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To cite this article: Lewis Charles Smith (21 Mar 2024): 'Like aid given by a mother to her young': The British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and the marketing of economic development 1948–1965, Business History, DOI: [10.1080/00076791.2024.2319341](https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2024.2319341)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2024.2319341>



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Published online: 21 Mar 2024.



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# 'Like aid given by a mother to her young': The British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and the marketing of economic development 1948–1965

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## ABSTRACT

This paper locates Britain's nationalised airline, the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), in the political discourse of colonial development. Between 1939 and 1974 BOAC connected Britain to destinations across the globe for business and leisure. However, the vast majority of people in Britain could scarcely afford the luxury of flight: BOAC had the task of convincing its shareholders, of whom were paying for a product they did not use, that it served an important national purpose. This paper explores BOAC not as an airline, but as a marketer: at the heart of BOAC's communications was a vision of Britain and its place in the world. It sought to promote its services by using the language of economic development to encourage and justify increased business abroad. In so doing, it shows how BOAC used marketing to justify its operations using political, rather than economic, messages.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 March 2023

Accepted 11 February 2024

## KEYWORDS

Colonial development;  
aviation; public sector;  
transport; welfare

## Introduction

In October 1948 the company magazine of Britain's biggest nationalised airline, the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), published an article which described the then Chairman Harold Hartley on a visit to Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> On his visit, he delivered a paper titled the 'Limiting Factors in World Development: Or What is Possible' to the Associated Scientific and Technical Societies of South Africa, where he questioned 'how can the Engineer and Scientist, working together, as they did in the combined operations of the war, contribute to the future well-being and contentment of the world?' (Hartley, 1948). The *BOAC Review* went on to describe his speech to staff:

The theme of this paper was that world prosperity now depends on the intensive and balanced economic development of every part of the world, and especially the more backward or still thinly populated regions. Africa, in Sir Harold's view, is a continent offering tremendous possibilities of development, possibilities which depend on air transport for their full realisation. ('The Chairman in South Africa', 1948, p. 11)

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Hartley was one of a number of BOAC Chairmen who recognised that BOAC held a unique position in the development of economies across the world. Aside from operating Britain's vast network of aviation services, BOAC helped to promote Britain's continued involvement in Imperial, and later Commonwealth, activities across the globe. This paper observes how BOAC worked within the wider policies of colonial development, not only promoting but engaging in paternalistic practices across the ex-empire. BOAC was not simply a proficient promoter of colonial development activities, but a willing participant engaged in the development of colonial air transport systems.

This paper uses documents available at the British Airways Heritage Centre in the United Kingdom including advertising pamphlets, board meeting minutes and copies of the BOAC in-house staff magazine, the *BOAC Review*, to explore how themes of colonial development surfaced within the organisation as well as how they were communicated outwardly to the general public. In so doing, this paper brings together a number of different literatures relating to civil aviation, decolonisation, business and governance to showcase how business history and business records can inform the wider historical discussion.<sup>2</sup> BOAC was a global organisation with links across the world, and therefore the *BOAC Review* was in most cases the only source of news and events – and corporate attitudes – for the organisation's staff (Heller & Rowlinson, 2020, p. 1010). It therefore offers unique purchase on the common mission BOAC sought to instil throughout its diffuse global family. In reference to Britain's Empire and colonies, it sought to encourage readers to see themselves not just as BOAC staff, but as being engaged in the frontline work of colonial welfare and development.

BOAC offers a unique example of business in post-war Britain. BOAC's close relationship with both the state and the *nation* meant that its image was not just reputable, but it could define a reality; its marketing helped BOAC staff and British citizens locate their nation's place in the post-war international order (Smith, 2022, p. 2). As A. Mills (2006, p. 121) demonstrated, the organisation's Chairmen were 'tempered by different experiences' which included service in the First and Second World Wars, in Government departments and other national governments which 'gave the airline a hybrid feel of part military, part business, part government agency'. Such a structure meant that, as Paddy O'Shea (2015, p. 14) outlined, at the heart of BOAC's brand and design strategy was that it was 'essentially selling a British identity', one which 'position[ed] itself as an arbiter of modern taste, informing on British fashion, the strength of British industry, new and future modes of transport and the role that air transport would play in a global business world' (O'Shea, 2015, p. 100). As this paper will argue, one essential part of this was colonial development, which represented a very specific British *political* identity prominent after the Second World War.

One way this paper seeks to challenge prevalent literature is by re-evaluating the national airline as a nation builder: scholars have used national airlines as a device for 'critiquing the unravelling post-colonial state' in the post-war period (Nsubuga, 2020, p. 11), recognising airlines as institutions that symbolised new or newly developed nationalism like the flag or a national anthem (Raguraman, 1997, p. 240). New states, determined to showcase their new sense of independence, could use airlines to demonstrate their newly developed statehood at airports around the world (Cumming, 1962, p. 35). Consequently, these literatures have often suggested that aviation in the post-war period was used as a way of *constructing* nationalism and, by logical inference, a means of rejecting external influence. What has been rarely examined is how civil aviation has been used to maintain the influence of an existing global power. In the context of BOAC's post-war operations, Britain's nationalised airline was

used to *defend, reconstruct* and *reinforce* Britain's existing conception of nationalism by reframing it in line with the renewed politics of humanitarianism.

As Empire policy shifted in the post-war period, so too did notions of imperial responsibility. This change ultimately meant understanding colonies as partners rather than subjects, where partnership meant 'adequately – and thoroughly – preparing [colonies] to adapt to modernity' (Hewitt & Mark Duffield, 2013, p. 33). As the principles of the new 'humanitarian tradition' evolved from the limits of what was acceptable in the post-war Colonial Empire (Baughan, 2020, p. 59), the notions of partnership and cooperation reflected BOAC's shift away from the imperial to the national, but within the limit of what was deemed acceptable in the new world order. BOAC must therefore be seen as part of this shift in attitudes away from direct imperialism to the politics of moral responsibility.

The post-war British Empire was vast and complex, as were BOAC's operations within it. BOAC maintained relationships with almost every country, whether commonwealth, dominion or independent across the world. However, much as the policies of colonial development were focused on Africa (Kelemen, 2007), so too was BOAC's rhetoric of colonial development. Africa had long been an important focal point for aviation infrastructures as European powers used aeroplanes and airlines to acquire 'prestige and influence, routes and ports of call, and traffic in mail, cargo and people', which McCormack (1976, p. 89) described as the second 'scramble for Africa'. As a result, this paper showcases that BOAC's attention was largely on Africa. A number of scholars have identified that the rhetoric of economic development in Africa was present in the advertising for a number of organisations in this period including Barclays and Shell (Decker, 2007; Ramamurthy, 2003). These organisations were doing business in Africa: what makes BOAC different is its role as an *infrastructure* of business, acting as the middleman between the home economy and those abroad. With this in mind, this paper examines how BOAC performed two important functions in relation to colonial development: firstly, it promoted the economic value of colonial economies in its marketing by referencing people, natural resources and infrastructures as opportunities for British businesses, ultimately to encourage their expansion overseas. Secondly, it developed its network of associate and subsidiary airlines, many of which were those of current and ex-colonies, through which it transferred technical resources, operational practices and staff. These actions ultimately enabled BOAC to promote itself on political rather than economic grounds.

### ***BOAC, empire and economy***

In 1939 the British Overseas Airways Act merged and nationalised two private airlines, Imperial Airways and British Airways Limited, to form BOAC (Ord-Hume, 2010, p. 10). Throughout the Second World War BOAC operated a basic skeleton service and delivered post to the furthest reaches of Britain's bases across Europe and the rest of the world (Air World Books, 2018, p. 6). The 1946 Civil Aviation Act split BOAC into three organisations which included BOAC, British European Airways (BEA) and British South American Airways (BSAA), each of which would look after a specific set of, sometimes overlapping, international routes. BOAC operated within the largest domain which included North America, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Australia; BEA served routes to Europe; and BSAA served routes to South America and were absorbed by BOAC in 1949 under the Air Corporations Act (1949). Private airlines could operate airlines in theory, as did Hunting-Clan Air Transport, Skyways and Air Kruiise to highlight a small selection (Merton Jones, 1976), but these were often locked into

operating very narrowly defined routes and forbidden to compete with the nationalised airlines. The reality of private aviation was that no airline had the resources, contacts or government support to operate on the scale as those operated by the state. Backed by the government, Britain's nationalised airlines became the sole operators of commercial aviation in Britain.

What made BOAC different to BEA and BSAA was its relationship to the British Empire. BOAC was built heavily on its predecessor, Imperial Airways, which operated from 1924 as what was, in essence, a communication network for the British Empire (Lyth, 2000, p. 886). The official British Air Transport Statement of Government Policy (1945, p. 4) outlined that Imperial Airways had been 'responsible for the development and operation of these routes in the past' and were in 'close relations with the corresponding operators of other Commonwealth countries'. This made BOAC 'clearly the appropriate instrument' to take over and further develop the routes of Imperial Airways. As a result BOAC, like Imperial Airways, embraced imperialism as a social and organisational discourse which penetrated all facets of the organisation, including internal communications and recruitment practices, for a number of years (A. J. Mills, 1995, pp. 259–261). Complicating the matter was the fact that the ex-Empire routes were often the least profitable, but BOAC were nonetheless required legally to operate routes to ensure they remained connected (Lyth, 2002, p. 79). This differed from BOAC's other routes like those to North America which were natural profit makers.

The need to maintain good Imperial connections in the post-war period echoed official Government policy. Following the Second World War, British Government officials and the Civil Service had recognised a need to keep the Empire at the centre of Britain's post-war economic recovery. The Labour Party in particular had considered 'cooperation in defence, diplomacy and economic policy pivotal to sustained British great power status' (Thomas et al. 2015, p. 49). Whilst they recognised a need to maintain and develop these connections, this vision of post-war Empire faced a number of challenges; Britain's economic, military and political resources had been stressed as a result of involvement in the Second World War highlighted the need to 'convince the world that traditional prestige and skills could compensate for economic and military decline' (Adamthwaite, 1985, pp. 231–232). Furthermore, wartime mobilisation had 'forced colonial governments into actions they knew to be unpopular' (Darwin, 1988, p. 48) and a number of tensions between Britain and its colonies were surfacing as violent nationalist movements in centres across the world such as the Malayan Emergency in British Malaya in 1948, the Mau Mau Revolution in Kenya in 1952 and the Suez Crisis in 1956. This reflected the essence of the problem facing post-war planners as they sought to maintain an unpopular regime without any of the resources to police it if it went wrong. Extending the principles of the welfare agenda to include the entirety of the Empire was therefore a 'defence strategy', which ultimately 'revived imperial aspirations in the British and French colonies, however unsuccessful' (Decker, 2007, p. 61).

Hence, Governments sought ways to reframe the Empire to better reflect these changed circumstances. At the core of the problem was that the term 'Empire' suggested militarism, despotism, and domination, and was inappropriate for the self-governing Dominions' (Webster, 2005, pp. 62–63). In 1949, the institution was officially renamed 'The Commonwealth of Nations', which marked an intention to 'associate the Commonwealth with modernity, democracy, and freedom as a "peoples Empire"' (Webster, 2005, pp. 62–63). The heart of the people's Empire was economic cooperation, but this economic cooperation was very much designed with Britain's interests at the centre. The construction of an economic community

of trade was, as Patrick Gordon Walker – Attlee's Secretary of state for Commonwealth relations – described as part of a 'close contexture of commercial and financial links, held together by long-standing, friendly agreements between merchants, tradesmen, bankers, organised in the same way, maintaining the same standards of conduct thoroughly understanding one another' (Walker, 1965, pp. 268–269). The shift in the language of Empire did not mean planners stopped thinking about matters in imperial terms, but rather that 'the relationship between Britain and the Empire had changed, placing the interests and prerogatives of the former at the heart of decision making' (A. Baker, 2009, p. 706). The Commonwealth 'was very much a British creation for the promotion of British interests, and the participation of the monarchy in the experiment, as symbolic and non-functional head of the association, strengthened its appeal', one in which 'Britain gained in stature' (Srinivasan, 2006, p. 260). Nonetheless, it meant that the British Government could argue that it had 'selflessly rejected national economic benefits available in Europe in favour of a higher moral loyalty to the Commonwealth' (Russell, 2001, p. 10), believing that the future of Britain's power, security and economy rested on maintaining and utilising these connections.

This shift in image and language, underpinned by a maintenance of the status quo, was also represented in the shift from Imperial Airways to BOAC. As Bhimull (2017, p. 125) reflected, the change to 'British Overseas' in 1939 under the British Overseas Airways Act reflected a political economy interested in the expansion of its own *nation* which 'drew boundaries' and 'blurred the lines of demarcation between a foreign territory and an imperial domain'. This change of name was the 'trace of an earlier vision: Britain as an Empire without colonies' (Bhimull, 2017, p. 126), a perspective that emphasised how Britain had colonies only by consent and agreement – only through the promotion, support and agreement of the people that wanted to be a part of it. It did not need to force loyalty as nations would be loyal because of a mutual interest, not political or military power. In changing its name, it sought to better reflect the renewed political outlook, one which put the priorities of the *nation* and its own interests ahead of those of the Empire and Commonwealth. Where 'Imperial Airways' drew a loyalty to the Imperial regime, 'British Overseas' drew loyalty to *Britain* and its involvements *overseas*.

This was as much a practical consideration as it was a moral one, and partially a result of the way BOAC was set up in the post-war economy. As a nationalised industry, operating expensive flights that most of the owners – the British public – could not afford was an insufficient justification of its cost. BOAC recognised the limited size and scope of its flying audience: BOAC's Public Relations department had identified in 1948 that given the enormous expense of flights, 'one of the primary Public Relations duties of a national Corporation such as BOAC is to gain and maintain the goodwill of those tax paying shareholders, the majority of whom got no material benefit from air transport' (British Airways Heritage Collection, 1948, p. 1 Appendix B, Public Relations Budget 1948/49). BOAC advertising therefore had to promote a message that was deeper than transport. Consequently it designed its communications to generate 'goodwill' for nationalised aviation services, with the aim of justifying the expense of an international airline in political and social terms – rather than economic – to non-flyers.

At which point, BOAC represents somewhat of a hidden history of the nationalisation project as it is usually isolated from other landmark nationalisations such as coal, gas or railways. Often its importance is seen as a part of the wider history of the aircraft industry, which represented 57 per cent of the procurement budget in 1949/50 (Edgerton, 2005,

p. 101; Snyder, 1965, p. 89). Of this, £8 million of the £120 million was dedicated to civilian outputs, including aircraft (Edgerton, 2005, p. 102). The arms industry, of which the aircraft manufacturing industry was a part, was operated in the private sector; The Labour Party considered nationalising the arms industry after the Second World War, but ultimately decided against it for administrative reasons (Edgerton, 2013, p. 139). In fact, as Edgerton (2013, p. 139) highlights, Labour went on to privatise elements of the aircraft industry. Ultimately, in the post-war economy Britain's aircraft industry represented an extremely important economic asset, and one in which many policymakers thought was capable of competing with the United States (Lyth, 2020, p. 18).

BOAC was therefore poised to maximise the utility of this industry. Its role was to support the industry in its objectives, primarily through the purchase of British aircraft where it would operate them abroad which would in turn 'advertise' them to secure foreign currencies.<sup>3</sup> In the case of the Vickers VC-10, BOAC's early purchase agreement guaranteed its manufacture in the first place (Cole, 2017). The realities of this arrangement were complex, often contentious, and only moderately successful in the long term,<sup>4</sup> but they nonetheless reveal that one of BOAC's important roles was to support in the advancement of a number of extremely important arms of the post-war British economy.

Another economic function BOAC could perform was through connecting valuable members of the Sterling Area together. The Sterling Area represented a number of nations, the majority of which were Commonwealth or dominion territories, that used Sterling or pegged their own currencies to Sterling (Schenk, 2020, p. 775). This was set up to streamline Britain's payment of its war debts to colonies, particularly those in South Asia (Schenk, 2020, p. 776). However, the Sterling Area also served as a useful way of protecting colonies from the dollar and as a means to lock in advantageous trading relations – policies deriving from pre-war initiatives like imperial preference, across the Commonwealth. Consequently, trade within the Sterling Area was seen to create an important economic bloc with which to base Britain's 'dollar-earning and dollar-saving empire production' with the ultimate aim of tackling the balance of payments crisis (White, 2000, p. 550). The Sterling Area ultimately helped keep some of the more valuable regimes, like Malaya, the Gold Coast, and Kenya – useful dollar earning colonies with important resources – economically tied to Britain (White, 2000, p. 545). Coupled with subsidies for emigration, imperial preference and the Sterling Area ultimately remained Britain's strategy for expanding its imperial capabilities until the early 1960s (Hopkins, 2017, p. 735).

BOAC was therefore the public face of the private industry. It was a nationalised operator of the *products* of one of the most important economic assets Britain had – and often pressured into making purchases 'in the national interest' by the sitting government and often against BOAC's business interests. Nonetheless, BOAC still had to manage a reputation through Public Relations and Marketing to justify such decisions to the public. Military technology and expense often justified itself in the post-Second World War world without a need to compete, but BOAC as a service operator had to work hard to showcase its necessity. Consequently, BOAC needs to be analysed not as an airline, but as a *public utility*, a device which supplies 'what are on the whole basic services, on which the life of the country depends' and one in which 'the demand for them is constant and continuous (though by no means regular in volume), and why regularity and reliability in supply are essential' (Sleeman, 1953, p. 9). Keeping BOAC in public hands was considered essential for the running of the internal economy, one comparable to coal, gas or electricity, as it was seen as an essential



way to connect Britain's economy to economies across the globe. This would help acquire foreign currencies through the advertising of fares and aircraft, and thus contribute to eliminating Britain's balance of payment issues. This distinction matters because rather than seeing BOAC's contribution to Britain's economy as purely an aviation provider, it is about seeing it as a device for *facilitating* British business internationally for the overall good of the home economy.

For a number of years, BOAC pushed the Government to see that the development of the airways was 'indispensable to the political and commercial well-being of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth' and that when the Government was deciding on how much to fund BOAC operations 'account must be taken of its primary responsibility for providing Commonwealth and Imperial communications under circumstances in which the commercial character of the service must often be subordinate to the national interest' ('Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the British Overseas Airways Corporation for the Year Ended 31st March 1947', 1947, p. 24). This was matched by the view from politicians that by connecting distant nations with civil aviation, political relations would subsequently improve. This was a forward thinking insight at the time as contemporary scholars have identified that 'well-run national carriers can lift global perceptions of their home country' and that they can play an important role in 'connecting people, cultures, companies, ideas, innovation, and opportunity' (McClory, 2014, p. 30). Aviation has been recognised as an important source of 'soft power', a means by which national governments can exercise power by encouraging others to admire their values and would hence seek to 'emulate its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness' (Nye, 2004, p. 5). Despite an acknowledgement of the power that airlines had in contributing to national 'soft power', the concept has rarely been historicised, nor historicised with attention to the history of aviation and airlines.

The vision of soft power clearly played an important role in the heads of planners and policy makers; Alan Lennox-Boyd, who would later become Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation and Minister of State for the Colonies in Churchill's Governments of the 1950s, described in 1946 that he had 'looked to seeing a vast expansion of British air services in the United Kingdom and the Empire, and to Europe and overseas, carried by British crews and flying in British planes, and still further uniting the Empire' which would;

[enable] people from the mother country who are living in the Empire to keep in touch with their homeland, and giving to people in this country, in ever widening numbers, chances of imperial and foreign travel which most of them have never enjoyed, and drawing for these services on all the youth, enterprise and zeal which this country can command (Commons Sitting of Monday, 6th May, 1946, 1946).

There was also a recognition that civil aviation was a tool to spread a notion of 'British democratic values' across the world. Labour MP and veteran pilot of the Second World War, Wing Commander Geoffrey Cooper argued that civil aviation would 'aid[...] the development of our Colonies, and will link with a closer tie the bonds of union which already exist within the British Commonwealth' going on to describe that aviation was the 'paramount instrument for spreading and crystallising peace throughout the world. It can be the means of spreading the principles and spirit of democracy for which this country stands' (*Commons Sitting of Thursday, 16th August, 1945*, 1945). Civilian aviation, in a way different to military aviation, was considered an important domestic and international resource for the economy well beyond its transport capacity.



### **Early promotion of advancing economies**

BOAC was a big domestic and international advertiser. It advertised to a variety of audiences through a number of media including but not limited to billboards, leaflets and newspaper advertisements and later in the 1960s, television. The majority of BOAC advertising in the period up to 1948 was communication materials which publicised timetables and destinations with little effort to actively sell destinations, likely a result of government restrictions and austerity measures from 1945 (Haughton, 2017, p. 409). What made advertising materials different after 1948 was that advertisements shifted away from information and made an active effort to *sell* the BOAC product. An article in the 1949 edition of the *BOAC Review* examined the role of the advertising department, describing how '6,858 BOAC advertisements will appear in 250 newspapers and magazines. 'BOAC takes good care of you' will appear in twelve languages and in forty-three countries. About twenty-two million readers are reached in this country alone through national and provincial dailies and magazine advertising' ('Spotlight on Advertising', 1949).

BOAC's early promotion of economic development was parallel with Britain's renewal of interest in Empire and welfare. These policies were formalised under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts enacted in 1929, 1940 and 1945 which allocated finances for Colonial economies to 'help themselves towards a higher standard of living' by allowing for funds 'to be funnelled towards education and welfare' (Godwin, 1957, p. 21). The 1945 Colonial Development and Welfare Act was spearheaded by the Labour Government, and represented the Party applying its Fabian and socialist ideologies to empire policy (Riley, 2017, p. 51). In 1951 after the Labour Party left government it 'advocated funding for Africa on a more ambitious scale, on the model of the Marshall Aid' (Kelemen, 2007, p. 93). The Acts also had a particular emphasis on transportation infrastructure, making £1,635,257 available for Civil Aviation between 1949 and 1950, second only to the development of roads ('Colonial Development and Welfare Acts. Return of Schemes Made under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with the Concurrence of the Treasury, in the Period from 1st April, 1949, to 31st March, 1950', 1950).

However, 'Development' was also a term frequently used in the imperialist lexicon to justify further imperial expansion. The post-war period in Britain represented what Barnett (2011, p. 105) called the 'age of neo-humanitarianism' which represented a system of aid and humanitarian intervention that was more centralised and bureaucratised than it had been before. Such a system of aid was still underwritten by the same attitudes as before the Second World War, but instead cited 'humanity than God to explain why they cared'. Neo-humanitarianism 'infantilised' its beneficiaries by qualifying itself through the use of 'expert knowledge' and 'quasi-technocratic language' to promote continued colonial intervention. The aforementioned investments in infrastructure were completed with the view to secure export industries in the colonies at the expense of more pressing issues in their domestic economies like medical and food infrastructure (Havinden & Meredith, 2002, p. 315).

One of the centres of Britain's colonial development policy was the Colonial, later renamed in to 1964 Commonwealth, Development Corporation (CDC). The CDC was set up 'to operate big ad hoc development schemes in the Colonies on a 'break-even' basis' (McWilliam, 2001, p. 5), and whilst these projects would incur significant expense, government officials argued that the 'increase in colonial production would be helpful to the UK's balance of payments' (McWilliam, 2001, p. 8). Between 1948 and 1964, the CDC had focused on a number of large

scale infrastructural and industrial projects across the world, including 15 in the West Indies, 12 in West Africa, 12 in East Africa, 6 in Central Africa, and 4 in the Far East (McWilliam, 2001, p. 15), again highlighting the importance of Africa as a focal point of Britain's interests in colonial development.

BOAC's links to the CDC were important; soldering the interests of BOAC and colonial development together was Miles Thomas, known foremost for his role as BOAC Chairman from 1949. Before his appointment as Chairman, Thomas served as Deputy Chairman of BOAC and board member for CDC. In 1948, he stated in an interview with the *Daily Mirror* that he would 'Run Two Jobs' emphasising that 'the two tie up from the Empire angle' ('Sir Miles Gets Air Post: Will Run Two Jobs', 1948). BOAC had cooperated with the CDC in a number of different operations, including on Operation Ploughshare to move important material and equipment for a number of development projects in Nyasaland (C. Baker, 1999, p. 32), as well as flying out machinery and agricultural equipment for CDC operations (C. Baker, 1988, p. 165). His attitude to both aviation and Empire was outlined in an interview for the *Financial Times* where he described that 'the economic position in Britain[...] stood between the stubborn ideologies of the East and the dynamic industrialisation of the West' ('United State of Africa', 1948). Thomas, like his predecessor Hartley, highlighted the importance of natural resources in his interview, describing the importance of iron ore, coal and copper; asbestos, chrome and mica, which he saw as 'badly needed not only for economic progress but for the type of mechanisation that is the determining factor in modern conflict', highlighting the 'potential of hydro-electric power' and 'coal from oil' ('United State of Africa', 1948). This emphasis on natural resources reflected a broader history of the British Empire establishing extractive industries in sites across the world where natural resources were rich. These resources continued to be of interest to Britain in the post-war period, with their acquisition often framed in terms of social welfare but without change in the extractive operations as before (Curtin, 1995; Ricart-Huguet, 2022, p. 738).

For much of the post-war period however, the focus of colonial development projects was on Africa. Thomas saw a particular opportunity in Africa for BOAC, where he went on to describe how Britain could best make use of the continent using aviation:

The whole of that vast African territory – so much of it fortunately at high altitude enabling white men to live in reasonable comfort even in the tropical – is simply asking to be turned into both treasury and armoury, a source of dollar reserve in peace-time, a steadfast fortress in time of war[...] My vision is of a United State of Africa, criss-crossed with railway lines; with road developments in keeping with modern needs; and with British air-lines feeding down both her Eastern and Western corridors, interlinked by local cross-over services[...] The economic potentialities of such a vision give scope for us Britishers still to do what the early Americans did in their pioneering old days – go out into the still sparsely inhabited areas and develop the agriculture and the industries. ('United State of Africa', 1948)

Conceptualising Africa as a utility for Britain's economic and military interests was not a new idea: Cecil Rhodes had originally envisaged the construction of a railway from 'Cape-to-Cairo', a North-South railway spanning the whole of the African continent (Williams, 1921). Whilst the form of transport changed, the overarching principle remained the same – constructing and improving transport infrastructure in Africa would enable Britain to increase the utilisation of its resources. Thomas' view of the expansive network of aviation covering the whole African continent symbolised not simply the continuation of an imperialist ideology, but a continuation of the means to achieve it.

By the early 1950s, the imagery and rhetoric of the CDC had started to appear in a number of different advertisements for business travellers. BOAC advertising divided Africa into three regions which largely echoed the administrative boundaries of the colonial territories; West Africa, which comprised of the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and The Gambia; East Africa, which included Kenya, Tanganyika (modern day Tanzania), Uganda and Zanzibar; and Central Africa, including Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland ('Colonial Office. The Colonial Territories 1953-54', 1954). Leaflets emphasised the 'opportunity' in these regions of Africa, signalling the availability of land, people and natural resources for British businesses. These attitudes were captured in a series of 'fly there by BOAC' advertising leaflets, for example, a 1952 leaflet entitled *West Africa: Fly There by BOAC*, it described West Africa as a region on the way to an industrial economy;

The last fifty years have seen great progress in the construction and installation of modern amenities – roads, railways and airports: electricity and piped water supply in the towns; post, telephone and cable services; schools and hospitals. Post-war constitutional changes have brought about an increasing measure of local self-government in all four territories. The tremendous task of building them into progressive nations with balanced economies is being tackled with vigour. (British Airways Heritage Collection, 1952b)

The suggestion was that economic developments had started a process of bringing West African nations into a new era of modernity, implying that Africans had ascended beyond a perceived notion of technological backwardness to achieve this position. More so, it suggested that a 'tremendous task' of improving building the nations in West Africa into 'progressive nations' was still being undertaken and needed additional support.

This also made specific reference to people by highlighting the opportunities available for African citizens as a workforce, describing how 'professional careers are open to the rising generations of Africans, while every year increasing numbers of skilled engineers and technicians are being trained ready to take their places in the many new industries which are being established' (British Airways Heritage Collection, 1952b), highlighting the human impact of the development agenda. This reflected the ongoing shift in African nations where Africans were portrayed 'not just as bystanders and consumers but increasingly as also occupying positions of responsibility' (Decker, 2007, p. 63). In so doing, it also highlighted the availability of a useful, and cheap, workforce that was available for British businesses to exploit.

These themes were common in descriptions of all regions of Africa, for example in 1952 advertising described East African land as the 'most fertile and productive areas of the African continent and in recent years great progress has been made in the development of its natural resources' (British Airways Heritage Collection, 1952a). It went on to describe:

The Kilembe copper mines in Uganda are now in production, the Williamson Diamond Mine at Shingyanga in Tanganyika produces large quantities of gem and industrial stones; while great projects such as the Owen Falls Hydro-Electric Scheme on the Nile, from which the electricity supply for the whole region will be drawn, are under construction. (British Airways Heritage Collection, 1952a)

Both of these infrastructural developments were implicated with British development policies. In 1955, the CDC owned 20% shares in Kilembe Mines and prepared to 'lend £500,000, if called on, to assist extensive mechanisation of the mine' ('Colonial Development

Corporation. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the Year 31.12.55', 1956, p. 43), and which would later become an important symbol of administrative colonialism and later a key symbol of nationalism for the Toro tribes and, ultimately, Ugandan statehood (Mwakikagile, 2012, p. 19). Similarly the Owen Falls Hydro-Electric Dam was a potent symbol of colonial development (Ramamurthy, 2019, p. 46).

Queen Elizabeth II went on to describe the ultimate objectives of the project in a 1954 edition of *The Standard* pointing out that 'economic development and the building up of industries are not ends in themselves. Their object is the raising of the people's standards of living' which would allow the African people 'to advance' (Gore, 2009, p. 369), echoing Thomas' words almost exactly. East Africa's economic assets, particularly the natural reserves and raw industrial resources, were central in encouraging British business to utilise the improved access available *via* air travel. Advertising reflected the idea that Britain's investments in infrastructure had presented 'a vision of both the British state's desire to maintain a sphere of influence, as the world adjusted to a new balance of power, as well as the desire of major British corporations to do the same' (Ramamurthy, 2019, p. 46). BOAC's use of these symbols in advertising implied the ready availability of these assets, highlighting their availability for economic agents in Britain.

By the mid-1950s, these messages of economic development had largely shifted to a narrative of tourism. BOAC had suffered an enormous financial and political setback in 1955 with the grounding of its brand new Comet jet airliners, and coupled with increased competition from the USA's Pan American Airways meant that priority had shifted to reducing fares and encouraging tourist travel. Furthermore, by this point BOAC had long since lost the 'sympathetic ear' of the Labour party as successive Conservative Governments were uninterested in BOAC's undercutting of the private aviation sector (Bray, 1974, p. 164). The Conservative Governments worked hard to reduce BOAC's monopoly on Britain's aviation in a number of ways, including the offering out of aviation contracts to private airlines and, eventually under the Civil Aviation (Licencing) Act introduced in 1960, removing BOAC's monopoly entirely. This was also matched by the view that Britain's economic security rested in Europe rather than in the economics of the Sterling Area (Thackeray, 2019, p. 115). The Conservative Governments were consequently less interested in the state's involvement in colonial development, which believed that the CDC was a 'dubious socialist experiment... more appropriately handled by private enterprise' (McWilliam, 2001, p. 44). As enthusiasm for economic development *via* CDC waned, BOAC's approach focused on using its network of subsidiary organisations for publicising economic development.

Nonetheless, BOAC tourist advertising continued to echo the language of colonial development. A 1958 advertisement for travel to Africa described it as 'no longer the Dark Continent' highlighting that it was 'a land of untold resources where rapid commercial development is everywhere afoot', featuring 'Nairobi, hub of East Africa's commerce and industry', the 'important port and industrial centre' of Dar es Salaam, and 'Lagos, Nigeria's capital and busy industrial and commercial centre' (British Airways Heritage Collection, 1958). Such language of the 'Dark Continent' referenced the works of Henry Stanley's 1871 *How I Found Livingstone* and his 1878 *Through the Dark Continent*, which portrayed Africa as a wild, primitive and dangerous land. The use of the 'Dark Continent' metaphor was a common theme especially in reference to post-war economic development in Africa. As Jarosz (1992, p. 108) described, the 'discourse of economic development in British and American mass media accounts of large scale development projects' were often used to 'justify, or even celebrate,

dominant international and national political and economic agendas'. The use of the 'Dark Continent' to refer to the economic and social change, worked in tandem with notions of economic development to create an interpretation of Africa as a rapidly industrialising 'opportunity' for businessmen that had transcended its 'primitive' status as a result of Western intervention.

Further *BOAC Review* articles continued this theme, and highlighted an interest in continuing to aid Africa through a number of economic and social initiatives. New aircraft, like the Vickers VC-10, were also described in humanitarian terms: in 1964, the aircraft was described as a continuation of the aim of the early route pioneers 'to lay an aerial path across the 'dark' continent to the cape', continuing the imagery of old imperial objectives and suggesting the conquering of Africa by air ('West African Inaugural on 29 April', 1964). A 1965 entry in the *BOAC Review* revealed a sense of charity alongside the progressive need to develop: entitled 'through fighting and famine to the VC-10', it described the 'attractive young stewardess' named Pat and detailed her experience with Oxfam and their relief work in North Africa, in which she described 'conditions in England were so different from the primitive ones I experienced in North Africa that it took me a good six months to readjust myself' ('Through Fighting and Famine to the VC10', 1965). The persistent narrative of colonial development, moral interventionism and humanitarian involvement *via* BOAC was a consistent theme, one which was ingrained within all levels of communication.

### ***Development and BOAC partner, associated and subsidiary enterprises***

While enthusiasm for colonial development in the formal CDC sense was on the decline, BOAC had turned its paternalistic attitudes towards the number of associated and subsidiary airlines it had been cooperating with, some of which it had worked with since before the Second World War. These organisations were ones in which, as the Annual Report and Statement of Account (1954, p. 30) described as 'associated, either financially or through advisory and other agreements' (see Table 1). In 1957, this system of airlines was formalised under 'BOAC Associated Companies Limited' which was specifically set up to manage the shareholdings in BOAC's other enterprises after assessing that 'a stage had been reached which required an organisation to undertake the separate responsibility for continuously watching the interests of the Corporation in the companies' ('British Overseas Airways Corporation. Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March 1958', 1958, p. 7). By 1960, BOAC was 'associated' in some way with 18 different companies.

Some of these agreements originated from Imperial Airways which had formed associations for a variety of reasons, often for a specific type of operation, local tax or legal requirements (Higham, 2013, p. 182). Managing these relationships was one of the most expensive and all-consuming endeavours committed by BOAC which included a huge financial investment and, ultimately a loss of £7,843 in 1950 ('British Overseas Airways Corporation. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March, 1950', 1950, p. 36), and by 1959 a loss of £2,532,207 ('British Overseas Airways Corporation. Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March 1959', 1959, p. 1).<sup>5</sup> However, despite the enormity of the costs to uphold these relationships, BOAC could argue, at least up until 1958, that 'the losses on these companies were more than offset by the business they generated, the route rights preserved, the competition they restricted, and the British aircraft they bought' (Higham, 2013, p. 182). By the early 1960s this had become a harder case for BOAC to make: increased

**Table 1.** List of BOAC associated and subsidiary organisations.

Organisation <sup>a</sup>	Date(s) in operation	Association to BOAC <sup>b</sup> (financially, advisory, other)	Details
Qantas Empire Airways.	1934–Present.	Advisory.	Shares relinquished in 1947, advisory from 1948 onwards.
Tasman Empire Airways.	1940–1965.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC until 1954.
British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines Ltd.	1946–1954.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC until 1954.
Air Lingus.	1936–Present.	Financially.	Part-owned by BOAC from 1946 until 1952.
International Aeradio Ltd.	1947–2002.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC, BEA and BSAA.
Malta Airways.	1946–Present.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC. Ownership passed to BEA 1948.
Iraqi Airways.	1945–Present.	Advisory.	Advisory from 1948.
Eagle Airlines, Iran.	1948–1949.	Advisory.	Advisory from 1948.
Aden Airways.	1949–1967.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC.
East African Airways Corporation.	1946–1977.	Advisory/Financially.	Advisory, aside from a £250,000 loan in 1961.
West African Airways Corporation.	1946–1958.	Advisory.	
Orient Airways, Pakistan.	1947–1955.	Advisory.	
Malayan Airways.	1947–Present.	Financially.	Subsidiary. Part-Owned by BOAC.
Hong Kong Airways.	1947–1959.	Advisory.	Owned by BOAC until 1949. Advisory from 1949.
Egyptian Aircraft Engineering Company S.A.E.	1949–Present.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Central African Airways Corporation.	1946–1967.	Advisory.	
Bermuda Development Company Limited.	1948–Unknown.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Bahamas Airways Ltd.	1936–Unknown.	Financially	Part-Owned by BOAC.
British Caribbean Airways Ltd.	1946–Unknown.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC.
British West Indian Airways Ltd.	1939–2006.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC until 1958. Part-Owned from 1958.
Gulf Aviation Company Limited.	1950–Unknown.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Cyprus Airways Limited.	1947–2015.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC. Sold to BEA in 1959.
British International Airlines Limited.	1944–Unknown.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Kuwait National Airways Limited.	1954–Present.	Financially/Management.	Part-Owned by BOAC. Management Services provided 1955.
Arab Airways (Jerusalem) Limited.	1946–1958.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Associated British Airlines (Middle East) Ltd.	1955–1958.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Middle East Airlines Ltd.	1946–Present.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
South African Airways.	1934–Present.	Advisory.	
BOAC Associated Companies Limited.	1957–1972.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC.
Mideast Aircraft Service Company.	1955–1961.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC.
Turkish Airlines.	1933–Present.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Ghana Airways.	1958–2004.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Nigerian Airways.	1958–2003.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Borneo Airways Limited.	1953–1965.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Alitalia.	1947–2021.	Financially.	Financial stake sold to BEA in 1959.
Fiji Airways Limited.	1951–Present.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Cathay Pacific Airways Limited.	1946–Present.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.

*(Continued)*



**Table 1.** Continued.

Organisation <sup>a</sup>	Date(s) in operation	Association to BOAC <sup>b</sup> (financially, advisory, other)	Details
Bofort Catering Company Limited.	1966–Unknown.	Financially.	Owned by BOAC.
The Airways Housing Trust Limited.	1948–Unknown.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
The Cunard Steam-Ship Company Limited.	1948–Unknown.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC (as BOAC-CUNARD, 1964 - 1966.)
Air Jamaica Limited.	1963–2015.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
Air Mauritius.	1967–1972.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.
New Hebrides Airways Limited.	C.1966 – Unknown.	Financially.	Part-Owned by BOAC.

<sup>a</sup>Collected from BOAC Annual Reports and Statements of Accounts and Higham (2013, pp. 388–390). Often, other summaries of BOAC's relationships only factor in formal financial agreements, neglecting informal and "advisory" contracts with airlines.

<sup>b</sup>Where 'Associated' refers to associated airlines as associated 'either financially or through advisory and other agreements'.

scrutiny into BOAC finances, legislation to increase competition and political challenges in BOAC's bases abroad meant that the burden presented by these relationships outweighed their benefits.

Endnote to append to Header of Column 1.<sup>6</sup>

Endnote to append to Header of Column 3.<sup>7</sup>

More importantly, these arrangements were justified in political terms as, like the marketing and PR resources that came before, these relationships would establish 'local British goodwill' and ensure 'that adequate connecting services' were available ('British Overseas Airways Corporation. Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March 1955', 1955, p. 8). BOAC argued that 'the development of Colonial air communications is of the utmost importance not only to the Colonies themselves, but also to the Corporation' and 'these Companies are building up networks of local services which will feed the Commonwealth trunk routes and they will also serve as the Corporation's agents in their areas, to the advantage of all' ('Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the British Overseas Airways Corporation for the Year Ended 31st March 1947', 1947, p. 8). These networks would share advice on technical and operational matters as well as 'assistance on policy matters[...] provided through the Corporation's representatives on their Boards' ('British Overseas Airways Corporation. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March, 1950-51', 1951, p. 23). These relationships seamlessly fit into BOAC's rhetoric of colonial development: not only could they be framed in marketing as evidence of BOAC's (and thus, Britain's) altruistic credentials, they could also be framed as good business. From late 1959, BOAC added the tag 'with Associate Airlines' to its marketing materials.<sup>8</sup> It also added all associate airline routes to its own publicity route maps, in one instance picturing a hand placing Union Jack's around a world map of BOAC and Associates (Figure 1), which projected BOAC as an enabler of business investments across the world (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 1961).

Symbolising cooperation was only one part of this advertising objective; the tagline 'BOAC takes good care of you' had come to represent BOAC's role in 'taking care' of both customers, but also taking care of Britain's economy. Associate airlines also formed a small part of a number of 'defensive' advertisements for BOAC operations in 1959. BOAC's domestic advertising highlighted to readers of the *Times* that 'BOAC takes good care of you more than you think!' (Figure 2) where it argued that it 'helps the nation's economy by earning





**PIN-POINT YOUR EXPORT MARKETS**

## BOAC ROUTES COVER THE WHOLE WIDE BUSINESS WORLD



**BOAC & ASSOCIATES WORLD ROUTES**

**B·O·A·C SPEEDS THE EXPORT DRIVE**  
BRITISH OVERSEAS AIRWAYS CORPORATION WITH ASSOCIATE AIRLINES

Nobody wins big export business just sitting at a desk. And nobody keeps it—unless they keep giving sales and technical service on the spot. But what's the best way to get down to big export business *fast*? Take a look at the BOAC world map. Your people at all levels—chasing new business, following it up or seeing it completed—can fly *anywhere* in a matter of hours by BOAC and its associate airlines. No other airline can match it. Any BOAC Appointed Travel Agent or any BOAC office will gladly help you.

Figure 1. BOAC speeds the export drive, 1961.



To you, perhaps, BOAC is simply "your airline" . . . taking good care of you, the passenger, on routes all over the world. But have you ever stopped to think in just how many other ways BOAC is taking good care of Britain's interests? . . .

## BOAC takes good care of more than you think!

**LINKING THE COMMONWEALTH—AND THE WORLD** The route network operated by BOAC and its associate airlines covers no less than 130,000 miles . . . linking 73 countries throughout the Commonwealth and the world with the fastest, most modern air travel. This year, BOAC has inaugurated the world's first round-the-world jet service with Comet 4s and jet-prop. Britannias.

**EARNING FOREIGN CURRENCY** BOAC helps the nation's economy by exciting valuable foreign currency. During the year ended March 31st 1959, BOAC revenue of £104,000,000 and its associates amounted to over £22,000,000—of which some £12,000,000 was credited to foreign currencies.

**PARTICULARLY DOLLARS** BOAC has been particularly successful in winning passengers on the highly competitive Atlantic route. In the year just ended, BOAC earned for Britain some 20 million dollars and the prestige of operating the first-ever Atlantic jet service with the Comet.

**HELPING ASSOCIATE AIRLINES** BOAC is actively helping the development of 13 associate airlines with technical and financial aid, loan of personnel and assistance with training.

**BRITISH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY** For present and future requirements, BOAC and its associates have placed orders with the British aircraft industry amounting to approximately £100,000,000. These include 30 British Britannias, 30 de Havilland Comets 4s, 25 Vickers Viscounts for associates, and a £40,000,000 contract for 100-to-150 continue to look to the future. By ordering "off the drawing board" 15 mighty VC10 British jetliners for delivery from 1960, BOAC intends to remain the "most experienced jet airline in the world."

**INCREASED VOLUME OF WORLD TRAFFIC** In five years the volume of traffic carried by BOAC Conquest routes throughout the world has risen by 80%. This growth in numbers of passengers carried has been most marked on the dollar-earning Atlantic route.

**YOUR AIRLINE SHOWS THE FLAG WORLD-WIDE** Today BOAC proudly shows the flag throughout the world—embroidering Britain's prestige by providing the finest, most modern air travel. You can enjoy the speed and smoothness of BOAC's services, plus BOAC's unique service to all six continents.

Figure 2. BOAC takes good care of you more than you think!, 1959.

valuable foreign currency' and that it was 'actively helping the development of 15 associate airlines with technical and financial aid' (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 1959b). Another advertisement described 'Why it's good for you and good for Britain when you fly BOAC every time' which argued its case on two grounds; emphasising passenger needs through tailoring the flight experience to the customer and operating a cutting-edge business and secondly, that the airline 'built prestige for us abroad' which helped build the domestic economy (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 1962). Such defensive advertising was likely a response to muster political support for BOAC as the late 1950s and early 1960s saw increased hostility to nationalised aviation. Harold Macmillan's streamlining of the industry, followed by the 1960 Civil Aviation (Licencing) Act which removed BOAC's monopoly, meant that BOAC had to market on political rather than economic grounds. Nonetheless, the fact that notions of imperial responsibility were a key part of this argument demonstrates that it sought to defend its record on humanitarian grounds.

Narratives of goodwill, resource exploitation and British 'altruism' would also appear in the advertisements of subsidiary and associated organisations. Of course, each of these organisations had individual nuances and contexts, but in general themes of goodwill, economic development and national empowerment persisted. Many of these companies were useful ways to promote Britain's economic investments abroad, including International Aeradio Limited (IAL) which was set up by BOAC, BEA and BSAA in 1948 as a subsidiary company to 'take over the provision of communications, flying control, and navigational facilities at a number of stations along the routes when the Royal Air Force Staging Posts were withdrawn' ('Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the British Overseas Airways Corporation for the Year Ended 31st March 1947', 1947, p. 9). Despite BOAC's direct ownership of IAL, it was hoped that 'the airlines of other countries will participate in order to broaden its basis and make it a truly international company' ('Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the British Overseas Airways Corporation for the Year Ended 31st March 1947', 1947, p. 19). The *BOAC Review* described that IAL's interventions were necessary across the globe as there was 'a lack of financial or technical resources in some of the countries or administrations concerned' was 'one of the major reasons for these facilities not having been provided'. IAL hoped to 'get all the main Dominion and foreign air operators to join the organisation and to provide their requirements as well as those of the British operators' ('What International Aeradio Will Do', 1947). By 1957, IAL acted 'as air radio consultants to 21 governments, administrations, and firms in the electronic industry' ('IAL's First 10 Years', 1957), signalling a wide distribution of technical knowledge across the globe and imprinting a British standard of communication.

Whilst the technologies provided by IAL were inherently designed to make BOAC's operational life easier, advertising promoted its influence on local economies and peoples. A 1952 advertisement pictured various individuals that had been trained by IAL including 'the Radio Engineer from Africa, the Radio Mechanic from India, the Air Traffic Controller from Malta, the Fireman from Bahrain, the Wireless Operator from Burma are all trained members of International Aeradio Limited' (International Aeradio Limited, 1952), implying that IAL provided opportunities for generations of people in their countries throughout the Empire and Commonwealth.<sup>9</sup> Further promotional materials in 1954 described how IAL was 'proud of the contribution it has been able to make in providing Telecommunications and Air Traffic Control Services at the new Khartoum Airport' where 'IAL designed and installed the facilities and is responsible for their daily operation and maintenance' (International Aeradio Limited,

1954). A similar 1958 advertisement highlighted how 'Throughout the World – Planning Installation Operation Maintenance... IAL can relieve administrations of many worries' (International Aeradio Limited, 1958). These advertisements directly echoed those of BOAC as they sought to construct a positive image of the British expansion of these services.

There were similar implications for the African associates. For example in Eastern Africa the East African Airways Corporation (EAAC) was regularly highlighted as an example of ideal economic and political cooperation between airlines. EAAC was formed on 1 January 1946 as a result of the 1943 Conference of Governors of Britain's East African Territory. This conference assessed the needs of East African aviation with a view to improving connectivity to and within the region. EAAC 'was very much a Kenyan airline' in which its 'instincts[...] remained proudly British' where it 'stood poised to play a small but not insignificant role in the grand design of colonial development and modernization' (R. L. McCormack, 1989, p. 388). EAAC was jointly owned by the governments of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and whilst BOAC did not own shares in EAAC it did provide an extensive amount of management and technical expertise, describing them as an associated company in which BOAC had 'no financial interest' in 1950 ('British Overseas Airways Corporation. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March, 1950', 1950, p. 18). This consisted of staff, engineering teams, services and aircraft.

Given that the British Government maintained a number of regulatory and licencing functions up until the early 1960s, ultimate control of EAAC operations rested in Britain (Ochieng-Obbo, 1981, p. 388). Consequently themes of colonial development were a persistent narrative in EAAC's advertisements. Advertisements in British publications presented East Africa as a thriving modern economy, for example in 1959 an East African Airways advertisement in the *Daily Mail* pictured two tribal warriors looking up at an EAAC aircraft (Figure 3). The advertisement described;

Now, with new buildings towering above the commercial centres of the principal cities, and modern agricultural projects increasing the rich yield of the soil, East Africa is rapidly developing into a fruitful and challenging field for investment. Good communications are vital to the development of these vast, far-flung territories – and East African Airways, by providing fast and reliable air transport, are proud to be playing their part in shaping East Africa's future. (East African Airways Corporation, 1959)

EAAC advertising offered a glimpse at a successful and developing East Africa rich in opportunities for further development. In 1964, an edition of the *BOAC Review* described how cooperation with EAAC had 'opened up' Africa 'to an impressive degree', where BOAC and EAAC had 'contributed vigorously and generously to the 'discovery' of East Africa by the rest of the world, both by their own direct efforts and by the distribution of promotional materials' ('The East African Tourist Reserve', 1964). The same article described that the 'development' of overseas airlines had resulted in a positive impact on the tourist trade in East Africa. The impact on business was described as one in which the East African Tourist Travel Association described 'only temporary political crises – Mau-Mau, Suez and the Congo – have checked the rise in numbers of overseas visitors', and the 'whole-hearted cooperation of BOAC and East African Airways' had made a significant impact on bringing in new tourists to the area ('The East African Tourist Reserve', 1964).

By 1958 not only had these relationships thrown a number of awkward commercial problems, often owing to local political disputes, their value to BOAC 'fluctuated' (Higham, 2013,



## *East Africa is looking up!*

Wings in the sky above East Africa hold the key to a new era in the development of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar. For many years, East Africa, with its thrilling natural Game Reserves and magnificent palm-shaded beaches, has been one of the unspoiled holiday playgrounds of the world.

Now, with new buildings towering above the commercial centres of the principal cities, and modern agricultural projects increasing the rich yield of the soil, East Africa is rapidly developing into a fruitful and challenging field for investment.

Good communications are vital to the development of these vast, far-flung territories—and East African Airways, by providing fast and reliable air transport, are proud to be playing their part in shaping East Africa's future.

### *Fly There in Style on the E.A.A. Britannia 312*

You can be in East Africa in less than 16 hours' flying time—when you travel by the speedy jet-prop Britannia 312 of East African Airways. The service and comfort provided for first-class 'Flagship' passengers is modelled on the world's best hotels—or you can enjoy the warm friendliness of E.A.A. Tourist Class Travel!

### *There is no Cheaper Fare Than the Coach Canadair*

Alternatively, you can travel to East Africa by the budget-wise Coach Class service of East African Airways. This new weekly service links the United Kingdom and East Africa at a fare that's well within your reach. Your travel agent will gladly give you details—and you'll save pounds as you fly there Canadair!

### *FLY AMONG FRIENDS ON*



1101/289 ZW2 - MADR08



Figure 3. East African Airways.

p. 185). Furthermore, the early 1960s BOAC's future was economically and politically uncertain: Harold Macmillan's government sought to open up and streamline aviation in Britain. This resulted in a generally hostile relationship with the government and Minister of Aviation Julian Amery. The deeply critical Corbett Report commissioned by Macmillan in 1962 revealed the extent of BOAC's financial position and made the funding of associate and subsidiary operations untenable.



However, the decline in ability did not reflect a decline of will, as some BOAC management and advisory staff continued to voice disappointment at the forced reduction in overseas initiatives. Capturing this attitude was Duncan Cumming, adviser on African affairs to BOAC between 1959 to 1964, who argued in a 1962 joint meeting of the Royal African Society and the Royal Commonwealth Society that ‘one of the first things a newly independent nation wants to do is to demonstrate its independence by having its own airline and to show its national colours on the independent countries’ aerodromes’ (Cumming, 1962, p. 35). Cumming was fearful this was putting too great economic pressure on newly emerging economies he described how ‘an outside observer cannot but wonder whether the cost of ‘political aviation’ is not too high for some countries that need their resources for more urgent needs’ (Cumming, 1962, p. 36), arguing that the only reasonable solution was to pool with European airlines. In 1963, Keith Granville who was then Chairman of BOAC Associated Companies but who would go on to become Chairman of British Airways in 1969, published in *The Times* and further reprinted in the *BOAC Review*, an article entitled ‘Help for Other Airlines’, which explored their history of BOAC and its assistance granted throughout the world:

Other British airlines[...] have played their part in the growth of Commonwealth aviation, but Imperial Airways and BOAC have done most to answer the call first made at an Imperial Conference in 1922 for the establishment of air communications to and within the British Empire and Commonwealth. And certainly no other airline has been the “midwife” at the birth of so many other airlines as BOAC/Imperial Airways (Granville, 1963b).

He went on to reflect that BOAC’s assistance was ‘similar to the altruistic, though often rewarding, aid given by a mother to her young or a mother country to its colonies – in which BOAC have specialised’, and argued that the losses incurred by BOAC Associated Companies was far outweighed by the number of British aircraft that were purchased by these airlines (Granville, 1963a, *Times*). The metaphor of the ‘midwife’ offers a powerful insight into the culture of the organisation’s expansion policies throughout the post-war period as it shows how BOAC sought to frame post-imperial relationships in terms of a global family of aviation. However, like many post-imperial engagements in this period, they were inherently self serving, ultimately designed to expand Britain’s capabilities for import/export and renewing Britain’s global influence.

BOAC saw its actions within the mantra of imperial responsibility, and argued that it was ‘saving’ independent national airlines from the burdensome ‘political’ costs associated with operating an international airline. Like the popular neo-humanitarianism that had dominated this period, the advertisements reveal less about the locations and organisations themselves, rather revealing more about the mindset of the morality that enabled neo-Imperial activity to persist in business. As Harrison (2015, p. 1) reminds us that the ‘imagery and discourse about Africa addressed to Britons’ has contributed to the ‘process of the construction of British self-perception and even self-esteem’. This narrative has persisted within the organisation as late as 2013, where a retired British Airways pilot wrote in the *Journal of Aeronautical History* that the relationships established with post-colonial airlines were part of a broader reflection of ‘one of the best examples of colonial altruism and one which has been an enduring gift from a fading Empire’ (Watson, 2013, p. 158). Watson argued that it was ‘perhaps a fitting reversal of the relationship established under Imperial rule’ as ‘fledgling national airlines [...] were able to exploit the benefits of BOAC’s expertise, infrastructure and assets

to create a blueprint for continued success into this century' (Watson, 2013, p. 158). British imperialism had many characterisations and descriptions, but fundamentally, and particularly throughout decolonisation, it was 'characterised by decency, moderation, lofty liberal ideals, racial tolerance, and noble plans for a future in which partnership, welfare and development initiatives, and a roadmap for planned self-government were all in the cards', characterisations clearly present in Watson's analysis (Buettner, 2016, p. 40).

## Conclusion

Ultimately, BOAC management had considered the scheme of associate airlines as a failure, describing in 1965 that the 'miniature' experiment in creating a Commonwealth airline 'in circumstances of the best goodwill, the minimum of political complications, the maximum of historical affinity between the participating countries[...] still failed' ('Above the Seven Seas: BOAC and Its Commonwealth Partners', 1965, p. 350). This description suggested that everything had been done on Britain's part to secure these partnerships – failure in the end product therefore lay elsewhere. It went on to outline that 'while some of these partnerships may, for good commercial or unfortunate political reasons, wither, the inherent sense of most of them promises durability and further development' ('Above the Seven Seas: BOAC and Its Commonwealth Partners', 1965, p. 357).

Echoing their pre-war expansion, 'just as "indirect rule" and "trusteeship" were words woven within governments seeking to expand imperial policies before the Second World War, the term 'partnership' became the post war symbol of advance' (Lee, 1967, p. 18). Britain's relationship had supposedly matured by this point in 1967 and the relationship Britain had with its wider Commonwealth was something which other nations would do best to emulate. Of course, the realities of Britain's post-war imperial history are far more complex than governments would suggest, but it is the *narrative* of these relationships that mattered as much as the relationships themselves. It is important to recognise that the themes outlined in the paper were not unique to BOAC and the British: a number of flag carrier airlines like the French Air France, Belgian SABENA and the Dutch KLM had connections to their nation's imperial activities. cursory observations suggest that similar studies with reference to European airlines would yield further nuance as to state-owned aviation and its tie to the promotion of imperial objectives.<sup>10</sup> The BOAC case reveals a nationalised industry that needed to defend its position in the British economy to the public, the vast majority of which could not partake in its services. By engaging with the rhetoric of colonial development, BOAC could present not only an organisation as concerned with the welfare of overseas colonies, but this could also inform and reinforce ordinary citizens conception of the *nation*. The message of colonial development acts as a reflection of the notions of post-imperial morality in Britain that sought to present a narrative of productive partnerships, whatever the realities were.

## Notes

1. The choice to hold this speech in South Africa was largely circumstantial as the election of the National Party and subsequent development of Apartheid policies on the whole did not affect either BOAC or tourism in general until at least the mid-1960s. See (Grundlingh, 2006; Pirie, 1990).

2. The importance of using business records to inform wider historical analysis has been demonstrated by Green (2019).
3. Nationalised industries were generally very nationalistic purchasers, however because the aircraft industry represented thousands of jobs and a potentially huge income, BOAC purchasing Britain mattered more. See (Edgerton, 2011, p. 36).
4. General histories of BOAC demonstrate the limited success of some of these endeavours, but in particular the British Airways Heritage Centre recommended Winston Bray's book, citing that it was an extremely candid look at BOAC's operations (one which was unpopular with management at the time and one of the reasons it was not published). See (Bray, 1974).
5. Figures not adjusted for inflation.
6. Collected from BOAC Annual Reports and Statements of Accounts and Higham (2013, pp. 388–390). Often, other summaries of BOAC's relationships only factor in formal financial agreements, neglecting informal and "advisory" contracts with airlines.
7. Where "Associated" refers to associated airlines as associated "either financially or through advisory and other agreements".
8. For example, this is observable in (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 1959a).
9. Interestingly, BOAC itself did not tend to employ crew people from Associates and Subsidiaries. In general, local staff would consist of only junior and non-crew based roles such as baggage handlers and support staff. BOAC staff would often move to management positions within the Associate and Subsidiary airlines. See Mills (1995).
10. See for example (Binkley, 2019; DeWald, 2007; Dierikx, 1991; Wigley, 2014).

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Matthew Grant, Alix Green, Andrew Priest and Glen O'Hara for their guidance and feedback at different stages of my doctoral research at the University of Essex in the Department of History, on which this paper is based. I am thankful for the valuable guidance on drafts of this paper provided by Samantha Woodward and Liam Redfern. Furthermore, this work would not be possible without the support of my colleagues, Rebecca Warren and Christopher Cunningham. I would also like to Jim Davies and all at the British Airways Heritage Centre for their support in the archive and use of images.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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