

“GARRISONING THE MOON AGAINST AN ATTACK FROM MARS”; THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING AND THE IMPERIAL MINDSET

John Bottomley

(Department of History, University of North West)

Opsomming

Die Beleg van Mafeking sal altyd 'n belangrike hoofstuk in die annale van Imperialisme wees. Die amptelike interpretasie van gebeure word geboekstaaf deur dagboeke. Drie Victoria Kruise is toegeken, en loopbane en reputasies, wat die glorie van 'n dankbare Ryk weerspieël het, was gewaarborg. Maar was dit die realiteit? Hierdie referaat poog om 'n breër perspektief en derhalwe 'n beter begrip van die Beleg weer te gee. Dit sluit in Sol Plaatje se beskrywing van die onthutsende opofferings deur swartes; Abraham Stafleu se weergawe van die onbekwaamheid en onverdraagsaamheid van die Boereleierskap en hoe naby hulle aan 'n oorwinning was. Ada Cock met haar babas se heroïese stryd om oorlewing te midde van 'n nagmeriewêreld van angste en warboel. Sulke dergelike wyd uiteenlopende perspektiewe illustreer die dilemmas in die weg van die wat Imperialisme wil verstaan. Hierdie ideologie het sy ontstaan te danke aan die Britse adel se oorlewingsdrang en het ontwikkel tot 'n globale dominasie-meganisme. Die magie van Imperialisme het miljoene betower en vele het hulle lewens daarvoor opgeoffer. Teenoor diegene wat die Imperialistiese ideaal gedien het, was daar bevolkingsgroepe wat gely het; en selfs in die 1990s is daar nog groot bevolkingsgroepe van 'lewende gewondes' wat sukkel om hulle te versoen met die wêreld wat die Imperialiste geskep het.

Introduction

Lord Salisbury, contemplating the British military in the nineteenth century preparing to defend India against an attack from Russia whose nearest railhead was still 1000 miles away, commented that if they had their way they would garrison the moon against an attack from Mars.¹

The sections of men on this globe are unequally gifted. Some are strong and can govern themselves; some are weak and are the prey of foreign invaders and internal anarchy; and freedom which all desire, is only obtainable by weak nations when they are subject to the rule of others who are at once powerful and just. This was the duty which fell to the Latin race two thousand years ago. In these modern times it has fallen to ours, and in the discharge of it the highest features in the English character have displayed themselves. J. A. Froude (1888)²

M. Howard, *The causes of war and other essays* (1983), pp. 127-128.

J. A. Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (1888), p. 182.

It is an extraordinary epoch in which so many men can be made to believe that a people is being given happiness by being reduced to subjection, by being robbed of all that is most precious, to it, that is to say of its own civilization, by being forced to adopt manners and institutions that were made for a different race, and by being constrained by the most distasteful kinds of work in order to make it acquire things for which it has not the slightest use for that is what is taking place. René Gernon (1941) ³

But the nobility of war was only one of the casualties. The mechanized slaughter on the western front corrupted or undermined the credibility of most of the ideals and assumptions on which the Europeans had based their sense of superiority to all other peoples and from which they had fashioned the ideological testament to their unprecedented hubris, the civilizing mission. Years of suicidal devastation forced European intellectuals to question the very foundations upon which their thought and value systems had been built: the conviction that they were the most rational of all human beings, in control of themselves, of other peoples, and of all creation. Their unswerving faith in reason was doomed. ⁴

When Alan Wilson and his small band of men were slaughtered, 'the white men sang'; the townfolk of Mafeking played cricket in the face of Boer cannons; General Lord Methuen buried Compte de Villebois-Mareuil, his gallant opponent in the Boer army, with full honours of war, and fifteen hundred men stood to attention in the small moonlit cemetery at Boshof. Hundreds of men stood aside and let women and children into the lifeboats as the *Titanic* went to her icy grave; Captain Nevill of the East Surrey regiment nonchalantly dribbled a football towards the German trenches in the disastrous Battle of the Somme - and died. These actions epitomise the glamour, glory and mystique of Imperialism; but retrospection is generally kind and glosses over the pain the past has occasioned.

Not so lucky are the victims and the vanquished. Theirs is the search for dignity, lost when worlds were destroyed; traditions shattered, codes and customs thrust into the shanty towns of large cities in which discontented populations are forced to listen to the promises of postcolonial elites, opportunistic enough to hitchhike on Western models of governance - Imperialism has much to answer for.

But who or what was Imperialism, and where shall we place the blame? From the beginning, Imperialism was a lie, a fabrication, an attempt to postpone the death of a social class whose existence was increasingly superfluous.

René Guernon, *East and West* (1941), pp. 133-134.

Michael Adas, *Machines as the measure of men, science, technology, and ideologies of Western dominance* (1989), p. 398.

The nobility in Europe was the product of a decentralised and often violent medieval period when fighting skills were essential. In a commercialising and industrialising world with its mechanized armies, however, medieval martial skills ceased to be important. Nevertheless, these influential social classes were not prepared to gracefully accept their demise. These classes created a specific milieu that projected and glorified 'noble' values and thus prolonged their existence. Two world wars were fought before the variegated arsenal of the nobility was overcome and this class finally lost its societal predominance.

This paper and the diaries that follow attempt to highlight various elements of the Imperial experience from contrasting perspectives, leaving the reader to form an opinion of the worth or otherwise of this ideological phenomenon. Perhaps though, in the final analysis, our project merely serves to confirm that caustic opinion of Imperialism expressed by Joseph Conrad almost a century ago, when he wrote:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...⁵

'Imperialism - was 'simply part of the everyday', and also the product of a 'specific historical moment'

A journalist recently referred to 'Rhodesia's remnant psychopaths', and popular history thereby furnished an epitaph for an Imperial experiment that began a century earlier, when white settlers were first drawn to that particular expanse of the African interior.⁶

Many settlers were encouraged to Rhodesia by the vision of its founder, a man who reasoned that Imperial expansion was everything, 'These stars... These vast worlds, we can never reach. I would annex the planets if I could'.⁷ The attitude of the natives was as relevant to Rhodes, as was the opinion of extraterrestrials, for this was the high age of British Imperialism:

Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), preface.

Ken Owen in *Sunday Times*, 4 August 1991.

Martin Green, *Dreams of adventure, deeds of Empire* (1980), p. 285. See also R. C. Selous' evidence before the Royal Colonial Institute in Kathryn Tidrick, *Empire and the English character* (1992), pp. 76-77. On the subject of Rhodes, Selous opined: 'Mr Rhodes has never posed as a champion of the Mashunas or any other black race; his object, I take it, is to extend the domination of the British race, and to secure for Englishmen any country worth having on the plateaux of Central South Africa. Therefore for what he has done and is doing unborn generations revere his memory, let the enemies of Imperial England snarl as they may'. Selous further argued that normal moral standards were not to be applied to the all-important task of establishing the absolute supremacy of the numerically small white race over the aboriginal blacks. 'Savages do not understand such leniency', he pointed out, 'they take it for fear and at once take advantage of it.'

... the day of the bayonet and the Gatling gun, of horse-drawn gun carriages and balloon observation, of soldiers fighting in tight-necked scarlet tunics. This was popular imperialism, garish, noisy, sentimental and above all celebratory. It was an intensely patriotic reaction to a series of wars in remote and exotic lands where gallant British soldiers overcame savage foes. If there were issues they could be either ignored or reduced to simple chiaroscuro.⁸

The end of the Rhodesian epic was in sight in the 1960s, when the British Labour government renounced its Imperial and 'noble' past and accepted a post-colonial future. This *volte face* and the inescapable socio-economic realities of the day were rejected by the white colonists. Caught in a world no longer of their own making, they clung to their delusions and the phantoms of a departed Imperial culture.

A bloody civil war against black nationalism unleashed a flood of human misery, and left the vanquished vainly attempting to salvage a modicum of logic from the incomprehensible, as they set out on their global diaspora.

As one of those 'walking wounded' whose existence was blighted by events in Rhodesia, the author of this article experienced Imperialism as an intuitively comprehensible form of logic.⁹ For most Rhodesians, Imperialism was an integral part of those assumptions which Holt refers to as being, 'simply part of the everyday':

It is precisely in the every day that one encounters lived contradictions and contingencies... our most important codes are not for the most part written down, much less legally enforced; they are simply part of the mores, etiquette, and behaviours we internalize, that is, simply part of our everyday ... Within everydayness, one finds relations of kin, neighbours, and allies elaborated and reproduced, while at more global levels, these same relations become cultural rules, territorial boundaries, and class solidarities or conflicts.¹⁰

Holt goes further in supporting the necessity to contextualise and ground any ideological phenomenon in its surroundings in order to understand it:

A self is knowable, then - even to itself - only in terms of its history. If this premise is true, it follows that one cannot explain human behaviour and desire absent from the social and historical contexts within which they are grounded.

Flora Thompson, *Lark rise*, quoted in Lawrence James, *The savage wars* (1985), pp. 5-6. Read for instance, Doris Lessing, *Under my skin, Vol. 1 of my autobiography, to 1949* (1995); *The grass is singing* (1950) and her *Martha Quest* novels.

Thomas C. Holt, "Marking, Race. Race-making and the writing of history", *American Historical Review*, 1 (February 1995).

More specifically, one must seek explanations for the reproduction of ...belief and behaviour not in individual pathologies but in social formations at specific historical moments that shape and make both self and other knowable.

In a historical context, Holt's view has much in common with those researchers who suggest that the path followed by different countries in adopting industrialisation, is determined to a large extent by their specific and unique histories.

Walt Rostow was an influential proponent of this vision believing, for example, that 'the totalitarian temptation was primarily a 'disease of transition', a pathological condition arising out of the special political and social requirements of countries at a certain stage of socio-economic development'.¹¹ John L. Comaroff similarly concluded that 'ethnic - indeed all identities are not "things" but relations, that their content is wrought in the particularities of their ongoing historical construction'.¹²

Other authors who have supported an approach co-joining ideologies with the 'differential receptivity' of countries to industrialization include Francis Fukuyama, Alexander Gerschenkron, Michael Howard, Tom Kemp, Arno J. Mayer and Clive Trebilcock.¹³

This paper is an attempt to gain a clearer understanding of the Imperial cosmology by examining firstly, the specific Imperial context (as suggested by Holt and the others) and secondly, by listening to the various voices (or heteroglossia) articulating this phenomenon.

Imperialism: The survival of an aristo-military caste in an unarmorial age

Children brought up on exploits of Hector and Achilles, Horatius holding the bridge, Arthur and his knights, Roland blowing his horn, Richard Coeur de lion charging the Saracens, the Black Prince at Crecy, Henry V at Agincourt, Sir Philip Sydney at Zutpen, Richard Grenville on the Revenge, Sir John Moore at Corunna, Nelson at Trafalgar, Wellington at Waterloo, the charge of the Light Brigade and the gallant little garrison at Mafeking playing cricket in the jaws of the enemy ¹⁴

¹¹ Walt Rostow, *The stages of economic growth* (1960), pp. 162-163.

¹² John L. Comaroff and Paul C. Stern (eds.), *Perspectives on nationalism and war* (1995).

¹³ A. Gerschenkron, *Economic backwardness in historical perspective* (1962); Howard, *The causes of war*; Tom Kemp, *Industrialization in nineteenth century Europe* (1982) and *Industrialization in the Non-Western World* (1989); Arno J. Mayer, *The persistence of the Old Regime* (1981); and Clive Trebilcock, *The industrialisation of continental powers, 1780-1914* (1981). For the South African context see John Bottomley, 'The application of the theory of "economic backwardness" to South Africa 1881-1924', *South African Journal of Economic History*, 8, 2 (1993).
Mark Girouard, *Return to Camelot* (1981), p. 281.

The full range of human motivations was at work constructing the Imperial edifice, and it is impossible to examine them all. In South African history, however, the predominance of structuralism has meant that the economic impetus behind this phenomenon has received the greatest attention. In contrast to an unremitting emphasis on market relations, this paper examines Imperialism from the perspective of Arno J. Mayer in *The persistence of the old regime* (1981).

Mayer was convinced of the tenacious perseverance of pre-industrial societies in an industrialising world, and argued that the attitudes of elites towards modernisation were crucial in the mechanics of transition. Mayer concluded, in opposition to the thrust of much work in South African history:

The Great War was an expression of the decline and fall of the old order fighting to prolong its life rather than of the explosive rise of industrial capitalism bent on imposing its primacy.¹⁵

On another level Mayer's work was also a reassertion of the anti-determinist vision of Max Weber in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* published in 1905. Weber stood Marx on his head by arguing that it was not underlying economic forces that created cultural products like religion and ideology, but rather culture that produced certain forms of economic behaviour.¹⁶ It is Mayer's perspective that is adopted in this paper.

The French Revolution unleashed the might of mass politics on an industrializing Britain and enforced the forbidding task of building a new society. The warrior caste that had dominated Britain since William the Conqueror was increasingly superfluous in this new industrial world and was, therefore, greatly threatened by societal transformation.

Imperialism was the creation of this embattled social order and a crucial element in its survival strategy; Imperialism may thus be understood as a defensive strategy, a form of political empowerment, and an identity-generating strategy by Britain's nobility in the face of the erosion of modern capitalism.

Some idea of the impact of this beleaguered strata of society can be gained from the stark indicators. In 1873, some seven thousand persons monopolized 80% of all privately owned land in the United Kingdom. More than forty years later and despite decades of social flux, some four thousand individuals still commanded 50% of all privately owned land in 1914.¹⁷

The nobility then, was a far from impotent caste and it dominated a vast, deferential, obeisant and venal society accustomed to all forms of societal inequality. As late as 1928 Anthony Eden told parliament:

Mayer, *Old regime*, p. 4.

See, for instance, Francis Fukuyama, *Trust* (1995).

Mayer, *Old regime*, p. 25.

We have not got democratic government today. We have never had it and I venture to suggest to Honourable members opposite that we shall never have it. What we have done in all progress of reform and evolution is to broaden the basis of oligarchy.¹⁸

Despite the deceptive calm of the Victorian era and the resourcefulness of the nobility in its defence, societal transformation forged ahead and increasingly focussed on the politics of access.

As early as 1839 more than two million citizens signed a petition - or charter - asking for manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, election by ballot, just distribution of electoral districts, payment of members of a parliament and the abolition of property qualifications for a parliament. These demands were rejected by a vote of 235 to 46.¹⁹ Nonetheless, from that point on until 1918, manhood suffrage was achieved in gradual but forceful steps.

One of the most powerful forces reforming this *laissez-faire* /caretaker state, was the detritus of societal transformation. The sprawling city slums brimful of discontented Irish immigrants and other dispossessed, challenged the state and its aristocratic social order. The welfare consensus - or the belief that the state had a responsibility for the material welfare of all its members - gradually undermined a societal mores that worshipped individualism and self help. The depression of the 1870s and the misery this prompted, turned the tide irrevocably in favour of the welfare state.²⁰

Another challenge to the Victorian state and its ruling class came from popular opinion. The growth of literacy along with cheaper printing processes placed the government in the unpleasant position of being forced to justify its actions to an increasingly critical public.²¹ Benedict Anderson has discussed why printing was such an important aspect in the imagining of communities:

The explosion in print made the work of imagining our society far easier: We could invent, perfect and disseminate tradition, and make it the basis of new communities. We could write history in our own image, and give form and substance to our longing to belong. Mass communication makes the process of imagining quicker.²²

W. L. Guttsman, *The British political elite* (1968), p. 370.

Girouard, *Camelot*, p.131.

R. C. Birch, *The shaping of the Welfare State* (1974) and M. Smiley, *Charity rediscovered. A study of philanthropic effort in nineteenth century Liverpool* (1992).

S. Todd Lee, 'Imperial imaginings: British stereotypes of the Afrikaner enemy during the South African War, 1899-1902'. Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, Pretoria (July 1997).

Benedict Anderson quoted in Mathew Horsman and Andrew Marshall, *After the Nation-State. Citizens, tribalism and the New World Disorder* (1994), p. 269. Also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (1983).

The creation of a popular and bellicose Imperialism was one of the ways of manipulating popular opinion. Another element in these mechanisms of control was the intricate personal network that existed amongst the nobility. Milner, for instance, was forced to engage in a massive public relations campaign to justify his 'working up to a crisis' in South Africa. Above all else, Milner feared a 'wobble' in popular opinion which would deny him his freedom of action.²³

To avoid this catastrophe meant influencing the press, but on an entirely different plane it also meant mobilizing an 'invisible nexus of loyalty'. Milner turned to his colleagues, influential intimates and various opinion-makers for support for his 'little Armageddon' in South Africa. Pakenham argues *arcana imperii* - imperial secrets - were a crucial dimension in the outbreak of war.²⁴

The press also evolved into an indispensable tool in creating and circulating ethnic and racial stereotypes. These stereotypes became an implicit form of cultural shorthand determining the behaviour of Imperialists in their discourse with other nations and in creating a sense of superiority within the Empire. This sense of preeminence was important in justifying the rape and conquest of foreign climes.

Smuts referred to the attitude of 'supercilious contempt with which the civilized decadent treats the rough untutored humanity of nature'.²⁵ Lord Durham in Canada was even more forthright in his assessment of the ethnic and racial arrogance of the Imperial population, "It is not anywhere a virtue of the English race to look with complacency on any manners or laws which appear strange to them; accustomed to forming a high estimate of their own superiority, they take no pains to conceal from others their contempt and intolerance of their usages".²⁶ Fukuyama concluded that "liberal" England and France could acquire extensive colonial empires because they rated the dignity of Indians, Algerians, Vietnamese and so on, lower than their own.²⁷ This view is augmented by Robinson, Gallagher and Denny:

Upon the ladder of progress, nations and races seemed to stand higher or lower according to the proven capacity of each for freedom and enterprise. The British at the top, followed a few rungs below by the Americans, and other 'striving, go-ahead' Anglo-Saxons. The Latin peoples were thought to come next, though far behind. Much lower still stood the vast oriental communities of Asia and North Africa where progress appears unfortunately to have been crushed for centuries by military despotisms or smoth-

Eversley Belfield, *The Boer War*, (1975), p. 75: Milner to Chamberlain, 17 June 1900: "The only thing I ever really fear is a 'wobble' in British opinion".

Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (1979).

S. B. Spies and Gail Nattrass (eds.), *Jan Smuts. Memoirs of the Boer War* (1994), p. 87.

David Welsh, "English-speaking whites and the racial problem" in A. de Villiers (ed.), *English-speaking South Africa today* (1976), p. 217.

Fukuyama, *End of History*, p. 699.

ered under passive religions. Lowest of all stood the 'aborigines' whom it was thought had never learned enough social discipline to pass from the family and tribe to the making of a state.²⁸

James Belich has examined Victorian attitudes towards the 'aboriginal' population of New Zealand, and concludes that the core of this *Weltanschauung* was the belief in the superiority of the European intellect:

The European monopoly of the higher mental faculties was the inner tabernacle of Victorian racial attitudes. To question it was to question a whole world view. When events did indeed cast doubt on it, as with evidence of Maori possession of the higher military talents, Victorian commentators avoided, misinterpreted, or suppressed them.²⁹

This was why the Anglo-Boer War was confusing to many Britons because, apart from the Crimean, this was the only war in the second half of the century against a white foe. Racial stereotypes normally so effective in colonial environments, were of limited use in this war. Belich discusses the value of racial stereotyping in moulding the collective image of the Victorians:

Racial ideas are not just images of others, but of one's self and one's own society. Superiority or inferiority, inevitable victory and inevitable defeat, higher faculties or the lack of them; each are two sides of the same coin. To question the one is to question the other, and thereby cast doubt on an individual and collective self-image. Victorians, like other people, were not eager to ask such questions.

Another important element in Victorian racial thought Belich argues, was the 'fatal impact thesis' - that Europeans would inevitably exterminate, absorb, or at the very least, subordinate inferior races. The 'fatal impact thesis' was the product of two schools of thought.

One school of thought was the racial determinism of Robert Knox and the American J. C. Nott that emerged in the 1840s and posited that conflict was inherent amongst civilizations, and the inferior state of the dark races was unchangeable. These races would inevitably perish in the course of closer contact with the modern world.

From the 1850s, the evolutionary theorists began to have an impact. They included, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, A. R. Wallace and their disciples. The evolutionists argued that life was a struggle for the survival of the fittest, in which the European race would always succeed because of its superior intellect whereas the dark races would inevitably succumb.³⁰

²⁸ R. Robinson, J. Gallagher and A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians. The official mind of Imperialism* (1981), p. 2.

²⁹ James Belich, *The New Zealand wars and the Victorian interpretation of racial conflict* (1986), p. 326.

³⁰ Robert C. Bannister, "'The survival of the fittest is our doctrine': History or Historions?", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 31 (1970).

To the views of the racial determinists must be added the opinions of the Eugenic movement, the Malthusians and the followers of Nietzsche - all of whom helped create a Victorian milieu filled with acute anxieties and which was increasingly anti-liberal, anti-democrat and anti-social.

A closer examination of Victorian attitudes to race and ethnicity reveals that this was a further instance of Marxism's failure to kill off collective identities; instead of these 'tribal' or 'primordial' distinctions being destroyed by modernisation, racism and ethnicity were mobilized and became increasingly consequential.

These attitudes must also be seen against the backdrop of a society in which there was a growing predilection for war, and in which war evolved into an important instrument of domestic and 'popular' politics. On another level, the influence of war had much to do with technological advance during the nineteenth century and the fact that Victorians were able to unleash overwhelming military force at minimal costs.³¹ Finally, as John Mackenzie has shown, it was principally through warfare that the racial ideas of the day were diffused to the public at large:

Concepts of race were closely related in popular literature to the imperative of conflict between cultures, and the evidence of superiority it provided. Colonial heroes became the prime exemplars of a master people.³²

In view of the foregoing, we turn now to an examination of militarism, which was the most important element of that ideological cluster that included chivalry, the contemporary cult of personality, devotion to royalty, and the worship of national heroes.

Leaving war to the paladins and professionals of Empire

Baden-Powell was sitting watching a tennis tournament there (Peshawar) one afternoon with a number of ladies, nurses and children. The booming of guns could be heard in the distant passes, and there passed along at the back of our seats a procession of dhoolies, stretchers, and ambulances, bringing in dead and wounded from the field. But it created very little excitement, and the game went on without interruption, for that to the players was an everyday incident.³³

Lawrence James, *The savage wars, British campaigns in Africa, 1870-1920* (1985); Adas, *Manchines as measure of men*; Brian Bond (ed.), *Victorian military campaigns* (1967); Philip D. Curtin, *Death by migration. Europe's encounter with the tropical world in the nineteenth century* (1989); Daniel R. Headrick, *The tools of Empire, technology and European imperialism in the nineteenth century* (1981); Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and war: Armed conflicts and international order, 1648-1989* (1991); G. R. Searle, *The quest for national efficiency. A study in British political thought 1899-1919* (1971); Charles Tilley, *Coercion, capital and European states, AD 900 - 1990* (1990).

John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion 1880-1960* (1984), p. 7.

Belich, *New Zealand Wars*, p. 11.

In the extended struggle between agrarians and industrialisers, the armed forces also emerged as the teachers and schools of cultural images and racial stereotypes. Concurrently, as Arno J. Mayer has shown, a martial mentality arose in Britain and on the Continent and was celebrated as a societal elixir:

The violence and blood of battle promised to reinvigorate the individual, re-energise the nation, re-sanitise the race, revitalise society, and regenerate moral life. In addition to being a panacea, war was a fiery ordeal that tested physical prowess, spiritual soundness, social solidarity, and national efficiency. The idea of defeat became well-nigh unthinkable as victory was expected to provide irrefutable proof of personnel, social, and political fitness. This cult of war was an elite, not a plebeian, affair.³⁴

Whilst the monarchy and its noble officers flaunted their military uniforms and campaign ribbons and choreographed intricate parade-ground manoeuvres, they relied on a submissive soldiery. The lower ranks were largely recruited from an illiterate or semi-literate peasantry, from rural villages and provincial towns, rather than from the more politically conscious and therefore less subservient urbanised and industrialised populations.

It was to be expected that the reputation of the military would be transformed as it grew in importance, as a vehicle for noble aspirations and Imperial expectations - but this occurred only gradually and largely during the high age of Imperialism.

In his speech on the East India Bill in 1783, Fox referred to 'a rapacious and licentious soldiery'. Early in the nineteenth century impressed and brutalised troops were billeted upon the people, ate their food and threatened their daughters. At Waterloo, the British army pillaged indiscriminately. At this time some four thousand men remained in England because they were too young and too weak to be used in war - revealing both the failure of recruitment to meet societal needs and the unpopularity of an army in which service was for a full 21 years. It was only with the Cardwell reforms (Edward Cardwell, Liberal Secretary of War), that the period of enlistment was reduced to twelve years, with the option of half this time in the reserves.

The reluctance of the population was easy to understand, for this was a time when punishments, especially lashes, were regularly administered in the armed forces. 'Even at the height of the Victorian era, brutal punishments were still common. In 1879, for instance, during the Zululand war, a private who had stabbed a corporal was given fifty lashes. In December 1880 an artilleryman who broke into a Pretoria distillery was given a dozen lashes. The following year flogging was abolished in army and navy, as was the press-gang in the navy. On active service, however, such punishments were still administered.

Then there were punishments for 'funking' or cowardice. A corporal of the Coldstream Guards broke and ran during the Battle of Modder River. This battle was unique, in that for the first time during a colonial campaign, British losses of 20% equated with the losses experienced in pitched battles in Europe especially during the Franco-Prussian War. The corporal was given two years hard labour for 'misbehaviour'. Two privates of the West Yorkshire regiment were sentenced to twenty one days field punishment for the same offense. At Rhenoster in September 1900 an NCO was sentenced to death for cowardice - later commuted to ten years hard labour by Lord Roberts, and sixteen other men were given between three and ten years for desertion during battle. In May of the following year, also at Rhenoster, a further thirteen men were sentenced to between five and fifteen years for similar offenses.

There were other dangers and privations suffered by the troops, apart from the threat of being killed in action. The army's water supply was often contaminated by all forms of human activity. A soldier serving in the Boer War noted:

It is in all probability drawn from the dam where the horses were watered last night, and where, if you reached the camp early enough, you and your fellow Tommies, and the nigger drivers washed yourselves and possibly your clothes, and where you washed your mess tin and bathed your horse.

It is little wonder then, that measles, pneumonia, dysentery, typhus and enteric devastated the British forces. With the occupation of Bloemfontein in April 1900, an epidemic of enteric fever swept the occupying force, killing fifty men a day and incapacitating thousands more. The camp looked like the Crimea with all the sick and dying.³⁵ In May 1901 the daily sick rate in the British army in South Africa stood at 850, with 152 cases of dysentery. For every soldier lost on the battlefield, three others died of disease.

The 'respectable' working class was especially unwilling to enlist, believing military service to be below their station in society. A mother told her son that she would rather bury him than see him in a red-coat. This unfavourable attitude is partially shown in the recruitment figures whereby only 2.5% of the population of Britain was under arms during the Napoleonic Wars. A decade later this had fallen to less than 1% of the population, and during the Crimean and Zulu Wars, only 1.5% of the population enlisted.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Britain's military organization was so defective, that out of a regular army of 200,000 men, the government found it difficult to embark an expeditionary force of 20,000 men.³⁶ These figures contrast strikingly with the militarism of the French and German populations, or the situation in Britain at the outbreak of the First World War when more than a million and a half young men had enlisted by December 1914.

³⁵ Searle, *National efficiency*, p. 37.

³⁶ Brian Bond, *Victorian military campaigns* (1967), p. 16.

Like its continental counterparts, the British army was caste-ridden. The German rank and file up to and including the First World War were kept apart from their officers in the use of restaurants, hospitals, stairways, entrances, railway compartments, bordellos etc. A similar separation of classes was common in the British army. As Girouard has pointed out:

The philosophy of imperialism was essentially elitist. It was not only that it saw the British people as a ruling race; within the British people it saw British gentlemen as leading, loyally supported by what it liked to think of as British yeomen³⁷

Societal discrimination against soldiers took various forms including, for instance, a regulation dating back to Charles II that excluded soldiers from the parks and gardens of London. Soldiers were also excluded from many places of entertainment because they were rowdy, but also because mixing between officers and men was forbidden. In 1892 the *Select Committee on theatres and places of entertainment* disingenuously concluded that soldiers in uniform were to be excluded from all such venues because it would be a 'bit unpleasant, perhaps, for officers to find privates by the side of them'.

Rudyard Kipling has graphically expressed the attitude of the soldiers towards the contradiction between their discriminatory reality and official expressions about 'the common enterprise of war':

Tommy

I went into a public 'ouse to get a pint o' beer,
 The publican 'e up an' sez, 'We serve no red-coats here.'
 The girls be'ind the bar they laughed an' giggled fit to die,
 I outs into the street again an' to myself sez I:
 O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Tommy, go away';
 But it's 'Thank you, Mister Atkins,' when the band begins to play -
 I went into a theatre as sober as could be,
 They gave a drunk civilian room, but 'adn't none for me;
 They sent me to the gallery or round the music-'alls,
 But when it comes to fightin', Lord! They'll shove me in the stalls!
 O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Tommy, go away';
 But it's 'Thank you, Mister Atkins,' when the band begins to play -
 The band begins to play, my boys, the band begins to play,
 O it's 'Thank you, Mister Atkins,' when the band begins to play.³⁸

The nobility's domination of the army was absolute. It was only in 1870 that the purchase of commissions was abolished, although, even then, other forms of discrimination kept the lower classes from breaching the walls of privilege. Officers and men were often buried separately. In Mafeking, for instance, the officers were buried in coffins (when available), and the other ranks in sailcloth. In 1904 an officer was discharged for drinking and being inebriated in a sergeant's mess. In 1917 an Australian officer was reprimanded for offering to share his

³⁷ Girouard, *Camelot*, p. 224.

³⁸ Craig Raine (ed.), "Tommy" in *Kipling, Selected poetry* (1992), pp. 170-171.

whisky with a sergeant and some privates. As late as 1930 a British Major-General, fifty three years old, was adversely reported on for not playing field games - he no longer fit the mythical profile of the ever dashing officer.

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'Empire', he proclaimed, 'represents to us our history, our tradition, our race. It is a matter of influence, of peace, of civilization, above all IT IS A MATTER OF FAITH

Lord Roseberry.³⁹

I have nothing to do with facts, the entire war IS A MATTER OF FAITH

General De Wet at the Peace Negotiations at Vereeniging⁴⁰

The role of religion was another important element in the ideological arsenal of Imperialism, providing self-legitimation and support for Imperial expansion. Religious sanction justified the oft-stated argument that the Imperial mission was the 'most efficient, mutually beneficial ordering of the global political economy'⁴¹.

During the Medieval period, which provided the archetype for nineteenth century Imperialism, feudalism, manorialism and chivalry depended upon the social cement of a solemn Christian contract between the parties. When the cash nexus undermined this religious bond, the age of 'Bastard Feudalism' began. The Victorians felt a great empathy with the Mediaeval period which they believed, like their own age, had been undermined by crass commercialism and greed.

Imperialists killed on service also died in a religious cause - for they were prosletysing on behalf of the Christian faith and ensuring that populations in the darkest parts of the globe were exposed to the Christian message. The soldiery thus became an instrument of moral purpose.

The Bishop of Grahamstown expounded on this religious purpose when he gave a sermon in London in 1896. He argued that Britain had been awarded her colonies by 'the Prince of Kings of Earth' and they were held in trust, this was the end 'for which our empire had been granted'.⁴²

David Livingstone was the supreme representative of missionary imperialism. As the greatest hero of the nineteenth century, Livingstone personified the diverse and often contradictory elements within Imperialism. Whilst advocating the abolition of slavery, Livingstone also viewed himself as a "cog in God's machinery," and believed in scientific endeavour as the handmaiden of religion.

³⁹ James, *Savage wars*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Belfield, *The Boer War*, p. 140 and J. D. Kestell and D. E. van Velden, *The peace negotiations at Vereeniging on 31 May 1902* (1908).

Adas, *Machines as measure of men*.

James, *Savage wars*, p. 12.

Livingstone argued that railroads and telegraphs were important instruments for breaking down the barriers to Christian conversion. Livingstone went so far as to speculate on the mental capabilities of colonizers and colonized:

(whether)... the "stagnation of the mind" which had checked technological development in non-Christian societies was part of God's larger purpose. Their failure to advance, he reasoned, had ensured, that "the greatest power derivable from science and art might be associated with the religion that proclaims peace and goodwill to man".⁴³

Livingstone also viewed white emigration as an important aid in spreading the word of God throughout Africa - and providing a better life for Britain's dispossessed. The bizarre events surrounding his death, with his heart being preserved by his mourning Black acolytes, helped deify Livingstone and his ultimate sacrifice 'on behalf of Africa'. It was partially as a result of the missionary factor, that the Imperial experiment was sanctified in the eyes of the public.⁴⁴

The final aspect of Imperialism to be discussed in this paper is an examination of the innate arrogance of this ideology, and the pain and suffering that resulted from this hubris.

'We will hasten back together to the healthier atmosphere of war'⁴⁵

Despite their fearsome reputation, Alorns are at best only gifted amateurs, largely because their rank is hereditary. A man who is born a general doesn't have nearly the grasp of things a man who's worked his way up through the ranks has.⁴⁶

Colonial campaigns were fought by professionals against indigenous societies burdened by socio-economic and/or technological disadvantages. It was not until the First Anglo-Boer War and the Battles of Bronkhorstspuit and Majuba that Imperialism came face to face with formidable fighting units in the colonial context.

The negotiated settlement that followed the British defeat at Majuba, created much bitterness. The pride of the empire was unable to countenance the reality that some of its best regiments had been 'out-maneuvred and out-fought by irregular troops of the two tiny pastoral republics'.⁴⁷ As Churchill wrote, 'it was not to be dreamed of that a parcel of ragged Boers should stand against the famous soldiers of Kabul and Kandahar'.⁴⁸

⁴³ Adas, *Machines as measure of men*, p. 205.

⁴⁴ See Mackenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, and Green, *Dreams of adventure*.

⁴⁵ Winston S. Churchill, *The Boer War* (1989), p. 234.

⁴⁶ David and Leigh Eddings, *Balgarath the sorcerer* (1996), p. 596.

⁴⁷ Searle, *National efficiency*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Churchill, *Boer War*, p. 275.

Churchill was overjoyed, therefore, by the decision to go to war with the Boers for a second time in 1899, and wrote, "eighteen years of heart-burnings, the abandoned colonist, the shamed soldier, the cowardly Englishmen, the white flag, the how about Majuba? All gone forever."

But what had been learned of this 'land of lies'? Churchill referred to the 'ignorant peasant communities' whom he argued were incapable of winning by themselves, for the burghers were 'only common men without any real discipline'. The two republics had been victorious in the past because they relied upon advisors from Europe. Churchill had forgotten that the Prussians were also irregulars and landlords in uniform, and yet had smashed the might of the French regular army during the Franco-Prussian War.

The British had also been suborned by their own 'degeneracy paradigm' - that propaganda used to prepare the British public for Imperial excursions into South Africa. The deprecation of Afrikaners was a constant and intensifying theme during the course of the nineteenth century. The abiding attitude of English-speaking literature was of a 'semi-barbarous, lazy, dirty and dishonest population'. The fact that such attitudes were widespread can be seen in the effort of George McCall Theal to write a corrective history attempting to dispel the conviction that all Afrikaners were 'retrograded Dutchmen'.⁴⁹

The effectiveness of this propaganda can be seen in the justification used by the Australian irregulars, the Bushveld Carbineers, for their brutality against the Boers, soldiers and civilians alike. Lieutenant Witton regarded the men whom he and his fellow troopers were hunting as a 'dirty, untidy, unwashed crew who were not soldiers, but bushrangers':

Witton thought such creatures needed a generation of purging, educating and civilizing before they will be capable of taking part in national life'. In this he was at one with his brother officers who had appointed themselves instruments of this cleansing during their patrols.⁵⁰

The Carbineers were not the only ones deceived by Imperial propaganda. Pakenham argues that throughout the Anglo-Boer War, the British High Command refused to regard the Boers as a serious adversary.⁵¹ Many casualties resulted from the British underestimating the potential of their opponents to fight a protracted war against overwhelming odds. Had the Imperial leadership been more circumspect, they might not have rushed into war, and their conduct of that war would certainly have been different.

Milner regarded the Boers 'in utmost contempt as ignorant, uneducated and backward people' and this affected his attitude towards the war.⁵² The result of

⁴⁹ F. A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's interpretation of South African history* (1964), p. 78.

⁵⁰ James, *Savage wars*, p. 206.

⁵¹ Pakenham, *Boer War*, p. 77.

⁵² Irving Hexham, *The irony of Apartheid* (1981), p. 15.

Milner's prejudices can be seen in a discussion the Pro-Consul and 'man of no illusions' had with Ian Hamilton:

He [Milner] said in a questioning sort of way, surely these mere farmers cannot stand for a moment against regular troops?

I replied that this depended on locality and other conditions. In the open they were no use against cavalry and artillery, on their own Boer ground they were the most formidable foe in the world. He did not like this.⁵³

Various attempts were made to account for the Boer victories. Younghusband argued the British had been lulled into a false view of Imperial invincibility thanks to the cheap successes of so many colonial campaigns, 'against ill-armed though brave adversaries, when the enemy lost thousands and we counted our casualties by tens or at most hundreds'.⁵⁴

Churchill was equally guilty of supporting this false aura of moral and racial invincibility. His was the world of Obdurman. During this five-hour battle, twenty Britons and twenty Egyptian allies were killed whilst 11,000 Dervishes were slaughtered.

Churchill had cause to reconsider his assessment of the Boers when he was captured. He had a discussion with an old Boer who endeavoured to teach him something of independent thought in action:

'Don't you have to obey your orders?'

The old man shook his head in bewilderment, then he observed, 'I will fight to kill: I do not fight to be killed.

If the Field Cornet was to order me to go in an armored train, I would say to him, Field Cornet, go to hell!!!'

'Ah You are not soldiers'

'But we catch soldiers and kill soldiers and make soldiers run away'.⁵⁵

One of the few officers to place the blame squarely on the vanity of British officers was General Sir Edward May, a gunner who argued that the colonial campaigns had created a false sense of pride:

Officers... who have gained high positions for gallantry and resources displayed when fighting against opponents ill-trained and equipped, met for the first time in South Africa an enemy as well armed as they were, and capable of developing the resources modern science had placed at their disposal.⁵⁶

⁵³ James, *Savage wars*, p. 192.

⁵⁴ James, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Churchill, *Boer War*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ James, *Savage Wars*, p. 194.

This failure to appreciate the ability of the enemy was a constant theme in the conduct of the Anglo-Boer War, but one particular incident will suffice to illustrate this ideologically derived blindness. At the Battle of Colenso the British artillery commander C. J. Long brought his guns to within 800 yards of the Boer positions because he argued, 'the only way to smash the beggars is to rush in at them'. This action suggests that like so many other officers, he had little conception of the killing power of magazine rifles. Within minutes he lost nearly all his transport horses and thereafter many of his men died trying to extricate themselves.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Historians are constantly aware of the dangers of imposing their consciousness on the consciousness of the past - which is bad history. Little consideration, however, is paid to the opposite - that it is dangerous to impose the stultifying consciousness of the past on an ostensibly malevolent present. This, of course, is what the Victorian nobility was guilty of.

In an effort to save itself from extinction, this *classe dangereuse* applied its ideological hegemony to the task of turning the industrial population of Britain into the fodder of an 'imagined community.' The priests and sorcerers of Empire wove a familiar, and comfortable web of deceit about the 'miracle' of the British people and their natural ability to rule the world. The success of their efforts proves that delusions can be held by millions of people as easily as by the individual.

The First World War and the senseless murder of millions of young men did not stop the fiction. Too many people had invested their all in making the Imperial myth a reality. The Second World War was more successful - but still Imperialism clung tenaciously on. The growth of the Third World was a powerful instrument of change. Perhaps though, it was the coming of the Kalashnikov which finally altered the balance of power in favour of indigenous peoples and their nationalisms; by making the cost of Imperial ventures too great for metropolitan powers in terms of men and matériel. It was this weapon that finally forced the abandonment of colonies and their settler populations and doomed the Imperial crusade.

The medieval crusades were also a failure, but closer contact between medieval Europe and the wider world was the first step in persuading Europe to take its place as a world superpower. One can only hope that, in retrospect, the Imperial experience will turn out to have been similarly valuable to this modern world.