exports give us the chance to order from all over the world the imports we need for our factories, ships and homes'. Beyond the authoritative chauvinism and intimations of propaganda, the

advertisement is a concerted effort to explain what is at this time an unfamiliar process: the circuitously reciprocal trade across regions that is now a hallmark of globalisation.

Figure 1.

Advertisement from the Wide World Magazine (1947)

The advertisement explains the logic of the illustration with an almost childish simplicity befitting an audience grown unused to the concept of globalised production and consumption. Factory goods are not consumed locally, instead they are exported to distant places, which the readers of the Wide World Magazine were obviously aware of through their vicarious reading. And in exchange the resources and products of other regions are imported to the UK, not only to meet basic requirements but also, more importantly, luxury ones.

The illustration evokes an ideology of borderless global trade through a circular economy: import and export, when balanced equally across regions, is 'fair' to consumers and workers at home and in distant manufacturing geographies. What is fascinating about this little remembered campaign by the UK Board of Trade is its counter-discourse against the very self-sufficiency and localism this government department had championed during the war. The 'Fill the Ships and We Shall Fill the Shops' (FSWSFS) campaign is no less than an early illustration of what would become the process known as containerisation (Birtchnell and Urry 2012; Cidell 2012; Morley 2011). Indeed, alongside facts about globalisation, the campaign also blanketed the public's imagination with what is to all intents and purposes an early manifestation of the container ship decades before the milestone patent for the transoceanic shipping container in 1958 (Parker 2012).

Apropos, this campaign interests me so much in this article because it provides a vital juncture for other recent research on the globalising of production and consumption and counter-trends to the

prevailinglly lopsided socio-technical system whereby (to generalise somewhat) mass production occurs in the poor Global South and mass consumption in the rich Global North. In this article I examine how present manufacturing geographies got made through explicit expansionary strategies starkly at odds with, but also strangely deferential to, a preceding discourse of austerity. Furthermore, I ask: how were consumers convinced to be accomplices in the development of a system typified not by regional reciprocity but instead by global inequalities more remnant of Empire than the home front?

A policy sea change

'Why can't we have the goods first? Why must there be this insistence upon exports? How have conditions changed since the years before the war?' (Board of Trade 1947, 1). Despite the celebrations following Victory Day, Britain was in crisis and its citizenry had many questions for the government. The austerity campaigns had contributed greatly to Britain's success, but had led to a deep discontent with living standards and systemic fissures in the economy. As historian William Crofts summarises, rationing of fuel, food, confectionary and clothing continued; a black market flourished; 70 per cent of cars were exported and petrol was unobtainable; homes were heated by coal or paraffin; only 4 per cent of families owned a television; and consumables such as fridges, freezers, washing machines, mowers and microwaves were unheard of (1989, 9–10).

At the end of the war the scholar Karl Polanyi had reminded the British of the country's long history of global trade with his book *The great transformation* (1944), which the conflict had hurried to its inevitable nadir. And in 1945 Winston Churchill's Conservative government was surprisingly defeated in the election by the trade-obsessed Labour government under the leadership of Clement Attlee. With this defeat came a fresh approach to propaganda, markedly removed from Churchill's home front austerity campaigns. The Attlee government rapidly increased expenditure on economic propaganda and the appointment of Stafford Cripps to the Presidency of the Board of Trade set off a new campaign of 'facts' downplaying the previous austerity campaigns. This new tack championed an export drive to counter a fuel crisis, national debt and the huge demand for luxury staples such as tea, cotton, petrol, timber, tobacco, fruit and cocoa (Board of Trade 1947).

As a campaign film from 1946 makes clear: 'Here are your two hands. During the war they worked very hard. Now they are tired' (British Pathé 1946a). The film goes on to explain that although war production was over, a final push was needed in peace production to increase exports in order to fill the shops with the things consumers wanted for 'better living': luxury and comfort items.

So under this different political landscape the Board of Trade's campaigns underwent a dramatic sea change directly after the war to reverse the reigning discourse of self-sufficient austerity and to kick-start globalisation again. To do this the campaign highlighted that austere mending cars and clothes and digging gardens were not enough for the British to 'eat, drink and smoke' and be merry (Board of Trade 1947, 4). During the war, and in response to extensive rationing, the Board acted as an inspirational medium with such memorable entreaties as: 'go through your wardrobe – Make Do and Mend' (Nachshen 1945). Ships were still there in the austerity campaigns, but these became increasingly confined to the background as losses to German U-boats became unsustainable: 'freight space is vital, that is why your vegetable plot is so important', a wartime advertisement for Clays Fertilizer noted (Gardeners Chronicle 1942, 201). To be sure, the austerity campaigns relied on ethics learned in the Great Depression (De la Bédoyère 2005), but nevertheless consumer cultures developed in the interim with great regard for luxury garments and consumables impossible to procure locally. Austerity discourses sought to replace these consumer cultures with thrifty alternatives by a forcefully chauvinist ideology privileging uniform frugality.

The home front austerity campaigns such as 'Dig For Victory' and 'Make Do and Mend' (MDM) have become tropes for renewed ethics of austerity encompassing political movements ranging from environmental sustainability to conservative nationalism (Ginn 2012; Bramall 2011). One movement in particular is articulated as a 'New Home Front', in order to meet the challenge of climate change and at the same time to promote 'policies for ecological, social and economic renewal' (Simms and Lucas 2011; Lucas 2012). Indeed, these tropes are an inspiration for fair trade and ethical production as well

(Blanchard 2008). But to understand the so-called first age of austerity during and following the Second World War in terms solely of localism and anti-consumerism is a mistake. The immediate after-effects and counter-discourses to the home front campaigns represent a crucial tipping point in the establishment of present-day geographies of manufacturing and cultures of consumption characterised, just as they were before the war, by stark inequalities between regions (Shove and Warde 2002).

As Cripps highlighted in a pamphlet and series of picture charts (Board of Trade 1947), the ethic of austerity in Britain during the war was contingent on the economic sacrifices made in order to achieve military victory, a state of affairs that left the balance of payments worryingly skewed immediately after the conflict ceased. The country was struggling to pay for crucial imports with radically diminished export revenues (Tomlinson 2009). So required was not only a change in economic policy but also a rapid transition in the moral economy in order to entreat the community to accelerate economic globalisation 'at a time of full employment and with a citizenry empowered and energized by the exigencies of war' (Tomlinson 2011, 360).

The FSWSFS campaign attempted to expand and mutate the success of the MDM campaign in the opposite direction – towards globalised consumerism. This also meant the suppression of, and at times heated resistance against, the orthodox home front ethic of austerity from a government keen to reinvigorate international trade. But rather than being a war between competing discourses, the FSWSFS campaign instead borrows many of the virtues of MDM. Notably, the campaign adopts the idea of camaraderie, hard work and (international) reciprocity in order to appeal to British consumers' sense of fairness, altruism and community resourcefulness nurtured in the home front.

From make do and mend to make do and spend

Histories documenting the shift towards global production systems in the UK point to the period 1950–1973 as an era of sustained expansion (Martin 2010). The context and timing of the FSWSFS campaign is then significant in fleshing out the discourses that were formative directly before this period. The self-sufficiency and localism engendered as a matter of survival in wartime Britain had left its people on the verge of starvation when many felt they should be reaping the spoils of war; however, immediately after the war British citizens were suddenly informed that, even with the sacrifices they had made, they were 'living beyond their means' (Board of Trade 1947, 14).

A poster produced by the Board of Trade shows a ship with the words 'cars, radios and pottery' on its side leaving the UK and below it a second ship returning with the words 'timber, wheat and petrol'. The header explains: 'Sending out goods we make ... brings home other things we need' (Sherborne 1947 2013). Here MDM is mutated. New electronics and household items are made to be sent overseas rather than to fill local shops. This version of MDM is not for the war effort. While electronics and vehicles could feasibly continue to be reused and repaired just as they were during the home front, here wartime austerity is warped to be compatible with ideologies of economic growth and to honour Britain's post-war commitments as a continuing world power to a citizenry endowed with modern luxury comforts. Cripps was explicit about the aspirations of the FSWSFS campaign: 'we now face the task not only of rebuilding the pre-war standard of life but of attaining new standards ... production can bring us prosperity' (Board of Trade 1947, 1).

Export or die

A film released by the Board of Trade in 1946 unobtrusively summarised the government's revised home front campaign: *Export or Die*. The feature introduces the 'very dissatisfied' Smith household: 'Dad wants a new wireless, Mother wants a sewing machine', and Betty wants 'glamorous beauty preparations'. The goods are sold overseas for foreign currency, the narrator explains, to buy the food and raw materials needed to live and work. The film lists these unobtainable staples: food, tobacco, cotton, timber and petrol. Here, MDM is mobilised again, but this time in a negative light. Dad must make do without tobacco, newspapers and even wood for his chair, if he wants a new wireless. Mother will have a new sewing machine but nothing to sew. And Betty will not think much of glamour 'without a roof over her head'. The narrator sums up this new ethic of make do and spend: 'We must sell the things we like to buy the things we need' (British Pathé 1946b).

'Britain has never been and can never be self-sufficient. "Export or die" has become more than a mere slogan' (Daily News 1947, 14). By 1947 this fearful mandate had become unpalatable to consumers. Indeed, Cripps's emphasis on facts had departed from the UK's official guidelines for propaganda, which had recommended in 1939: 'As regards fundamentals many people are vainer and idler than they imagine or admit. Propaganda should take notice of this' (Taylor 1981, 61). The Board of Trade changed tack and instead began to try and bait consumers with luxury items while at the same time emphasising the global perspective, harking back to the worldliness of the pre-war British Empire and sermonising about the global system Britain was a forgotten member of: 'We buy half our food, all our tobacco, cotton, rubber and most other raw material from abroad' (Daily News 1947, 14). In this framing luxury staples became necessary for wellbeing and even (portending junk-food advertising practices now) everyday health: 'biscuits keep you going', one advertisement proclaims alongside an image of an out-of-breath man who has just missed his bus (Daily News 1947, 14).

This shift of ideology in the FSWSFS campaign is illustrated by another 1947 animated cartoon from British Pathé featuring the Smiths, again, at supper together. Here a different strategy is invoked to appeal to desires for luxury commodities and the capacity of global production networks to meet them. As the narrator makes clear:

This family is feeling pretty good. They've just been enjoying the Sunday joint. Father's got his pipe going. Betty is pleased with her new frock. Mother is enjoying her cup of tea. We depend on imports for our main supplies of tea, meat, tobacco, cotton and a great many other things too. Does that worry the Smiths? [They shake heads] They're solidly behind the export drive. Because the more we export the more we import and the better off we shall all be. (British Pathé 1947)

During the wartime MDM campaign, ostentatious enjoyment of civilian clothing was deemed unpatriotic, but now no more – desire for luxury goods procured through global means had to be relearned to be acceptable and even merited (McLoughlin 2011, 340). The animation finishes by showing the family surreally pushing a swelling yin and yang symbol with the words 'imports' and 'exports' depicted inside each half. This appeal to 'Eastern' spiritual ideals of equality, justice and balance is significant as evidence of a newfound tolerance of other countries, perhaps gleaned from troops returned from service overseas: some British gravestones of Second World War soldiers had even begun to bear yin and yang symbols (Tarlow 1997).

The urgency of the FSWSFS campaign was a response to a potent threat: the emerging cultures of consumption in the USA. By learning to spin prosperity in the same manner as austerity, government mouthpieces such as the Board of Trade could incite further post-war productivity, repel post-victory malaise and settle their accounts with consumers who were demanding the luxuries they were exposed to through contact with US consumers and its media, such as cinema. Hence the prime position of the USA in the first advertisement (Figure 1) represented an awareness of a new geopolitical configuration geared towards global trade not global war.

The notion that Britain's prosperity lay in the global not the local was given credence by British historian Llewellyn Woodward, writing concurrently with the FSWSFS campaign. He critiqued the state of British scarcity in comparison to American abundance after the war. In particular it was luxury goods that rankled the middle classes: 'An English housewife finds it odd that English china to match a tea-set shattered in the Blitz can be bought in New York but is not on sale in London' (Woodward 1947, 381). Of particular issue were the aspirations of 'Middle England' consumers for the 'acquisition of material things' on top of their 'desire for more leisure' after the privations of the war and the consequent subsidisation of post-war Europe's rebuild (Woodward 1947, 381).

For commentators at the time the scale of the project to meet post-war expectations of the good life was daunting and MDM was no longer the solution. Filling the shops by filling the ships had to be enacted in direct conflict with mainstream ideals of self-sufficiency and localism. War losses and damages, labour shortages, exhausted pre-war markets, widespread fatigue, limited diets and obsolete equipment in the coal and textile industries made this project to promote luxury over frugality all the more urgent (Woodbury 1947, 901).

Though not risking lack of credibility by directly criticising the ethics prevalent in the wartime austerity campaigns, the Board of Trade instead adopted an early manifestation of a now pervasive

advertising strategy. Appeals to demand for luxury staples (tobacco, cotton, tea) were a marked departure from entreaties for more productive imports such as wood, wheat and petrol. What is evident in this early campaign to reignite globalisation is a precursory stirring of a world development agenda, whereby Britain would become a leader in trade relations, rather than a hegemon.

A lack of balance

A recent special issue in the journal *Geoforum*, 'Global production networks, labour and development', draws attention to the 'functional and spatial fragmentation of production and consumption' and problematises the common neoliberal assumption that economic upgrading leads to social upgrading (Coe and Hess 2013). This collection provides some fascinating accounts of the rationales that have produced, on the one hand, 'fab-less' (fabrication less) firms concerned with branding and consumer cultures and, on the other hand, firms concerned with 'material transformation processes'. And in contrast to the latter are the sorts of firms concerned with innovation, marketing and knowledge rather than physical products per se (Thrift 2008). What is significant is that these two poles are globally fragmented as 'manufacturing today is carried out to a substantial degree in emerging and developing economies' (Coe and Hess 2013, 4).

The FSWSFS campaign further supports the idea that the schism between those who make (Global South) and those who create (Global North) has its roots not in post-war expansion, which focused on reciprocity, but rather political volatility in Africa, Asia and Latin America and interventions under the rubric of development for strategic power in the Cold War context (Hayter et al. 2003; Williams et al. 2012). Current interest in the 'return' of manufacturing to the Global North and more reciprocal, 'fair' trade would then be more a desire to get back on track to the kinds of geographies of manufacturing imagined in post-war euphoria than a regression from this ideology. The very success of the MDM campaign was due to the galvanisation of local competencies in craft and repair. Therefore, a focus on luxuries in the FSWSFS campaign sought to avoid undermining this latent facility for production still pervasive in Britain. In this manner, there is much to be yielded from the FSWSFS campaign in how appeals for the return of manufacturing to the UK or the USA could be balanced with a desire for luxury consumption and commodities that must be imported. So then campaigns targeting social action on issues such as fair trade or climate change could do well to consider the rhetorical stance of these post-war campaigns with their intermediacy between the home front and the intensified containerisation during and after the Cold War. Indeed, disconnects between consumption and production extant in ideas of the 'New Home Front' do not necessarily apply to this mutated discourse.

Despite its lack of success – a 1947 survey found the FSWSFS slogan could only be recalled by one in ten respondents (Crofts 1989, 39) – what can be learned from the campaign is that, surprisingly, reciprocity and circularity are deeply engrained values in the structural history of post-war global production networks. This is supportive of geographers who dispute that power structures in global production networks are by default set in stark relief against fair trade products (Franz and Hassler 2010). What is articulable in reflecting on the FSWSFS campaign is a foundational discourse, which bears close proximity in values to home front campaigns of austerity and later fair trade movements and ecological regional production systems. The anomalous 'neoliberalisation', 'flexibilisation' and 'deindustrialisation' that came later, which departed from this base primer of reciprocity between the Global North and Global South, can be reassessed as distortion rather than linearity of post-war expansion ideologies (Coe and Jones 2010). This further undermines conceptions of globalisation as simply composed of 'beginnings and endings' (Lepawsky and Mather 2011). This history of the making of geographies of manufacturing is thus useful for geographers and other social scientists seeking to challenge inequalities between regions as ideologically exceptional rather than inevitable (Ong 2006). For instance, the myth peddled by economists, factory managers, corporate executives and consumers that labour is 'disposable' in global geographies of manufacturing has no substance in post-war thinking on how trade relationships between regions would work (Wright 2006). Indeed, recent interest in the 'return' of manufacturing to the Global North is far from a departure from early thinking on global

geographies of manufacturing as commonly construed (Khanna 2012; Pisano and Shih 2012). In fact, a manufacturing 'renaissance' in the Global North was the very logic that drove the FSWSFS campaign.

Interestingly, the ideology of balance between producers and consumers that is largely missing from the present state of globalisation is depicted as the greatest boon in the campaign, a point sociologist Robert M. McIver urgently noted in his foreword to Polanyi's reminder to austerity Britain of the pitfalls of pre-war globalisation: 'Of primary importance today is the lesson it carries for the makers of the coming international organization' (Polanyi 1944, ix). As Polanyi was no doubt aware, MDM was surely not an adequate response to the collapse of the global trade system and this remains an urgent issue now as history appears to be repeating itself in terms of growing regionalism, inequality and crisis.

Conclusion

It has long been argued that the term 'globalisation' lacks a secure definition (Allen and Thompson 1997). Recent advocates of the 'New Home Front' and a renewed MDM discourse should recognise that this was understood directly after the war as an unsustainable interlude rather than a return to simpler, self-sustainable and more local ways. In this article I have argued that attention to a foundational counter-discourse, the FSWSFS campaign, which occurred as a counterpoint to the dominant discourse of austerity, MDM, is a step in the right direction towards historicising geographies of manufacturing. Indeed, like the FSWSFS campaign, the 'fair trade' movement adopted the yin and yang symbol, and more work remains to be done on these lines of discourse.

Instead of a simple one-to-one exchange through import and export, production and consumption has become regionally skewed and is one of the most pervasive sources of global inequalities in living standards, incomes, worker rights and conditions between regions. In reviewing the FSWSFS campaign, this article examined the manner in which manufacturing geographies came into being through moral economies before transport infrastructures, freight systems and financialisation. The above advertisement's (Figure 1) core statement was that 'we need not always spend the money in the country to which we send the goods' and this takes on a dramatically portentous meaning in light of the inequalities in geographies of manufacturing that now mark the global financial system and offshore worlds. Such post-war foundational discourses of globalisation, occurring as they do in an era known more for being the first age of austerity, have only had a cursory review in historical and transport geography. This article has tried to make headway for a richer history of geographies of manufacturing.

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