

Chapter Two, Depicting the Zulu:  
The British Popular Press's Presentation of the Zulu People  
By Daniel Dodman

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Cetshwayo: But if you have Missionaries left at home, why do they not teach you the same things as they teach me? They tell me I must not invade Englishman's country. The Englishman invade mine. They forbid me to wash my spears in Boer's blood. Englishman wash his bayonets in Zulus'. They teach me I must not keep up an army of young men. Englishman keep up his army of younger men than mine. They say I must not kill Zulu. Englishmen kill Zulu. I must not take your cattle. You take mine. I must not settle on Englishmen's or Boer's land. Englishmen and Boers settle on my young men's.<sup>1</sup>

The British Press's response to the Anglo-Zulu War was, unsurprisingly, very different to that of those who fought in it. Reports of the conflict were dominated by the very evident problems of both the communications delay from the Cape and the British defeat at Isandlwana. The British military disaster in Zululand confronted many editors with an event which was unpredicted, unprecedented and, in most cases, a matter of complete astonishment. Faced with this situation it became necessary to find an explanation for the massacre of the 24<sup>th</sup> Foot. This fundamental problem dictated the way Zulus were depicted in the British Press.

Communication marked one of the greatest differences between the soldiers' experience in the war and the way in which the conflict was presented to the British domestic population. For the soldiers in Zululand the war progressed daily; each new day brought new events which altered perceptions of the Zulu and changed their own personal opinions. However, British news from Natal relied entirely on a complicated process of steamships and telegrams. This effectively meant that the fastest news (that which was telegraphed for a proportion of its journey) still took at least twenty days to reach England. In addition, this information was sketchy with its facts condensed and it often had the effect of creating a great deal of confusion in the press.<sup>2</sup> For the majority of the war information was published when it became available in the form of the despatches shipped to England. This method meant that little or no war news was published for days, and sometimes weeks on end before a despatch arrived causing the newspapers to become temporarily saturated with articles concerning the Zulu War. For the press the Zulu War became a set of isolated incidents; each despatch bringing a new story and each new story altering the way in which the press depicted the Zulu. By looking at these incidents in turn it is possible to create a clear picture of how the image of the Zulu changed over time.<sup>3</sup> This process of change occurred at similar times across the political spectrum. It is not the intention of this chapter to delve into the complex issue of the popular press's political allegiance and how this altered the way in which the

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<sup>1</sup> *Punch Preface to Second Volume of 1879*, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1879

<sup>2</sup> For example, many newspapers initially described the battle of Isandlwana as occurring at Rorke's Drift because of an imperfect reading of Lord Chelmsford's telegram on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1879. This was only corrected when Chard's epic defence of the mission station at Rorke's Drift became known and must have caused considerable confusion in the British public.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed list of these incidents, when they occurred and when the news of them arrived in England see Figure 1

Zulu was responded to. This issue was characterised far more by the need of certain newspapers to portray events in certain ways to reflect party political beliefs. As such the concern is far more Anglo-Centric and will be dealt with in the third chapter. Instead this chapter's aim is to chart the collective response to the isolated communiqués from Zululand and the way in which this changed how the Zulu was written about. As shall be seen, this response was largely uniform in its nature and therefore provides an appropriate model for study.

There were five discernible stages in the way the Zulu was reported in the press, firstly, the initial impression at the outbreak of war. Secondly, the change which occurred when the details of Frere's ultimatum to Cetshwayo were discovered in late January and early February of 1879. Thirdly, the massive alteration in opinion which was prompted by the British defeat at Isandlwana. Fourthly, the reaction caused by the news of British victories at Khambula and Gingindlovu. And finally the conclusions reached at the end of the war which were particularly shaped by the battle of Ulundi and the capture of King Cetshwayo. All of these events demanded a different set of responses from the British Press and by attempting to demonstrate the importance of contingent circumstances in the depiction of the Zulu it should be possible to demonstrate the unstable nature of the Zulu stereotype in Britain.

The initial reactions to the Zulu were confused. Although the term Zulu first begins to appear in newspapers around 1850 it is clear that the writers' understanding of the geographical limits of Zululand or the anthropological origins of the Zulu are extremely unclear.<sup>4</sup> *The Times* of 1867 describes an expedition "to ascertain the truth of the report that Dr. Livingstone had been murdered by a Zulu tribe near Lake Nyassa."<sup>5</sup>

Clearly the later conception of the Zulu people had not yet found common usage in the popular press. Indeed, most regularly the term Zulu is directly followed by Kaffir. This seems to have been a catch-all phrase to depict the Africans of the South and Central continent. From the Victorian perspective such an approach is indicative of a society which had yet to have close contact with the vast majority of Africans and had thus failed to appreciate the complex gradations in the African people. More crucially, when the news that war was likely to break out in 1879 arrived in England, press opinion fell heavily on the side of Sir Bartle Frere. Many papers followed the abolitionist legacy of legitimising interference in Africa by an emphasis on the importance of humanity and commercial interest. This old tradition had not been completely extinguished either by the Liberal desire to limit Empire or the impending Tory focus on Imperial ambitions. *The Manchester Guardian* stated clearly that,

"The Dark Continent is being attacked at every point by the more enterprising races of the world.... Englishmen especially cannot be indifferent to the future of Africa. It appeals at once to their humanity and their keen commercial interests."<sup>6</sup>

Indeed *The Manchester Guardian* also contained a lengthy debate undertaken by readers over the trading importance of Africa particularly in regard to the absorption of

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Times* the first mention of the Zulu people is January 20<sup>th</sup> 1849, p.3

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1867, p.9

<sup>6</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1879, p.4

excess production of the Northern cotton mills.<sup>7</sup> Some newspapers were therefore more ready to accept Frere's intervention in Zululand as the moral duty of the British Empire.

Frere's issuing of the ultimatum on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1878 was ostensibly to force king Cetshwayo to accept the vows he made at his coronation and to rule in a more 'Christian' manner.<sup>8</sup> In practice however, the terms of the ultimatum were deliberately designed to be unachievable by Cetshwayo. Simultaneously Frere started a huge propaganda campaign to emphasise both the Zulu King's tyranny and the threat which this posed to Natal. Many newspapers accepted Frere's 'casus belli' for war by depicting the Zulus as war-like savages and Cetshwayo as the bloodthirsty tyrant of a nation which could descend on peaceful Natal at any time. *The Graphic* illustrated its fear by concluding that, "By this time we are probably at war with Cetshwayo a military despot, who has been for years training his Zulu warriors for the express purpose of trying conclusions with the English."<sup>9</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* took a more melodramatic view of the affair claiming that, "The Zulu power has for years been weighing upon [the colonists] like a nightmare."<sup>10</sup> Such a view, although heavily prevalent at the time, is lifted almost verbatim from Bartle Frere's despatches to England. Frere's own motivations for making such statements are a subject of historiographical debate and do not concern us here.<sup>11</sup> What is far more important is the willingness of the British Press to adopt such a position. Much of the reason for this blind acceptance is that the contents of Frere's ultimatum to Cetshwayo were not yet known and that the British understanding of the Zulu and the Zulu culture was extremely limited. So limited was this knowledge that the Zulu fighting ability was consistently under-estimated early in 1879. *The Manchester Guardian* rather prematurely declared on January the 27<sup>th</sup> that, "there is little ground so far as we can see, for the anxiety which seems to be felt in some quarters as to the amount of force which Lord Chelmsford has at his disposal."<sup>12</sup> These dismissals of the Zulus' fighting ability would soon be corrected. However, prior to the news of Isandlwana, a despatch arrived in London containing Frere's ultimatum to the Zulu King Cetshwayo. This is the subject of the second shift of opinion regarding the Zulu people.

The arrival of Frere's ultimatum in London in late January of 1879 created a backlash against the High Commissioner, especially amongst the more liberal press. Many editors and reporters realised that the wording of the ultimatum was deliberately designed to force Cetshwayo into war, arguing that its points would, "mount to a virtual extinction of Cetshwayo's power."<sup>13</sup> Even the more apolitical *Illustrated London News* claimed that, "the ultimatum...[was] claiming a right to interfere with the internal affairs of the Zulu Government."<sup>14</sup> More worryingly for the Liberals it appeared that the government was

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<sup>7</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1879, p.6

<sup>8</sup> The terms of the ultimatum included the abolition of summary executions, the abolition of the Zulu army and the presence of a permanent British resident at Ulundi. These innovations would have destroyed Zulu society and therefore were almost impossible for Cetshwayo to accept.

<sup>9</sup> *The Graphic*, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1879, p.98

<sup>10</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Jan 27<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

<sup>11</sup> The debate concerning Frere's decision to go to war is affected by partisan attitudes of many historians and amateurs alike. It seems likely however that a continuing commitment to the confederation of South Africa was responsible. See Webb, "The Origins of the War: Problems of Interpretation". In *The Anglo-Zulu War: New Perspectives*. Ed. A. Duminy, C. Ballard

<sup>12</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

<sup>13</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

<sup>14</sup> *Illustrated London News*, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1879

entering into a policy which, “if consistently pursued would leave us no rest until we had succeeded in disarming every black in South Africa and in breaking up everywhere the tribal system.”<sup>15</sup> The realisation that the policy of confederation in South Africa and the actions of the ‘man on the spot’ had plunged Britain into a costly war began to change press attitudes against the value and morality of the war. Although this fell short of accepting the Zulus’ positive attributes, newspapers shifted towards opposition to the war, not in sympathy of the plight of the Zulu, but on a far more Anglo-Centric concern over the sanctity of foreign nation states and the importance of money.

The third event which helped to shift Press reactions to the Zulu was the discovery on the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1879 that the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the 24<sup>th</sup> Foot had been wiped out under the forbidding frame of the mountain of Isandlwana. This defeat required explanation and the majority of the papers struggled in an attempt to give this to their reading public without necessarily increasing the military prowess of the Zulu people. *The Leeds Mercury* used the defeat to back Frere’s depiction of the Zulu people as warlike and aggressive,

“so far as we have been permitted to learn the truth concerning it, that war has been embarked upon because the army of Cetshwayo has become a distinct menace to the peace and security of the British subjects who have settled in Natal. We know now by the terrible expense of last month how well-founded was the dread inspired on the settlers by the proximity of the Zulu warriors.”<sup>16</sup>

*The Manchester Guardian* was equally quick to place the blame elsewhere declaring that, “Where a few hundreds of men are exposed to the attack of 20,000 sheer weight of numbers must be decisive.”<sup>17</sup> Such views represented a short lived attempt to rationalise the defeat without affecting British military pride. This approach was however fighting a lost cause. Although much criticism landed directly on Lord Chelmsford, the Press increasingly explained the defeat with reference to the martial prowess of the Zulu people. This new-found respect for the Zulu became more evident after the initial shock of Isandlwana had passed. By the time news of the battles of Kambula and Gingindlovu had had been received in England it was obvious to most commentators that the time for the feared descent of the Zulus into Natal had come and gone. These two British victories therefore allowed an expression of relief. It seemed that the battle of Isandlwana had done no long-term damage to colonial possessions and the Zulu defeats had reaffirmed British superiority. The atmosphere was ripe to emphasise the Zulu military ability in the newspapers and by doing so helping to both reduce the shock of Isandlwana and increase British prestige in obtaining the newly fought victories. The language used towards the Zulu and their ‘pluck’ changed accordingly. *The Times* began by stating that, “We have often before encountered barbarian enemies, but seldom enemies who united ferocity of barbarism with the discipline and unity which have been supposed to be characteristics of civilisation.”<sup>18</sup> By the end of the April the editorial column was comparing Cetshwayo’s bloodline to that of Napoleon.<sup>19</sup> The respect directed towards the Zulus’ military ability flowed from the pages of the press. *The Graphic* firstly admired the Zulu fighting man’s

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> *The Leeds Mercury*, February 12<sup>th</sup> 1879

<sup>17</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, February 13<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1879, p.8

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, April 24<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.8

“indomitable pluck”<sup>20</sup> before commending the Zulu commanders’ “remarkable powers of strategy”<sup>21</sup>. *The Graphic* went even further to conclude that, “It is plain, by this time, that in courage, activity and several other important military qualities the Zulus are on par with some of the best troops in Europe.”<sup>22</sup>

This new-found respect transformed the way in which both the Zulus and the Zulu War were portrayed in the political press of Britain. The conflict was transformed from a minor ‘little war’ into a potential arena in which the military prowess of individuals could be put to the test against a worthy adversary. The Prince Imperial’s obvious eagerness to depart for the war was a demonstration for the British public of his bravery and for many officers the conflict represented the easiest route to obtaining a brevet position. This fresh military interest also started an increase in engravings attempting to show the social side of the Zulu life. *The Graphic* produced a series of illustrations attempting to show “Dancing Girls”, “A Typical Zulu Lad”, “The Inside of a Kraal” and “Zulu Blacksmiths Forging Assegai Blades”.<sup>23</sup> These distinctly peaceful images seem surprisingly accurate. Although other engravings, such as the one produced purporting to be Cetshwayo, are far less realistic, they all represent an interest not only in the battles of the Zulu War but the characters and social environment of the country.<sup>24</sup> Such a conclusion is borne out by the presence of advertisements within the pages of the press. *The Times* heavily advertised “Wyld’s new military sketch” and “Wyld’s map of South Africa”<sup>25</sup>; both implied that readers would be interested in learning more about the area in which the conflict was taking place. The development of this increased social interest represents the increasing perception that the Zulu were a very different people to other kaffirs in the Cape. The language and portrayal of the Zulu suggested levels of order and martial skill that were not present in the other indigenous peoples of South Africa. The realisation that the situation was more complex than had been previously thought intrigued the Victorians and the newspapers simply matched this demand. It is obvious, simply by counting the number of articles that, after the battle of Isandlwana, the Victorian inquisitive mindset was awoken to the possibility that there was still a massive amount to discover about this previously mysterious people.

This change of attitude was further reinforced by a subtle change of emphasis in the final days of the war. Here the battle of Ulundi and Cetshwayo’s capture finally solidified the sympathetic approach to the Zulu and directed criticism away from Cetshwayo as the main protagonist in the war, instead focusing on Frere as responsible. Some newspapers came out openly in support of Cetshwayo and hoped that he would be respected and treated well, “It was remembered that in this war, it was ourselves, not Cetshwayo who took the first aggressive step...with all his bad qualities, the man’s character was not wholly destitute of elements of nobility and greatness.”<sup>26</sup> Other papers cast Cetshwayo in the frame of the noble and unfortunate leader who, despite the courage required to fight against the British Empire, was inevitably doomed to failure.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Graphic*, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1879, p.187

<sup>21</sup> *The Graphic*, March 8<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.226

<sup>22</sup> *The Graphic*, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1879 p.354

<sup>23</sup> Figure 2.

<sup>24</sup> Figure 3.

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, February 26<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.12

<sup>26</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

“But every chivalrous Englishman will acknowledge in his innermost conscious that there has been something at variance with the English traditions and sympathies in this hot chase after a man who had shown himself to be at least a brave foe, and who was for many years a faithful ally.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the Zulus themselves became portrayed clearly as having a great deal of nobility and skill. The Battle of Ulundi, where the majority of news correspondents were, for the first time, present impressed them graphically with the martial ability and courage of the Zulu. Newspaper reports of the battle are full of the proximity that the Zulus reached to British guns and the truly horrific fire that Chelmsford’s square produced, “Such severe a loss proves that in this decisive struggle the Zulus more than maintained their reputation for unflinching bravery.”<sup>28</sup>

The culmination of the battle of Ulundi and Cetshwayo’s imprisonment firmly shifted Victorian opinion towards the admiration and respect for the Zulu people. The initial response to the war had been a confused reaction forced by a lack of understanding of the Zulu culture or even of basic geography. The newspapers were forced into a better understanding by the battle of Isandlwana which initially created a patriotic ripple that attempted to undermine the Zulu achievement. However, it quickly became obvious that the easiest way of reconciling apparent British military might and the defeat was to emphasise Zulu military ability. Combined as this was with British victories and a realisation that Natal was not likely to be invaded by the Zulus an entire press language grew up around the Zulu people discussing the apparently contradictory facets of an organised and effective military system with a barbarous and uncivilised culture. So effective was this discourse that by August 1879 *The Graphic* was declaring,

“When the time for concluding peace comes the public opinion of the Empire will demand that the terms imposed on the vanquished enemy be as moderate as may be compatible with the safety of Natal. The Zulus have proved themselves a brave and capable race and we have to some extent incurred a moral obligation to help them to a higher stage of civilisation.”<sup>29</sup>

The British political press therefore went through a clear process in its depiction of the Zulu to the ordinary public. Initial reports from Zululand were marred by a lack of knowledge. The nature of tribes in South Africa was not understood, neither was the culture or military capacity of the Zulus themselves. Increasingly however, the public’s inquisitiveness over the military situation led to a growing demand for an explanation of the environment in Natal and South Africa. In the light of these developments the depiction of the Zulu changed from a vague notion of black tribesmen to a deliberately more ambiguous definition. The people of Zululand would increasingly serve different purposes in different situations. The nature of these changes would be dictated by British concerns; these issues will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter three.

It is not the desire of this chapter to attempt to map the popular mood of Britain by looking simply at newspapers. Such an undertaking would be too difficult to construct from one set of sources. However, it is clear that newspapers were careful to tap into the popular conception of specific events. In some circumstances newspapers helped to shape and mould these interpretations. The aim of this section of the dissertation is thus to

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<sup>27</sup> *The Leeds Mercury*, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1879

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, July 24<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.9

<sup>29</sup> *The Graphic*, August 16<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.146

attempt to distinguish running themes throughout the portrayal of the Zulu in the popular press whilst simultaneously highlighting potential discrepancies in this model. By doing this it is hoped that, in conjunction with other sources, specific themes might be distinguished and a clear idea about how the image of the Zulu changed throughout 1879 might be gained. It is clear that the popular press was faced with a number of challenges during 1879. These ranged from the realisation that very little was known about the Zulu to the shock and reason behind the defeat at Isandlwana. It is also clear that the majority of newspapers responded to these challenges in a uniform way, initially supporting the government and attacking the Zulu before events on the ground forced a dramatic U-Turn in favour of the invaded party. Considering the politically partisan nature of the press such uniformity is a testament to the scale of the defeat inflicted on the British on Isandlwana. In essence the martial ability of the Zulu had wider domestic implications than the simple sending of reinforcements to Zululand

### **Chapter Three, Understanding the Zulu: Anglo-Centrism and the war of 1879.**

“Gainst twenty thousand foreign foes,  
‘Mid thunder, shot, and shell,  
Five hundred valiant English fought.  
And nobly fightin fell.  
Five hundred valiant English fought,  
And nobly fighting fell.”  
Extract from ‘The Noble 24<sup>th</sup> Vanquished Not Disgraced’,  
sung with immense success by J.W Rowley.<sup>30</sup>

Although chapters one and two are important in understanding British perceptions of the Zulu they also reveal a fundamental similarity in the way in which British society dealt with this ‘other’. The Zulus’ role in the contemporary reactions to the war was constantly changing in response to events in Zululand and more importantly events in Britain. The British coverage of the war had relatively little to do with the Zulu people; the majority of commentary was instead dictated by far more Anglo-centric concerns. Newspaper articles and art depicted the Zulu but did so almost in passing. More crucial to them was the attempt to arrive at what was the far more pressing matter of British prestige and the British place in the world. These attitudes were absorbed into the popular culture and their legacy is still being felt today. The modern day popular interest in the Anglo-Zulu War far outstretches its military or political significance in the formation of Britain or the British Empire, yet it still maintains a crucial part in the popular myth of Empire. The films *Zulu* and *Zulu Dawn* are the descendants of this uniquely British way of looking at the Anglo-Zulu War.<sup>31</sup> The aim of this chapter is two fold firstly, to examine why and how British newspapers reflected a domestic British political tussle in their opinions regarding the Zulu War. Secondly, to demonstrate how British society reacted to the defeat at Isandlwana not by undermining the Zulu effort but by building up Zulu valour as a milestone against which to measure British bravery. By examining both of these aspects it is hoped to be able to prove that, although looking at the British perception of the Zulu is important to the wider issue of Empire and ‘race’, the key to understanding the Anglo-Zulu War’s domestic impact is to place the war within the context of internal debates about the nature of imperialism.

#### The Political argument and situation

International changes of the 1860s and 1870s, including the unification of Italy and Germany, created a climate in which British global supremacy seemed less secure. This created a large amount of domestic anxiety over the position of the Empire and an increasing desire to see Britain defined as a world power through its imperial possessions.

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<sup>30</sup> G. C. Anewick, *The noble 24<sup>th</sup> Or Vanquished not disgraced*, (London: Howard & Co, 1879)

<sup>31</sup> Both films are interesting in their portrayal of 1960s attitudes to the British Empire and examine the mythology of the war very carefully. As a point of interest ‘Zulu’ is largely accurate, although the more dramatic elements, including the singing of the Men of Harlech, are imaginary. *Zulu Dawn* follows the conventional interpretation of the battle of Isandlwana, which has now been thrown into doubt.

This development therefore required a new mythology to combat an increasingly aggressive European environment. For much of Britain this would mark the end of the Whig tradition of informal Empire and the arrival of a more aggressively imperial foreign policy. This new ideology has been associated with Disraeli and the extent to which this represented a real change has been debated by historians. Morison has argued that Disraeli really had little idea about the new Imperial policies he was heralding in and Robinson and Gallagher claim that there was little if any distinction between Empire before 1870 and after 1870.<sup>32</sup> However, what is more important to this dissertation is how the Liberals perceived Disraeli and his policies.<sup>33</sup> The Liberals still associated themselves with the mid Victorian tradition of limited Empire. Britain was to be at the centre of a free association of independent colonies all of which practiced free trade.<sup>34</sup> No new expansion was to occur and in areas where Britain's presence was irremovable, as in India, the country was to be held in moral trusteeship until the nation's own people were fit to govern. This attitude sat uneasily with what Gladstone described as 'Beaconsfieldism'. Disraeli was seen by the Liberals as covering Imperialism with a deceptive sheet of glamour and pomp to detract from his poor domestic policies. Disraeli's flamboyance and to some extent his Jewish ancestry all helped to aid the accusation that the Conservatives foreign policy was a triumph of style over substance which required expansion and inevitably cost human lives.<sup>35</sup> The Liberal press's guilt over the Zulu war was less concerned with the plight of the Zulu people and more focused on actual or pretended guilt that the British people should act in a way which threatened the sanctity of another people. The war of 1879 came at a crucial juncture in the argument over imperialism. The election of 1880 was fought by the Liberals mainly through an attack on Conservative 'imperialism'. The Afghan and Zulu Wars were seen by many as part of a wider policy move by the Tories. Whether imperialism had become part of the Conservative ideology of government is open to debate but an increasing number of Members of Parliament were willing to accept this notion. The Zulu War therefore came at an important time in the development of the Tory party's theory regarding imperialism. Actions not dictated by central government had created wars of expansion and Disraeli was left with the difficult task of legitimising this new type of conflict, either by playing down its significance or openly embracing imperialism. To demonstrate how perceptions of the Anglo-Zulu War were shaped by this situation, it is necessary to look at two examples of the way in which coverage of the conflict was dictated by British concerns. Firstly, through the nature of the subtle variations of reporting in newspapers and what motivated these variations, and secondly, through art.

For many papers, political allegiance affected the timing of the shifts in different perspectives of the Zulu and the War shown in the previous chapter. For example, the Conservative Press spent much longer attempting to legitimise Bartle Frere's decision to

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<sup>32</sup> J.L. Morison, 'The Imperial Ideas of Benjamin Disraeli', *Canadian Historical Review*, 1 (1920), p.267-80. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The official mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> C.C. Eldridge, *Disraeli and the rise of New Imperialism*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996)

<sup>34</sup> C.C. Eldridge, *England's mission the Imperial idea in the age of Disraeli and Gladstone, 1868-1880* (London, MacMillan, 1973)

<sup>35</sup> Anthony S. Wohl, "'Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi': Disraeli as an alien" in *The Journal of British Studies*, 34 ( July, 1995)

go to war with the Zulu people and subsequently criticised Liberal tendencies to portray the war as unjust. As *Punch* declared,

“But what are they made of, these preachers and praters?  
What is this tale of “aggression” they tell?  
To old England’s honour the basest of traitors  
Wishing her bitterest enemies well.”<sup>36</sup>

This was a direct criticism of the growing Liberal Press opinion that the war in South Africa was unwarranted. Eventually, however, *Punch* would fall into line and began to portray the Zulus in a similarly positive light. *Punch*’s criticism here is indicative of its satirical nature. Its political affiliation is questionable but its pages lampoon the Liberal approach to the Anglo-Zulu War. *Punch* was quick to declare that the Zulus were Britain’s enemies and therefore any support for the Zulu was anti-British. Its carefully contradictory nature changed as the conflict continued but was always keen to attack any situation which was seen as ludicrous. For example, *Punch* was extremely critical of Lord Chelmsford despite the official government backing that was given to him, declaring that a “strange official mistake in Geography [had been made] - To have Chelmsford in Africa.”<sup>37</sup> Such criticism was common and actively attacked all political bodies which were engaged in commentary in the Anglo-Zulu War.

The themes of political debate ranged across a number of issues, some of which had very little to do with the Zulu situation. Commentary often followed standard political lines. For example, Frere’s creation of war was criticised by the major newspapers but the motives behind the timing of such attacks differed according to the political allegiances of the newspaper in question. *The Manchester Guardian*’s motivation reflected the Liberal concern with the sanctity of nation states’ own political power and concern over Disraeli’s apparent imperialist foreign policy.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, *The Times* concerned itself with an almost exclusively financial outlook on the situation declaring that, “if England could confine herself to the military position at the Cape peninsula she would retain nearly all that it is worth her while to keep.”<sup>39</sup> Other Tory press confirmed such feelings; *The Graphic* stated that, “many of us are old enough to remember a time when the very name of the Cape Colony stank in the nostrils of the British Tax-payer.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly the reasons for arriving at the same conclusion (the criticism of Frere’s colonial policy) varied greatly between different portions of the political press depending on which aspects of the government’s actions concerned them most. This impacted on the perception of the Zulus because it created a varying atmosphere across different newspapers. The Liberal press, due to moral and political objections to the war, were more susceptible to a positive view of the Zulu. Conversely the Tory press, with its concentration on the financial disadvantages of war, was relatively unconcerned with the portrayal of the Zulu. As *The Times* was keen to highlight,

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<sup>36</sup> *Punch*, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1879

<sup>37</sup> *Punch*, March 15<sup>h</sup> 1879, p.109

<sup>38</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

<sup>39</sup> *The Times* January, 28<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.9

<sup>40</sup> *The Graphic* February, 1<sup>st</sup> 1879 p.98

“I write with no partiality for the Zulus I believe their government to be as wicked a one ...to exist among the most savage tribes, but unless we intend to undertake the responsibility of governing them, it is doubtful whether, it is wise to interfere with their internal affairs.”<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, certain parts of the press were eager to portray the events of the war in a way which would begin to create legends of bravery. These events although often militarily directly connected to the Zulus themselves had very few references to their roles in the fighting. The Tory press in particular emphasised the bravery of Rorke’s Drift and the Battle of Isandlwana to excuse the British defeat. *The Leeds Mercury* declared that,

“Fortunately we are not without a well-founded confidence in the qualities of a race which has never shone to more advantage than in the hour of sudden adversity and bitter stress. Members of that great family, some of whose children held our Indian Empire with steadfast hearts amid the tremendous tornado of 2 and 20 years ago, these kinsmen of ours in South Africa will do their best.”<sup>42</sup>

The use of the Indian Mutiny in this example is not unusual and evokes the sense of crisis and perseverance which was often contained within the Tory and patriotic press. *The Illustrated London News* went further to describe the events at Rorke’s Drift as, “events never to be forgotten in British military history”.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast much of the Liberal Press was less keen to highlight the military successes of Zululand, instead focusing on the humanitarian disaster of the situation. *The Manchester Guardian* was scathing after the capture of Cetshwayo declaring that, “we are equally free from the wish to win admiration in vulgar eyes by leading a savage chieftain captive at the wheels of the British triumphal car”.<sup>44</sup> This reference in particular directly satirises Disraeli comparing the Prime Minister to the Emperor of ancient Rome, a comparison which was designed to attack the glamour of aggressive and expansionist imperialism. Liberal attempts to attack the Conservative policy in South Africa, particularly once war against the Zulus had begun often caused a backlash in the Tory press. Accusations of a lack of patriotism were difficult for the Liberals to avoid whilst questioning the prosecution and reason for the war in Zululand. It is perhaps as a result of this that most newspapers were keen to portray the conflict as one which was equal and competitive. The bravery of both sides was at the forefront of most editors’ minds and this aided the development of the mythology of the war. Many papers, particularly the patriotic press, used contemporary accounts to bolster a sense of Zulu bravery. By doing so they also fundamentally emphasised British skill in resisting attacks or the bravery with which British officers and men faced death on the field of Isandlwana. At this time Otto Van Witt, the owner of the mission station at Rorke’s Drift, published a very well read account of the Battles of Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift which was often quoted verbatim in the British Press. In this account he states,

“behold on the other side- the black ones- how they are fighting against the intruder and oppressor, fighting for liberty and independence...Who wins your warmest sympathy- the Captain, who, knowing that he is

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<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1879,

<sup>42</sup> *The Leeds Mercury* February 13<sup>th</sup> 1879

<sup>43</sup> *The Illustrated London News* March 8<sup>th</sup> 1879

<sup>44</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* June 10<sup>th</sup> 1879, p.5

lost, stops a moment to spike the cannon and die; or the Zulu, who, in his excitement leaves his fellow soldiers behind and alone makes the attack on the hospital at Rorke's Drift."<sup>45</sup>

The two events mentioned are references to Major Stuart Smith of the Royal artillery at Isandlwana and an incident which occurred after the battle at Rorke's Drift when, after the battle had finished and the Zulus had withdrawn, a Zulu sneaked up to the makeshift defences of the station and fired a symbolic shot into the men who were still shocked after the ferocity of the Zulu attack. The Zulu missed and had numerous shots fired after him until Chard, admiring his courage, gave the order to cease fire and allowed him to escape. The juxtaposition of these two events by Witt is obvious and gives an insight into the way in which the Zulus' bravery would increasingly be used as a measure for British martial ability. This interpretation of the war as a noble contest has continued to the present day, although it is increasingly challenged by a new wave of revisionist historians.<sup>46</sup>

The final major discrepancy between newspapers was the way in which visual images were used to shape the Victorian view of the Zulu. The vast majority of illustrations in the leading periodicals attempted to inform the reader in the absence of photographs. In this respect they follow the increasing interest the Victorian public found in the Zulu people.<sup>47</sup> Some satirical papers, however, diverged from this norm and increasingly used the visual medium to give a particular message regarding the Zulu. *Punch*, due to its concern for the domestic political situation, used the Zulu as an aid to illustrate the follies of British colonial policy. In its cartoon "The Lesson" a standing Zulu teaches John Bull to, "despise not your enemy".<sup>48</sup> John Bull takes the inferior position in this caricature; he is sitting, humbled by the experience of Isandlwana, while the Zulu warrior stands holding his *assegai* and knobkerries behind his back. A Martini Henri rifle (presumably from the camp at Isandlwana) is propped against his shield in the background. The message is clear: British arrogance and disdain for the enemy had led to the military reverses. This is clearly an Anglo-centric view concerned mainly with the British failure to perform to the military ideals it aspired to. In direct contrast *Judy*, *Punch*'s sister magazine, takes a more overtly racial approach. Its engraving "Strange conduct of a Noble Savage", published before Isandlwana, depicts a Zulu with typical 'negro' features attempting to strike a relaxed John Bull.<sup>49</sup> John Bull is equally up to the task and is capable of tackling the Zulu single handed. The caption depicts the supposed difference between Liberal perceptions of the Zulu and *Judy*'s apparent practical reality. The racial approach to the Zulu was not changed by the news of Isandlwana. *Judy*'s cartoon on "Retribution" depicts a youthful Britannia strangling a Zulu who has just

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<sup>45</sup>*The Illustrated London News* March 8<sup>th</sup> 1879. Witt's account is almost certainly a composite of others. It seems unlikely that he was close enough to Isandlwana to observe events there and he gets certain key facts wrong. This is irrelevant, however, because it is the accounts inclusion in the British Press which makes it important to this dissertation.

<sup>46</sup> Of particular note is Michael Lieven "'Butchering the Brutes all over the place' Total War and massacre in Zululand in 1879". *History*, 84 (1999), pp. 614-632. The article although excessively critical of the British makes valid points about the sanitised version of the Anglo-Zulu War.

<sup>47</sup> For a good example of this compare Figure 3 with Figure 4. Two depictions of Cetshwayo. One in *The Graphic* and one in *The Illustrated London News* separated by a mere eight months. They help to illustrate the vast increase in knowledge about the Zulu which occurred in a relatively short space of time.

<sup>48</sup> Figure 5

<sup>49</sup> Figure 6

killed a member of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot.<sup>50</sup> The colours of the 24<sup>th</sup> are being desecrated by the Zulu and the suggested action of the British is clear. Cartoons such as this represent the clearest way in which the illustrated news magazines attempted to deliver the news for its particular readers in a way which was acceptable to them. The variety of illustrations went some way to developing the popular myth of the war. Perhaps more crucially, it also seems likely that the variety of different illustrations is not indicative of a different racial attitude towards the Zulu but a matter of editors catering for their audience. *The Graphic* and other illustrated papers traded on their use of the image to portray the exotic. Their portrayals of the Zulu therefore had to be as objective and realistic as was believable to the majority of those who read the papers. In contrast *Judy* catered for the cruder entertainment market where more overtly racist or patriotic images would be popular. Although this dichotomy does reveal something about the varying attitudes to the Zulu it ironically says far more about the complexity and focus of the British press during the period. The war of 1879 was effectively divided into two separate spheres. Firstly, there was the military situation in Zululand. However, of far more importance to the majority of newspapers was the second political conflict at home. The British press regularly blurred the difference between these two areas using the military campaign to bolster political ideologies.

#### The role of Art in the creation of myth and Anglo-Centrism

As important as newspapers' depiction of the war was the portrayal of the conflict in art. The Zulu War was made unique by the Battle of Isandlwana. The Zulu victory here was explained away in the popular press and across the nation by raising the perceived standard of the Zulu Warrior. As we have seen in other chapters the Zulu was no longer imagined as a simple savage who could be defeated easily but a warrior whose martial ability placed him on the same footing as Europeans. It therefore followed that Zululand was a prime location for the British army to create its own new set of myths and to prove its own ability. At a time when European competition against the Empire was increasingly evident and fears over the British position in the world were voiced regularly, Zululand provided an example where British 'pluck' and heroism could take dramatic visual realisation. Two events in particular were capitalised on more than the others, firstly the rescue of the colours by Melvill and Coghill and secondly the defence of Rorke's Drift. Both incidents featured heavily in literature and art outside of their importance to the Battle of Isandlwana which was their backdrop. Many historians have in the past accounted for this by explaining away the British interest in these events (particularly when it came to the issuing of Victoria Crosses) as a blunt form of cover-up to deflect public attention away from Isandlwana.<sup>51</sup> However, such a view misses two facts, firstly that the gap between the event and the issuing of the Victoria Crosses was very large (in the case of Melvill and Coghill a matter of decades)<sup>52</sup> and secondly that in

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<sup>50</sup> Figure 7

<sup>51</sup> See Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill *Zulu Victory: The Epic of Isandlwana and the Cover-up* (United Kingdom: Greenhill Books, 2002)

<sup>52</sup> Melvill and Coghill were initially denied the Victoria Cross because there was no facility for it to be awarded posthumously. Only after 28 years of campaigning did their families ensure that it was given to both men.

contemporary newspapers the battle of Isandlwana had far more coverage than either of these two incidents. Instead the situation is more complex. Both events were portrayed as examples of typical Victorian ‘pluck’ and bravery. The formal artwork depicting these events echoes this concern; for example, Alphonse de Neuville’s depiction of finding Melvill and Coghill’s bodies.<sup>53</sup> The painting romanticizes the situation to demonstrate a fallen kinship between both men; lying in death as they would have fought side by side. Coghill still clasps the colour in his hand whilst both men have the arms with which they fought lying next to them. A lancer salutes the body with a look of pride which symbolically represents the attitude of the Victorian military elite. The reality was quite different. The colour had been lost in the crossing of Fugitive’s Drift and was found jammed between two rocks a good distance away and the bodies themselves had been exposed to the elements for almost two weeks. These images were not however the ones which the Victorian public wished to view and therefore they were suppressed in formal paintings and instead traditional British values were emphasized instead.

A similar picture can be seen in Lady Butler’s famous painting of the defence of Rorke’s Drift.<sup>54</sup> Commissioned by Queen Victoria, it was originally to have been of the discovery of the body of the Prince Imperial by the 17<sup>th</sup> Lancers but the topic was changed at the last minute to reflect public opinion. The picture itself is remarkable mainly for its complete absence of any Zulus. The concentration of the picture is very much on the British soldiers who fought in the battle. Intelligent use of light highlights the main protagonists in the centre of the painting whilst storekeeper Byrne falls in a cruciformed pose; shot through the head while handing out ammunition. The dynamic of the painting therefore rests with the British defenders; Zulus are removed from the equation as being unimportant. By doing this, Lady Butler effectively made the defence of Rorke’s Drift a blank canvas by which all Victorian manhood could be measured. Whether against the Zulus or any other enemy of the Empire the gallant defence of Rorke’s Drift was used as a mythological mile stick against which to measure the Victorian soldier.<sup>55</sup>

These two examples are representative of a number of formal Victorian paintings that dealt with the events of the Anglo-Zulu War.<sup>56</sup> All of them represent the conflict in a way which reduces the savagery of the situation and emphasises the noble nature of the struggle. Much work has already been done on the way in which reality and perception of ‘fair play’ were at odds in this conflict.<sup>57</sup> However, it is crucial when examining the British attitude to the Zulu War to acknowledge that domestic British perception was divorced from reality soon after the battle of Isandlwana.<sup>58</sup> In the place of this reality was a myth of a contest fairly fought by Cetshwayo but confidently won by the British. The Zulu were a means to an end to have this message voiced.

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<sup>53</sup> Figure Eight

<sup>54</sup> Figure Nine

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of paintings of the Anglo-Zulu War see ‘Scenes of Rorke’s Drift’, *The Journal of the Anglo-Zulu War Historical Society*, 18 (December 2005)

<sup>56</sup> See also C.E. Fripp *The battle of Isandlwana* and R.T Mognan *Last of the 24th*

<sup>57</sup> Michael Lieven, *‘Butchering the Brutes all over the Place’*.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 2.

## **Conclusion**

“A very remarkable people the Zulus. They defeat our generals; they convert our bishops; they have settled the fate of a great European dynasty”-Benjamin Disraeli<sup>59</sup>

The Anglo-Zulu War ended much as it had begun, in tragedy. The once mighty Zulu army was finally destroyed in a little over half an hour at the battle of Ulundi. The kingdom itself was divided into thirteen chiefdoms by General Garnet Wolseley’s peace settlement. This balkanisation of the region led to a civil war which would kill more Zulu’s than the British had. By the end of 1879 there were very few newspaper reports

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<sup>59</sup> J.A Froude, *Lord Beaconsfield*, (London: Samson Low, 1890), p.251

coming from South Africa. The British public's opinion was directed elsewhere and the memory of the war faded into the distant past. However, the war still continues to interest a large section of the public today. In particular military historians are fascinated by the vivid imagery of an army equipped with spears defeating a British force that was close to becoming a modern industrialised army. Isandlwana is the British equivalent of the battle of Little Big Horn. It is perhaps this focus of military historians which has dissuaded cultural or social historians from focusing on other aspects of the war. However, there is a wealth of underused source material and a number of issues which are still to be discussed regarding the war and its wider impact. It has been the aim of this dissertation to investigate some of these issues, particularly those which deal with how the British public perceived the Zulu. The Anglo-Zulu war has much to say about two topics, firstly that of race and British ideology and secondly that of British politics. It is hoped that the new research which I have conducted will illuminate these wider issues.

Any analysis of race and the changing attitudes of individuals in the past is fraught with problems. Individuals rarely explicitly state their true emotions and are inevitably affected by the trends and society surrounding them. The methodological approach which many historians have used to tackle this problem has been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. The relative merits of Hall or Mandler are open to interpretation but the sources of the Anglo-Zulu War raise one interesting trend. Racial attitudes amongst the British were by no means unified. Any attempt by historians to prescribe particular feelings to the population is doomed to fail; even general comments about the progression of race are highly circumspect. Almost every source that has been dealt with over the course of constructing this dissertation changed its approach to the Zulu during the course of the brief war. Newspapers reacted to the shattered complacency of Isandlwana and then heralded the later British triumphs in the context of Zulu military ability. Individuals were stunned by the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> January or elated by the cavalry charge at Ulundi. Clearly any racial discourse was fluid at this time.

The second theme of interest is that which the sources reveal about the political impact of the war and the way in which this interlinks with the racial perspective. The majority of resources reveal that although racial attitudes did play some part in the portrayal of the Zulu during the war the far more important consideration was that of domestic politics and ideology. Both of these issues fed directly into the issue of race and once again suggest that the establishment of a standard orthodoxy does not really apply. The political fears of certain newspapers affected the way in which the Zulu was discussed. Political allegiances were therefore sometimes of more importance than the issue of race. This can also be seen by looking at art and in soldier's own personal accounts of the war. The Anglo-Zulu War provided a new set of myths and heroes to bolster an ideology of Empire. In this situation the battle of Isandlwana allowed the creation of a new myth by raising the military standard of the Zulu in the minds of Victorians.

The one of the objects of this dissertation is to demonstrate the importance of not oversimplifying British attitudes during this period. Discussions of race are complicated and the debates which continued through the political press were far more concerned with domestic British problems than with issues in South Africa. Perhaps more importantly British attitudes reveal an appreciation of the Zulu which is remarkable. The Victorians

viewed the Zulu as primitive yet courageous, basic but not base. The concept that technological inferiority did not equal genuine inferiority was not removed from the mindset of many Victorians. The concept that the Zulu was inferior simply because he had no guns did not occur to the extent that perhaps it does to modern day commentators. The Victorians recognised simplicity as an attribute. Historians should therefore tread carefully when dealing with inferiority and the Zulus.

Although many historians have been quick to proclaim the treatment of the Zulu explicitly racist it should be clear that in practice such an interpretation is limited. The Anglo-Zulu war created a complex set of emotions and reactions amongst many people. The Victorian self-image was defined by a cultural exchange of migration, immigration and colonialism motivated by the 'colonial desire' or British fascination for colonial others.<sup>60</sup> In this case war provided another outlet for this Victorian attribute. The Anglo-Zulu War is a subject worth studying not only for its own sake but also for the illumination it provides on the Victorian mindset.

## Appendix

A Table to show the respective dates on which key events occurred in the Anglo-Zulu War and when they were subsequently reported in the British press.

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<sup>60</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994) and Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: hybridity in theory, culture, and race*, (London: Routledge, 1995)

*Figure One*

Event	Date Occurring	Date Reported in British Press
War Announced	11 <sup>th</sup> January	27 <sup>th</sup> January
The Battle of Isandlwana	22 <sup>nd</sup> January	11 <sup>th</sup> February
The Intombi Drift Attack	12 <sup>th</sup> March	10 <sup>th</sup> April
The Battles of Hlobane, Kambula and Gingindlovu	28 <sup>th</sup> March, 29 <sup>th</sup> March and 2 <sup>nd</sup> April	2 <sup>nd</sup> May
Death of the Prince Imperial	1 <sup>st</sup> June	21 <sup>st</sup> June
The Battle of Ulundi	4 <sup>th</sup> July	24 <sup>th</sup> July
Cetewayo captured	28 <sup>th</sup> August	18 <sup>th</sup> September

Zulu Social Scenes-The Graphic, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1879 p.188

*Figure Two*

Cetshewayo, King of the Zulus-*The Graphic*, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1879 p.185

*Figure Three*

The King Under Guard, Brigadier Clarke's Encampment on the Black Umvolosi-  
*Illustrated London News*, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1879



*Figure Four*

'Despise Not Your Enemy' -Punch, March 1<sup>st</sup> 1879

*Figure Five*

'Strange Conduct of a noble Savage'-*Judy*, February 5<sup>th</sup> 1879

*Figure Six*

'Retribution'-*Judy*, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1879

*Figure Seven*

'The Last Sleep of the Brave'-Alphonse de Neuville



*Figure Eight*

'The Defence of Rorke's Drift' - Lady Butler (1881)



*Figure Nine*  
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