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The Commonwealth(s)—inter- and non-state—at the start of the twenty-first century: contributions to global development and governance

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ABSTRACT *The official and unofficial Commonwealths have rarely been treated as inter- or non-state organisations, partnerships or epistemic communities contributing to global development and governance. This article seeks to rectify this oversight, especially in an emerging world 'order' characterised by unilateralism rather than multilateralism. After more than a half-century, both types of (interrelated) Commonwealth communities have emerged as invaluable, albeit second-order, adjuncts to global institutions, civil societies and private corporations. Their undramatic yet helpful characteristics as established, empathetic networks may be more needed to advance global development and governance in the new century than in recent decades, with implications for both analysis and practice, approaches and policies.*

> The Commonwealth has many personalities: international organisation, global network, diplomatic club, amongst others. Underpinning these, however, is an intricate and complex set of linkages, from the ACU to the CPA. These professional associations are, in many ways, the glue which holds the Commonwealth together. (Vale & Black, 1994: 14)
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> Past literature on the Commonwealth has been overwhelmingly descriptive, historical and lacking in theoretical substance. It has also, perhaps like the Commonwealth itself, sought to avoid controversy and has been largely devoid of any strong critical reflection of the organisation. (Taylor, 2000: 51)

The Commonwealths, plural, in their interrelated official and non-official, state and non-state, forms are, as Ian Taylor's above citation indicates, a much underappreciated and -analysed feature of contemporary world politics (McIntyre, 2001: 101–109; Randall, 2001). Unlike the United Nations system or the international financial institutions, let alone regional organisations including the network of regional development banks (Culpeper, 1996), the contributions of the Commonwealths to global government/governance and international develop-

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ment have not been seriously considered by either students of international relations, organisations and law or by policy makers concerned with multilateralism—a 'new multilateralism' (Cox 1997: xix)?—or global governance. They and their contributions are not mentioned, for instance, in the Report of the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood* (1995), even though Shridath (Sonny) Ramphal, the second Secretary-General of the Commonwealth (1975–90), was its co-chair! And the latest collection from UNU/WIDER on *Governing Globalization* (Nayyar, 2002) is likewise silent on the Commonwealth(s). Indeed, like the more modest *Francophonie*, the lusophone network or the G-77, the Commonwealth is very hard to classify: certainly sub-universal, somewhat interregional, definitely non- as well as inter-state but, at least until recently, quite inactive as a grouping in either of the two major global fora: the UN and the World Bank/International Monetary Fund.

This article seeks to advance the comparative study of inter- and transnational organisations and relations by placing the Commonwealth nexus or family in such a context at the start of the new millennium (Shaw, 2003). My thesis is that the inter- and non-state Commonwealth(s) are uniquely placed because of their genesis, composition and character to play a crucial role in advancing human development and security in the twenty-first century, in contrast to some other global agencies which lack their unique flexibility and adaptability. Because of their relative informality, as well as their nurturing of civil society even before such a notion was articulated, the Commonwealths should be able to respond to emerging global issues more readily and rapidly than more conservative or sclerotic institutions. They can be categorised as an example of 'new multilateralism' (Keating, 2002: 5–6) as they include 'bottom-up' as well as 'top-down' pressures and participation, as indicated below in this initial section, even if the first editions of *Global Civil Society 2001* (Anheier *et al*, 2001) and *2002* (Glasius *et al*, 2002) failed to so notice! Nevertheless, the inter-state Secretariat asserts that:

> the modern Commonwealth is a family with members in every continent and their association is as much a Commonwealth of peoples as of nations; it is a network not only of governments but also of individuals, non-governmental organisations and civil society groups. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2001: 1)

It is perhaps symptomatic that this may be the first article on the Commonwealth to appear in *Third World Quarterly* in its first quarter century: half the life-span of the inter-state Commonwealth. Yet, as Deryck Schreuder (2002: 652) has recently argued:

> because of the very nature of the current international community […]—an intensification of regional conflicts, an environment of small states in loose leagues of association, of politicized world religions on the rise—now is the time for new forms of diplomacy and global strategies. In an extraordinary way, it is almost as if the Commonwealth has leapt in utility from past to future. It is a non-exclusive transnational organisation whose time has probably come.

The Commonwealth emerged as an 'epistemic community' in the fight against apartheid in the 1980s and then transformed itself into an 'advocacy coalition' to advance good governance in the 1990s well ahead of the 'discovery' by the UN

and World Bank *et al* of such a formulation. And because of the unique quasi-state, intermediary role of the Commonwealth Foundation, it has been able to draw attention to a range of 'global' issues ahead of most other inter- and transnational organisations. As Alison Duxbury (1997: 345) suggests:

> the Commonwealth as an association of over 1.5 billion people, with disparate cultural and ethnic backgrounds, has [been able to] use the human rights debate to reaffirm and reform its role as an international organisation.

This ability to innovate should be assured in the future by the catalytic role of the recently established Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit (CPSU) (Bourne, 1998) (www.cpsu.org.uk) at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS) (www.sas.ac.uk/commonwealthstudies) of the University of London (and related networks in the Commonwealth Foundation/professional associations, especially the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) (CHRI, 2001) (www.humanrightsinitiative.org)). The Unit has already undertaken creative research and related policy formulation in two main areas—globalisation and development, and Commonwealth membership rules for governance—focussing initially in particular on a set of emerging issues like civil–military relations, election monitoring, indigenous communities, IT and governance, etc.

Commonwealth(s) in comparative perspective: (an)other inter- or transnational organisation(s)?

This article in some ways continues and updates the pioneering collection co-edited by Robert Cox and Harold Jacobson (1973) on patterns of influence in multilateral organisations, expands the range of cases in Robert O'Brien *et al* (2000), and attempts to augment the useful typology of forms of governance recently proposed by Jean Philippe Thérien (1999) and Tom Weiss (2000). It supplements the welcome, pioneering essay by Taylor (2000: 51), which also approaches its analysis of the (mainly official) Commonwealth by reference to Robert Cox, but reflecting the latter's, more critical Gramscian approach to 'hegemony' within 'multilateralism':

> Certainly, the Commonwealth as an inter-governmental organisation has not been studied with any reference to the growing literature on multilateralism … [I] attempt to rectify this gap in our knowledge of an important multilateral organisation by applying a critical theoretical framework to the organisation.

Likewise, throughout I consider the possible contributions which Commonwealth-based or -centric comparative studies of state and non-state 'multilateralisms' might make to several overlapping fields and discourses, especially human development, human rights and human security.

The first co-edited volume by Cox and Jacobson contrasted the evolution of several UN agencies and the IMF after 1945. But their volume obviously cannot incorporate changes post-bipolarity and -apartheid, neither does it leave much space for non-state actors, so the authors cannot really anticipate or embrace any notion of multilateral or global 'governance'. They do recognise several periods in the development of these interstate institutions—the post-bipolar and -apartheid

period would clearly constitute another—of these interstate institutions but over-emphasise the 'internal' role of international bureaucrats rather than 'external' pressures from state or non-state actors or alliances. They propose a useful distinction between 'forum' and 'service' organisations; the Commonwealth tends to be both, though the Commonwealth Foundation increasingly plays the latter role.

The second framework of O'Brien *et al* is more contemporary and juxtaposes civil society and the international financial institutions (IFIs) at the height of the neoliberal era: the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO). This is very timely given the 'battle of Seattle' over the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in late 1999 and subsequent anti-globalisation demonstrations (www.attac.org), although the 'official' Commonwealth has had very different relations with its non-state or 'unofficial' counterparts historically, as indicated below, in part as it lacked the resources or influence of the IFIs. So I am not as certain as Taylor that the Commonwealth advances the neoliberal 'hegemonic' project of its imperial founder, Britain. He discusses the people's Commonwealth less than I do and his focus on the inter-state Commonwealth and South Africa (cf Vale & Black, 1994), mainly in the Thatcher era, may colour his more critical perspective.

The last pair of articles focuses on definitions of global governance. Thérien (1999) and Weiss (2000) both differentiate among several origins and formulations of such governance. The former differentiates UN from World Bank formulations, while the latter looks at the term's evolution since 1945 with the passing of the early era of nationalism and decolonisation. Weiss also contrasts UN notions with others from a range of sources, from the World Bank and OECD to the Commission on Global Governance and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Thérien could go further to identify a possible synthetic 'NGO'/global civil society perspective, while Weiss could look at some conceptualisations from think-tanks, along with possibilities of 'partnerships' among state and non-state actors such as those symbolised by the UN's novel 'Global Compact'. Taylor pays insufficient attention to such 'political' rather than 'economic' forces in the contemporary Commonwealth nexus; he could apply the notion of 'hegemony' equally to the Commonwealth's rules on 'liberal' democracy, as well as to those related to a 'free' economy. In a later section below I indicate that the distinctive formulation advanced by the Commonwealth Secretariat and Foundation may yet contribute to governance policies and practices. And I conclude by suggesting ways in which such a comparative analysis of the Commonwealth may challenge and advance a set of interrelated fields and debates in the new century.

From decolonisation to development

The initial impetus for the Commonwealth was to facilitate inter-Dominion relations and then decolonisation for large and established countries like Australia, Canada (Keating, 2002) and India, as well as for new ones like Bangladesh, Namibia and South Africa. The informality and ambiguity of such an evolution continues to be both its strength and weakness. Like other major postwar global institutions, it is now over 50 years old, yet it still lacks a

charter or constitution, although of late it has advanced a number of consensus declarations about 'values' or 'norms' to which all members should aspire. As David McIntyre (2001: 77) asserts: 'The old Club had become a rules-based international association'. Moreover, it was only in the mid-1960s that the Secretariat (1965) and then the Foundation (1966) were established to administer and advance the work of growing numbers of member states and professional associations (some of which predate the Commonwealth, like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, initially founded in 1911 (www.comparlhq.org.uk). On the Commonwealth Games, founded in the 1930s, see below). In turn, as treated further in the following section, the Foundation has evolved by the new millennium from an agency to encourage these professional associations to one designed to promote interaction throughout the Commonwealth's non-governmental sector (MacIntyre, 2001: 139–147). The third and most recent leg or pillar of the 'official' Commonwealth is the Commonwealth of Learning (www.col.org), founded in Vancouver in 1987, with a remit to advance distance education and open learning at all levels (McIntyre, 2001: 148–154) (cf the rather mixed bag of other links at www.thecommonwealth.org).

As the balance in the memberships in both inter-state organisation and professional associations shifted to the South in the era of nationalism and independence of the 1950s and 1960s, so the focus of Commonwealth deliberations moved towards issues of development. According to McIntyre (2001: 114–115), until the late 1960s—ie, the decolonisation decade in Africa—Commonwealth countries made up but 10%–15% of the UN; in the 1970s this became a quarter; and as the 1980s turned into the 1990s, membership had reached about one-third (50 states out of some 150). But now there are almost 200 in the latter, just over a quarter of these are simultaneously also members of the Commonwealth. Table 1 suggests, albeit in broad, overly stylised terms, the place of the Commonwealth(s) in the four major periods of the postwar world following the creation of international institutions and advancing reconstruction in the 1940s and 1950s.

Yet, unlike either the World Bank or UN systems, the Commonwealth has never been particularly 'ideological', eg advancing neoliberal conditionalities or human development, respectively (Taylor, 2000; Thérien, 1999; Weiss, 2000). As the overwhelming proportion of member states are in the Third or Fourth Worlds, and as the four First World members are hardly hegemonic, the tenor of Commonwealth debates is pragmatic: how to maximise development along with communication, networking, etc. Unlike other international organisations,

TABLE 1
The Commonwealth's place in the world since the 1950s

Period	*Global context*	*Commonwealth focus*	*State of globalisation*
1960s	Early bipolar	Decolonisation/development	Pre-globalisation
1970s/1980s	Late bipolar	Anti-apartheid	Proto-globalisation
1990s/2000s	Post-bipolar	Good governance	High globalisation
2010s	US hegemony/ unilateralism	Human development/security	Post-globalisation

growing out of its anti-apartheid focus, it emphasises non-racism and pluralism; its mantra is human dignity and development. Yet such an undramatic institution continues to attract applications for membership, following Mozambique (and the Cameroon) in 1995, including expressions of interest from some countries with no historic formal or informal connection with Britain: 'In 1997 the Palestinian Authority, Rwanda and Yemen were in the running. Other possible candidates are Bermuda, Somalia, even Israel, Sudan, Myanmar (Burma) and Ireland' (McIntyre, 2001: 76)

In the post-apartheid era, in addition to continuing concerns like education, the Commonwealth activities have emphasised gender, small island states and youth, reflective of its distinctive membership. The gender programme reflects the centrality of women in development in both the unofficial and official Commonwealth, including issues of human rights, domestic violence, and participation in electoral and peace processes. The concentration on small island states reflects their numerical dominance among the 54 members (more than half).

As most of these islands are in the Caribbean and South Pacific, they are most concerned with development (how can small island states negotiate effectively in the WTO?), with global warming and sea-level rise and, even before September 11, with their niche as offshore financial centres in the global political economy given the rise of money laundering for both illegal and criminal purposes. The Commonwealth's pair of reports (1985 and 1997) reflects the evolution in small state dilemmas from military insecurity to economic and ecological vulnerability (McIntyre, 2001: 112–126) and reinforces the work of the 50-strong UN-centric Small Island Developing States (SIS) network (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002: 26–29). As McIntyre (2001: 117) suggests: 'The Commonwealth has, indeed, become the premier small states forum'. And the long-standing Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has four regional centres in the Commonwealth's four major regions—Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific—and works to advance youth employment and empowerment.

However, most commentators on the Commonwealth suggest that there is a 'generation gap' between increasingly elderly as well as male and white *aficionados* and the majority of citizens who are young and multiracial (McIntyre, 2001: 101–111; Shah, 2003); most of the latter at best know of the Commonwealth Games every four years (McIntyre, 2001: 201) although, as I point out below, almost all the Commonwealth is now available online for the new IT generation. Moreover, the new school curriculum on citizenship in the UK includes the Commonwealth along with the EU and UN, a niche which the newly privatised (more correctly transformed into a non-profit!) Commonwealth Institute was meant to exploit (www.commonwealth.org.uk, www.ecommonwealth.net) reinforced by its role in educational promotion around the mid-2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

The Commonwealth(s) as epistemic community: the struggle against apartheid

The Commonwealth achieved its highest level of visibility and influence during the 1960s over Rhodesian settlers' UDI, which often pitted it against its host,

Britain, and in the 1980s when it was in the vanguard of the global movement to end apartheid. The first of these crises in southern Africa was more fraught for the Commonwealth than the second, in part as Britain was central and in part because it occurred at a time when anti-colonial and -racist sentiment was particularly strong (contrast McIntyre, 2001: 31–37 with 38–43). Given its race-based structure, South Africa withdrew from the network in 1961, not to return until the process of transition was underway in 1994. The Commonwealth invested heavily in this, reflective of its symbolic as well as economic dimensions. Given the near-universal support that this campaign achieved, the Commonwealth family of inter- and non-state institutions may have realised the status of something like an 'epistemic community' over this issue, concentrated around an Eminent Persons Group. Peter Haas (1992: 3) has defined such an international ginger group in regard to global campaigns over both ozone depletion and pollution controls in the Mediterranean:

> An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area … a common policy enterprise—that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence.

Because of its role over 'one of the most salient transitions of our times' in South(ern) Africa almost a decade ago, Vale & Black (1994: 1) argued then that: 'the Commonwealth has the potential to achieve a new relevance'. Conversely, they cautioned that 'a lack of effective engagement with South Africa might speed the Commonwealth's demise. For the obverse of its nascent new relevance is to be found in the telltale signs of a slow but determined drift towards obsolescence and neglect'.

Realising such historic cohesion and direction may indeed be more problematic in the future as numbers of members and range of issues increase along with inequalities between as well as within states. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth has been in the vanguard of moves towards democratic government, if not always governance, and it remains the only inter-state organisation to sanction through indefinite suspension members whose regimes are insufficiently democratic.

Haas' approach concentrates on how networks of professionals (or 'experts'?) seek to respond to identified problems. It is less helpful in explaining why some global issues get onto the agenda while others do not. The prior challenge of drawing attention to one rather than other issues is a function of advocacy coalitions, some of which achieve more momentum than anticipated (eg over blood diamonds, debt and landmines) while others languish (eg those dealing with small island states and global warming). Haas (1992) focuses on how networks of professional analysts achieve 'epistemic' status, enabling them to define and resolve a problem. He suggests that, despite diverse disciplinary or other identities, such professionals share beliefs which facilitate agreement over priorities and identification of solutions, leading to policy advice and implementation through a variety of connections.

By contrast, Stone (1996) and others highlight the emerging roles of 'think-

tank' and policy coalitions, compatible with the *dirigiste* role of the CPSU (Bourne, 1998). They are concerned to rank issues before any attempt to resolve them. Such analysis has emerged after that of Haas and reflects the growing role of non-state agencies in highlighting new global issues such as blood diamonds and landmines. Rather than placing confidence in networks of professionals, they tend to emphasise the catalytic role of mixed actor coalitions, leading to strategic 'partnerships' (eg www.copenhagencentre.org). It is such broad coalitions which have begun to advocate new forms of democratic governance in the Commonwealth through the facilitative activities of the Commonwealth Foundation. Such concerns are clearly broader than the specific target of the anti-apartheid movement, although the latter did spawn 'experts' on related issues like debt, destabilisation, sanctions, etc.

Finally, given the centrality of both Britain and the issue of apartheid to the Commonwealth during the era of Margaret Thatcher, it is ironic that the organisation was able to mature between the mid-1960s and late-1980s by confronting both apartheid and the historic place of Britain in an ex-imperial community. As Taylor (2000: 69) concludes his own case study:

> whilst the Commonwealth propagates and legitimises a particular set of norms in line with the ongoing hegemon, there have been times—centred around the question of South Africa—when the organisation has acted to de-legitimise the founder of the very same organisation.

The Commonwealth(s) as advocacy coalition: good governance

With the demise of both the Cold War and apartheid, let alone the continued decline of Britain as ex-colonial 'hegemon', the Commonwealth needed a new *raison d'être*. Ahead of most other international organisations, more in response to the end of institutionalised racism than of state socialism, the Commonwealth at its 1991 Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Harare agreed a set of principles (Duxbury, 1997; McIntyre, 2001: 89–90). In turn, these have enabled the Commonwealth to do what no other such institution has done: suspend members, starting with Nigeria in late 1995 at Auckland (Keating, 2002: 181). As Duxbury (1997: 363) indicates:

> What is clear from the Auckland summit is that fundamental political values have become the focus of the Commonwealth's enforcement strategy.

The Commonwealth was always concerned to ensure *good governance*, even if such smacked of imperial delusions. But NGOs and think-tanks in the Commonwealth have not seen the Harare Declaration of principles as the end of the struggle for good governance. Rather, they have tended to seize the initiative away from the official Commonwealth and advocate strengthening its principles beyond a preoccupation with democratic government: in areas such as civil–military relations, corruption, election monitoring, indigenous communities, etc. Such relentless advocacy has served to complicate relations between official and non-official Commonwealths, as the former are still jealous of their 'sovereignty', especially in an era of apparently unstoppable globalisation.

Yet, as a reflection of NGO advocacy and pressure, in 1995 the Commonwealth

created the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to overview implementation of the Harare and related principles. This has already led to the suspension from effective membership of Nigeria (1995–99) (since readmitted), Fiji (2000), Pakistan (1999) (extended by CMAG in late-2002 despite a formal 'election') and Zimbabwe (2002). McIntyre (2001: 97) indicates that: 'As the twentieth century drew to a close, the CMAG established itself as the Commonwealth's potentially most powerful instrument.' Yet CMAG is under-funded and under-appreciated, often receiving less than sympathetic or empathetic responses to its rulings on patterns of governance in member states, now informed by the parallel Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association's (CMJA) Latimer House Guidelines on parliamentary supremacy and judicial independence (www.cmja.org, www.cpahq.org).

As the private sector has come to balance civil society in Commonwealth fora, it has been able to advance a parallel agenda around state–corporate relations: the Commonwealth Business Council (London, October 1997; Johannesburg, October 1999) (www.cbcnet.org; www.combinet.net). Its advocacy, parallel to that of the UN Global Compact, led to the Fancourt Declaration from the Durban CHOGM on good governance and best corporate practices. Its emphasis was on public–private partnerships, corporate codes of conduct, etc (McIntyre, 2001: 211–220), all responses to the anti-globalisation movement so well captured in Naomi Klein's (2000) *No Logo* (www.nologo.org).

Finally, reflective of its ambiguous place in the Commonwealth nexus, towards the end of the 1990s and emerging out of its project on 'Civil Society in the New Millennium', the Foundation developed an innovative programme on 'Citizens and Governance'. The former, through networking with myriad NGOs throughout the Commonwealth, produced a report for the Durban CHOGM before the end of the twentieth century (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999), then a set of comparative regional overviews for Brisbane (Commonwealth Foundation, 2001a) on the four regions of the South, plus one on the role of the four more developed members, and finally an overview collection (Knight *et al*, 2002). Currently, a Foundation team led by Rajesh Tandon and Miriam Wyman is looking at some 30 NGOs and civil society networks to advance understanding of 'governance' given the shrinking role of the state and growing place of the private sector (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999: 16; 2001: 4, 6–7). And Amanda Shah (2003) is engaged in a CPSU project on communication between official and non-official Commonwealths ahead of CHOGM in Nigeria at the end of 2003 (see next section).

In concluding this part, let me mention a few Commonwealth arrangements that are even more distinctive (idiosyncratic?) than the Foundation and COL: the Commonwealth Games, the Writers' Prize and the Commonwealth Day and Lecture. The first of these also predates the 'modern' Commonwealth, beginning in Hamilton, Ontario in 1930. The Games are managed by the autonomous Commonwealth Games Federation in London (www.thecgf.org, www.commonwealthgames-fed.org) and embrace an expanded set of participants—some 80 nations rather than the 54 member states (mainly a function of teams from UK (and Australian and New Zealand) overseas territories like Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar and the

Norfolk Islands, but also England, Guernsey, Jersey, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, etc). They include a rather different set of sports by contrast to the Olympics. They also increasingly include a non-athletic, youth festival dimension (McIntyre, 2001: 201–210). The mid-2002 Games took place in Manchester (www.commonwealthgames2002.org.uk); those for 2006 will be in Melbourne (www.melbourne2006.co.au). The second arrangement is managed by the Commonwealth Foundation to draw attention to the burgeoning field of increasingly diverse 'post-colonial' literature in English (www.commonwealth writers.com). The last was created in the late 1990s to fall in mid-March and is now marked by a Commonwealth Day lecture at the Commonwealth Institute in London, delivered by an eminent citizen of the Commonwealth (eg, Kofi Annan in 2000, Graça Machel in 2001, Mary Robinson in 2002 and Mohammed Yunus in 2003).

The Commonwealth(s) in the new century: 'smart' network and think-tank for human development/security?

> If the Commonwealth does have a future as a thriving and relevant intergovernmental organisation, it is probably through some combination of the last three 'reinventions' listed here (small states, good governance and globalisation) … there is also at least as strong a case for resisting calls to expand CMAG's remit as for acting on them. To turn the Commonwealth into a vehicle for censoring its own members would almost certainly be counterproductive … Alongside the 'network of networks' that the Commonwealth still embodies and its lingering community-like features it would still be possible for the Commonwealth to play a role that was both highly visible and not duplicated by any other intergovernmental organisation. (Armstrong, 2001: 46–47)

Given its inherent limitations as well as distinctiveness, the Commonwealth has to be 'smart' to define and maintain a niche in a world of competing regional to global arrangements, now including willing coalitions for particular humanitarian or other interventions. Most new issues and creative coalitions have come from below rather than above, especially in the post-cold war era: biodiversity, blood diamonds, diasporas, gender, governance, human rights, indigenous communities, landmines (www.icbl.org), ozone, small arms, etc.

Such emerging global issues were initially brought into the Commonwealth arena by its unique set of professional associations, which now number over 70, following 'a virtual explosion' in their ranks in the post-independence era (McIntyre, 2001: 168). However, with the rise of NGOs in the last two decades of the twentieth century, these rather traditional and staid associations have been somewhat overtaken and overshadowed. The People's Commonwealth and the Foundation can draw strength from such connections, but the Secretariat remains congenitally cautious, tending to be driven by the lowest common denominator. Thus, while the former has advanced its network around non-state governance and has provided the framework for the innovative CHRI of some eight professional associations and has nurtured the CPSU, the latter has not been actively engaged in several current issues such as landmines or small arms. Such 'silences' are telling. Similarly, the 'Mbeki' High Level Review to outline

the medium-term future at the turn of the century was hardly creative: it did not indicate where the Commonwealth might again become more than an advocacy coalition; ie, over what issues it could again become an epistemic community.

Certainly, the 2001 report of the CHRI (2001: 24) was not sanguine about receiving much attention or support given its assertion that pervasive poverty in the Commonwealth has now become a human rights issue. It calls for the 'new' Commonwealth to become a champion of human rights as the means to eliminate poverty through a more effective CMAG and Human Rights Unit along with a new post of Commonwealth High Commissioner for Human Rights. Likewise, the Secretariat's apparent discomfort with myriad issues around indigenous communities is not reassuring in terms of its adaptability and flexibility. As Alison Duxbury (1997: 386) cautioned well before the end of the twentieth century:

> While the Commonwealth has used rights to reaffirm its role as an international organisation, further reform is needed if it is to fulfil all the functions traditionally performed by such institutions.

Thus, while civil society in the Commonwealth is officially recognised, encouraged and nurtured, in fact there is considerable ambivalence in the Secretariat, reflective of some member regimes' ambivalence. Hence the limited formal contact between the official and unofficial around the CHOGM (Shah, 2003): the NGO Forum is hardly reflective of the diversity and energy of communities or agencies; hence the innovation of a Commonwealth People's Centre/Festival, essentially a marketplace for non-official activity. Such arrangements are imperative if any distinctive notion of 'Commonwealth governance', as opposed to less organic or authentic World Bank or UNDP versions (Thérien, 1999; Weiss, 2000), is to be designed and developed. However, the CHRI (2001: 24) cautions that 'open governance' in the Secretariat and related official organs is elusive and that formal consultation with civil society is insufficient. It calls for the Secretary-General to 'signal his clear and unequivocal support for the unofficial Commonwealth and the importance of these networks for the longevity of the Commonwealth itself'.

There is another important, yet largely unrecognised aspect to the Commonwealth's networking, especially for those members who are immigrant societies and/or multiracial or multicultural: it facilitates relations among myriad diasporas, having originally advanced white emigration from the UK. As much of the world becomes more cosmopolitan—not just traditional immigrant countries like Australia and Canada but also Britain and South Africa—so Commonwealth connections constitute a framework for communication and understanding: the Harare principles applied domestically as well as externally?

What future(s) for the Commonwealth(s)?

> four disciplines … constitute the continuing core of Commonwealth Studies … and indeed already contribute substantially to the new international relations … if pursued *in combination* and *in appropriate dialogue* [they] stand the best chance of giving Commonwealth Studies a new and interesting lease of life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. (Payne, 2002: 661)

If the study and practice of international development and international relations did not change much with the end of bipolarity in the 1990s, they are under irresistible pressure to rethink at the start of the new millennium, reinforced by the 11 September syndrome, which highlights new actors, coalitions, relations, threats, values, and so forth. Yet both academe and bureaucracy have remained reluctant to transcend established assumptions and analyses. However, with the proliferation of new states, especially poor and weak regimes, the parallel proliferation of mafias and militias proceeds apace: global politics and economics can hardly remain unmoved.

While an unlikely candidate for redirection and rediscovery, the Commonwealths may, as Schreuder (2002) suggests, be an organisation or network whose time has come. Happily, it is multilateralist in genesis and culture rather than unilateralist. And as Payne (2002: 660) suggests, studies of Commonwealths can build on contemporary history, international relations, comparative politics and political economy:

> the Commonwealth looks more at home, or at least less out of place, in this neo-medieval vision of the present and likely future nature of international relations than it did in the realist paradigm.

Thus studies of the contemporary Commonwealths can inform a range of disciplines and debates, with relevance for policy as well as theory. As already suggested, they can expand the range of comparative analyses of global governance beyond the IFIs, UN and WTO. Furthermore, they have relevance for the related fields of human development, human rights and human security, given the Commonwealths' membership's concerns with development and governance. And finally, such analyses should inform current discourses in parallel disciplines like international relations, political economy and political science through their emphasis on non-state actors, both for- and not for-profit. The Commonwealths can, then, be treated as a microcosm of the global system, especially if their 'extended family' of non-state agencies is included in any such purview. As DFID (2000: ch 8, para 350) recognises:

> The Commonwealth is a unique grouping, embracing developed, developing and least developed countries across all regions of the globe, and including many of the world's smallest countries. It is a valuable forum for addressing issues such as tax, competition, money laundering, and corruption, as well as broader political issues such as good government. We will work to sharpen the focus in the Commonwealth's activities on its areas of comparative advantage.

Alternative 'optimistic' versus 'pessimistic' scenarios can be envisaged for the Commonwealth family over the next decade or so (McIntyre, 2001: 221–229). The former would entail a welcome for the diverse range of non-state institutions and relations, such as the Commonwealth Games, Writers' Prize and Young Commonwealth. By contrast, the latter would see a retreat away from the engagement with civil society tentatively pursued in the past decade, back towards a more limited, state-centric focus, even if 'governance' remained on the agenda, albeit in diluted form, more compatible with prevailing IFI rather than UNDP formulations. The optimistic preview would tend to attract more NGO attention,

whereas the more conservative scenario might attract more state applicants, even members.

Hence, the Commonwealth is at something of a crossroads at the start of the new millennium, intensified by the understandable yet regrettable postponement, post-September 11, of the official CHOGM from October 2001 to March 2002 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002). To be sure the People's Commonwealth proceeded with vigour in Brisbane, but missed the other, official side to which to relate. Happily, Amanda Shah (2003) and others are seeking to identify ways to transcend such solitudes ahead of the late 2003 Abuja CHOGM. Hopefully, in taking the events on and after 11 September 2001 into account the Mbeki report can be further revised and transcended to reflect the profound challenge of global governance after two decades of neoliberalism and related inequalities and alienation: the intensity of some forms of anti-globalisation. Hence the importance of the current Manmohan Singh Expert Group on Democracy and Development, with its diverse participation from the academy, corporate world, NGOs, think-tanks, etc, itself a reflection of the diversity of the Commonwealths and their related networks.

We should also note 'silences': the Commonwealth does not relate to issues of (national, regional or global) security, except in a very broad sense of enhancing the context for human security, nor to regionalism, although there are some regional dimensions to the Foundation's youth and professional activities. The Commonwealth has not been an active player in peacekeeping interventions, although its election monitoring augments longer-term confidence building and occasional appointments of special representatives of the Secretary-General can nudge mediation in some of the smaller member states. Neither has it related to regional economic blocs like the APEC, ASEAN, EU or NAFTA, although these affect its members' development prospects profoundly. Unlike some other regional or sub-global groupings in the IFI and UN systems, the Commonwealth has not often used such fora to advance its network or concepts.

New technologies have affected it and other international organisations, state and non-state. The Internet has transformed the Commonwealth along with other such inter- or transnational agencies (McIntyre, 2001: 231–234). It would be impossible to contemplate an anti-globalisation movement without the world-wide web (www.attac.org; www.nologo.org). Fortuitously for its contemporary salience, the Commonwealth uses and advances the 'global' language, English. Its members therefore have a distinct advantage in terms of attracting high-tech investment and activity, from the manufacture of computer chips to call centres (Lundun & Jones, 2001). In other words, the Commonwealth is no longer only cricket, it is also the internet, even if the 'digital divide' reinforces the North–South fissure right though the Commonwealth! Association with the contemporary anglophone world, without the presence of the USA, may be one reason for the queue of aspiring members. It certainly helps to explain the expanding role for the ACU as a 'knowledge network' of great relevance to the global political economy and culture, from Bangalore to Singapore, Britain to Mauritius.

The Commonwealth itself now exists 'virtually' as well as in reality as indicated in the helpful list of websites in an appendix in McIntyre (2001: 231–

234). This 'virtual' Commonwealth may appeal more to the new generation throughout its 54 members than to the old-fashioned CHOGMs of middle-aged men. Happily, most major Commonwealth websites are hyperlinked to each, other so one can 'surf' both official and unofficial Commonwealth any day, anytime, anywhere (see Commonwealth Secretariat flyer 'Click into the Commonwealth', London, August 2001, at www.thecommonwealth.org)!

Unhappily, however, as already indicated, the Secretariat still exhibits ambivalence about being too positive towards the unofficial or people's Commonwealth (Shah, 2003), not wishing to yield the initiative to it, notwithstanding its invaluable role in discovering and advancing new global issues around the turn of the century. Moreover, other global institutions have begun to emulate the Commonwealth and develop their own working relations with civil society, notably the World Bank, which has the resources to co-opt at least programmatic if not advocacy NGOs, and the UN. Both of these have gone further than the Commonwealth (cf Commonwealth Business Council (www.cbcnet.org)) in developing close working relations with the private sector, again the former in terms of subcontracting, the latter in terms of image and finance (the UN Global Compact).

The Commonwealth has the potential to bring states, civil societies and corporations together in productive ways given its unique set of professional associations, Commonwealth Games, etc (yet note the absence of reference to either non- or inter-state Commonwealths in Anheier, 2001 and Glasius, 2002!). If it can facilitate communication, confidence building and innovation, then it will have earned its status as a smart international agency at the start of the new millennium. For this to happen, it would have to consult with a range of stakeholders and design new consultative mechanisms so that both non-state as well as state members came to feel a higher level of comfort and ownership than at present. Alas, the Mbeki report is not creative in this regard despite both the World Bank and UN (www.unglobalcompact.org) becoming much more competitive in this area of governance.

If the Commonwealths are able to build on their unique advantage and heritage in this regard then, rather than engaging in debates about good and global governance (Thérien, 1999; Weiss, 2000), we might come to focus on 'Commonwealth governance' (Shaw, 2003)—a 'Commonwealth Compact'? The very existence of an anti-CHOGM movement is suggestive of the credibility problem confronting the grouping, notwithstanding its unique legacy of NGO links: why was www.stopchogm.org set up before the proposed Brisbane summit in October 2001? Would anti-globalisation demonstrations in Brisbane have been different without September 11 from those in Goteborg and Genoa, recognising that the Commonwealth is distinct from, say, the EU and G-7, respectively?

Finally, both official and unofficial Commonwealths can contribute to and be reflective of contemporary analyses of and policies for human development and security. Their innovative recognition of and responses to a range of 'new' issues —from corruption and money laundering to civil society and governance— are informed by novel contemporary perspectives in the interrelated fields of development and security studies, international relations, international organisation and political science and political economy. These are the primary fields

which Payne (2002) suggests help to revive and redefine contemporary Commonwealth studies. In short, nuanced perspectives on the new multilateralism in the new millennium can and should be informed by Commonwealth practice and analysis.

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