

THE HONEST REPRESENTATIVE OF TRUE ENGLISH... FREEDOM': THE METROPOLITAN
PRESS AND THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR OF 1879

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During the second half of the nineteenth century, the British press saw itself as the 'fourth estate' of the realm and expressed this view in high-blown prose. It was the representative of enlightened and diverse public opinion, the voice of progress and the defender of liberal political and economic freedoms. The leading article in the *Daily Telegraph*, when it was re-launched in 1855, famously asserted that the triumphs of the press had made it, 'under a constitutional monarchy, the safeguard of the throne, the improver of morality, and the guardian of the subject'.⁽¹⁾ The view that the freedom of the press had been achieved by the middle of the century and that the next fifty years saw the golden age of a free, liberal, pluralist press was echoed, if in less hyperbolic language, by many later historians. James Curran, in an influential book, claimed that:

The orthodox interpretation of the development of the British press has remained virtually unchanged for over a century. 'The British press', writes David Chaney, 'is generally agreed to have attained its freedom around the middle of the nineteenth century'. This view, first advanced in the pioneering Victorian histories of journalism, has been reiterated in histories of the British press and general histories of modern Britain ever since. ⁽²⁾

Against what he sees as the traditional, heroic view of the press, Curran asserted that:

The period around the middle of the nineteenth century did not inaugurate a new era of press freedom and liberty; it introduced a new system of press censorship more effective than anything that had gone before. Market forces succeeded where legal repression had failed in establishing the press as an instrument of social control. ⁽³⁾

In attempting to establish this point, Curran did some violence to the complexity of recent debates in order to include writers such as Raymond Williams and Alan Lee as proponents of 'a golden age' of British journalism.⁽⁴⁾ Lee had argued rather that such a pluralist vision 'was perhaps always far from reality, but it was a vision which did illumine liberal views of the press before 1914', while Williams' view was of a complex development which included elements of growing independence alongside incorporation by market forces.⁽⁵⁾ In fact, the last two decades have produced a substantial body of work by Lucy Brown, James Curran, George Boyce, Alan Lee and others, amounting almost to a new orthodoxy, which has identified the extent to which the press was tied to political and commercial forces which undermined its claim to autonomy.⁽⁶⁾

This article uses the coverage by the metropolitan press of the British invasion of Zululand in 1879 as a case study in order to test these competing claims about the pluralistic and critical role of the late-nineteenth-century press.

The response of the metropolitan press to the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 was complex, shifting and often self-contradictory as it reacted to events and to changes in the public mood. The war generated little interest at the start, being generally seen as no more than another punitive expedition against a black monarch; the fact that it was initiated by the colonial governor on the spot, Sir Bartle Frere, rather than by the imperial government, also served to lessen its significance for the metropolitan press. Within weeks, however, one British column was annihilated by the Zulus, another was cut off and besieged and the British suffered further defeats before they finally managed to crush the Zulus after a long, expensive and humiliating war. It could be argued that the increasingly hostile response of the press, both to the strategy of the military and to the imperial policies of the government, triumphantly vindicated its claim to be a fourth estate: this article examines that claim and concludes that beneath complex levels of shared opinion and disagreement in their editorializing about the war, a new consensus can be seen emerging. While no single theme characterized their coverage of the war, nevertheless a number of continuities emerge which were to be of significance as the new imperialism gathered momentum in the last twenty years of the century. Beneath the growing consensus that the war was unnecessary and unjust, was an implicit theme of the heroism of imperial adventuring which transcended the rights and wrongs of this particular war.

I. The article analyses the content of four daily and three weekly metropolitan newspapers, to identify their response to what was widely perceived as a 'new imperialism' developing in the 1870s. In 1879, *The Times* retained much of the commanding position it had achieved under the editorship of Delane. James Grant, in a generally restrained survey published in 1871, had echoed the self-estimate of the press when he wrote that, 'being supreme in the control of that mighty moral power, Mr Delane may be said to possess an empire which is co-extensive with the area of civilization... for the newspaper press is destined by providence to be the supreme sovereign of the world'.(7) Under the strong editorship of William Mudford, the *Standard*, which has been a conservative paper for some times, was a firm supporter of Disraeli: it was also the exception to the rule that newspapers overwhelmingly represented the views of their proprietors to whom editors had to defer.(8) It had a record of reporting the little wars of empire and one of its special correspondents was G. A. Henty who was to become the doyen of boys' adventure story writers. By contrast the *Daily Telegraph* which, after its highly successful re-launch by Joseph Moses Levy, achieved the astonishing sales figure of 300,000 copies, had been described in the 1860s as the most formidable liberal opponent of *The Times* and prided itself on its independent line. By the late 1870s, however, it too had become a reliable supporter of Disraeli's policies. Levy (later Levy-Lawson), its proprietor, provided one of the clearest examples of the active exercise of power by proprietors over editorial policy. The last of the four daily papers examined in this article is the *Daily News* which was the leading voice of Gladstonian liberalism. Fox Bourne had written that it 'was as radical as it dared to be, considering its recognized position as the champion, though not the avowed organ, of Gladstone's reforming government, and it worthily performed its office': more recently Schalck has written of 'its traditional doctrinaire Liberal course'.(9) The article also examines the coverage of the war in three London weeklies, *Lloyd's Weekly*, the *Weekly Dispatch* and *Reynold's Newspaper*, which formed a distinct group, addressing themselves mainly to the skilled working classes and the lower middle class. They had their roots in the era of Chartism and retained some of the working class radicalism of the earlier period.(10) Between them and the smaller circulation Sunday papers they had a very large readership, outselling the dailies with a circulation of one and a half million copies a week, and a readership greatly increased by multiple use in clubs and reading rooms.(11) These papers supported the cause of moderate trade unions, parliamentary and social reforms, working class movements such as the National Sunday League and various campaigns against individual injustices. Fox Bourne, a sympathetic commentator, wrote of the *Weekly Dispatch* at the time of the war, that it was 'a thoroughly independent exponent of advanced radical opinions, bound to no party, but zealous in supporting all that it approved and criticizing all it saw reason to object to in the policy of the Liberal leaders'. (12) Recent historians have been more sceptical of their political influence. Lucy Brown has suggested that 'they were read more as fiction or entertainment than as news'; one needs to bear in mind, however, the difficulty of supporting generalizations about how such papers were 'received' and it was certainly the case that some of them expressed strong, and clearly stated, political views.(13) These papers were much attacked by the established national dailies and the serious journals for their sensationalism, vulgarity and radicalism and later historians have seen them as the forerunners of the 'new journalism' of the period 1890-1914.(14) Even *Lloyd's Weekly*, the least radical of the group, was attacked for its dangerous views. Virginia Berridge wrote of 'the South London clergyman... who divided the working class in two - those who went to church and those who read *Lloyd's*' and quoted the comment of the *Quarterly Review* that these papers were full of 'discontent - discontent with the laws, with the constitution, with the governing classes, with the employers of labour, with everything, in short, which is not of the lowest working man level'.(15)⁵ Fox Bourne wrote of *Reynold's* that it was 'a formidable spokesman for the most irreconcilable portions of the community' although recent historians have been more dismissive of its claim to political influence.(16)

Recent research has done much to undermine claims about the independence of the press in the period 1850-1914, identifying the extent to which the different newspapers were at best used and at worst manipulated by senior politicians to further their policies. Boyce concludes that 'government was not "government by journalism"... but government by politicians with journalists acting as go-betweens, advisors and, occasionally, opponents of practicing politicians'.(17) The use of the *Pall Mall Gazette* under Stead during the Egyptian crises, of the *Daily News* by Gladstonian liberals and of the *Standard* by Disraeli are well documented.(18) It is less clear that in these cases the editors were not themselves also using the politicians in order to receive inside information to support causes with which they were already in sympathy. It does, however, raise serious doubts about the extent to which the claims of newspapers to represent public opinion was reality: often they may only have represented the opinion of editors and politicians attempting to influence the small world of Westminster and Whitehall.

II At the start of the war *The Times*, *Standard* and *Daily Telegraph* shared a similar position, unconditionally supporting the invasion of Zululand and offering authoritative tactical advice. On 27 January 1879 *The Times* published a long leading article to coincide with the expectation that the invasion had now started. The writer accepted that the Zulus had been loyal to the British, but argued that their social and military was necessarily a threat, in the long term, to British interests in southern Africa. The article several times repeated the point, culled from the dispatches of Sir Bartle Frere, the high commissioner in southern Africa, that the Zulus were barbarous, savage and cunning: 'the kernel of the Zulu question is to be looked for in the extraordinary military system which has been imposed upon a whole nation by a succession of despots'. It was claimed that Cetshwayo, the Zulu king, only maintained his rule 'by frequent punishment of horrible and unsparing cruelty'.(19) The similarity of the coverage in *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Standard* indicates the extent to which the press relied on official documents at this stage of the war, in particular Frere's own interpretation of events. While the reports often simply restated the available documents, the editorials echoed the cross party consensus among front-bench politicians. Evidence of British good faith was that 'neither valuable territory nor military reputation is to be achieved in a conflict with a barbarous enemy'. What was at stake, rather, was racial dominance: 'the mastery of the Zulus is manifestly the concern of the whole white population of South Africa; a victory over the white man in Natal or Transvaal would probably drive all the native races into insurrection, from the Indian to the Atlantic Ocean, and from the Limpopo to Table Bay'.(20)

In view of the formidable military power of the enemy, *The Times* considered it was fortunate that 'the cunning of the Zulus is of that barbarian sort which overreaches itself'. Four days after a British force of 1,400 men had been annihilated at the battle of Isandlwana, (and nearly three weeks before the news arrived in London), the leader writer was able confidently to offer the advice that 'in wars against barbarous enemies extreme prudence is wasteful both of time and money'. (21) *The Times* reached a pinnacle of hubris just days before the news of Isandlwana finally erupted in London. The paper argued that the Zulus,

'are utterly ignorant of the very principles of tactics. Bigoted as to savage monarchs are and defiant as they usually appear, we as a nation have too good reason to know that their courage evaporates at the sight of our serried battalions... [they] compel us to drive their forces through scrub and bush, much as a master of hounds carefully works a covert. This we opine is the work marked out for Lord Chelmsford's columns. ... we fully anticipate that before the sickly season sets in Lord Chelmsford will be in a position to report the complete success of his plans and the unconditional surrender of the now haughty chief'.(22)

The Daily Telegraph and the *Standard*, though they gave relatively little coverage to the war, took the same line as *The Times*. Among the national daily newspapers only the *Daily News* opposed the war. Before the invasion started, the paper commented dryly that while 'it may be commendable on Sir Bartle Frere's part to desire to promote early marriages in Zululand... it was not easy to see why they should be compelled to receive missionaries at the point of a bayonet': to offer Cetshwayo 'the alternative of taking back the missionaries or having war made upon him in the event of his refusal, does not seem calculated to promote the real interests of Christianity in Zululand'.(23) The *Daily News* was supported by the radical weeklies. The *Weekly Dispatch* and *Reynold's* attacked the war from the start in a series of editorials and fiery weekly columns. According to the *Dispatch*, in its first editorial of 1879, 'if war does take place the blood spilt will be on our own heads, for by observing the commonest principles of justice it might have been avoided'.(24)

There were thus, at the start, significant differences of editorial opinion about the justice of the war, a compound of party political loyalties, considerations of circulation figures and the strongly held opinion of proprietors and editors. The publication of the news of Isandlwana in London on 12 February 1879 transformed the way the war was reported and editorialized in the British press. *The Daily Telegraph*, which had shown little interest in the invasion of Zululand until the news of Isandlwana arrived in London, reacted strongly: 'at any cost, at whatever necessary strength, the reverse must be effaced, the savage victors chastised, conquered and disarmed, and those daring Zulus made us harmless as the Hottentots. ... Sir Bartle Frere must be sustained by all loyal and right minded citizens'. (25) The Zulu king had built 'his ghastly kingdom upon corpses and ruled by boundless terror... There can be no termination to the Zulu war until the name of Cetewayo and the last relics of his horrible system are "washed" in turn from the face of the continent, and Zululand has been delivered from its African Nero'.(26)

The *Standard* was the only newspaper to employ a professional journalist to cover the start of the war, although the choice of a locally based journalist, Norris-Newman, was hardly inspired. In January 1879 he assured readers that Zululand lacked natural obstacles, that the people of Zululand at large were content with the terms demanded by the British, that the British military build-up 'had a repressive and deterrent effect upon the native mind and temper' and that 'every incident of the campaign will serve to establish the influence of British rule as a dominant and irresistible fact'. Events were to demonstrate that each of these prognostications by the local expert was wildly ill-informed. Newman's overall conclusion was that there was 'no reason to entertain the slightest uneasiness as to the capability of the force assembled to carry out the objects in view'.(27) This report was published in London five days after the Zulu victory at Isandlwana and two weeks before the news of that disaster for the British reached London. His reports unfolded with bizarre effect, for, due to the delays in communication, columns of jingoistic optimism, reported after early skirmishes, continued to be printed long after the brief telegraphed report from Chelmsford, announcing news of the annihilation of the British at Isandlwana, had already been published. Forced to choose between throwing away expensive and unique reports from the only newspaperman on the spot or protecting the reputation of their correspondent, the newspaper chose to print the reports and thereby expose Norris-Newman's lack of judgement. Even when he was given one of the great scoops of history, Newman was so shocked by Isandlwana that his coup in being the only correspondent on the spot resulted in a dull report, in which he was more concerned with bureaucratic lists of the dead than with the course of events, for, as he himself announced, 'my letter is far less complete than I could have wished but I am so completely unnerved by the scenes I have witnessed that it is with great difficulty I can arrange my thoughts in a coherent train'.(28)

In its first response to the news of Isandlwana, the *Daily News* maintained its condemnation of the war arguing that Britain was now involved in 'another war of which the justice and necessity are alike open to doubt': and while the paper agreed that the war would be easily won and would resemble an 'unopposed occupation', it nevertheless condemned the entire enterprise, maintaining its position that 'we can scarcely be going to war merely to amend the administration of a savage monarch'.(29) It was, the paper claimed, 'a war entirely of our own seeking, and was almost avowedly undertaken not because the Zulu king was hostile to us, but because, if he were hostile, he might be dangerous'.(30) Frere, the paper concluded, has a closed mind over the policy he wished to pursue, and 'sought confirmation for it in the tittle tattle of missionaries and irresponsible outsiders'.(31) The position of the *Daily News* in opposing the government's policy is significant because of the extent to which it then radically altered its views once the initial public reaction to the disaster became apparent and once the Liberal front bench had expressed its support for the government's determination to retrieve the situation in southern Africa. The shock of the defeat initially unified public opinion behind the government and the opposition front bench's determination to reverse the defeat and re-establish British prestige. By the end of February, the *Daily News* was to argue that, despite all the mistakes in the policy of the government, England nevertheless has 'a proud place in history as the mightiest civilizing agency that the world has ever seen. We should be false to our mission if we allowed the permanence of that civilization which we have established in South Africa to be endangered by a combination of barbarous tribes or by the headstrong action of a self-willed and reckless high commissioner'. (32) On the necessity for a final British victory the *Daily News* now had no doubt: 'we are now of course compelled to carry it through, through to what end nobody seems to know. It will be necessary to protect the safety of our fellow subjects, and this can be done only by asserting the superiority of our arms. There are no two opinions on this subject'. Despite its radical attack on aspects of government policy in southern Africa, its conclusion about the future of the area was not very different from that of its Tory rivals: 'the bulk of the population will probably consist for many generations of half reclaimed savages among whom the Europeans exist as a ruling race'. (33) The Liberal paper did not seem too dismayed at this prospect for the future.

However, as troops were rushed to southern Africa and preparations were mounted for a second invasion, and as evidence accumulated of British duplicity in manipulating the lead up to war, several newspapers began to shift their positions.

III Despite its eminence, *The Times* became increasingly inconsistent in its attitude to the war, altering its line in keeping with shifts of opinion in parliament and among its readership. While the paper insisted that this was not the right moment to question Frere's policies and that 'it is enough that we have entered upon this struggle, and that is our duty and our determination to bring it to a triumphant conclusion', nevertheless in a leading article on the same day the newspaper began to distance itself from

the position of Frere and his supporters in government. It argued that 'these revolting characteristics of an alien government are not of direct concernment to us. If we were to undertake the quixotic enterprise of overthrowing every government which was founded on "brute force" and "blood shedding", we should have more than enough to do in this wicked world'.(34) *The Times* began to question whether it might have been the wrong moment to fight, and denied that the British should have a universal policing role; but the paper remained the strongest voice arguing for the role of the British in leading the white races in their crusade of civilization against black savagery. 'We are in the front of the general advance of civilization against barbarism, and we shall cheerfully take the share which falls to the post of honour in this unending campaign. ... The natives, it may even be hoped, will learn once and for all that the white men of whom they are jealous are but the advanced guard of an inexorable force, and that resistance to us must be futile'.(35)

By March the flood of information revealed in government documents, in parliamentary debates and by former ministers and administrators was beginning to shake even the government's supporters. Under parliamentary scrutiny, Frere's reasons for going to war appeared increasingly feeble, and the *Standard* and the *Daily Telegraph* reported the parliamentary debates in terms which made it clear that, while it maintained its whipped majority, the government barely attempted to win the arguments behind Frere's war policy.

Already on March 10th *The Times*, probably pre-warned of the forthcoming shift in cabinet policy, regretted in its leader that Frere had rushed Britain into the war without pausing to allow the government to determine policy: 'the war has been begun, and hardly anyone in this country is responsible for it. We must therefore, derive what satisfaction we can from Sir Bartle Frere's assurance that the task we have undertaken can be accomplished without any very exhausting efforts...'.(36) By the end of March *The Times* was moving closer to the changed public mood, writing of Frere that 'his pride, his strong will, his vehement convictions, even the ardour of his religious sentiments, which has led him to desire above all things the Christianization of Zululand, are, doubtless, at variance with the policy which the government and the country alike approve'. Frere, *The Times* concluded, needed the rebuke delivered by Hicks Beach, the colonial secretary: 'such a check upon a dangerous spirit of self-will was both necessary and deserved. Sir Bartle Frere's political experience should have warned him against the impetuosity with which he assailed Cetewayo's power and dragged the imperial government into a struggle full of perils and barren of glory'.(37) The paper had noted the mood of the parliamentary debates and was ruthless in its dismissal of Frere's dispatches which had now been published: 'it must be avowed that the whole tone of the dispatches is so excited and exaggerated as of itself to suggest the gravest doubts about whether he had not lost for the time that power of deliberative judgement which is the most essential quality in a high commissioner'.(38) Two days later *The Times* returned to the attack:

'To declare war is the last and most solemn act of a ruler... when it is further seen... that he was all along fully determined to drive matters to extremity with the Zulus, the case against him becomes extremely grave, and the policy of the government in continuing to support him proportionately questionable'.(39)

That, however, was the limit of critique presented by the paper. *The Times* was, by then, prepared to criticize Frere and the British government but the underlying righteousness of Britain's civilizing mission was not challenged. On all other essential points *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* still agreed that 'Cetewayo must now be taught our power by a lesson which neither he nor the natives of South Africa will ever forget'. (40)

In general historians have concentrated on the editorial policies of newspapers in estimating the range of views available to their readers. This is, however, a very misleading measure of the views presented to their readers by the daily newspapers which are examined in this article. Apart from other considerations, small staffs and tight budgets ensured that the papers recycled articles from other newspapers (in particular foreign ones), reprinted the speeches of politicians in unedited form and published lengthy letters from correspondents. (41) Thus the policy of *The Times*, as announced in its leader columns, gives little idea of the range of views available to its readers in its general coverage, and in this respect it was typical of most other dailies. The paper published extracts from other papers which were strongly opposed to the war. On 21 March it quoted the *Cape Argus* to the effect that Zulu 'prisoners not only state that the king and people are anxious to obtain peace, but they declare with a vigour that might convince anyone but a diplomatist that there never was any desire for war with the British, whom they profess to like immensely and whose institutions they are not unwilling to copy, provided we are content

with the position of neighbours'.(42) Two weeks later the newspaper printed a letter from the Earl of Pembroke, running to one and a half columns, which attacked the policy of war. Defending himself from the charge of attacking the absent Frere, the Earl reminded readers that 'the Zulus who are rotting on their native soil and those who are still to die are also absent men in a fuller sense of the word; and that they, too, have a right to demand a just judgement at our hands'. (43) *The Times* also printed lengthy reports of meetings protesting at the war. (44)

The case of the *Standard* confirms this drift towards a more critical stance among papers which were supported by the government. Like most daily papers, the *Standard* had envisaged a fairly easy conquest and, as noted above, it was able to back up its prognostications by reference to its special correspondent who reassured readers that 'the terms of the ultimatum had been received with immense satisfaction by the [Zulu] people at large'.(45) In the wake of Isandlwana the *Standard* increasingly attacked the competence of Lord Chelmsford, the commander in chief in southern Africa, while insisting that any enquiry into the policies and actions of Frere must await the outcome of a necessary war to 'teach a bloody and complete lesson to the savage victors'.(46) By May, however, the *Standard* too was part of the shift in public opinion, claiming that 'English lives and English money are to be spent seizing territory, not for the purpose of governing the natives in accordance with civilized principles, but to steal portions of the land, and allot them to private individuals'.(47) The *Standard* reflected a common attack on the motives of the colonists (and on Frere for pandering to them) and warned colonial interests that 'they will do well to put from them all belief that the war is generally approved at home, or can be allowed to degenerate into an immoral seizure of territory for private purposes'.(48) By then the paper was wholly disillusioned by the key argument that the Zulus had intended to invade the white ruled colonies: 'the wonderful man slaying machine remained fixed in its own country. Day by day, and week by week the colonists declared that the invasion was coming. It never came. The Zulus remained on the defensive to guard their own kraals'.(49) Despite this change in view, the paper continued to print the reports arriving from Norris-Newman whose main complaint was only that the war should be prosecuted more vigorously and who glorified the heroism and adventure of empire.

Far from the bloody war of revenge demanded earlier, the *Standard* now argued that 'the general feeling of Englishmen is that the brave, though hitherto misguided [Zulu] people, should be treated with gentleness and consideration'.(50) And in an editorial which comprehensively, if unconsciously, criticized its own earlier attitude, the paper commented that 'the remarkable glamour which falls over men's eyes while a war is in progress, leads to such expressions as that "no peace must be patched up until Cetewayo has paid the full penalty of his treachery". If we ask – what treachery? no one is able to explain'.(51)

The confusions in editorial policy extended to the radical weeklies although these papers did manage to introduce some new perspectives into the debate. Berridge has accused this section of the press of indulging in empty rhetoric and of purveying 'an outdated view of society with an emphasis on the monarchy, aristocracy, landownership, palaces, pensions and the Church': they were 'content to purvey outworn prejudices and to attack mistaken targets'.(52) Although they seemed dangerously radical to some contemporaries, Berridge has argued that:

'By purveying a mild brand of liberalism with a pro-working class and anti-aristocratic tinge (as did *Lloyd's*), or by the continuation of the type of outdated radical analysis which appeared in *Reynold's* and to a lesser extent the others, the papers were the effective means of social control which the establishment had always hoped the popular press might be'.(53)

Berridge's critique is most accurate in the case of *Lloyd's* which, from the arrival of the news of Isandlwana, was able cheerfully to maintain the position that the war was entirely unjust but must be prosecuted with the utmost efficiency. It argued that 'there are few men indeed in this country who do not condemn the war as an act of the most reprehensible and wanton mischief on the part of Sir Bartle Frere', but went on to welcome the news that 'eight thousand men... are on their way to avenge the disaster which has been felt at home as a national calamity to be redeemed at all hazards, without the loss of an hour'. (54) As the war dragged on, confusions in editorial policy blossomed. In April *Lloyd's* argued that the military failures followed from morally guilty policies: 'all this loss of life and treasure, these disasters to our arms and this sacrifice of prestige are the consequences of a guilty enterprise, undertaken by a stubborn public servant, whom the government have not had the courage or the wisdom to recall'.(55)

Unlike most papers *Reynold's* and the *Weekly Dispatch* did not conclude from the British disasters that the white armies must avenge themselves on the Zulus regardless of the justice of the war: the *Weekly Dispatch* approvingly quoted Sir Robert Peel, the son of the former prime minister, to the effect that 'the

disaster of Isandula should not be avenged by a war of extermination because of the incapacity of Lord Chelmsford'.(56) Having a lighter touch and a more flexible layout than the dailies, these weeklies could indulge in satire of social and political structures. The *Weekly Dispatch* effectively satirized British warmongering and military incompetence:

'As our private businesses are generally admirably transacted, and as our public business is so often a model of inefficiency, it would be as well if we English did all our work by contract with private firms. It would save an immensity of trouble certainly if we could arrange with Sir William Armstrong and Messrs Spiers and Pond to wage our wars for us, and on payment of a certain yearly sum be free from all anxiety'.(57)

In its serious comment, however, the *Weekly Dispatch* demonstrated as many contradictions as *The Times* and the *Standard*. It claimed, unconsciously proving its own point, that 'we English have utterly failed in every quarter of the globe to impress our civilization, or any appreciable tincture of it, upon any of the lower races of mankind with whom we have come in contact' and went on to claim that 'unfortunately the race prejudice, the objection to colour, is very strongly planted in the British nature'.(58) The *Weekly Dispatch* was anti-monarchist, anti-Tory and anti-foreigner in a patriotic republican mode and in attacking the racial prejudices of the British, as shown by government actions in southern Africa, the paper was happily able to demonstrate that this evil was largely the responsibility of a royal family and prime minister of foreign origin. It was the result of 'the degrading yoke of imperialist chauvinism that sinister Hebrew and German hands have now been busy for years stealthily riveting about our freeborn English necks'. (59) Its waverings may have had as much to do with party allegiances as with a populist and commercial desire to please the differing beliefs of its diverse readership for as it declared during the second invasion of Zululand, 'war is the natural state of Englishmen under a Tory government'.(60)

More forceful in its attack on the government, and more coherent in its opposition to imperialism, was *Reynold's* which consistently maintained its condemnation of the war: its use of traditional radical themes was at least less blatant than *Lloyd's* reprise of the Norman yoke. The war, according to *Reynold's*, legalized land stealing for the colonists, found jobs and promotion for the offspring of the British ruling classes and distracted attention from economic failure at home. The government was only able to get away with all this, the paper argued, thanks to a press which bamboozled the British people into thinking that Cetshwayo, an 'intelligent civilized ruler', was no more than a 'barbarous potentate'. The republican paper had fun with the claims of Frere and others that they sought to alter the behaviour of Cetshwayo: 'it is a very difficult process to civilize kings and indeed there is no precedent in history when it has been completely accomplished'.(61) The paper also enjoyed teasing the military over the scale of the invasion needed to overwhelm a people armed with spears and it approvingly quoted the claim that 'we continue to send out fresh troops in such numbers that we shall be able to crowd the Zulus out of their country without firing another shot'.(62) On the psychology and profession of empire among the upper classes the paper noted, following John Bright, that 'it is very pleasant for Englishmen of the imperial type to go about the world dictating to everybody in the name of the Queen: and there is a numerous class of people who see in such a policy the extension of one of the hierarchies which constitute the supply of outdoor relief for the aristocracy and the landed gentry. It is an open question whether we have ever done any good in Africa...'(63)

Reynold's saw more clearly than other newspapers the contradiction between liberal and democratic values at home and authoritarian rule based on military strength in the empire and it had some idea of the scale of repression which might, sooner or later, be required to maintain such an empire:

'Such a line of proceedings, founded as it is upon force and injustice, cannot be carried out by the mere adoption of half measures. Conciliation, justice, the rights of men, be they white or black, must be completely ignored.... Let what may happen in South Africa, the defeat of the Zulus or of ourselves, it is very certain that millions of black men cannot forever be kept in subjection by a few hundred or thousands of soldiers.

Imperialism is a very costly sort of commodity. It asserts a dominion everywhere.... To uphold such a system of universal despotism, millions, not thousands of soldiers will be required, and constant embroilment with other nations must result. These are the inevitable consequences of that imperialist notion which Sir Bartle Frere is attempting to carry out on Africa'. (64)

The weeklies may have lacked a coherent economic critique of modern capitalism, as Berridge implies, but in their populist attacks on class rule and on British imperialism they kept alive a radical democratic tradition and contributed to the growth of mass working class institutions; a significant role in social change. Curran's assessment of the early days of *Reynold's* could fairly be extended to its coverage of imperial expansion in 1879: it reworked a tradition of popular radicalism 'in ways that projected a radical ideology through human interest news and entertainment as well as through political coverage'.(65) Moreover, many of the criticisms of empire made in *Reynold's* have withstood the test of time and suggest that Berridge's attack is overstated: the element of social control, if it existed, was balanced by a telling critique of empire at that stage of its development.

On one level the editorial policies of the metropolitan press during the war thus lend weight to their collective claim to be critics of government and the mouthpiece of diverse opinion and debate. Though few of them maintained an entirely consistent or coherent position throughout the war, they did represent differing views in British society. The actions and policies of the government, the military commanders and the colonial administrators were examined with a degree of well-informed and balanced criticism; in several cases, such as reports of splits within the cabinet, there is a clear presumption of inside information. The criticisms contributed in time to the supersession of Lord Chelmsford, the recall of Sir Bartle Frere and the defeat of Disraeli's government in the election of 1880. In some cases, such as Lord Chelmsford's supersession, it is not possible to disentangle criticisms emanating from the newspapers from those coming from members of the government itself who wished for a more forceful direction of the war under General Wolseley or who wanted to prepare the public for further shifts in government policy. Nor can one discount the effect of circulation figures on shifts in editorial policy. Lucy Brown has shown that the high telegraphic cost of effectively reporting foreign wars and crises was offset by dramatic increases in circulation figures, a factor which every editor would have to balance against political commitment and party allegiances.(66) The extent of the pluralist debate should not be exaggerated. Only the *Daily News*, the *Weekly Dispatch* and *Reynold's* had criticized the invasion before the news of Isandlwana reached London and the *Daily News* had a party political interest in pursuing the charge that a new militaristic imperialism had developed under Disraeli. Had the effortless victory over the Zulus materialized, followed by the annexation of new territories to the British Empire, it is highly unlikely that many metropolitan papers would have offered serious criticisms. The attacks on imperialism, the greed of colonists and the violation of the rights of independent black kingdoms as well as the more predictable attacks on military incompetence were to a large extent the product of Zulu resistance and British defeats.

It is also the case that there were significant differences between the editorial opinions of the papers and the tone in which the war in Zululand was reported from the front. Despite the real differences on imperial policy which were fought out in the self-important editorial columns of the press, the theme of imperial adventuring and military excitement was woven into the war reporting of virtually all the papers once their interest had been fully engaged by the disaster at Isandlwana. The newspapers may have represented a wide variety of political views from the patriotic, monarchist and imperialist *Daily Telegraph* to the republican and anti-imperialist *Reynold's* and their views were communicated in some effective journalism which called on a range of literary styles from the heroic to the satirical. Beneath the overt message, however, almost all of them, if sometimes unwittingly, celebrated what were seen as British values and British military qualities.

IV With the reinforcements which poured into southern Africa arrived the 'specials', eager to report a small war which had so unexpectedly but happily turned into a spectacular event. Their achievement, highlighted by the limitations of Norris-Newman, was to breathe life into the reports of the listless second invasion of Zululand leading to the belated victory at Ulundi in July, a campaign which all the correspondents felt to be lethargic in the extreme. Most of the specials lived by war: they were a small group of professionals some of whom achieved the status of folk heroes in late Victorian Britain. (67) The professional correspondents formed a tight knit group, whatever their personal animosities: for this reason they welcomed, after an initial horrified reaction, Lord Chelmsford's innovative demand that all correspondents must hold a military pass without which they could not accompany the British force. Despite the correspondents' initial response to this new departure, 'eventually we all realised that it would be really and truly for our benefit, for outsiders would not be allowed to go to the front without this authorisation'.(68) Thus professional exclusivity too precedence over the desire for freedom from official control.

Best known among this group of journalists, until the arrival of William Russell in June, was Archibald Forbes, a flamboyant correspondent with a ruthless determination to be first with the news. An editor of his paper, the *Daily News*, wrote that Forbes 'rarely waited for the end of a battle to report it and sometimes did not even wait for the beginning'. (69) He was contemptuous of Lord Chelmsford and of the whole conduct of the war, which fitted well with the views of his employers who included Samuel Morley and Henry Labouchere. He commented, of the general's despatches, that 'I do not quite understand how in Lord Chelmsford's command it is always dead men who are made responsible for catastrophes'. He chronicled the mounting frustration in the army in Zululand and wrote of General Wolseley's arrival to supersede Chelmsford that 'to say that this news gave universal and unqualified satisfaction is but faintly to express the sense of relief which the tidings inspired'. (70) Later in 1879 Forbes wrote an article for the *Nineteenth Century* in which he commented on Chelmsford's 'feeble and incoherent missives'; claimed that he was 'obtuse to encouragement'; described the advance as 'this fatuous tramp' and a 'needlessly circuitous pilgrimage' and reached a climax in an apparent cry from the heart on 'the drifting, the chaos and the friction... [in] this grim burlesque on military operations'. (71)

Nevertheless, while his criticisms of the direction of the war might be harsh, they, in common with those of his colleagues, were belied by the journalists' highly coloured accounts of the drama of war. The government might be wrong headed and its imperial governors and generals incompetent, but the lasting impression of the reports was the excitement and romance of imperial adventure: an effective combination in selling newspapers. Almost all the specials combined this mixture of criticism of the direction of the war with a celebration of the fighting qualities of the British soldier and his field officers. As the war was dragged on, with little to report in April and May, the correspondents were at times hard pressed to breathe life into reports of the stagnant operations. Francis Francis of *The Times* brilliantly transformed a dismal scene of hut-burning into something far more glamorous:

'Certainly it was a most picturesque sight. In places the mist still lingered, wrapping the crest of some few distant hills, but as the sun rose up, bathing their rocky side with light and making the bronze and yellow patches in the grass glisten brightly, waving in the breeze, all was dispelled. Soon the track of Colonel Buller's cavalry was indicated by smoke from burning kraals, volume after volume bursting from amid the bush and rising in pillars into the sunny heavens, dotting the plain and yellow mealie fields, where could be seen the red coats of the infantry steadily pushing forward in skirmishing order'. (72)

F. R. McKenzie of the *Daily Telegraph* managed to represent his mundane and fumbling preparations for a reconnaissance as an experience reverberating with excitement (as well as the assumptions of his class and time). Having borrowed a snider rifle from Major Bromhead, he:

'turned in to get what sleep I could in boots, breeches and gaiters. There was not much undressing that night. Pockets were emptied of unnecessary contents and handily by the sleeper bandolier revolver, water flask and spurs were laid, ready to be slipped on at the first sound of the sentry's voice. And then an interval of sleep with the measured pacing of the sentries for a lullaby... In five minutes the expedition was equipped, and lanterns wandering like fireflies about the fort and the jingle of bridles and stirrups told of servants seeking their masters with cocoa and coffee, or the horses with the saddles'. (73)

In his memoirs, Forbes recreated the war through anecdotes of military gallantry and dash which are allowed to stand for the nature of the war for the reader. The excitement in the escapades submerges all other realities as well as Forbes' own doubts about the war's justice, prosecution and outcome. Forbes deplored the conduct of the war and his paper deplored the policy of the invasion but the military action, if successful, was something in which to revel. It was not only the likes of the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* which glorified the courage of British soldiers. The *Weekly Dispatch* puffed the military achievements of Colonel Wood, as did the *Daily News*. After Isandlwana, even an editorial in the *Daily News* had taken satisfaction from the actions of the British soldiers: 'how steadily they stood their ground when they had no hope but to sell their lives as dearly as they could'. (74) The main article on Rorke's Drift, where a small British force defended itself for several hours, was indistinguishable from the reports in the more jingoistic papers, celebrating the fact that 'the little garrison at Rorke's Drift was under an officer whose intelligence and skill were only surpassed by his unconquerable courage'. (75) The theme continued in an editorial article on the exploits of lieutenants Coghill and Melvill, who, in the legend, escaped together from Isandlwana with the colour of their battalion: 'can there be a more touching, a more

spirit stirring story than this of their desperate ride, and their death in the moment of success? The theme seems made for the poet who sang the *Ballad of the Fleet*, and who revived the memory of Sir Richard Grenville and the *Revenge*' (76) Only *Reynold's* refused to the last to celebrate the victory in any way. It dryly commented, on the battle of Ulundi, that Lord Chelmsford with 6,000 highly armed troops had defeated the Zulus armed with spears: 'whatever credit may be due to Lord Chelmsford for such an exploit we cheerfully award him'.(77)

While the specials on the spot all celebrated military glory, it was, as Phillip Knightley has suggested, the correspondents themselves who were often the intended heroes of their sagas.(78) Melton Prior of the *Illustrated London News* wrote of how, after the battle, he and Forbes had a race to be the first correspondent to enter Ulundi. Forbes called out, "'come on Prior, for Ulundi; ride for it old chap" and digging spurs into my horse it soon became a race between literature and art. He was a great rider, well mounted, and he beat me by a neck'. (79)

The adventuring was not over even then, however, for after the battle, Forbes rode 105 miles in twenty two hours to get his report to the nearest telegraph office despite the fact that, in truth, he regarded the so-called decisive battle as something of a farce. On the way, he used up all the fresh horses from the various stations thus accelerating his own report and condemning the opposition, including the messenger carrying Lord Chelmsford's official despatches, to long delays. His ride was headlined as 'The Ride of Death', acclaimed in parliament and became the subject of a claim for the Victoria Cross. Some of his colleagues were less impressed for, as Russell wrote in his diary, 'they clamour at home for a VC for him! He was, I hear, quite drunk at most stations where he arrived on his ride – he had an escort through all the dangerous places – and jumped horses all along'.(80)

As important, in the long term, as the mythologizing of the heroism of war, were the silences and omissions which allowed that version of colonial warfare to flourish in Britain. Such silences are highlighted by the case of William Russell who was employed by the *Daily Telegraph* to report the later stages of the war. Russell, who had made his reputation in the Crimean War twenty five years earlier, travelled to southern Africa in the troopship which carried General Wolseley and his staff. His relationship with the general nicely illustrates the ties between the military and the correspondents, the helpfulness of the former tacitly assuming a reciprocal plurality in the reporting of the latter. The public image of mutual respect is belied by Wolseley's journal in which his comments on Russell are so consistently hostile that they cannot be dismissed simply as examples of the general's notoriously venomous feelings for which his journal provided an outlet and a therapy. Russell is 'a mean spirited bore', 'the lowest class of cunning and witty Irishman' who Wolseley had 'hated' in the Crimea 'for his lying account of events there' and 'always loathed... for his low ways and vulgarity'.(81) Despite this barrage of loathing, Wolseley courted and pampered Russell until a volcanic row erupted between them. Russell reported that there had been various incidents in which drunken troops had insulted and robbed local citizens and Wolseley angrily defended the reputation of the troops under his command. 'What a contemptible character he is! A low sycophantic toady of royalty and of men above his humble origin and rank in life, and yet the writer of sensational articles on the shortcomings of every British force he has ever been associated with as a sort of camp follower'. (82) As far as Wolseley was concerned, the tacit deal which he understood to exist between himself and the journalist, by which the latter's privileged access constrained him to write well of his benefactor, had been reneged on by Russell.

Russell, for all his social conservatism, retained his professional commitment to serious investigation and was consistent in his attitude to the war, unlike his colleagues who combined generalised criticism with reporting which celebrated the heroism of war. Russell had noted in his journal that 'the wonderful way in which Sir Bartle Frere is involved in the shedding of blood and cattle lifting excites my admiration. I observe we always punish others for our own faults.... We are forever talking of the peace and order which prevail under a government which is forever at war somewhere or other'.(83) He later commented in his diary that 'Queen Victoria's reign has been an incessant record of bloodshed'.(84) Russell arrived in South Africa with a reputation for exposing army abuses and a strong dislike of what he saw as an unjust war: it was also the case that he badly needed to maintain that journalistic reputation and his high profile among the newspaper public which was being eclipsed by younger, more active men. The argument between the two men was very public, was much commented on at the time and seemed to confirm Russell's reputation for fearless reporting even at the cost of alienating important sources and powerful acquaintances. Though the incident appeared to raise serious issues and was the subject of questions in parliament and telegrams between London and South Africa it nevertheless has an air of irrelevance about it as Russell himself partly recognised. For while Russell and the army did battle on the

subject of whether or not British troops had drunkenly robbed the hen coops of provincial worthies in a remote colony, the British army was, in Russell's opinion, engaged in the systematic destruction of a society and culture and in massacres which disgraced the 'higher civilisation' which it claimed to represent and which it was trying to impose on ungrateful savages. Russell did comment on this and he wrote to the Duke of Cambridge, the commander in chief, expressing his opinions forcibly; 'Sir Bartle Frere has caused more men and women killing and blood shedding in a few months if he be responsible for this war than Cetshwayo did in all his reign, and the murders of the wounded prisoners are too horrible to think of'.(85) But the killing of the wounded and the refusal to take prisoners were only tangentially commented on by Russell in his reporting and, though even this caused some resentment in the army, they were neither properly investigated nor fully reported on by the correspondents. As Russell wrote to the Duke of Cambridge in connection with the murder of prisoners, 'I'm glad that I didn't see what I hear of for my pen couldn't have been stayed no matter what'.(86) His pen was, however, stayed as were those of the other correspondents.(87)

V The debate in the metropolitan newspapers was constrained by the views of proprietors, by political influences and by a consciousness of circulation figures. With the partial exception of Reynold's their criticisms were highly inconsistent, which might suggest that they were responding as much to changing public reactions and political influences as to any coherent editorial view. Commercial pressures cannot be discounted for, while the reporting of foreign wars was extremely costly, its effect on raising circulation figures is well documented. Equally, in the case of the *Daily News*, its position reflected its relationships to the Liberal Party and its radical wing as much as any long standing opposition to imperial expansion.(88) In some respects, however, party political influences, the views of proprietors and commercial pressures must have balanced each other in a benign way since in the result they allowed the expression of a range of views on the justice of the way and on the policy of imperial expansion: there was a real diversity of opinion among the press which offered a genuine forum for public debate. The press coverage examined above indicates that the newspapers were sufficiently open-minded for their opinions to alter as new evidence of British duplicity emerged from the publication of government documents in the blue books. Nor can there be much doubt about the influence of the press in the year before a general election. Their criticisms contributed to the supersession of the commander in chief, the recall of the high commissioner and the defeat of the government in the subsequent election. The press, despite or perhaps because of its confused and diverse coverage, played a major role in establishing the unpopularity of the war among the public at the time. It was only later, in the heyday of empire, that the Angle-Zulu War was absorbed into the British national mythology as a heroic struggle between well-matched warriors: in that long term process the reporting at the time of the war also played a significant part.

The debate occurred, however, within parameters which were rarely explicit but which are clear with hindsight. Although the conservative *Standard* and the liberal *Daily News* differed on what constituted the English 'genius' in world affairs they were both agreed on the necessity of its contribution to a progressive future. That mission was supported both by exclusion (no paper seriously investigated suggestions that the British had massacred the wounded and refused to take prisoners) and by narratives of the heroic and righteous aspects of the extension of the *Pax Britannica*. For most of the papers this vision found expression in the exemplary figures of British military heroes who protected women and children, and sacrificed their lives in a higher cause.

The lasting impression left by the reporting of the war was not the incompetence of particular generals, nor the wrong headedness of a particular policy: it certainly was not what Russell, in his diaries, was beginning to identify as the pathology of the 'new imperialism'. Rather it was the excitement of the imperial adventure given a moral meaning by the narrative of individual heroism and purpose, a message which was to feed into the growing popular imperialism of the late nineteenth century.

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