

**British Liberal politics, the South African Question, and the Rhetoric of  
Empire, 1895-1907**

Submitted by Simon Edward Mackley to the University of Exeter  
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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the public politics of Empire at the fin de siècle. Taking as its focus the relationships between the Liberal Party, imperial rhetoric and the South African question in British politics from the Jameson Raid of 1895 through to the Transvaal Colony elections of 1907, it analyses key episodes such as the 1899 outbreak of the South African War, the 'methods of barbarism' controversy of 1901 and the politics of 'Chinese slavery' in the run up to the general election of 1906.

Eschewing a traditional focus on high politics, personal motivation and imperial thought, this thesis explores the public rhetoric of leading Liberal politicians, as evidenced in newspaper records and parliamentary proceedings. In doing so, this study identifies the key themes, languages and arguments which served as the framework through which Liberal speakers articulated both their specific responses to events in South Africa and advanced a wider Liberal approach to the politics of Empire.

In focusing on Liberal politics as distinct from liberalism as political philosophy and avoiding a narrow factional focus, this thesis aims to further understandings of the role played by Empire within late-Victorian and Edwardian Liberal political culture. It argues that for all the internal divisions within the Liberal Party, Liberal speakers nonetheless maintained a largely consistent rhetoric of Empire in response to the South African question, emphasising the ideals of British imperial rule and the extent to which the Unionist government and the Boers respectively failed to meet such expectations. This thesis further suggests that the evidence explored provides a wider insight into the imperial factor in British political history, and challenges some of the assumptions of more minimalist accounts of the impact of the British Empire 'at home'.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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BSAC      British South Africa Company

OFS      Orange Free State

ORC      Orange River Colony

SAR      South African Republic

HC Deb.    *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons debate

HL Deb.    *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Lords debate

## INTRODUCTION: SOUTH AFRICA, IMPERIAL POLITICS AND LIBERAL RHETORIC

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When in September 1899 the Liberals of Bristol East selected Charles Hobhouse to contest the seat at the next general election, the normally sympathetic *Bristol Mercury* was notably muted in its support for the new candidate. Although its editorial of 7 September declared that ‘the constituency is lucky in finding an earnest and vigorous and convinced candidate’ and noted in particular that there could be ‘no room for doubt as to his soundness about education’, on the tricky matter of South Africa the *Bristol Mercury* found itself at odds with the candidate’s views.<sup>1</sup> The day before, in his first speech to his prospective constituents, Hobhouse had rubbished the prospect that Britain should go to war with the South African Republic, an outcome which looked increasingly likely throughout 1899 as Anglo-Boer relations in the region steadily worsened.<sup>2</sup> Challenging Hobhouse’s position, the *Bristol Mercury* insisted that imperial interests demanded that Britain maintain ‘a practical and moral supremacy throughout South Africa’. Nonetheless, the editorial conceded, ‘Liberal opinion is, as we know, not quite agreed on this subject, or shall we say that Liberals are not quite agreed as to which is the right way to apply Liberal principles’.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly this remark reflected a somewhat optimistic desire to minimise the significance of the Liberal split on the issue, but in many ways it also struck right at the heart of the Liberal Party’s difficulties over the South African question and the politics of Empire: ‘Liberal principles’ could offer their adherents no single guide to action.

This thesis analyses the rhetoric of Liberal Party speakers on Empire and the South African question in late-Victorian and early-Edwardian Britain. As well as looking at the period of the 1899-1902 South African War itself, this thesis also examines Liberal reactions to the Jameson Raid of 1895 and two of the key controversies of the war’s aftermath, namely Chinese labour and the grant of responsible government to the Transvaal Colony. By examining the public rhetoric of Liberal politicians, primarily through newspaper reports of key speeches and the records of parliamentary debates, this thesis identifies the

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, *Bristol Mercury*, 7 Sep. 1899.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hobhouse, speech at Bristol, 6 Sep. 1899, reported in *Bristol Mercury*, 7 Sep. 1899.

<sup>3</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 7 Sep. 1899.

key tropes through which the politics of Empire were articulated in this period. In doing so, this thesis also explores the relationship between this public, contested politics of Empire and the internal divisions which wracked British Liberalism in the post-Gladstonian era. With such a focus in mind, this thesis is, at its core, a political and rhetorical history: the focus is not so much on the nature of British imperial rule in South Africa in and of itself, but instead upon how the South African question was constructed, expressed and debated within British political life.

Naturally, the strong body of existing scholarship on the fin-de-siècle Liberal Party is of great assistance to a project such as this, biographers, political historians and scholars of imperial policy having extensively documented the intricacies of the party's high politics over the years.<sup>4</sup> In seeking to shift the focus from the private politics of Empire to that of the public sphere, this thesis aims not to reject this rich historiographical trend, but instead to complement it by identifying the public contexts within which these high political struggles occurred. Likewise, the many excellent studies of late-Victorian ideas of Empire and imperialism have greatly enriched our understandings of the intellectual and theoretical foundations by which liberalism and imperialism interacted. Through decoupling Liberal rhetoric from wider assumptions of liberalism, this thesis seeks to build upon this existing body of intellectual history by exploring how in relation to South Africa the conceptualisation of Empire existed and operated within the practical metropolitan politics of Empire.

In examining the public rhetoric of Liberal speakers on the South African question, this thesis contributes to the field of British political and imperial

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<sup>4</sup> The key accounts outlining the Liberal Party's approach to South African affairs in this period include Jeffrey Butler, *The Liberal Party and the Jameson Raid* (Oxford: 1968); Peter Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies: The struggle for the leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1890s* (Oxford: 1964); H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: the ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian élite* (Oxford: 1973); G.B. Pyrah, *Imperial Policy and South Africa, 1902-10* (Oxford: 1955) and Ronald Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, 1905-1908: the watershed of the Empire-Commonwealth* (London: 1968).

history by seeking to move beyond some of the limitations present in existing assessments of the politics of the South African question. First, by seeking to assess via a rhetorical focus the means by which the politics of the South African question were conducted, this thesis aims to complement and inform existing debates on the relative salience of 'Empire' or 'imperialism' within British politics by identifying the form such ideas took in political practice, unpacking the assumptions, approaches and ideals by which the British presence in South Africa was explained and justified. Second, by eschewing a traditional high politics emphasis on the private views and motivations of individual political actors, while at the same time adopting a focus on 'Liberal politics' rather than liberalism as a wider philosophy or ideology, this thesis aims to advance our understanding of the role played by Empire within Liberal political culture at the end of the Victorian era. Third, by examining the Liberal party as a whole, rather than focusing on a specific faction such as the pro-Boers or the Liberal Imperialists, this thesis aims to contribute towards both the existing historiography of Liberal Party history and the political historiography of the South African War. By situating the splits over Empire within a wider contest over the nature of Liberal politics it emphasises the common politics of Empire within which the different Liberal factions positioned themselves. Additionally, the chapters that follow will demonstrate the potential for a party-focused study of political rhetoric to inform wider debates surrounding the role of Empire within British political history. Finally, while the focus of this thesis is directly concerned with Liberal rhetoric and the politics of Empire specifically in relation to the South African question, this thesis will seek to suggest ways in which analysis of this Liberal rhetoric of Empire might inform wider understandings of the relationship between liberalism and imperialism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

### **The Road to 1895**

In one sense, the South African question as it existed in the politics of fin-de-siècle Britain can be said to have been brought about by the Jameson Raid of 1895, the abortive coup attempt by which the imperialist Cecil Rhodes attempted to displace the Boer leadership of the South African Republic (SAR) with a regime more amenable to British and Cape interests. Although the Raid proved a spectacular failure, it triggered a new period of crisis for South Africa,

sparking the war of 1899-1902 and ensuring South African questions dominated imperial affairs for over a decade. At the end of 1895, South Africa was a region dominated by four white settler states, of which two, the Cape Colony and Natal, were incorporated into the British Empire, while the remaining two, the SAR and the Orange Free State, were self-governing Boer republics. However, far from this state of affairs representing a blank canvas upon which the destabilising events of the Raid were painted, the region's recent history already contained the seeds of many of the critical issues which were to determine the course of the South African question in the years that followed the Raid.

Indeed, the basis for some aspects of the Anglo-Boer relationship trace as far back as the original British acquisition of the Cape. For our present purposes, though, the Boer settlement of the Transorangia and Transvaal regions in the first half of the nineteenth century represents the best starting point, the result of the Great Trek away from areas of British rule at the Cape and in the newly-annexed Port Natal.<sup>5</sup> This migration represented a specific rejection of British imperial authority, and was in no small part a response to the British position on the Black African populations of the region, particularly the legacies of the push against slavery, a point which later critics of Boer rule were keen to point out.<sup>6</sup> The years which followed the Great Trek were marked by what A.N. Porter has characterised as 'the long history of recurrent British withdrawal and advance in South Africa': following the pattern of the imperial acquisition of Natal, Transorangia was annexed to the Empire in 1848 as the Orange River Sovereignty in the name of countering disorder in the region, only to be retroceded just six years later in the face of Boer unrest.<sup>7</sup> Driven by a concern for order and the security of Britain's existing imperial possessions British authority was extended over new territories, only to be subsequently constrained by anxieties over accumulated responsibility and increased Anglo-Boer tensions. This tidal pattern of British imperial expansion would

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<sup>5</sup> For details see John S. Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire: British policy on the South African frontier 1834-1854* (Berkeley, CA: 1963).

<sup>6</sup> Iain R. Smith, *The origins of the South African War 1899-1902* (Harlow: 1996), p.17.

<sup>7</sup> Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire*; A.N. Porter, *The origins of the South African War: Joseph Chamberlain and the diplomacy of imperialism, 1895-99* (Manchester: 1980), p.37.

subsequently prove a useful basis for critics of the South African War and annexation.

However, the single most significant event in shaping the South African question of the fin de siècle was the Transvaal War of 1880-1881, also known as the First Boer War. The Boers of the Transvaal had established the SAR in 1856, but by 1877 the fledgling republic faced ruin and likely annihilation, prompting the Disraeli government to authorise its annexation to the Empire.<sup>8</sup> For William Gladstone this act represented just the latest element of Disraelian imperial acquisitiveness, prompting the Liberal stalwart to incorporate the issue into his Midlothian campaign ahead of the 1880 general election. Speaking in November 1879, Gladstone condemned the government's subjugation of 'a free, European, Christian and Republican community' against its will.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, however, upon returning to office Gladstone's South African policy was not one of reversing the annexation, but of cementing it in order to ultimately facilitate a British-dominated federation in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> This about-turn only increased resentment in the Transvaal, and after a poorly-handled dispute over taxation at the end of 1880 the Boers rose up against British rule, seemingly threatening an Afrikaner rising across South Africa.

The conflict which followed was short and, in military terms, relatively insignificant: although the British defeat at Majuba Hill would in subsequent years come to be seen as a humiliation, it did not greatly determine the course of the conflict, Gladstone's government having already determined to pursue a negotiated settlement.<sup>11</sup> The key legacy of the events of 1880-1881 was not therefore so much the conflict itself, but the nature of the settlement which followed, in the form of the Pretoria and London conventions. The Pretoria Convention of 1881, which directly followed the end of the conflict, established

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p.26.

<sup>9</sup> William Gladstone, speech at Edinburgh, 25 Nov. 1879, reported in *The Times*, 26 Nov. 1879. However, South Africa represented only a minor element of the Midlothian platform, which indeed was primarily concerned with the malign impact of imperialism upon Britain itself. See P.J. Durrans, 'A Two-Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10:3 (1982).

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p.30; D.M. Schreuder, *Gladstone and Kruger: Liberal Government and Colonial 'Home Rule' 1880-85* (London: 1969), p.58.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p.31.

what was termed the Transvaal State as an associated entity of the Empire, a relationship ambiguously referred to in the convention's preamble as suzerainty. Although notionally a grant of self-government, the convention greatly limited the state's scope for independent action and maintained British oversight over a number of key areas.

However, this state of affairs quickly proved unenforceable, generating resentment in the Transvaal and attracting criticism in British political circles. Significantly, when compelled to explain before Parliament why Britain was not seeking to enforce the convention, Gladstone fell back on a tactic which was to become a central element of 'pro-Boer' rhetoric: cautioning that 'a strong feeling of sympathy passes from one end of the South African Settlements to the other among the entire Dutch population', the Prime Minister warned that Britain risked calamity if it alienated its Dutch subjects at the Cape by implementing the convention through force.<sup>12</sup> With Gladstone's government having effectively admitted defeat over the Pretoria Convention, the road was soon paved for its replacement in the form of the London Convention of 1884. In contrast to its predecessor, the terms of the new convention imposed just two clear limitations on the state which the British now agreed to recognise under the name of the South African Republic: a prohibition against slavery, and a veto over any treaties the SAR might negotiate with foreign powers.<sup>13</sup> Critically however, the new convention did not directly address the question of whether British suzerainty remained in place, an ambiguity which was to become a key flashpoint in the autumn of 1899.

In the decade following the London Convention, dramatic developments in South Africa failed to be reflected in political life at the metropole. Arthur Davey's assessment that 'despite the upsurge of economic focus on South Africa [...] the period 1886 to 1892 was marked by political inattention to it in Britain' holds largely true for the whole period before the Jameson Raid.<sup>14</sup> Although reference to the post-Majuba settlement was to be made in the election of 1885, with Gladstone insisting that his policy had averted a general

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<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons debate (hereafter HC Deb.), 16 Mar. 1883, third series, Vol.277, c.722.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p.34.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Davey, *The British Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Cape Town: 1978) p.36.

war in South Africa, it did not form a centre point of the campaign.<sup>15</sup> In the years that followed, the discovery of gold on the Rand, the rapid industrialisation of the region around Johannesburg, and the interventions of Germany all had a profound impact on the regional balance of power.<sup>16</sup> The setting up of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the establishment of Chartered Company rule in Rhodesia brought about the further reshaping of South Africa in the late-nineteenth century. While these developments hardly went unnoticed in Britain, at the same time they did not form the keystone of debates about Empire in British politics. Beyond these specific developments however, this period was also significant for the development of ideas of Boer nationhood. It was not until after the events of the South African War that the notion of an Afrikaner national identity fully materialised, yet nonetheless the political climate in the Transvaal following British retrocession proved fertile ground for the construction of a new and revitalised Afrikaner national identity. As Iain R. Smith notes, 'the Transvaal became the rallying point for the vision of a united Afrikaner nation, with a shared sentiment and a common destiny'.<sup>17</sup> If the end of the nineteenth century had not yet witnessed the definite foundation of Boer nationhood, it was nonetheless a growing political and cultural force in this period.

Two further incidents in the run up to the Raid are worth noting, if not so much for their immediate political impact than for the underlying trends they embodied: the Malaboch War of 1894 and the Drifts Crisis of 1895. As Tlou John Makhura has argued, the Malaboch War, also known to history as the Boer-Bagananwa War, represented an important precursor to the events of the Raid; the SAR's efforts to conscript the mining population of Johannesburg exacerbated tensions within the Republic as well as directly involving the imperial government in the affairs of the Uitlanders.<sup>18</sup> Likewise the Drifts Crisis,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.32.

<sup>16</sup> For details on the political and economic changes that took place in South Africa in this period, see. D. M. Schreuder, *The Scramble for Southern Africa, 1877-1895: the politics of partition reappraised* (Cambridge, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p.34.

<sup>18</sup> Tlou John Makhura, 'Another Road to the Raid: The Neglected Role of the Boer-Bagananwa War as a Factor in the Coming of the Jameson Raid, 1894-1895', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21:2 (Jun. 1995). A revised version of this article was subsequently published as Tlou John Makhura, 'The Neglected Role of the Boer-Bagananwa War in the Jameson Raid', in *The*

at heart an economic dispute between the Cape and the SAR over the charges levied on goods traffic entering the Transvaal, again saw the intervention of the imperial government in a standoff between the regional powers.<sup>19</sup> The situation at the close of 1895 was therefore not only one of increasing tension in the region, but also one of growing direct concern for London.

Events in Britain meanwhile had seen the Liberal Party stumble from crisis to crisis, as disputes over foreign policy, imperial policy and Irish Home Rule crippled the effectiveness of both Gladstone's final ministry and Lord Rosebery's short-lived successor administration. Cast firmly into opposition following the cordite vote and the general election of 1895, the end of the year saw the party badly divided with increasingly fractious relations among its leadership. Joseph Chamberlain, the former Liberal turned Liberal Unionist, was by the same chain of events elevated to the position of Colonial Secretary in Lord Salisbury's new Unionist ministry. Although traditionally something of a less overtly political post, the prominence Chamberlain brought to the position allowed him to increasingly push imperial issues to the fore of British politics.<sup>20</sup> In this manner, with imperial interests increasingly clashing in South Africa with the growing strength of the SAR, and with a renewed focus on imperial affairs emerging in domestic politics, the stage was set on the eve of the Raid for over a decade of political turbulence surrounding the South African question.

### **Imperialism, Imperial History and the Politics of Empire**

The nature of British involvement in South Africa at the dawn of the twentieth century has long been a subject of intense historical interest. Quite apart from its significance for the history of the region itself, the events of the South African War and the subsequent settlement laying the foundations for the apartheid state that was to emerge in the aftermath of the Second World War, the decade of upheaval unleashed by the Jameson Raid of 1895 was to have enormous

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Brenthurst Press, *The Jameson Raid: a centennial retrospective* (Houghton: 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p.66. See also discussion in Kenneth Wilburn, 'The Drifts Crisis, the "missing telegrams" and the Jameson Raid: a centennial review', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25:2 (1997).

<sup>20</sup> Porter, *Origins of the South African War*.

ramifications for Britain and the Empire at large.<sup>21</sup> The situation of the South African question's climax at the very end of the Victorian era, embodying the last major conflict for Britain prior to the cataclysmic events of 1914, has further served to emphasise for historians the significance of the crises and controversies which accompanied British intervention in the Transvaal, not only in understanding the course of late-Victorian and early-Edwardian British imperial policy but in seeking to assess the fundamental character and scope of British imperialism and British imperial rule in this period, as well as the impact of the Empire upon life at the metropole.

In particular, historians have sought to use developments in the South African theatre as a case study for identifying the wider impulses behind British imperial expansion in the latter part of the nineteenth century. These debates surrounding the relationship between the South African War in particular and scholarly theories of imperialism are explored in more depth in chapter two, but for our current purposes it suffices to broadly characterise the key approaches as emphasising alternately economic determinism and strategic concerns as key drivers of British imperial expansion. In terms of the former, a variety of explanations have been proposed: for Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, intervention in South Africa represented only the latest in a series of reactive steps taken by the 'official mind' of the British government in order to address apparent threats to the Empire; in Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw's analysis, British policy was driven by a need to counter the growing economic strength of the South African Republic; and for John Darwin imperial expansion in South Africa was concerned with reinforcing the interests of British 'bridgehead' groups in the region.<sup>22</sup> In terms of the focus of this thesis, what is of most

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<sup>21</sup> Writing in the aftermath of South Africa's secession from the commonwealth, Nicholas Mansergh traced the roots of the new South African question back to the Liberal Party's efforts to settle the previous one: see Nicholas Mansergh, *South Africa 1906-1961: The Price of Magnanimity* (London: 1962). For other accounts situating the conflict within the wider history of twentieth century South Africa, see for example: T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: a modern history*, fourth edition (London: 1991); Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge: 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism* (London: 1961), ch.14; Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, ch.2; John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the

significance is not so much which theory best explains British expansion into South Africa, but more that the strategic assessment can be seen as reflecting an essentially defensive imperial outlook, which one might be expected to find in contemporary interpretations of events.

To a degree, similar inferences might be drawn in relation to interpretations which explained the growth of empire from an economic determinist perspective, not least because many such assessments can be said to have had their origins in J.A. Hobson's theories of imperialism, directly articulated in the context of South Africa.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, the question of which combination of forces actually brought about British action in South Africa is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, if the nature of British imperial expansion is to be understood, a key element of this understanding must be an appreciation of how contemporary political actors conceptualised, explained and justified British actions. With this goal in mind this thesis seeks to uncover the Liberal Party's public response to the South African question.

Given this focus, this study also engages with the debates surrounding the significance of the Empire at the metropole. The study of British imperial history has in recent decades seen a marked shift in scholarly attention towards the challenge of assessing the pervasiveness of imperialism and the impact of the Empire upon life in Britain. As an area of inquiry it is one which had produced starkly contrasting results, most notably in the form of the ongoing disagreement between John MacKenzie and Bernard Porter. While the specific contours of the debate have invariably shifted over time, the key area of dispute remains over the degree to which the Empire 'mattered' to the British: whereas in *Propaganda and Empire* MacKenzie depicts a Britain infused with imperial imagery and thinking, Porter in *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* presents the Empire as largely unimportant for all but those, mainly elites, directly connected with the enterprise.<sup>24</sup>

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Victorians: the Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *English Historical Review* 112:447 (1997).

<sup>23</sup> J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: 1954) [first published 1902].

<sup>24</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: 1984); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: 2004).

These debates, subsequently explored through works such as Andrew S. Thompson's *The Empire Strikes Back?* and Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose's volume *At Home with the Empire*, have in many ways been neatly reflected by developments in the political history of fin-de-siècle Britain, particularly in relation to the significance of the South African War.<sup>25</sup> For example, in *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* Richard Price sought to overturn the 'khaki' interpretation of the 1900 general election, the notion widely advanced by contemporary political actors that Unionist exploitation of patriotic and jingoistic narratives secured the Salisbury government's re-election. However, Price's efforts to downplay the impact of the war and imperial concerns upon voting behaviour have themselves come under challenge from more recent scholarship.<sup>26</sup> In particular, the work of Paul Readman on the language of patriotism in Unionist election addresses has demonstrated the degree to which the South African question played a prominent role in late-Victorian party politics, while the contributions of M.D. Blanch and Ian Sharpe have also sought to challenge the notion that impact of imperial affairs on British politics was minimal.<sup>27</sup>

A focus on language and rhetoric has also proved useful in examining the ways in which the nature of the British Empire and the meanings of imperialism more generally were understood by historical actors. In one sense, historians of the British Empire have long recognised the contested and evolving meanings of

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Although not directly connected with the questions examined here, it is worth noting that more recently the question of the Empire's centrality to life in Britain has been linked with wider debates over the 'minimalist' or 'maximalist' interpretation of the Empire's impact on the world at large: see John M. MacKenzie, 'The British Empire: Ramshackle or Rampaging? A Historiographical Reflection', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43:1 (2015).

<sup>25</sup> Andrew S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow: 2005); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902* (London: 1972).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Readman, 'The Conservative Party, patriotism, and British politics: the case of the general election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies* 40:1 (2001); M.D. Blanch, 'British society and the war', in Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Harlow: 1980); Ian Sharpe, 'Empire, patriotism and the working-class electorate: the 1900 general election in the Battersea constituency', *Parliamentary History* 28:3 (2009).

the term. In their classic study *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word*, Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt identified a turn-of-the-century British imperialism caught between two understandings, one an earlier critical identification of imperialism with despotic rule and the other representing an outward-looking expression of national patriotism. Significantly, it is worth noting that for the authors the South African War represented 'an essential turning point' in the career of imperialism as a political word, bringing about a reversion to the earlier, pejorative understanding of the term.<sup>28</sup> More recently, Thompson has made use of the South African question to chart the rise to dominance of different visions of imperialism within British political discourse. The contest for the language of imperialism, Thompson argues, saw first the dominance in the run up to the conflict of 1899-1902 of a Conservative vision of Empire which stressed settler kinship, then the emergence of a Liberal Imperialist-Fabian imperialism which sought to link patriotism with social reform, and finally the articulation of a Radical politics of empire which rejected imperialism and instead championed ideas of trusteeship.<sup>29</sup> Along related lines, works such as Miles Taylor's study of radical critiques of imperialism have also served to stress the changing and contested understandings of what imperialism meant to different groups and movements.<sup>30</sup> Bernard Semmel, who situates their development within the wider international histories of liberal and racial thought, has additionally further documented the shifting theorisations of imperialism in this era.<sup>31</sup> Quite apart from the insights such studies give as to

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (Cambridge: 1965), p.248.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew S. Thompson, 'The language of imperialism and the meanings of empire: imperial discourse in British politics, 1895-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 36:2 (1997). See also Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: the empire in British politics, c. 1880-1932* (Harlow: 2000), which situates these debates within the wider political context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain.

<sup>30</sup> Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19:1 (1991). See also Gregory Claeys, *Imperial sceptics: British critics of empire, 1850-1920* (Cambridge: 2010); Mira Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late Victorian Britain* (London: 2011); Jon Wilson, 'The Silence of Empire: Imperialism and India' in David Craig and James Thompson (eds), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin* (Baltimore, MD: 1993).

how ideas of imperialism evolved over time and were adapted to different circumstances, most critically the scholarship in this field has underlined the essentially contested nature of imperial language in British politics in this period.

Yet to adopt a narrow focus on the specific understandings of the term imperialism advanced by key political and intellectual figures risks missing the wood for the trees. In a recent review article, MacKenzie criticises the tendency for minimalist accounts of the British Empire to exclude non-state action from their definitions of imperialism, speculating that the trend had arisen in part from an excessive focus on the term imperialism itself: some, he argues, 'seem to imagine that if the word was not used the phenomenon somehow did not exist'.<sup>32</sup> Although MacKenzie advances this point in relation to the informal imperialism of the frontier, such concerns are just as relevant for historians concerned with the political context at the metropole. While certainly the nature of British imperialism formed an important component of public political debate in this period, and indeed some of these debates from the time of the South African War are explored in depth in chapters two and three of this thesis, it would be wrong to imagine that such debates represented the totality or even the bulk of British political discourse on the character of the Empire. Instead, this thesis proceeds on the basis that political figures conveyed assumptions and beliefs about the nature of British imperial rule not primarily through explicitly defined visions of imperialism, but implicitly through their wider public statements on aspects of imperial politics. Faced with the need to respond to events in South Africa, Liberal speakers drew upon wider assumptions as to the nature of the British Empire and the ideals it supposedly represented. Further still, Liberal speakers also made use of the South African question to develop and advance new imperial ideals within British politics.

In adopting this approach, the constraints of this study ultimately pose limitations as to the nature of the imperial politics it assesses. Given that this thesis focuses on the imperial dimensions of the South African question, rather than the more abstract use of imperialism in this period, it means that aspects of the debate over, for example, the Roseberyite notion of imperialism as the basis

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<sup>32</sup> MacKenzie, 'Ramshackle or Rampaging?', 113.

for domestic social reform are not directly examined.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, notwithstanding the fact that the settler population of South Africa represented only ever a small minority of the region's total population, the notion of Empire articulated in relation to the South African question was primarily that of the Empire of white settlement. The politics of Empire as constructed in relation to South Africa might therefore have had only a partial resemblance to debates on India or the dependent Empire.

Nonetheless, as will be examined in the following chapters, Liberal rhetoric on the South African question did indeed draw upon the rhetorical aspects of other episodes in the history of Empire. For example, the use of ideas of character to justify the imposition of imperial rule, as explored by P.J. Cain in his studies of the financial administration of Egypt and the idea of the 'civilising mission' in the dependent empire, formed a core component of Liberal rhetoric on the South African question, shaping British perceptions both of the Boers and of the nature of British rule.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, while the debates over 'domestic' imperialism were not directly related to the politics of the South African question, as will be demonstrated much of the emphasis such debates placed, for example, on notions of constitutionalism and progress can be seen as reflected in debates on the governance of South Africa, alternately critiquing the nature of British and Boer rule in the region. As much, therefore, as the imperial politics examined in this thesis relates specifically to the context of the South African question, this politics did not exist in isolation but instead formed a part of a much broader politics of Empire.

### **Liberal Politics and Liberal Rhetoric**

In adopting this approach, the rhetoric of Liberal politics becomes central to understanding the nature of the party's response to the South African question.

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<sup>33</sup> For studies exploring the use of imperialism as a basis for domestic social reform in Britain during this period, see in particular: Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and social reform: English social-imperial thought, 1895-1914* (London: 1960); Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*; Thompson, 'The language of imperialism'.

<sup>34</sup> P.J. Cain, 'Character and imperialism: The British financial administration of Egypt, 1878–1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34:2 (2006); P.J. Cain, 'Character, "Ordered Liberty", and the Mission to Civilise: British Moral Justification of Empire, 1870–1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40:4 (2012).

The study of rhetoric in British political history is one which has received increasing scholarly interest in recent years, as historians have sought to investigate not simply the operation but the culture of British politics. Gareth Steadman Jones' seminal work *Languages of Class*, which emphasised that 'the problematic character of language itself' was not adequately addressed by existing social historical understandings of experience and consciousness, is often credited with heralding the advent of the linguistic turn in British political history.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the study of political languages has been heavily influenced by the 'Cambridge school' of intellectual history and the work of J.G.A. Pocock: Pocock's characterisation of political language as 'plural, flexible and non-final' and his stress upon what he terms speech-acts as modifying user, audience and the language-structures in which they are performed have played an important role in shaping the approaches of historians concerned with political rhetoric.<sup>36</sup>

Yet despite the increasing interest in the field, the question of what exactly is meant by rhetoric is one which continues to lack a simple answer. Depending on the nature of the inquiry at hand, rhetoric can be understood at the micro level, focusing on the specific semiotics or oratory deployed within a narrowly defined context, or alternatively rhetoric might be elevated to the level of the discourse and the overarching performative aspects of politics, in which sense it effectively becomes synonymous with the very practice of politics itself. A plurality of interpretations of rhetoric is of course no bad thing; however, the terms of reference must be appropriate to the subjects under investigation.

With such considerations in mind, this thesis understands rhetoric to be both a process and a product of political activity. It was in one sense a toolkit for political actors, not simply enabling the effective communication of political ideas but serving as a means of reshaping the political reality of the situation. Richard Toye's work on the 'rhetorical premiership' in twentieth-century Britain

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<sup>35</sup> Gareth Steadman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: 1983), p.20. For a discussion of Jones' wider impact on the practice of British political history, see discussion in Paul Readman, 'The State of Twentieth-Century British Political History', *Journal of Policy History* 21:3 (2009).

<sup>36</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, 'The reconstruction of discourse: towards the historiography of political thought', in J.G.A. Pocock (ed.), *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: 2009), p.74

serves as a useful illustration here, demonstrating the ways in which successive Prime Ministers augmented their formal political power through the use of rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> Rhetoric in this sense takes into account not just the form of language used, but also takes into consideration performative factors such as context and the medium through which rhetorical acts were communicated. At the same time, however, the rhetorical expectations of the context in which political speakers operated fundamentally shaped not only the range of rhetorical tools available to them, but the very political reality in which they were acting. Rhetoric in this sense can be seen as broadly synonymous with the 'languages of politics' outlined by David Craig and James Thompson, that is as a phenomenon comprised not so much as the expression of a coherent body of political thought, but instead rather as guided by the 'loose clusters of beliefs and arguments [...] that made up the world-view of political persons, that shaped what they did, and enabled them to evaluate the words and deeds of others'. Critically, Craig and Thompson's interpretation emphasises the regulatory role of language on political conduct: 'no one existed in a vacuum, and even the shifting and shuffling politician knew that wider norms and values limited what he or she might do'.<sup>38</sup> In examining Liberal rhetoric on South Africa therefore, this thesis is seeking to identify both the methods by which the public politics of the South African question were conducted and the underlying assumptions and ideals which fundamentally shaped the rhetorical framework within which Liberal speakers acted.

In seeking to understand British Liberal rhetoric on the South African question, it is necessary to draw a distinction between liberalism as philosophy or ideology and Liberal politics as a specific feature of British political history, or, as it is sometimes denoted, between 'small l' liberalism and 'big L' Liberalism.<sup>39</sup> As far as the former is concerned, the term liberalism might charitably be

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Toye, 'The Rhetorical Premiership: A New Perspective on Prime Ministerial Power Since 1945', *Parliamentary History* 30:2 (2011).

<sup>38</sup> David Craig and James Thompson, 'Introduction' in David Craig and James Thompson (eds), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Basingstoke: 2013), p.2.

<sup>39</sup> Given the inevitable hazards embodied in such a notation, the term Liberal politics rather than Liberalism is generally used throughout this thesis, although quotations from contemporary and secondary sources do not necessarily make this distinction.

characterised as one which evades easy description. As Duncan Bell has argued in his recent essay 'What is Liberalism?' the concept is one which has produced not only myriad and often starkly conflicting definitions, but has also generated very different methods of scholarly engagement with the phenomenon. Where the term is critically engaged with at all, Bell notes, authors alternately seek to apply prescriptive accounts, demarcating an 'authentic' branch of liberalism while relegating or discarding all rival forms, comprehensive approaches, concerned less with specific meaning and more with the usage of liberal discourse, and explanatory responses which focus on the development of liberalism(s). The diffusion of approaches is further multiplied by the division between stipulative and canonical interpretive protocols: that is, whether the liberal tradition is to be identified through engagement with a series of core concepts or constructed from a pantheon of great writings.<sup>40</sup>

Yet while Bell is surely right to insist on the importance of historical context in seeking to understand liberalism, even if the scope of inquiry is narrowed to the liberalism of fin-de-siècle Britain, the task of definition remains a daunting challenge. Michael Freeden, for example, notes two clusters of liberal thought in this period, in the forms of classical liberalism and the new liberalism, quite apart from the ongoing processes which would see it continually contested and remoulded.<sup>41</sup> The divergences between the two schools of thought and their manifestations in political life were substantial. Precise systems of classifying Liberal thought vary considerably but, for present purposes, it suffices to define classical liberalism as a doctrine that emphasised the rights and liberties of the individual, often in the context of the powers of the state. The new liberalism by contrast represented an evolution of these ideals into a philosophy that placed a much greater emphasis on the community and the capacity of state action to meet the new impulses of social reform. Despite a shared common tradition therefore, liberalism at the end of the nineteenth century represented a considerable range of different perspectives and purposes.

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<sup>40</sup> Duncan Bell, 'What Is Liberalism?', *Political Theory* 42:6 (2014).

<sup>41</sup> See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: 1996), particularly chs. 4 & 5. See also Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism : an Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: 1978).

The introduction of the imperial element complicates the task of definition still further. Although public figures in Britain sought to frame the Empire as explicitly - and indeed exceptionally - liberal in nature, as Uday Singh Mehta, Martin J. Weiner and others have argued, the supposedly liberal instincts of imperial actors not only failed to soften the realities of imperial rule but also provided an intellectual framework and justification for imperialism. The civilising mission and the desire to uplift the subject populations of the Empire provided a rationale for their indefinite subjugation to British rule, just as the inherent contradictions between self-government and the rule of law became manifest in the colonised territories.<sup>42</sup> As Jennifer Pitts has documented, this in itself represented a marked shift from the liberal scepticism of colonialism in the eighteenth century, as liberal thinkers abandoned earlier pluralistic conceptualisations of progress in favour of a dichotomy of civilization versus barbarism that justified the imposition of European rule over non-European populations.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, authors such as Mira Matikkala have identified liberal thought as concurrently central to the anti-imperialism of late-Victorian Britain.<sup>44</sup> The problem of the 'over-extension' of liberalism as a concept identified by Bell thus remains a daunting challenge.<sup>45</sup>

This thesis seeks to respond to these challenges by adopting as its focus what can be termed British Liberal politics: the characteristics and practices of Liberal Party politicians, structures and audiences, along with the characteristics and practices of those organisations and institutions closely affiliated with the party, for example the Liberal-supporting Press. Such a definition should not, however, be taken to imply that Liberal was somehow an empty term, a mere descriptor of party allegiance without greater significance. Indeed, the causes and ideals championed by Liberals, most notably for example support for Free Trade, lay at the very heart of what it meant to be Liberal. In this respect the key elements of Liberal politics reflected many of the core concepts associated with liberalism, and it would of course be fanciful to suggest that there was no

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<sup>42</sup> Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, IL: 1999); Martin J. Weiner, *An empire on trial: race, murder, and justice under British rule, 1870-1935* (Cambridge: 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition*.

<sup>45</sup> Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 683.

connection between British ideas of liberalism and the central tenets of British Liberal politics. Yet it is important nonetheless to decouple assumptions about the nature of British Liberal politics from the expectations of wider liberalism, however it might be defined. In spite of its name, the Liberal Party cannot simply be regarded as the manifestation of liberalism within the British parliamentary system: instead, British Liberal politics must be approached as a distinct historical phenomenon in its own right, the understanding of which was continually redefined as Liberal actors contested the meaning of the term.

In this fashion, the divisions within the late-Victorian Liberal Party should not be seen as just a contest over the party's leadership and organisation, but also fundamentally a contest over what it meant to be Liberal in the post-Gladstonian era. Indeed, for leading Liberals such as Rosebery or Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to be successful in their efforts, it was vital that they could frame their own position as one which was indisputably Liberal. Jones' observation in *Languages of Class* about the history of the post-war Labour Party is no less true of the Liberal Party of the late-Victorian era. The idea of the party having an essential definition, or being the product of a continuous evolutionary process, takes on an importance 'not as its definition, but rather as an animating myth producing real effects upon the practices of many of the participants within that history'.<sup>46</sup> The authority conferred by the Liberal name made the battle over Liberal ideas all the more significant.

The 1886 schism over Irish Home Rule had after all spawned a pretender to the Liberal mantle in the form of the Liberal Unionist Party. Although often dismissed as a party that quickly lost its distinctiveness in alliance with the Conservatives, more recently the work of historians such as Ian Cawood has demonstrated the continuing claims to a Liberal identity advanced by the Liberal Unionists. As much as the strength of this appeal was fading by the end of the century, the party nonetheless continued to challenge Liberal speakers' claims to represent the 'true' Liberal position.<sup>47</sup> The plurality of political positions within the Liberal Unionists, and particularly the personal prominence of Chamberlain, prevents any easy categorisation of the party's appeal beyond the specific issue of opposition to Home Rule. In simple terms however, the Liberal Unionists at

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<sup>46</sup> Jones, *Languages of Class*, p.23.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party: A History* (London: 2012).

the end of the nineteenth century might best be characterised as appealing to two specific audiences. First, there was a continuing concern to appeal to 'moderate' Liberal support. The Liberal Unionist press often characterised the mainstream Liberal Party as the Radical Party, emphasising its sectional nature in contrast to the national position of the Unionist alliance, an appeal in some ways not all too dissimilar from that of the Roseberyites. Second, there also existed alongside this Chamberlain's more radical pitch, combining popular imperial appeals with promises of social reform, advanced with the aim of attracting the support of the newly enfranchised working classes. Although as E.H.H. Greene notes Chamberlain's own prominence in this cause risks eclipsing the fact that many of his party colleagues were strong opponents of social reform, this nonetheless represented another dimension of the Liberal Unionists' efforts to contest the political territory of their former party.<sup>48</sup> This continuing contest further manifested itself in the language of Liberal politics, with figures such as Chamberlain on occasion adopting many of the same rhetorical tropes as his former colleagues in opposition.

The challenge for Liberal speakers in relation to divisions over South Africa was therefore that of seeking to present their own viewpoints as recognisably Liberal, while additionally reframing understandings of what a Liberal approach to the politics of Empire represented in order to undermine rival claims to a Liberal policy. By analysing the Liberal response to the South African question during this period of internal division, this thesis therefore aims to uncover not only the underlying assumptions as to what a Liberal approach to Empire constituted, but the ways in which Liberal speakers sought to reshape such expectations with a view to the wider struggle for control over British Liberal politics.

As discussed above, this thesis focuses on the practice of fin-de-siècle Liberal politics as opposed to seeking to outline the major tenets of the British Liberal tradition. However, one aspect of this tradition worth specific consideration is that of constitutionalism. As the work of Jonathon Parry has explored, mid-nineteenth century Liberal speakers placed great emphasis upon English

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<sup>48</sup> E.H.H. Greene, *The crisis of conservatism: the politics, economics and ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: 1995), pp.129-31.

constitutionalism as part of a wider patriotic ideology underpinning the party's domestic and foreign platforms. Pride in the allegedly open, disinterested governance of Britain in the national interest was contrasted against 'continental' despotism, a rhetorical construction that not only allowed for the legitimisation of the British state to domestic audiences, but also enabled the pursuit of interventionist international policies for the cause of liberty against autocracy.<sup>49</sup> In the imperial context, this in turn served to fuel the idea of the civilising mission, even as Liberals justified the imposition of British rule over other nations by making a unique virtue of the British capacity for self-government. Although the mid-century confidence of this Liberal appeal had faded somewhat by the end of the century, not least in the face of a concerted Unionist effort to capture the language of patriotism, the framework of constitutionalism against despotism remained prominent in Liberal politics and thinking. For Liberal sceptics of imperialism and jingoism, such movements threatened to undermine the constitutional and democratic basis of the British state, both by enabling the extension of personalised autocratic rule in Britain and by damaging the essential bonds between democracy and morality.<sup>50</sup> As this thesis explores however, Liberal imperialists also marshalled ideas of constitutionalism in support of imperialist appeals, emphasising the democratic and self-governing nature of the Empire as exceptional and uniquely British. The constitutional strand running through Liberal rhetoric on the character and the governance of Empire must therefore also be understood in the context of these wider trends in nineteenth-century Liberal thinking.

In adopting a rhetorical approach, the historian of the nineteenth-century must add an important caveat as to the nature of the evidence available to them. Whereas a historian of twentieth-century politics might conceivably have access to a full audio or visual record of a given speech, the scholar of Victorian politics has no such luxury. Instead the core body of evidence available, and that with which this thesis is primarily concerned, is the written record of political

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<sup>49</sup> Jonathon Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge: 2006), conclusion.

<sup>50</sup> See for example discussions in P.J. Durrans, 'A Two-Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10:3 (1982); James Thompson, 'Democracy, Monism, and the Common Good: Rethinking William Clarke's Political Religion', *History of European Ideas* 38:2 (2012).

speeches as they were reported in newspapers. Such a state of affairs is by no means an insurmountable obstacle to examining Liberal rhetoric, but it does require an appreciation that the rhetoric under examination in this study has been mediated via the Press, rather than representing a direct line of communication between Liberal speakers and their audiences. The late-Victorian period can be said to have been a golden age of political reporting, in the sense that political speeches were reported to a remarkable degree of detail within both the London and provincial Press: indeed, in the case of speeches by particularly high profile figures, whether locally or nationally, the bulk of the speech would often be reported in the form of a verbatim transcript rather than integrated into an article.<sup>51</sup> However, while the product of this culture of political reporting provides a greater textual record of speechmaking that is available for earlier and indeed later periods, the mistake must not be made of assuming that the evidence provided by newspaper reports represents a complete reproduction of the speeches in question.

Instead, even before the range of speeches examined is narrowed down to allow for a focused historical inquiry, it must be recognised that the process of political reporting in this period produced what was essentially a skewed reproduction of politicians' speeches, both in terms of which speeches were reported in the first place and in terms of the nature of the transcripts included in the reports. As Joseph S. Meisel notes, while the top tier of prominent politicians might reasonably expect extensive coverage of their speeches, the same could not be said of their less high-profile colleagues, and the result was that the overall body of speech reporting inevitably did not directly reflect the full volume of speeches made.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the Press were additionally mediators between political speakers and their newspaper-reading audiences in terms of the elements of the speech which were reported. While practices varied from newspaper to newspaper, and indeed from report to report, it was not uncommon for entire sections of a spoken speech not to be reproduced with little indication in the report itself as to the content of the excised sections. To

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<sup>51</sup> However, in the absence of other evidence the degree to which reported transcripts actually reflected the content of the speech can never be truly known.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph S. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: 2001), ch.5.

take an example from chapter three, a comparison of the reports in *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* covering Campbell-Bannerman's infamous 'methods of barbarism' speech of June 1901 reveal key differences between the two. While both covered the section condemning British policies on the grounds of morality, the subsequent part of the speech in which Campbell-Bannerman criticised the government's tactics on the grounds of imperial governance was greatly conflated in *The Times* report, possibly indicating why the focus of many subsequent historical studies has been on the humanitarian dimensions of the speech.<sup>53</sup> In respect to the latter issue, this thesis uses a range of different newspapers as its source material for Liberal speeches, generally selecting the newspaper reports which provided the fullest account as the sources to be examined with the aim of ensuring as far as possible that any relevant sections are not overlooked. More significantly, however, as this study is concerned not so much with the quantitative aspects of Liberal speeches so much as their qualitative aspects, the potential impact of this skewed reproduction is lessened. If as is argued Liberal speakers did indeed frame their stances on South Africa in relation to existing assumptions within British Liberal politics, then ultimately the mediating role of the Press in communicating and reinforcing these assumptions forms part of the wider phenomenon under investigation.

In considering the wider audiences which newspaper reporting of speeches enabled politicians to address, it is worth also reflecting upon the role of public opinion in late-Victorian life. In an important contribution to the interpretation of fin-de-siècle British politics, James Thompson in *British Political Culture and Public Opinion* identifies the phenomenon as a 'cardinal feature of late Victorian and Edwardian political culture'.<sup>54</sup> Although there was considerable variance in the political and intellectual conceptualisations of public opinion, many of the key notions associated with the term are of direct relevance to the political dynamics this thesis examines. The perception of the public, as opposed to only the electorate, as a politically powerful group embodying the virtues of the national character and capable of acting as a guiding force upon the nation's politics, and if necessary a restraint upon political elites, is key to understanding

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<sup>53</sup> Compare the reports in the *Manchester Guardian* 15 Jun. 1901 and *The Times*, 15 Jun. 1901.

<sup>54</sup> James Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867-1914* (Cambridge: 2013), p.26.

the importance of the public dimensions of the South African question. Because public opinion could serve as a source of authority, especially for an opposition party lacking the prestige and machinery of government, the performative politics of being seen to represent public opinion proved of such use to Liberal speakers seeking to contest and reshape the nature of imperial political debate. At the same time, it was the recognition of this power for public opinion to direct the nation's fortunes which provided Liberal speakers with a compelling need to advocate their own approaches to questions of imperial politics. Furthermore, as Thompson notes it was the Press, alongside other mediums such as the platform and the petition, which most frequently served as a barometer for public opinion.<sup>55</sup> The relationship between political speakers, newspapers and readerships was not mono-directional therefore, but a dynamic in which newspapers at the very least notionally acted as arbiters of the public response to political developments.<sup>56</sup> Not unrelated to this idea of public opinion, the Press can also be said to have served the function of representing party opinion: at a time of Liberal divisions at the elite level, in a party structure in which no organisation could be said to have ultimate authority over Liberal politics, the idea of representing a wider Liberal opinion present in the country at large could again serve to provide Liberal speakers with a degree of authority over their internal party rivals.

The need for speakers to address audiences in the country at large via the newspaper industry did not render the speaker's immediate audience and surroundings irrelevant. Indeed, the setting of the public meeting was itself a rhetorical act which provided both an opportunity and a challenge for speakers. As Jon Lawrence has noted, open public meetings represented a test of political legitimacy. If a speaker could be seen to carry the meeting, winning over their audience by force of argument, then they could demonstrate not merely the righteousness of their cause but crucially also present their self as a true representative of public opinion.<sup>57</sup> Somewhat counterintuitively, a speaker who

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., ch.2.

<sup>56</sup> Whether newspapers accurately reflected the views of their readers and the public at large is in this instance of secondary importance to whether they were seen to do so.

<sup>57</sup> Jon Lawrence, *Electing our masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: 2009), p.62.

faced severe hostility and even violence might also emerge from the encounter with their reputation strengthened, the theatrics of being seen to speak out in spite of intimidation reinforcing their apparent adherence to principle in the face of an unreasoning crowd.

Even in circumstances where a meeting was not truly public in the sense of offering general admission, being seen to win over the audience could be of immense symbolic importance: for example, the infamous 'war to the knife and fork' of 1901, in which the battles of the Liberal civil war were fought out over a series of dinners hosted by different party factions, served to demonstrate the right of the speakers' respective claims to speak for Liberal opinion.<sup>58</sup> This dynamic was indeed only amplified further in the parliamentary arena, where the goal of being seen to speak for the Liberal Party carried with it the more immediate need to persuade reluctant colleagues to vote in the same division lobby, such parliamentary splits themselves further being reported extensively in the Press. Furthermore, both on the platform and in the parliamentary chamber the audience in the room mattered for the reason that they were not simply passive receptors of the speaker's oratory, but active participants, challenging and heckling the speaker over controversial points. These interruptions, recorded by newspaper reports of speeches and by Hansard alike, provided yet still another context in which Liberal speakers were compelled to articulate their views for public consumption. The relationship between the speaker and their immediate audience thus remained of considerable importance, even if the audience in the country at large constituted a speaker's primary target.

In adopting a rhetorical focus, as opposed to examining private political views on Empire, and by focusing on Liberal politics, rather than a broader understanding of liberalism, this thesis is thus able to explore how the South African question operated as an issue within British political culture. By examining the speeches of Liberals at key moments in the history of the South African question, in which politicians were compelled to publicly state their views on the nature of British imperial power in the region and its operation, this thesis is able to explore the practical form which the politics of Empire assumed

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<sup>58</sup> See chapter three.

within the dynamic of British party politics. While however the focus of this study concerns Liberal rhetoric on Empire, and indeed as noted above only the rhetoric of Empire in so far as it related to the South African question, it should not of course be assumed that such rhetoric existed as a closed system: instead, it was always articulated within a wider framework in which the meanings of imperialism were contested between political parties and indeed in relation to organisations and movements external to party politics. In examining the form taken by the politics of Empire within the confines of British Liberal politics therefore, it must be borne in mind that it existed not in isolation, but formed part of a wider rhetoric of Empire in British politics and society.

### **Towards a Liberal Rhetoric of Empire**

Over the following chapters, this thesis explores the nature of Liberal rhetoric on Empire and the South African question in relation to four key episodes or periods between 1895 and 1907. Chapter one examines the Liberal response to the aftermath of the Jameson Raid of December 1895, the disastrous incursion of British South Africa Company forces into the South African Republic sparked by the abortive efforts of Cecil Rhodes to engineer regime change in the SAR to the advantage of the British Empire and Rhodes' own administration in Cape Colony. Eschewing a traditional focus on the behind-the-scenes calculations that enabled Rhodes to escape the censure of the parliamentary inquiry into the episode, this chapter instead examines the ways in which Liberal speakers seized upon the events of the Raid in order to advance critiques of the nature of British imperial rule in the region. Looking in particular at how notions of character were deployed to critique the capital-driven imperialism perceived to have led to the unrest in the Transvaal, this chapter explores how Chartered Company rule in South Africa came to be criticised on the grounds of misgovernment, falling short of the governing ideals the Empire supposedly embodied. Furthermore, this chapter assesses how Liberal rhetoric on the Jameson Raid characterised Anglo-Dutch harmony within the settler community as the key requirement of successful British rule in South Africa, a narrative which at the same time served to erase the non-white populations of the region from political debate. While, therefore, out of all the aspects of the South African question examined in this thesis, the aftermath of the Jameson Raid produced the least public debate on the nature of Britain's South African Empire, the

themes explored in this chapter are nonetheless critical in setting the stage for the Liberal Party's response to the South African War and its aftermath.

Chapter two takes this thesis up to the end of the century, examining the period spanning from the early summer of 1899, when renewed tensions over the Uitlander franchise further increased the salience of the South African question in British politics, through to the weeks following the outbreak of the war, in which the Liberal Imperialist faction made explicitly clear their breach not only with the pro-Boers but also their party leader. Although this represents the shortest period under examination in this thesis, it is nonetheless one of great significance. At a point in which the conflict remained largely hypothetical, and even after during the initial fighting, the focus of political debate was less on the practical situation within South Africa and more on the principles at stake. Again examining the theme of imperial governance, this chapter explores how Liberal speakers responded to the 1899 Transvaal crisis by articulating rival visions of imperial rule in South Africa, expressed both in terms of the supposed imperial suzerainty or paramountcy exercised over the Transvaal and in relation to the ideals of good government and self-government embodied in Britain's colonies but allegedly denied to the Uitlanders. Likewise, this chapter explores how Liberal speakers exploited ideas about the character of the South African Republic and of the Boers as a race in support of their positions on South Africa, and the means by which both supporters and opponents of the Unionist government's interventionist policy were able to cite the need for white racial harmony throughout South Africa in support of their stances. Critically, this chapter demonstrates how a broad level of agreement among Liberal speakers over the principles and ideals of British imperial rule nonetheless fractured against a political situation in South Africa in which the implementation of said ideals was to prove fundamentally contradictory.

The progress and conduct of the conflict itself forms the subject of chapter three. Although there are many elements of the politics of the South African War which could be explored, such as the debates over the fitness of British military preparations and the expense of the conflict, the key controversies examined in this chapter are those which touched at the heart of the imperial nature of the conflict and which Liberal speakers used to advance wider critiques relating to the nature of British imperial rule and the future of South Africa. In particular,

this chapter re-examines the Liberal Party's response to British counterinsurgency methods - most notably in the form of Campbell-Bannerman's famous 'methods of barbarism' speech - as not just a humanitarian critique but one framed in the same logics of white racial harmony and the importance of free self-government that had characterised earlier debates. Alongside debates over the consequences of martial law in Cape Colony and the implications of the government demand for 'unconditional surrender', this chapter also explores how Liberal speakers from across the party framed the questions of the Boer republics' annexation in terms of what it meant for good government and self-government in the Transvaal and across South Africa as a whole. Critically, while the course of the war saw a substantial shift in the internal balance of power within the Liberal Party as the narrative shifted from the justice of the war's origins to the conduct and proposed settlement of the conflict, there remained a strong element of consistency in the themes invoked by Liberal speakers in relation to the politics of Empire.

Finally, in its fourth chapter this thesis explores the politics of the reconstruction era, specifically the Liberal response to the Chinese labour controversy and the debates over the mechanisms of self-government to be introduced in the newly-established Transvaal and Orange River colonies. These two debates formed the core of Liberal objections to Unionist policy in South Africa in the years following the conflict, and were two of the highest-profile issues in South African affairs which Campbell-Bannerman's incoming ministry would face after the fall of the Balfour government in 1905. While the question of Chinese labour was undoubtedly driven in part by working class concerns in Britain, as this chapter examines the question was also one directly linked to the task of governing South Africa, with Liberal speakers reworking earlier narratives on the importance of white racial harmony by framing the policy as one which would further exacerbate the racial obstacles to British rule. Likewise, the debates over the form of self-government to be granted to the former republics, whether a limited form of representative government or full responsible government, represented a continuation of many of the narratives of imperial governance from the time of the war, as well as serving to advance wider visions about the structure of the Empire of white settlement. Again, the fundamentals of the Liberal response to the South African question were largely unchanged:

Unionist policy was attacked as running contrary to the ideals of British imperial rule, and Liberal policy was presented as one which would resolve the problems of South Africa by embodying said ideals. However, as will be seen, the contradictions of race and governance at the heart of the Liberal outlook on Empire remained, setting the scene for new fractures within the Liberal Party over imperial policy.

In studying these four episodes, what emerges is an understanding of how Liberal rhetoric on the South African question was framed with reference to what might be termed the idealised Liberal vision of Empire. This vision of imperial rule embodied the ideals which were not only presumed to exist within the Empire, but indeed were considered essential for its successful maintenance. Self-government, whether defined in terms of specific representative institutions or in terms of settler communities' participation in government, was held to be the cornerstone of the good governance of the Empire, avoiding the pitfalls of direct rule and martial law. This idealised Empire was also one not, in theory at least, driven by race: rather than advocating the Anglicisation of its settler populations, the Empire embraced the plurality of white races which comprised it as its strength, an instinct which extended in very limited form to an aversion to explicit colour bars in the settler colonies. For the same reason, the character of the imperialism the Empire embodied was held to be of critical importance: an aggressive or capital-driven imperialism would, it was argued, undermine the bonds of imperial loyalty that held this idealised Liberal Empire together. Viewed in this light, the Liberal split becomes less a question of fundamental divisions over imperialism and more the result of a contest between competing positions each framed in the language of a Liberal approach to Empire. Critically, in arguing for an essential continuity within Liberal imperial rhetoric on the South African question, this interpretation also challenges existing interpretations that minimise the impact of the Empire on politics in fin-de-siècle Britain by demonstrating instead that the imperial debates associated with the South African War formed only the most visible element of an already existing Liberal imperial politics.

## 1. 'PRIVATE ADVENTURERS IN DOMINION': RESPONSES TO THE RAID, 1895-1898

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In late December 1895, Dr Leander Starr Jameson led British South African Company (BSAC) forces in an armed invasion of the South African Republic (SAR) from the neighbouring Bechuanaland protectorate. Ostensibly responding to a call of distress from the civilian Uitlander population of Johannesburg, the move was in fact a desperate attempt to force the Uitlanders into open revolt against the government of President Kruger and thus bring about the installation of a government in Pretoria more amenable to the interests of Cape Colony premier Cecil Rhodes. Although Jameson's action did succeed in sparking an uprising on the Rand, his reformer allies failed to make much headway and Jameson found his men outmanoeuvred by the SAR's forces, ultimately being forced to surrender on 2 January 1896. The failed invasion became known to history as the Jameson Raid. The subsequent exposure of the conspiracy behind it led to the downfall of Rhodes, elevated the Uitlander question to prominence, and ultimately paved the road to the outbreak of the South African War in 1899.

While debates over South Africa were hardly a new feature of British politics at the beginning of 1896, the dramatic news of the Raid and the contentious developments which were to follow marked the beginning of a new chapter in the South African question as an issue within British party politics. At the time of the Raid itself however, its political impact in Britain was initially rather limited. This was no doubt partly down to timing: the Jameson Raid erupted against a backdrop of heightened tensions between Britain and the United States over Venezuela and renewed disputes over Britain's Eastern policy in the wake of the Armenian massacres. The swiftness with which the Raid fizzled out and the relatively conciliatory positions initially adopted, in public at least, by Joseph Chamberlain and Kruger most likely also helped diffuse the sense of immediate crisis. Furthermore, there was at this point less direct potential for party conflict on the issue, and certainly less potential for public conflict within the Liberal Party: the breach between Lord Rosebery and Sir William Harcourt was not at the beginning of 1896 public knowledge.

Nonetheless Liberal speakers did not prove quiet on the issue. Seeking a return to the House of Commons at the Montrose Burghs by-election early in 1896,

John Morley made extensive use of the Jameson Raid in his election speeches.<sup>1</sup> At Westminster both Rosebery and Harcourt likewise devoted considerable attention to the South African question in their speeches on the opening of Parliament, and sections on the Transvaal were to be regularly included in their public speeches as leaders of the Liberal Party.<sup>2</sup> The weeks and months after the Raid also saw a Radical Liberal critique emerge, most notably in the form of Henry Labouchere's forceful attacks on the Chartered Company in his speeches and in his weekly periodical *Truth*. Such rhetoric from leading Liberal Party politicians was however the exception rather than the norm in the immediate aftermath of the Raid.<sup>3</sup>

As the initial period of crisis faded, the political debate in Britain focused around the parliamentary inquiry into the Raid, later ingloriously dubbed the 'committee of no inquiry' for its reputation as a whitewash. Delayed by the trial of Jameson, the committee began its hearings in February 1897 and was significant for Liberal politics not only its content but for the reason that both Harcourt, then leader of the party, and Labouchere were some of the highest profile figures on the committee, along with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who was to lead the party through the South African War. The controversies surrounding the majority report's lacklustre conclusions, which angered the Radical wing of the Liberal Party, and Chamberlain's decision to come out fighting for Rhodes, which introduced a new partisan element into the debate as well as severely weakening Harcourt's position, both provided for further high-profile opportunities for Liberal rhetoric on the South African question.

This chapter explores the key imperial themes that emerged in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid and its repercussions. First, this chapter considers the condition of the Liberal Party in 1895, and outlines the ways in which historians have approached the subject of the Raid. It then goes on to assess the critiques of character advanced in response to the Raid, looking in particular at the ways in which Liberal speakers framed Jameson's action as illegitimate. Next, it

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<sup>1</sup> See for example John Morley, speech at Arbroath, 30 Jan. 1896, reported in *Dundee Courier* 31 Jan. 1896.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords debate (hereafter HL Deb.) 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37 cc.36-39; HC Deb. 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol. 37 cc.90-96.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Davey, *The British Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 39.

considers the role played by race in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid, exploring the scope available to Liberal speakers in terms of framing the different national groups in South Africa, as well as examining ideas of white race harmony and the position of the Black African population. Finally, this chapter closes by considering the rhetoric of imperial governance, looking specifically at the debates surrounding the idea of suzerainty, the importance of white racial harmony to the British position in South Africa, and the idea of imperial misgovernment in the form of Chartered Company rule. In doing so, it will be shown that not only did Liberal speakers use the Raid to advance wider visions and critiques of British imperial rule in South Africa, but also that the Liberal Party's response to the Raid demonstrated many of the key elements of imperial rhetoric which were to characterise subsequent debates on the South African question.

### **The Liberal Party at the time of the Raid**

Although it had been Liberal governments which had played the greatest role in shaping the politics of the South African question before the Raid, the events of December 1895 found the party banished to opposition. Six months prior to the Raid the exhausted Rosebery government, face with an opposition motion of censure, had chosen to resign. The Conservative Lord Salisbury formed a government, significantly for the first time bringing the Liberal Unionists into the Cabinet, and went on to win the general election that autumn, making nearly a hundred gains from the Liberals and obtaining a clear majority in the House of Commons. By the end of 1895, therefore, the Liberal position was an unenviable one. Indeed, the situation was worsened by the traumatic experiences which had dogged the Liberals ever since their precarious return to power in 1892. The increasing clashes of personality within the parliamentary party had made the very act of forming a ministry difficult, while flagship measures over Irish Home Rule, local government reform and the Employer's Liability Bill all met their demise at the hands of the House of Lords.<sup>4</sup> The state of affairs deteriorated further following Rosebery's ascendance to the premiership in the spring of 1894. Clashes with Cabinet colleagues and with the

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<sup>4</sup> Roy Douglas, *Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties* (London: 2005), p.90.

radical section of the party, as well as divisions over Welsh disestablishment and imperial policy in Uganda, further exacerbated tensions within the party.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these divisions, the Liberal Party entered 1896 with a continuation of the notional partnership between Rosebery in the House of Lords and Harcourt in the House of Commons. Although largely concealed from the public, the already-strained relationship between the two leaders had spectacularly collapsed, with Rosebery having privately repudiated any notion of dual leadership following the election.<sup>6</sup> The split had been as much driven by clashes of personality as it had been over questions of policy, although Uganda and the thorny issue of British authority over the Upper Nile had highlighted a clear divide between Rosebery's policy of territorial acquisition in order to consolidate the Empire, and Harcourt's more anti-expansionist attitude. Furthermore, it was divisions over foreign and imperial policy in the form of the Eastern question which were to form the notional basis for Rosebery's resignation and Harcourt's succession to the leadership, although as Peter Stansky documents this was only the end product of the long-running personal tensions between them.<sup>7</sup> Yet in spite of imperialism representing a key divide between the two, it is notable how little public disagreement there was between Rosebery and Harcourt over the South African question, although as will be seen the two nonetheless adopted significantly different approaches to the issue.

In his stance on the South African question, as in other matters, Harcourt found a close ally in Morley, the former Chief Secretary for Ireland under Gladstone and Rosebery. The story of Morley's career after the fall of the Rosebery government is a fascinating one, of which his high-profile interventions over South Africa tell only a part. Although on good terms with Rosebery at the time of the latter's ascension to the premiership, Morley found himself increasingly aligned with Harcourt over the increasingly factional disputes that split the Liberal leadership. More astonishing than any shift in his personal position however was his effective reinvention of himself in opposition as Gladstonian standard-bearer and a leading orator on the radical wing of the party. Building

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<sup>5</sup> Leo McKinstry, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (London: 2005), ch.11, 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.383-385.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies: The struggle for the leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1890s* (Oxford: 1964), p.212.

on his steadfast commitment to Irish Home Rule, a policy which was to come under attack from Roseberyite circles in the post-Gladstonian era, Morley sought to place opposition to an immoral imperialism at the heart of his Liberal appeal, a position which by 1899 would place him at the vanguard of opposition to Chamberlain's South African policy. Morley's responses to the Jameson Raid must be considered with the wider trajectory of his career in mind, that is not as isolated expressions of opinion but as a central element to Morley's political reinvention.

In the case of other members of the Liberal frontbench the factors at play were less clear-cut.<sup>8</sup> One individual from the Gladstone and Rosebery governments who was to go on to play a key role in the party's future, particularly over the fraught question of Empire, was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Campbell-Bannerman, whose censure by Parliament in the 1895 cordite vote brought about the fall of the ailing Liberal ministry, would by the end of the decade find himself fending off a challenge to his own leadership of the Liberal Party from a resurgent Rosebery advancing a doctrine of Liberal imperialism. However, while his biographer John Wilson does indeed characterise Campbell-Bannerman at this point as having held essentially similar views to Harcourt, being 'firmly opposed to the rising tide of Imperialist and Jingoist sentiment', it would be a mistake to uncritically categorise him with the Radical reaction against imperialism within the Liberal Party.<sup>9</sup> Instead, as events in 1899 would show, Campbell-Bannerman was more than prepared to adopt the language of Empire in order to advance his own political interests, which prior to the confrontation with Rosebery at least involved positioning himself at the centre of the party.

Among more radical voices on the South African question, the role of Labouchere looms particularly large. From his combined position as the member for Northampton and editor-proprietor of the journal *Truth*, Labouchere's political goals in this period underscore in many ways the inadequacy of viewing Liberalism through a Gladstonian-Roseberyite binary. A

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<sup>8</sup> The interventions of Sir George Osborne Morgan, for example, might be seen as prompted more by an expectation for him to make known his views from his time as Colonial Under-Secretary of State rather than as part of a wider agenda for developing the Liberal position on Empire.

<sup>9</sup> John Wilson, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London: 1973), p.262.

divisive figure within the Liberal ranks, Labouchere had proven himself a thorn in the side of both Gladstone's and Rosebery's administrations, explicitly seeking to exclude Whig influence from the party and using *Truth* to advocate an anti-establishment and pro-Irish vision of Liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Although a less controversial figure, if in part because his position within the parliamentary party was not of comparable influence, C.P. Scott might be considered as falling within the same editor-MP category. In their different ways, both might be said to have sought to use their positions to shape Liberal public opinion on Empire, and thereby shape the position of the Liberal Party as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

If figures such as Labouchere represented a radical anti-imperialist effort to reshape the party, then we might also look to those who were to go on to form the 'Liberal Imperialist' group around Rosebery at the end of the century. However, while many of the seeds of later party division had already been planted by the time of the Raid, the situation was at this point far from the open schism that was to develop at the time of the South African War. Critically, 'imperialism', however defined had not yet explicitly become the battleground for this open dispute within the party, that development instead springing more from the resignation of Harcourt in the aftermath of the Fashoda crisis. Nonetheless, it is possible to recognise a difference in response based along the lines of subsequent Roseberyite sectionalism: if figures such as R. B. Haldane and Sir Edward Grey receive little attention in this chapter, it is partly a reflection of the extent to which they avoided saying much on the Raid, a silence which indeed contrasts strongly with the radical response. One proto-Liberal Imperialist whose behaviour did not fit with this characterisation however was H.H. Asquith, who made a number of high profile interventions in response to Jameson. H.C.G. Matthew's assessment of Asquith as being 'more closely identified with Rosebery's cause than his policies or inclinations warranted' and as 'a man who moved on the periphery of groups' holds particularly true for

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<sup>10</sup> For more on Labouchere's politics, see R.J. Hind, *Henry Labouchere and the Empire, 1880-1905* (London: 1972), ch.1.

<sup>11</sup> For more on Scott and the South African question, see Mark Hampton, 'The Press, Patriotism, and Public Discussion: C.P. Scott, The *Manchester Guardian*, and the Boer War, 1899-1902', *Historical Journal* 44:1 (2001).

Asquith in this period.<sup>12</sup> As will be seen however, while there were undoubtedly differences in approach to the Raid between Asquith's approach and the radical approach as exemplified by Labouchere, this did not take the form of the open divisions which would be seen at the time of the South African War. If the roots of party division can be seen in Liberal responses to the Raid, they were not yet the driving factor in shaping Liberal rhetoric.

Divisions within Liberal politics did not take place in a vacuum, but against a context of wider political struggle against the Unionist parties. In the simplest sense, as a party in opposition facing a newly installed government, it was in their interests to make immediate political capital out of the difficulties the government found itself in, with the aim of casting longer term doubts upon the competence of the government. In particular, the party faced a pressing need to respond to the rise of Joseph Chamberlain, whose return to office as part of a Unionist ministry not only further cemented the legacy of the 1886 schism but also brought with it a renewed imperial emphasis in British politics as Chamberlain sought to exploit the full potential of the platform the Colonial Office provided him. Liberal responses to the Jameson Raid were thus shaped from the very start by the two central struggles which gripped the party after 1895: an internal struggle not just for the leadership but also for the essential character of the Liberal Party, and an external struggle against the Unionist government, with a view to returning to office at the next election. That is not to say that the Raid was always invoked deliberately as a device for fighting these battles; indeed, it was often more the case that there was an expectation for Liberal speakers to pronounce upon matters of public concern, and thus a need to articulate a position on the Raid for ready consumption by Liberal audiences. Indeed, the impression is often given that at times the Liberal leadership would have been very happy to have ignored the South African question and adopt a more favourable battleground: Harcourt's exasperation in a private letter to Chamberlain from July 1896, declaring that 'I wish with all my heart that Africa did not exist', illustrates this point well.<sup>13</sup> Yet, however much Liberal speakers may have wished otherwise, the South African question did take on these wider

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<sup>12</sup> H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian elite*, (Oxford: 1973), p.22.

<sup>13</sup> William Harcourt to Joseph Chamberlain, letter of 5 Jul. 1896, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Harcourt dep. ff.87-88.

political significances, dynamics which would fundamentally shape how the Liberal Party responded to the events of the Jameson Raid.

### **Beyond Guilt and Gold: the Historiography of the Raid**

The historiography of the Raid can generally be said to have centred around two key controversies: the nature and degree of Joseph Chamberlain's involvement, and by extension the involvement of the imperial government more generally; and the extent to which the events of the Raid were either triggered or enabled by the policies of the Kruger government towards the mining interests of Johannesburg. To a certain extent both these debates have now run their course: writing a century on from the Raid Christopher Saunders considered the two controversies to have been essentially resolved, and indeed was to speculate that there was likely to be little further scholarship on the subject.<sup>14</sup> Although Saunders may have gone too far in effectively declaring the field closed, it is certainly fair to say that the Raid no longer remains heavily contested territory for historians, and indeed for the purposes of this chapter neither of the two central debates which once characterised the topic are of direct concern. At the same time however, much of the scholarship generated by these debates remains relevant, and indeed in some cases critical, to addressing the Raid's politics and it is thus useful to briefly survey the field.

In a sense, the debate among historians over the degree of Chamberlain's complicity in the Raid followed directly on from contemporary allegations of his involvement. As will be explored later in this chapter, it did not take long for Chamberlain's conciliatory and peace-making image of early 1896 to come under challenge. W. T. Stead's fictionalised and infamously redacted account of the Raid, *The History of the Mystery*, was to appear the following December and implicating Chamberlain, under the guise of 'Blastus', in the plot.<sup>15</sup> Yet given the somewhat sensationalist quarters from which such allegations

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher Saunders, 'Historiographical Aspects of the Jameson Raid' in The Brenthurst Press, *The Jameson Raid: a centennial retrospective* (Houghton: 1996).

<sup>15</sup> See Joseph O. Baylen, 'W. T. Stead's History of the Mystery and the Jameson Raid', *Journal of British Studies* 4:1 (1964). For a more recent assessment of Stead's motives, see the discussion of the Raid in Simon J. Potter, 'W. T. Stead, Imperial Federation, and the South African War' in Laurel Brake, Ed King, Roger Luckhurst and James Mussell (eds) *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary* (London: 2012), pp.123-124.

emerged, the reluctance of many of Chamberlain's political opponents to directly accuse him of involvement, and, one assumes, a general desire among many British authors to avoid implicating the Imperial government in a discreditable action, Chamberlain was to a degree exonerated in early historical writing on the Raid. Writing in 1934, and undoubtedly influenced as much by his own personal relationship with his subject as he was by the relatively limited material at his disposal, J.L. Garvin's biography of Chamberlain boldly declared that 'he had not a shadow of complicity with the Raid', although it is worth noting that even Garvin conceded that Chamberlain had considered how best Britain might respond to a revolution on the Rand.<sup>16</sup>

Stead's account was based in part upon his having access to what were to become the notorious 'missing telegrams', detailing the level of collaboration between the Colonial Office and Rhodes' supporters at the Cape, and indeed it was the degree to which these and other sources were slowly made accessible to historians which was to drive much of the early scholarship on Chamberlain's involvement. Writing a decade after Garvin, William L. Strauss was to suggest that upon a reinterpretation of the evidence Chamberlain might well have been a part of the conspiracy, a suggestion which Henry Winkler was to advance further in a 1949 article for *The American Historical Review*.<sup>17</sup> It was not until the work of Jean van der Poel however that a powerful assault was launched on Garvin's assessment of Chamberlain's innocence: writing in 1951 and making use of the papers of Sir Graham Bower and Sir James Rose Innes, van der Poel charged Chamberlain with 'aiding and abetting' Rhodes in seeking to overthrow the government of the Transvaal.<sup>18</sup> Van der Poel's thesis was not wholly or immediately accepted by many historians: Elizabeth Pakenham's own account of the Raid, though full of praise for van der Poel's scholarship, stopped

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<sup>16</sup> J. L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London: 1934), vol. III, p.125.

<sup>17</sup> William L. Strauss, *Joseph Chamberlain and the Theory of Imperialism* (New York: 1971) [first published 1942], pp.74-75; Henry R. Winkler, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Jameson Raid', *American Historical Review* 54:4 (1949).

<sup>18</sup> Jean van der Poel, *The Jameson Raid* (Oxford: 1951), p.259. In this assessment van der Poel soon found herself supported by Ethel Drus and J. S. Marais, who had in both cases independently come to similar conclusions on the question of imperial complicity at the time van der Poel was writing: see Ethel Drus, 'The Question of Imperial Complicity in the Jameson Raid', *English Historical Review* 68:269 (1953); J.S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (Oxford: 1961).

far short of accepting the latter's indictment of Chamberlain, while in his biography of the Colonial Secretary Peter Fraser criticised the 'eagerness' of South African historians to try and implicate Chamberlain in the conspiracy.<sup>19</sup> In spite of resistance however, the tone for subsequent development of the debate had been set, and the arguments in favour of Chamberlain's complicity continued to gain in strength as further documents became available.<sup>20</sup>

In recent years, the consensus on the Imperial Government's complicity tends to accept that Chamberlain desired regime change in the SAR and was happy to assist Rhodes in making preparations for a Chartered Company force to enter the Transvaal should an uprising occur, but that he did not expect Jameson to attempt to precipitate a revolution through a pre-emptive invasion.<sup>21</sup> Chamberlain is in this view considered as an accessory to the Raid and an accomplice in its cover up, rather than as an architect of the whole affair: the latter conclusion has not however always carried through into British political histories, Eugenio Biagini and Robert Ingham for example having recently sought to explain the Raid as 'Chamberlain's first attempt to seize the territories of the Boer Republics'.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately it is more helpful for our current purposes to consider not the degree of Chamberlain's guilt in the matter, which in the circumstances can only ultimately be considered a matter of personal interpretation, and instead reflect that the focus of the field on the question of imperial complicity touches upon the wider dynamics of imperial character and imperial control at play in this period.

The second strain of scholarship, which might be termed the economic or 'mining' debate, was sparked by the intervention of the Australian historian G.

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<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Pakenham, *Jameson's Raid* (London: 1960); Peter Fraser, *Joseph Chamberlain: Radicalism and Empire, 1868-1914* (London: 1966), pp.172-173n.

<sup>20</sup> See in particular: C.M. Woodhouse, 'The Missing Telegrams and the Jameson Raid, Part One', *History Today* 12:6 (1962); C.M. Woodhouse, 'The Missing Telegrams and the Jameson Raid, Part Two', *History Today* 12:7 (1962).

<sup>21</sup> Peter T. Marsh's 1994 biography of Chamberlain best reflects this point of view. See Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (New Haven, CT: 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Eugenio Biagini & Robert Ingham, 'Gladstonianism, Imperialism and the Origins of the New Liberalism (1886-1899)' in Robert Ingham & Duncan Brack (eds), *Peace, Reform and Liberation: A History of Liberal Politics in Britain 1679-2011* (London: 2011), p.120.

Blainey in 1965. The search for economic explanations behind Anglo-Boer confrontations was hardly a new initiative, the Liberal economist J.A. Hobson having articulated his theory of a capital-driven imperialism against the backdrop of events in South Africa.<sup>23</sup> Blainey however shifted the focus away from the metropole to events with the SAR itself: pouring scorn on the idea that the Raid could simply be explained as a 'patriotic political adventure', Blainey instead argued that the episode could only be understood in the context of Rhodes' mining interests on the Rand, and the differential impacts of Kruger's policies on outcrop and deep-level mining companies to the detriment of the latter.<sup>24</sup> Blainey's thesis proved controversial, and subsequently came under two waves of sustained assault.<sup>25</sup> In his own assessment of the Randlords, Robert Kubicek found there to be no direct correlation between the political activity of the mining interests and the division of their holdings along outcrop and deep-level lines, while the very idea of a distinction between outcrop mine-owners and deep-level mine-owners was to take a severe blow from A.A. Mawby's rebuttal of D.J.N. Denoon's efforts to extend the Blainey thesis into the 1900s.<sup>26</sup>

Blainey's assessment was most fatally undermined by the work of Elaine Katz, which convincingly demonstrated that the outcrop and deep-level distinction was unsustainable not just at the level of ownership, but also at the level of production: that is, there was no specific economic difficulty for the deep-level mine-owners which would explain their willingness to participate in the

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<sup>23</sup> J.A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa: its causes and effects* (London: 1900). See also Hobson's expansion of this theory to a general critique of imperialism in J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: 1954) [first published 1902].

<sup>24</sup> G. Blainey, 'Lost Causes of the Jameson Raid', *Economic History Review* 18:2 (1965).

<sup>25</sup> See Richard Mendelsohn, 'Thirty Years' Debate on the Economic Origins of the Raid' in The Brenthurst Press, *The Jameson Raid: a centennial retrospective* (Houghton: 1996). A useful discussion of some of the later historiographical debates on the Blainey thesis, from a more sceptical perspective, can be found in Ian Phimister, 'Unscrambling the Scramble for Southern Africa: The Jameson Raid and the South African War Revisited', *South African Historical Journal* 28 (1993).

<sup>26</sup> R. Kubicek, 'The Randlords in 1895: A Reassessment', *Journal of British Studies* 11:2 (1972); A.A. Mawby, 'Capital, Government and Politics in the Transvaal: A Revision and a Reversion', *Historical Journal* 17:2 (1974); D.J.N. Denoon, "'Capitalist Influence" and the Transvaal Government during the Crown Colony Period, 1900-1906', *Historical Journal* 11:2 (1968).

conspiracy, even if they had done so uniformly.<sup>27</sup> Other aspects of the Blainey thesis have also come under question, with Ian Phimister having demonstrated that Rhodes' private mining interests in the Rand were minor and largely unprofitable.<sup>28</sup> Although the more general theory of a Raid driven by capitalist unrest on the Rand still has some adherents, with Richard Mendelsohn for example having argued that the long-term material investment in operations on the Rand created a potential profit motive for the conspirators, the debate over the Blainey thesis now appears to be largely concluded.<sup>29</sup>

The search for economic motives for the Raid, whether at the broad level of Hobson's capitalist plot or in the in-depth assessment of the workings of the mining industry, has undoubtedly done much to further our understanding of the Raid. At the same time however, the neat division of the field into 'political' and 'economic' camps has understated the extent to which political and economic factors were interconnected, if not so much in determining the Raid's origins then at least in so far as the Raid was subsequently discussed. While the focus of this chapter is on the political therefore, it will not be to the exclusion of the areas usually considered within the domain of the economic history of the Raid, and indeed questions of gold and capitalist impulses form a key part of this chapter's assessment of the use of the tropes of character, race and governance in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid.

While these two key debates concerning causation have proved central to the Raid's historiography, it would be incorrect to assert that these controversies represented the entirety of historical scholarship on the Raid. Indeed, while understudied in comparison with other imperial episodes in this period, the political ramifications of the Raid have undergone a degree of assessment by historians of imperial politics, the works of some of which provide a valuable starting basis from which to pursue this inquiry. Although now somewhat dated, Jeffery Butler's *The Liberal Party and the Jameson Raid* remains one of the best accounts written on the impact of the Raid as a political issue within Britain.

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<sup>27</sup> Elaine N. Katz, 'Outcrop and Deep Level Mining in South Africa before the Anglo-Boer War: Re-Examining the Blainey Thesis', *Economic History Review* 48:2 (1995).

<sup>28</sup> Ian Phimister, 'Rhodes, Rhodesia and the Rand', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1:1 (1974).

<sup>29</sup> Mendelsohn, 'Thirty Years' Debate'.

A deliberate attempt to advance the study of the Raid's personal and political context beyond what he characterised as 'hunt the villain', Butler focused his efforts instead on trying to solve the question of why the Liberal response to the Raid, tied up as it was with the embarrassing episode of the committee of inquiry, should have proved so inadequate and seemingly weak.<sup>30</sup> Butler attributed this assessment to the failure of historians to understand the behaviour of the Liberal leadership, and that of Harcourt in particular, within the context of the political and ideological constraints on their actions by their personal views on Empire and patriotic duty. Yet while Butler's study of the Liberal response to the Jameson Raid has undoubtedly done much to further our understanding of the political impulses of its key actors, it was not as great a departure from the historiographical treatment of Chamberlain's complicity as might be imagined: as with the wider field, Butler's treatment of the politics of the Raid remained focused on personal motivation and private ideology, with the public dimensions of imperial politics consigned to a supporting role. While *The Liberal Party and the Jameson Raid* marks a useful starting point for our current purposes therefore, it only explores part of the picture.

Dating from the same time, Stansky's *Ambitions and Strategies* details how the aftermath of the Jameson Raid and particularly the drawn-out episode of the South Africa Committee formed the backdrop against which the continuing struggles over the Liberal leadership played out. Placing less emphasis on concern for the national honour than in Butler, Stansky identifies Harcourt's singular goal during the inquiry as being to secure the condemnation of Rhodes, a task in which he ultimately entirely failed.<sup>31</sup> Given the focus of *Ambitions and Strategies* on the personal dimensions of the Liberal leadership struggle, it only covers in passing the specific understandings and practices of imperial politics that shaped the South African question following the Raid. Nonetheless, Stansky's account provides important context as to how the issues mapped on to the struggle over the Liberal leadership, as well as serving to illustrate the need to interpret the positions adopted by leading Liberals in the wider context of the leadership conflicts.

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<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Butler, *The Liberal Party and the Jameson Raid* (Oxford: 1969), p.1.

<sup>31</sup> Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, p.244.

The failure of earlier histories to take into account the public dimension of the Raid's politics, and particularly the role of public opinion, was one of the key drivers that prompted A.N. Porter's re-examination of Chamberlain's role in the run up to the South African War.<sup>32</sup> Although in his focus on Chamberlain Porter was embarking on well-trodden territory his approach nonetheless represented a significant development in the field, emphasising the critical importance of ideas of public opinion in understanding the politics of the South African question between 1895 and 1899. It was with one eye towards the need to win over public opinion for the imperial cause that Chamberlain, in Porter's analysis, sought to shift public debate towards questions of Uitlander grievances in both his political and diplomatic strategies. While not directly focused on the position of the Liberals therefore, this assessment does go some way towards examining the context and some of the key themes which were to drive not just political calculation in this period but political debate. Additionally, Porter's assessment further recognises that the public politics of the Raid was not simply a reflection of private political action, but instead a central part of the processes of imperial policy, the public performances of the 'new diplomacy' representing a critical part of Chamberlain's wider political strategy.

This chapter seeks to build upon the existing scholarship on the high political and diplomatic elements of the episode by examining the operation of the South African question as a public issue within British Liberal politics after the events of the Raid. The aim of this exercise is as such not so much as to supersede the existing literature as it is to complement it, resituating an often narrowly defined episode of British imperial crisis within its wider party political context.

### **Gold, BSAC and the Character of the Raid**

An emphasis on the importance of character, of nations and systems as well as individuals, forms one of the most distinctive elements of public life in this period. As Stephen Collini has argued, the Victorian era saw the ideal of character in public discourse enjoy a prominence not seen before or since.<sup>33</sup> For the 'public moralists' of Victorian Britain it was inadequacies of character

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<sup>32</sup> A. N. Porter, *The Origins of the South African War: Joseph Chamberlain and the diplomacy of imperialism 1895-99*, (Manchester: 1980).

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Life and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: 1991), p.94.

which served as the primary explanation for the failings of government and civic life.<sup>34</sup> Recent scholarship in the field of imperial history has particularly emphasised the role of character in providing political justification and moral cover for the imposition of imperial control over subject populations and territories. Peter Cain has notably demonstrated the means by which critiques of character were deployed in support of the British occupation of Egypt in the latter portion of the nineteenth century, with British administrators adopting the view that the faults within the Egyptian national character rendered prospects for self-government impossible.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, similar arguments were advanced in relation to the character of the Boers and the Uitlanders at the time of the Jameson Raid, as discussed later on in this chapter. Crucially however, this framework of character also provided a reference base against which the actions and motivations of imperial actors could be measured. This section explores therefore how Liberal criticisms of the key players in the Jameson Raid were couched in this language of character, and used to advance wider critiques of both the character of the Raid itself and the character of imperial policy. Furthermore, this section then goes on to explore the means by which these personal critiques were linked with the idea of the national character and the character of the British Empire.

Although the British government acted quickly to denounce the Raid, that did not prevent some sections of society and the Press from lauding Jameson as a bold if somewhat tragic imperial hero. Infamously, the newly-appointed poet laureate, Alfred Austin, swiftly penned and published 'Jameson's Ride' in *The Times*, characterising Jameson as a bold and dashing hero whose actions may have technically been incorrect but were worthy all the same.<sup>36</sup> Such praise of Jameson's character flew in the face of Liberal Party opinion, and it is notable that leading Liberals took the opportunity to condemn both the poem and the mood it represented. In a speech to the St Andrews University Liberal Association on 17 January 1896, the Liberal Member of Parliament Thomas Shaw concluded by 'ridiculing the Jingo spirit as evinced in London newspapers

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Cain, 'Character and Imperialism: The British Financial Administration of Egypt, 1878-1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34:2 (Jun. 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Austin, 'Jameson's Ride', printed in *The Times*, 11 Jan 1896.

in what he termed the immortal ode of the poet laureate'.<sup>37</sup> Shaw was a backbencher; however his line of ridicule was nonetheless taken up by the party leadership when Parliament returned to session that February. In his reply to the Queen's speech, Rosebery remarked to laughter that he had 'always considered the Laureateship to be an obsolete office; I am now inclined to consider that it is also a dangerous one', while in the Commons Harcourt urged the Prime Minister to reflect the language and tone of the 'sober-minded people of England', continuing 'I am not speaking of music-halls or of Poets Laureate'.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly this contrast appears to have had some staying power in the debates on the Raid: in response to a speech he gave in Parliament in mid-May, Harcourt received a letter from one supporter praising him for his position and attacking Austin's poem as being 'deplorable as a work of art, execrable in its lack of taste'. By contrast, he argued, Harcourt was 'standing up for the honour of old England'.<sup>39</sup> Liberals then sought to position themselves in opposition to the jingoistic or laudatory accounts of Jameson's behaviour and, as Harcourt's reference to music halls suggests, the excesses of popular jingoism more widely.

Indeed, Liberal criticisms of Jameson and the raiders were notable for their severity. Upon the meeting of Parliament Harcourt denounced the Raid as an 'outrageous and disastrous event', while Rosebery characterised it as a 'filibustering excursion'.<sup>40</sup> Notably in this instance both leaders were following in the line of Gladstone, who in a widely-reported public letter to the *Cape Times* had expressed himself 'surprised and disgusted at the outrage committed on the Republic', although compared with the rhetoric of Gladstone and Harcourt Rosebery's language was considerably more restrained.<sup>41</sup> From the radical wings of the party the criticism was even more pronounced: in an article for *Truth* shortly after the Raid took place, Labouchere provocatively declared that

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Shaw, speech of 17 Jan. 1896, St Andrews University, reported in *Aberdeen Journal* 18 Jan. 1896.

<sup>38</sup> HL Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37 c.38; HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37 c.92.

<sup>39</sup> 'Englishman Abroad' to Sir William Harcourt, letter dated 11 May 1896, Bodleian Library: Oxford, Harcourt Papers, MS Harcourt dep.230 ff.78-81.

<sup>40</sup> HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, c.90; HL Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, c.37.

<sup>41</sup> William Gladstone to W.H. Simmonds, letter dated 17 Jan. 1896, published in *Morning Post*, 22 Jan, 1896.

'if ever men died with their blood on their own heads, they are the men who fell in this raid; and if ever prisoners of war deserved scant mercy, Jameson and his comrades are those prisoners'.<sup>42</sup>

Campaigning for his re-election to Parliament later in January, Morley similarly launched an aggressive assault on Jameson and his men, branding their actions as 'criminality' and 'lawless mischief'.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, such criticisms were not limited to being made during the immediate aftermath of the Raid. Asquith for example was thus able, in a speech made on 30 April 1897 in response to the inadequate conclusion of the committee of the inquiry, to denounce the Raid as 'one of the most criminal acts of folly and one of the most foolish acts of criminality which history records', a charge which Morley was to echo a few days later at Merthyr Tydvil, branding Jameson's action 'as silly and contemptible as it was criminal in design'.<sup>44</sup> In both cases, the attack on character can clearly be seen, with the Raid not just described as unlawful but the intelligence and sense of the Raiders called into question. Although the salience of the issue may have been lesser in 1897 than it has been in 1896, such narratives clearly retained staying power within Liberal rhetoric on the South African question and indeed, as the next chapter will discuss, such criticisms of the character of the Raid were to continue through to the crisis atmosphere of late 1899. Therefore while the tone and the nature of the attacks may have varied, there was nonetheless a clear underlying critique of not just the consequences of the action but its very character, disclaiming the motivations of Jameson as well as the direct consequences of his actions. However, while Liberal speakers did criticise the act of the Raid, Jameson and his companions did not form the main target of censure: instead, from many more radical quarters in the party Liberal criticism fell upon the actions of Rhodes and the operation of BSAC.

Criticisms of Rhodes and the directors of BSAC not only focused on the unacceptability of the Raid as an act of aggression, but also attacked its

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<sup>42</sup> Henry Labouchere, *Truth*, as reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 10 Jan. 1896.

<sup>43</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

<sup>44</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech of 30 Apr. 1897, York, reported in *Daily News*, 1 May 1897; John Morley, speech of 7 May 1897, Merthyr Tydvil, reported in *Western Mail*, 8 May 1897.

perceived roots as a conspiracy for financial profit. As discussed above, the interrelationship between gold, capital and the Raid has long been recognised as a significant element within the politics of the South African question. However, while it is certainly the case that the events of the Jameson Raid, as with the subsequent war, lent themselves readily to Hobson's thesis of a capital-driven imperialism, it was not with respect to this wider theoretical critique of imperialism that Liberal speakers addressed the issue of the profit motive behind the Raid. Instead, the question was addressed through a rhetoric which cast the pursuit of profit through the Raid and the conspiracy surrounding it as a moral failing demonstrating a deficiency of character among those in positions of power and influence in South Africa. This can be seen in a rhetorical focus not just on the general financial and mining interests at play in the Rand, but on the specific charges of immediate financial gain and 'stockjobbing'. The actual motivations and instincts behind the financial interests involved, it was implied, were what were to prove so dangerous about the character of the Raid.

When Parliament first debated the Raid in February Harcourt's remarks on character were limited, as discussed above, to criticisms of the event itself and to the danger it threatened. By the time of the Colonial Office vote in May however, Harcourt was advancing a powerful critique of the role played by Rhodes and the Chartered Company, and while much of this was focused on the principles of governance at stake, discussed later in this chapter, Harcourt's rhetoric also advanced a sustained attack on the financial character of the Raid and its backers. Describing the conspiracy as a 'sordid and squalid picture of stockjobbing Imperialism', Harcourt cited the language of the communications exposed by the Transvaal government to attack the financial nature of the episode. Mocking the coded language of the telegrams, by which the uprising became a 'flotation' and the would-be revolutionaries the 'new company', Harcourt declared that 'the very lingo is the language of the company promoter, and you might think you were reading the prospectus of a set of croupiers.'<sup>45</sup> As Paul Johnson notes, the company promoter, and particularly the promoter with political ties, was a figure of public excoriation in the Victorian era.<sup>46</sup> Harcourt's

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<sup>45</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.889.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Cambridge: 2010), p.210.

line of attack therefore represented a specific assault on the character of the company as well as highlighting the financial character of the Raid. In his allusion to croupiers, Harcourt may also have been further seeking to allude to traditional Liberal viewpoints on individual morality and responsibility, equating the idea of stockjobbing imperialism with the vice of gambling.<sup>47</sup>

Certainly, Harcourt was keen to present this financial influence as harmful to the morality and character of the Empire. Referring to the possibility that Rhodes might be restored to power in the Cape, Harcourt asked what 'lesson in public morals' would be presented,

if we are to tell our colonies, we are to tell the world, that the spirit by which we are accentuated is only this: 'Put money in thy purse,' and then call it the expansion of the Empire and the progress of civilisation – what effect is such a doctrine going to have in our Empire itself?<sup>48</sup>

In Harcourt's view, it was not just the events of the Raid but the financial forces behind the Raid which jeopardised the moral character of the Empire. In this sense, Harcourt's rhetoric reflects the wider tradition within British political culture of frame financial matters as fundamentally questions of morality.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, parallels can be drawn with the controversy over Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign which was to erupt after the South African War, with proponents of Free Trade attacking the profit motive as dangerous to the integrity and morality of the Empire.<sup>50</sup>

Such sentiments were echoed in Morley's rhetoric. Although in his initial responses to the Raid Morley had held off from outright attacking the conduct of Rhodes and of BSAC, by the time of the committee of inquiry's completion

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<sup>47</sup> Although by the end of the nineteenth century stock exchange trading was no longer primarily viewed as an immoral exercise, the language of gambling and financial risk would have remained a point of reference for Victorian audiences. On the morality of stock exchange trading, see Johnson, *Making the Market*, pp.222-24.

<sup>48</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.904.

<sup>49</sup> The mid-century debates on Free Trade and market liberalisation for example, took on the form of a moral crusade. See Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: 1988), pp.350-53; G.R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: 1998), pp.77-78.

<sup>50</sup> See Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: 2008), pp.165-71.

Morley was likewise attacking the role of financial interests in driving the Raid. Responding to a description in *The Times* of the Raid as part of a wider process of empire-building, in a speech to his constituents on 28 September 1897 declared that ‘all this empire building – why, the whole thing is tainted by a spirit of a hunt for gold.’<sup>51</sup> Seeking to avoid the outright condemnation of Rhodes, Morley continued,

I do not say of Mr Rhodes this Imperialism is a mere veil for stock operations and company operations, but this I do say, that he is surrounded by men with whom Imperialism is, and must be, nothing else but the end for operations of that ignoble kind.<sup>52</sup>

Again, the focus of Morley’s rhetoric was not just that actions of the Raid were themselves wrong, but that the financial motivations of the Raid’s backers directly contributed to the ill character of the episode. Indeed, the description of empire-building as ‘tainted’ by the hunt for gold in particular is suggestive of a viewpoint in which the character of the Raid corrupted forces of Empire which otherwise may have been acceptable from the Liberal standpoint, even desirable; this idea of the Raid’s character as corrupting the character of the Empire is discussed in further detail below.

Labouchere’s rhetoric, unsurprisingly, was the closest in tone to what was to become the Hobson thesis. The recent policy of the Chartered Company, he charged in early January 1896, was to ‘hire ruffians for filibustering raids and to manipulate the results for Stock Exchange purposes’, continuing that ‘to make money has been the one object of all, and all have doubtless succeeded. But every farthing that has been made has come out of the pocket of British investors, and has been stained with the blood of African natives.’<sup>53</sup> Hobson’s direct assault on the ties between imperialism, jingoism and international capital was still at this point a few years away. However, the currents in progressive political thought that were to make such a synthesis possible were by the time of the Raid already well developed. As James Thompson has argued, the commentator William Clarke identified in this period the connections between

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<sup>51</sup> John Morley, speech of 28 Sep. 1897, Arbroath, reported in *Dundee Courier*, 29 Sep. 1897.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 10 Jan. 1896.

monopolist capitalism and imperialism as undermining the moral and democratic basis of the nation through appeals to jingoism and greed.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, in 'The Genesis of Jingoism' Clarke explicitly invokes the jingo response to the Raid as an example of the capitalist influence: 'the music-hall patriot is encouraged to howl for Jameson or any other hero of the hour, when, in reality, he is howling for the financiers who are making of Jameson their tool.'<sup>55</sup> The Radical reaction against the Raid thus occurred in a wider intellectual environment that was increasingly critical of the links between finance and the new imperialism.

Yet while such language undoubtedly formed a wider economic critique of imperialism as a force, it was the moralistic critique that framed Labouchere's rhetoric, with his focus resting primarily on the profiteering aspects of the company's actions. Indeed, when in July 1897 Labouchere rose to speak in Philip Stanhope's debate on the committee of inquiry's report, he went as far to say that it was precisely because of Rhodes' financial interests that the Raid was so unacceptable, stating:

If Mr Rhodes had not been connected financially with the prospects of this company [...] he would be quite ready to respect Mr Rhodes, as he respected Garibaldi, the late Mr Parnell, and many gentlemen who have been engaged in revolutionary objects. But what would have been said of Garibaldi if it had been found that he had established a company in Sicily before he went there, out of which he was making a profit of millions? Or what would have been said of Mr Parnell if it had been shown that his advocacy of Home Rule involved large financial advantage to himself?<sup>56</sup>

The financial motivation of Rhodes and his co-conspirators, Labouchere continued, 'lowered the standard of British public men'. Again therefore, it was specifically the financial aspects of the Raid that were the subject of criticism.

In the same debate, Stanhope himself also advanced a critique along similar lines, casting the notion of finance-driven imperialism in direct opposition to the character-laded concept of patriotism. As Paul Readman has demonstrated in

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<sup>54</sup> James Thompson, 'Democracy, Monism, and the Common Good: Rethinking William Clarke's Political Religion', *History of European Ideas* 38:2 (2012).

<sup>55</sup> William Clarke, 'The Genesis of Jingoism', *Progressive Review* (Feb. 1987), as reproduced in *The Advocate of World Peace*, 59:4, (Apr. 1987).

<sup>56</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, vol.51 c.1103.

his work on early twentieth-century politics, although the Unionist alliance 'owned' the language of patriotism in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, this was not uncontested by Liberal speakers, who sought to couch their own political positions within the language of patriotism.<sup>57</sup> Stanhope's speech in response to the committee's report represents an interesting example of this, demonstrating not only a radical attempt to make use of patriotic arguments in an explicitly imperial context, but also an implicit attempt to differentiate between 'true' and 'false' patriotism, along the lines of 'true' and 'false' imperialism which were to become a central part of Liberal imperial discourse at the time of the South African War. While claiming not to want to dispute Rhodes' patriotism, Stanhope remarked that 'one's knowledge of patriots in history was not associated with the acquisition of millions by those patriots.' Instead, he argued, they were witnessing what might be called 'a fin de siècle patriotism, which had its nursery on the Stock Exchange.'<sup>58</sup> As with Labouchere's rhetoric therefore, the implication would seem to be that it was the prospects for financial gain which fundamentally made the Raid immoral, and indeed corrupted an idealised, true patriotism.

Such attacks on character can also be said to demonstrate an underlying current of anti-Semitism within Radical anti-imperialist rhetoric. Hobson's *The War in South Africa* was infamously anti-Semitic in tone, identifying the true beneficiaries of the war as 'a small group of international financiers, chiefly German in origin and Jewish in race'.<sup>59</sup> Hobson was writing several years after the speeches examined here, and we should not directly equate his theorisation of the South African question with the wider rhetorical political culture of Liberal pro-Boerism. Nonetheless, as Bernard Semmel argues critics of imperialism routinely drew upon the supposed demons of past society in their condemnations of Empire, of which the traditional reaction against Jewish usury

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Readman, 'The Liberal Party and Patriotism in Early Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 12:3 (2001).

<sup>58</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, vol.51 c.1098.

<sup>59</sup> Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, p.189. For discussions of anti-Semitism in Hobson's work, see Harvey Mitchell, 'Hobson Revisited', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26:3 (1965); Alan Jeeves, 'Hobson's *The War in South Africa*: A Reassessment', in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh and Mary-Lynn Suttie (eds), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War 1899-1902* (Athens, OH: 2002).

was among the most prominent. In addition to the racial dynamics of this anti-Semitic rhetoric, such language also therefore acted as a signifier for the continuation of historic ills in the actions of the new international financiers.<sup>60</sup>

This critique of irresponsible financial behaviour could sometimes be contrasted with a counter-narrative, likewise providing an implicit account of character and Empire. In his by-election campaign Morley drew a direct comparison between Britain's financial standing and Britain's moral standing, arguing that

Our money credit in the money markets of the world is unbounded. You will see to-day what are called Consols (national stock) standing at 107 or 108. It is the highest of our interests, but just as our credit in the money markets of the world stands high, so our moral credit, our equity, our inflexible equity, our strict good faith, and rigorous observance of our word and our bond – these too, our moral Consols, shall stand at 108.<sup>61</sup>

Morley's rhetoric in this respect bears great resemblance to that deployed by David Lloyd George in his famous Queen's Hall speech upon the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>62</sup> This use of financial metaphor in discussions of the national honour can also be seen to support John S. Ellis' thesis of a rhetorical continuity between Radical opposition to British aggression in South Africa and Radical support for the British war effort against Germany, albeit with a different focus to the one Ellis identifies.<sup>63</sup> In any case, it is noteworthy that this notion of financial behaviour as indicative of moral character could be presented not just as an explicit criticism of the Raid itself, but also used as a means of discussing a positive ideal of Empire.

These two narratives of the Raid's character, that of the discussion of the Raid as a criminal enterprise and that of the criticism of the financial motives behind the Raid, did not exist in isolation from each other but instead formed part of a

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<sup>60</sup> Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin* (Baltimore, MD: 1993), ch.5.

<sup>61</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

<sup>62</sup> Lloyd George countered the idea that treaties simply represented scraps of paper by characterising the pound note as representing the 'whole credit of the British Empire'. See Richard Toye, *Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness* (London: 2008), pp.129-30.

<sup>63</sup> John S. Ellis, "The Methods of Barbarism" and the "Rights of Small Nations": War Propaganda and British Pluralism', *Albion* 30:1 (1998)

combined moral critique of the Raid and the forces it represented. One area in which this was particularly apparent is in the occurrence of allusions to piracy in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid. Harcourt, in discussing the use of chartered companies as a means of imperial control during the May debate on the Colonial Office vote, advanced the argument that ‘these private adventurers in dominion have been very much like what was formally used in ancient warfare – privateers. Privateering has been abolished by the consent of most nations, because it has been found generally to degenerate into piracy.’<sup>64</sup> Harcourt’s choice of language is interesting for a number of reasons. In the first instance, the image of the privateer or the pirate can be seen as an overwhelmingly pejorative one in terms of character, not only conjuring up the image of the violent criminal, but also referencing the idea of the privateer as motivated wholly by profit, as opposed to some greater, more meaningful cause. The reference to ancient warfare and the allusion to degeneration are also suggestive of a departure from the modern standards of civilisation.<sup>65</sup>

Although critiques of the Raid’s character and particularly those centred on criticisms of stockjobbing imperialism tended to occur primarily in Radical responses to the Raid, the allusion to privateering can be found across the spectrum of Liberal opinion. Although Labouchere’s charge in *Truth* that the conspirators’ operations were ‘a mere adaptation of the methods and morals of Captain Kidd’ might be unsurprising given the ferocity of his criticism of the Raid, notably the charge of privateering was also deployed by Rosebery, who in his response to the Queens’ speech described the Raid as an episode ‘more worthy of the reign of Elizabeth [...] than to the days of Her Gracious Majesty’.<sup>66</sup> The significance of such rhetoric should not, of course, be overstated: for one thing, Victorian views on the piracy of the Elizabethan era would have by no means been entirely negative. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that such allusions to piracy were to recur in later discussions of the South African

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<sup>64</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.898-99.

<sup>65</sup> Again, this matches Semmel’s suggestion of liberal critiques of imperialism viewing the phenomenon as a cover for the continuation of historic ills. See Semmel, *Demons of Empire*.

<sup>66</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 10 Jan. 1896; HL Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37 c.37.

question, suggesting at the very least that the concepts of privateering and piracy made for useful shorthand in Liberal rhetoric on imperial issues.

Liberal concern over the character of imperial actors was matched by a concern for the national character and the character of the Empire. To a degree, this represented a concern about the impact of the Raid upon the reputation of the imperial government: in the Colonial Office vote, Harcourt declared of the Raid that 'it is transactions of this kind that enables our enemies to cast in our teeth the taunt of la perfide Albion'.<sup>67</sup> This concern for Britain's reputation abroad was echoed in the aftermath of the South Africa Committee's report. In a speech at Wormit on 12 Oct. 1897, Asquith expressed regret that the inquiry had been unable to bring the missing telegrams to light, and that as such

while they had implicit confidence in the honour and integrity of public men to whatever party they belonged, Great Britain was in that matter upon her trial at the bar of the civilised world. In every quarter and country they had censorious critics, to whom British pharisaism was a familiar and in many cases widespread charge, and who [...] would naturally draw the most unfair inference to Britain.<sup>68</sup>

Liberals then expressed a concern about the appearances of British imperialism not just with a view to the domestic audience, but also with a view to foreign powers.

Indeed, it had been partly along such lines that Stanhope and Labouchere had sought to justify their motion condemning the outcome of the inquiry: moving his motion, Stanhope had declared it to be a matter of 'supreme importance' that Parliament act to bring about 'the vindication of our national honour and the good name of Englishmen throughout the world', while Labouchere charged that if Britain failed to punish Rhodes then 'we should be regarded as the vilest hypocrites'.<sup>69</sup> Labouchere had deployed similar notions in the immediate aftermath of the Raid, writing in *Truth* that the actions of the Raiders had been such that they were prepared to 'drag the national honour through the mire'.<sup>70</sup> Again, the idea of damage to Britain's reputation abroad was clearly

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<sup>67</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.904.

<sup>68</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech of 12 Oct. 1897, Wormit, reported in *Dundee Courier*, 13 Oct. 1897.

<sup>69</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, vol.51 cc.1101,1104

<sup>70</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 10 Jan. 1896.

emphasised, implying a Liberal concern that the Empire was not only honourable but that it was seen to be honourable, as well as additionally serving as a means of attacking this version of imperialism without the risk of being seen as unpatriotic. Notably, while as with much of the rhetoric on the Raid in this period such allusions to this risk to the imperial character can be found mostly in the rhetoric of those who would go on to be labelled 'pro-Boers', they can also be found in the rhetoric of more markedly imperialist figures. Rosebery, for example, used a speech at Newton Abbot on 15 May 1896 to declare that on the question of the inquiry it was not only a case of reassuring opinion in Europe and in South Africa about Britain's intentions, but that 'we owe it also to ourselves to clear up our national character, for depend upon it any delay in this inquiry will be considered as suspicious by the vast majority of the population'.<sup>71</sup>

However, Liberals did not only consider this a question of appearances. Instead, such rhetoric attacking the Raid for harming Britain's reputation could also be accompanied by warnings that the national character had indeed been damaged. In the debate on Stanhope's motion of censure Scott expressed his fear 'that there had been a progressive demoralisation of public sentiment and opinion in this country'.<sup>72</sup> This was, he argued

a kind of depravation or degradation of public feeling in these matters which made it possible that the authors and abettors of public crimes of this kind should think that they had only to come to their fellow countrymen and show them just a little bit of success – a bit more territory won, huge possessions of this country made a bit huger – and they would at once have all their offenses condoned and themselves accepted as heroes by this country.<sup>73</sup>

In these remarks Scott can be seen as taking the key components of the attacks on the character of the Raid, and of the character of jingoistic responses such as Austin's 'Jameson's Ride', and applying them to the nation as a whole. The language of 'depravation' and 'degradation' in particular is suggestive of a corruption having taken place in the otherwise good character representative of Britain and the Empire, implying a threat posed by the strand of imperialism

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<sup>71</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech of 15 May 1896, Newton Abbot, reported in *Western Times*, 16 May 1896.

<sup>72</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, vol.51 cc.1144.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

Jameson represented. While Scott's rhetoric may have been unusual in so far as it alleged the damage to have taken place, we can see in this focus evidence of the wider expression by Liberals of the concerns about the potential degradation of imperial character. In the debate on supply the year prior to Scott's speech, Harcourt had advanced similar points by attacking the degeneration of the character of the Press: 'I have seen', he claimed

With the greatest regret what I must call the deterioration of the moral tone in the English press. To my mind, it is the most dangerous of all features of this transaction. I have seen palliations; I have seen apologies, even eulogies, upon transactions at which the mind of every honest man must revolt; I have seen appeals to the basest and most sordid motives to induce people to accept a condition of things which every man of honour ought to repudiate and condemn.<sup>74</sup>

The use of the Press as a proxy target for attacks on jingoism in the public at large featured considerably in the run up to the South African War, explored in the next chapter, so it is interesting to see the tactic being deployed by Harcourt in the discussion of the Raid. Nonetheless, Harcourt was to go even further and hint at this wider degradation, declaring that 'to my mind, one of the most serious matters for us to consider is to see how this accursed thirst for gold has eaten into the spirit of the English people'.<sup>75</sup> This idea of the corrupting potential of the Raid's character underscored much of Liberal speakers' attacks on this issue. Harcourt's attack on the doctrine of 'put money in thy purse', along with Morley's allusions to Britain's 'moral credit', can be seen as further evidence of this anxiety.

Concerns over character thus formed a key basis for Liberal responses to the Raid. Although often focused on the narrow attack on the Raid as an action, and the personalities behind the Raid, Liberal rhetoric often built upon these ideas to advance wider critiques of the nature of British imperialism at work in the region and at home. Critically, implicit in these attacks on jingoism, 'stockjobbing imperialism', and 'privateering', was an assumption that there had been a diversion from pre-existing British imperial practices, presumably free from such corrupting impulses. Yet this was combined in many cases with a concern for the potential harm caused by the Raid, both to the image of the

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<sup>74</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.902.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., c.903.

British Empire and, according to some speakers, the morality of the British themselves. Care must of course be taken to avoid overstating the significance of these lines of argument, particularly when as noted above it was those from the Radical wing of the party who typically, although as Rosebery's rhetoric demonstrates not exclusively, made use of such rhetoric. Nonetheless, it would seem reasonable to conclude that concerns over character did not simply represent superficial froth on the surface of Liberal rhetoric on the Raid, but instead could form the core of wider critiques of the imperial situation in South Africa, as well as serving as a means for Liberal speakers to evade the charge of unpatriotic motives.

### **Race and the Raid: Imagining South Africa**

A rhetorical emphasis on the character of the British Empire inevitably also touched upon questions of the character of the British as a people, drawing upon many of the racial assumptions which were used to justify imperial rule. The question of race was to represent an important element in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid. There was not, however, one single strand of racial rhetoric which ran through Liberal rhetoric on the South African question in this period. Rather, disparate elements were deployed alongside narratives of character and governance so as to frame race questions towards specific ends. Characterisations of the Boer and Uitlander populations of the Transvaal formed key areas of rhetorical focus, the relative novelty of the latter population in particular allowing for considerable scope in how they were presented. Alongside such characterisations, discussions of the Black African population by Liberal speakers also played a role in the rhetoric on the Raid, even if as is argued in this section such debates were notable more for their absence. Furthermore, the notion of white racial harmony also proved to be a recurring theme of Liberal rhetoric, again reflecting this idea of the damage caused by the Raid to an idealised pre-existing state of affairs.

Despite the history of animosity between Britain and the Boers of the Transvaal, stemming from the Great Trek and earlier conflicts as well as from more recent confrontations such as the Drifts Crisis, many Liberal responses to the Raid

spoke of the Boers in favourable terms.<sup>76</sup> For example, Robert Spence Watson, the president of the National Liberal Federation and a figure who would go on to become a prominent pro-Boer activist as the outlook in South Africa deteriorated, made favourable reference to the Boers in a speech at Blyth on 21 January 1896, remarking that 'We had had difficulties before with the Dutch in the Transvaal; difficulties in which they were proved to be right and we wrong.'<sup>77</sup> Similar sentiments had been expressed a few days previously by Sir G.O. Morgan, the Liberal member for East Denbighshire and a former Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, who in a public letter favourably contrasted at some length the characteristics of the Boers with those of the mining interests on the Rand. The Boers, he wrote,

seemed to me very patriotic, honest, simple-minded, and in their way a very religious people, singularly free from that gambling, grasping, money-grabbing mania which is the curse of our age, and seems to have found a congenial habitat in the golden soil of South Africa.<sup>78</sup>

Such language then framed the character of the Boers in opposition to some of the critiques of character which, as discussed above, would go on to form the core of much of the criticism of the motivations behind the Raid.

Indeed, Morgan went even further on this point, mocking the claim of the mining interests to have developed the Transvaal: 'the Boers would probably reply that they have no wish to be "developed" and that all they ask is to be allowed to live on their farms with their wives and their very large families without being molested.'<sup>79</sup> Morgan's rhetoric in this instance raises a number of interesting points. In one sense, it stands as an implicit criticism of the 'civilising mission' of Empire, questioning the merits of imposing the features of modern civilisation upon an unwilling population. Yet, although ostensibly in support of the Boers,

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<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that in addition to the legacy of Anglo-Boer tensions, pejorative popular attitudes to the Boers had also been shaped through publicised accounts of South Africa such as Lord Randolph Churchill's 1891 expedition to South Africa. See Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War: The Making of South Africa* (London: 2007), pp.271-73.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Spence Watson, speech of 21 Jan. 1896, Blyth, reported in *Morpeth Herald*, 25 Jan. 1896.

<sup>78</sup> Sir G. O. Morgan, undated letter to a correspondent, published in *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 Jan. 1896.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

the depiction is essentially one of a backward, pastoral population at odds with, and hostile to the modern world, albeit in a supposedly admirable way; the significance of such double-edged praise of the Boers is discussed in further detail below. Morgan's description of the Boers as a 'very religious people' is also significant. Although in the context of Morgan's other statements it might be seen as further damning praise suggestive of the Boers' backwardness, the essential status of the Boers as a Protestant people was to ultimately become a key contention of pro-Boer speakers by the end of the century: it might well be that in stressing this nature of the Boer character Morgan was also making reference to this wider point of Anglo-Boer similarity, although if so this did not form a major feature of rhetoric on the Raid.

Certainly, when contrasted with the extensive discussions of the Boer character which accompanied the crisis of 1899, the relative absence of direct characterisations of the Boers in this period is quite striking. Yet while many Liberal speakers were unwilling to engage directly with questions as to the nature of the Boer population, in many cases the underlying rhetoric of race was nonetheless present in Liberal discussions of the Raid and its aftermath, most notably through reference to Kruger as essentially a proxy for the people he led. Significantly, in initial Liberal responses to the Raid references to Kruger almost always took the form of praise for his restraint in the face of Jameson's action. Gladstone's own brief intervention in response to the Raid demonstrates this: in his letter of 17 January, subsequently printed in the British Press, Gladstone stated he was 'much pleased with what I see thus far of Kruger's conduct'.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, A.J. Mundella, the Liberal member for Sheffield Brightside and the President of the Board of Trade under Gladstone and Rosebery, used a speech at Leicester on 16 January to praise the 'magnanimity of President Kruger and of the Boers.'<sup>81</sup>

Morley was also to advance a similar position at Arbroath, notably making reference to the German factor in the process. Referring to the Kaiser's controversial telegram offering assistance to the SAR following the Raid, Morley cited Kruger's response as evidence of his good character:

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<sup>80</sup> *Morning Post*, 22 Jan. 1896.

<sup>81</sup> A. J. Mundella, speech of 16 Jan. 1896, Leicester, reported in *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*, 18 Jan. 1896.

President Kruger, as he wrote with dry piety, said in answer that he relied upon the aid of God, and not upon foreign powers, and he showed that he knew very well how to take care of himself against his enemies, and with great magnanimity.<sup>82</sup>

Harcourt was to likewise praise Kruger in his speech upon the opening of Parliament, declaring that

we also applaud the magnanimity and the humanity which he has exhibited under circumstances of unparalleled difficulty. I think the page of history offers few examples of such moderation under such conditions. It is well that in the difficult questions that lie before us we should have to deal with a statesman of such moderation and of such wisdom.<sup>83</sup>

Such descriptions were to some extent inevitable given the degree to which the circumstances of the Raid had strengthened the position of Kruger's government relative to the British. Yet the significance of such positive descriptions can be said to truly come into focus when contrasted with Liberal rhetoric on subsequent iterations of the South African question, with even pro-Boer rhetoric by 1899 regularly speaking of the Boers, and of Kruger personally, in far less positive terms.

Liberal praise could, however, also mask less flattering assumptions about the nature of the Boers as a population. An emphasis on their supposed simplicity, stubbornness and religiosity, while presented as a contrast against the capital-driven instincts of the mining interests, also served to fuel the popular stereotypes of the Boers which were to become commonplace in political debate by the time of the South African War.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, to the extent that the nature of the Boers is mentioned at all in debates on the Raid after the initial period, it is usually with allusion to this idea of a backward nature. In a speech given to the Eighty Club on 3 March 1896, Rosebery remarked that they had increasing doubts about 'the ability of our Heaven-born Ministers to counteract

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<sup>82</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

<sup>83</sup> HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37 cc.90-91.

<sup>84</sup> Indeed, as Kenneth O. Morgan notes, the rural stereotype was a common feature of war reporting in both the Liberal and the Unionist press. See Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)', *Twentieth Century British History* 13:1 (2002), 4-5.

the Dutch rural simplicity of our old friend President Kruger'.<sup>85</sup> In similar fashion, Campbell-Bannerman was to comment somewhat ironically in speech at Cambridge on 6 June that they were 'watching with some amusement at the game which was being played by our very astute Colonial Secretary and the simple minded Burgher'.<sup>86</sup> Clearly in both cases the primary purpose of these comments was to mock the government's record of the South African question and to cast aspersions on the Unionists' ability to manage the Empire, itself evidence of the swift turnaround in Chamberlain's reputation among Liberals in the months following his initial response to the Raid. Nonetheless, these comments can also be seen as making reference to and perpetuating some of these wider, negative characterisations of the Boers as simple and backward, again a characterisation which was to prove predominant in Liberal Imperialist rhetoric by the time of the South African War.

If characterisations of the Boers at the time of the Raid are most significant only when contrasted with later rhetoric, then this is even more so the case with characterisations of the Uitlanders. As Smith notes, the Uitlander population of the Transvaal did not form a simple homogeneous group, instead being 'a motley collection of individuals of diverse nationalities, divided by class and disunited'.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the next chapter, this did not pose a barrier to attempts by British politicians to conflate the Uitlander population with the wider British population of South Africa. Nor indeed were such generalisations entirely absent from general debate around the time of the Raid. In the May 1896 debate on Colonial Office supply, Chamberlain for example spoke of 'the grievances of British subjects, the majority of the Uitlanders'.<sup>88</sup> Within Liberal speakers' rhetoric on the Raid, however, discussion of the Uitlanders was a good deal more nuanced, as will now be explored.

One feature of Liberal rhetoric on the Uitlanders which might seem anomalous when compared with later rhetoric is the relatively positive tone with which the migrant population was discussed. This situation can be seen as having come

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<sup>85</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech of 3 Mar. 1896, Eighty Club dinner, reported in *Daily News*, 4 Mar. 1896.

<sup>86</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech of 6 Jun. 1896, Cambridge, reported in *The Standard*, 8 Jun. 1896.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *The origins of the South African War*.

<sup>88</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.910.

about primarily due to the presence of two opposing narratives that shaped wider British political debate in the immediate aftermath of the Raid. The first of these took root among pro-Boer speakers and, as explored above, rested upon the notion that the Raid was the result of a conspiracy between BSAC and the mining interests, rather than an organic movement on the part of the Uitlanders. The second narrative, by contrast, arose from jingoistic responses to the failure of the Raid. Jameson, the explanation went, had failed in his action not because of any fault on his part, but because the courage of the revolutionaries at Johannesburg had failed and that the Uitlanders had failed to provide significant support. Indeed, as Stephen Gray points out, in the weeks and months following the Raid pamphlets began appearing both in Britain and on the continent attacking the cowardice of the Uitlanders.<sup>89</sup> In seeking to develop a position in response to these two narratives, endorsing the first and challenging the implicit defence of the Raid contained within the second, Liberal speakers, and particularly those who later identified as pro-Boers, adopted a rhetorical position in defence of the Uitlanders.

Morley, for example, sought to rebut the jingoistic charge of Uitlander responsibility for Jameson's defeat in his by-election speech at Arbroath by making reference to the infamous 'women and children' letter which Jameson sought to use as a *casus belli* for intervention. 'If', he argued,

the Raid is to be justified on the ground that it was destined to rescue the women and the children who were in great danger in Johannesburg, why was it expected and made an article of blame that it did not happen that some thousands of men did not march out of Johannesburg to meet this force of Dr Jameson's, leaving their women and children exposed to all the suspected savagery of the Boers?<sup>90</sup>

Such a statement was in part undoubtedly designed to keep the focus of attention upon the actions of Jameson and his backers, and indeed in his speech Morley proceeded directly into an attack upon the Raiders' criminality. Nonetheless this can also be seen as a defence of the Uitlanders from a jingoistic political narrative in Britain which sought to cast aspersions upon their character.

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<sup>89</sup> Stephen Gray 'The Literature of the Jameson Raid', in The Brenthurst Press, *The Jameson Raid: A Centennial Retrospective* (Houghton: 1996), p. 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

We can see similar rhetoric adopted by Harcourt in the parliamentary set pieces of the spring of 1896, seemingly designed to establish distance between the Uitlander population and the conspiracy behind the Raid. In the debate on the loyal address, Harcourt called attention to Chamberlain's dispatch in response to the Raid, asserting to cheers that 'he [Chamberlain] stated, and stated truly, that this outrageous attempt to overthrow the Government of the Transvaal by force did not proceed from and had not the sympathy of the majority of the Uitlanders of the Rand.'<sup>91</sup> Harcourt stressed this point further in the debate in May on Colonial Office supply: after quoting from the telegrams sent to Jameson by his co-conspirator Rutherford Harris at the Cape, which warned of the lack of support for the reform movements, Harcourt declared 'No, they were not popular with the Uitlanders of Johannesburg. They were machinations, from first to last, of this syndicate, of the Chartered Company, connected with the gold speculators in Johannesburg and in the Cape Colony.'<sup>92</sup> What can be seen in such rhetoric is not only an attempt to separate the Uitlanders from the actual conspiracy behind the Raid, but more critically also to distinguish between the Uitlander population and the interests of mining capital, in spite of the essential ties between the Uitlanders and the mining industry. Notably, Harcourt also used his speech in the debate on supply to combine this interpretation with a rebuttal of the jingoistic Uitlander guilt narrative, charging that

there has been a great deal of, I think, very unjust abuse heaped upon these poor-spirited Uitlanders, and their treachery in not supporting the raid. The real charge against them is that they could not and would not be stimulated by bribery, and every other method, to enter upon an insurrection against the Government, which the great majority of them had no desire to overthrow.<sup>93</sup>

Continuing, he declared that the Uitlanders were being treated 'like the needy knifegrinder of Canning, as "wretches whom no sense of wrong could rouse to vengeance"', and unfairly slandered in the Press because they refused to meet the wishes of BSAC.<sup>94</sup> In contrast then to later turns of events in which the Uitlanders featured heavily in imperialist rhetoric on the South African question,

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<sup>91</sup> HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, c.92.

<sup>92</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40 cc.895-96.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., c.889.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., cc.889-90. The reference is to a satirical work by George Canning, produced in response to the radicalism of the French Revolution.

in early 1896 it was in fact Liberals such as Morley and Harcourt who sprang to their defence.

While this narrative might be characterised as pro-Uitlander, it can also be seen as an effort to undermine the narrative of Uitlander rights which had notionally justified the Raid, and as such the position that Chamberlain was now advancing in his South African policy. This tactic can be seen in the rhetoric deployed by both Rosebery and Harcourt upon the opening of Parliament, with both speakers invoking the politics of the Irish question. The Liberal leadership were responding to a speech that the Unionist Prime Minister Lord Salisbury had made at the end of January attacking the policy of Irish home rule, in which he sought to portray the SAR as an example of extreme home rule.<sup>95</sup> When Parliament met eleven days later, both Rosebery and Harcourt sought to turn this critique on its head and apply the Irish question to South Africa. While acknowledging that 'Her Majesty's Government cannot disregard the grievances with which it [the Raid] was intended to deal', Rosebery mocked Salisbury for going so far 'as to compare the Uitlanders to those cherished Ulstermen on whom they have been accustomed to heap so much eulogy in former days.'<sup>96</sup> In the House of Commons, Harcourt attacked the government along similar lines. Commenting acidly that the Prime Minister 'might have picked up stones enough to fling at Home Rule without seizing upon this delicate and dangerous topic as a missile to throw at his opponents', Harcourt condemned Salisbury for having drawn a link between the two issues.<sup>97</sup> 'For what purpose', he asked

Were the bitterest memories of Irish strife brought up, which can only serve to inflame the quarrel which now unhappily exists between the races in South Africa whom it is our policy to reconcile? [...] For what object was a vision of Scotch moss-troopers invoked to come to the rescue of the Ulster of South Africa?<sup>98</sup>

The primary purpose of such attacks was to discomfit the government. Yet in inviting this comparison to the Irish question, we can again see this process of deflection away from the question of Uitlander rights by invoking an established

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<sup>95</sup> Lord Salisbury, speech of 31 Jan, 1896, Nonconformist Unionist Association, reported in *The Times*, 1 Feb. 1896.

<sup>96</sup> HL Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, cc.37-38.

<sup>97</sup> HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, c.91.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, cc.91-92.

Liberal rallying cry. Furthermore, in this direct comparison of the Uitlander to the Ulsterman, we might also see an inference that the complaints of the Uitlanders were equivalent to the agitation of Ulster Unionism against Irish Home Rule: that is, in the eyes of a Liberal audience, the cause of reaction rather than reform.

The most significant aspect of Liberal discussion of the Uitlanders however was the reluctance on the part of Liberal statesmen to characterise them as British. Although Sir Edward Grey notably used a speech on 15 January 1896 to state that he hoped the Raid would at least have the consequence of concessions being granted 'to British subjects and others' living within the Transvaal, such comments, which stopped far short of characterising the Uitlander population as a whole as being intrinsically British, were exceptional for Liberal speakers.<sup>99</sup> Given that at the diplomatic level, Chamberlain moved very swiftly to make the question of the Uitlander franchise a central issue of Anglo-Boer relations, it is interesting to see this reluctance on the part of Liberal speakers to present the Uitlanders as an essentially British population.

If Liberal silences over the question of Uitlander identity constitute one of the more distinctive elements of the party's response to the Raid, they were as nothing compared to the party's silences over the non-white populations of South Africa, and particularly Black African population.<sup>100</sup> As noted above, the South African question prior to 1899 had long been framed, albeit generally from a governmental-diplomatic perspective rather than a political one, as a question of managing relations between imperial authorities, the British, the Dutch-speaking population, and, critically, the Black African population. Even as the relative power of the indigenous kingdoms declined, they were nonetheless presented as a key element underpinning British calculations in the region, as demonstrated by the continued prohibitions against slavery attached to both the Pretoria and London conventions. To the degree that the Black African population did feature in Liberal rhetoric in the aftermath of the Raid, it was however usually in the form of yet further evidence of the undesirable nature of

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<sup>99</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech of 15 Jan. 1896, Whitley, reported in *Morpeth Herald*, 18 Jan. 1896.

<sup>100</sup> The position of the Indian population in South Africa, concentrated particularly in the Natal, was almost entirely absent from political debates in Britain.

BSAC rule. As explored above, Labouchere had cited Rhodes' conduct towards the Black African population of Rhodesia in his attack upon the character of Company rule. Writing in *Truth* in the immediate aftermath of the Raid, Labouchere declared that 'the history of the company is disgraceful from beginning to end. It began by tricking Lobengula out of half his dominions; it went on to rob him by violence of the other half.'<sup>101</sup> The fate of the Matabele, along with Labouchere's attacks on profits 'stained with the blood of African natives', thus formed the backdrop of his attacks on the Chartered Company, rather than a current concern. In any case, the references to the dismemberment of the Matabele kingdom in Labouchere's rhetoric did not represent a common feature of Liberal rhetoric on the Raid.

The question of Chartered Company treatment of the Black African population was raised again in the summer of 1897, after the inconclusive conclusion of the committee of inquiry. Critically however, in this case the allegations centred on the charge of effective slavery. A critical report by the resident commissioner in Rhodesia, Sir Richard Martin, had attributed the unrest under BSAC rule to the policies of forced labour imposed by the chartered company. In Stanhope's opening speech in the debate on his motion censuring the committee, he seized the report as further evidence of what the 'scandalous maladministration' which had gone on under company rule. Martin's report, he charged, proved 'that practically a system of slavery existed under the company, that cattle of the unfortunate natives were improperly confiscated, and that when they protested or resisted they were mown down by Maxim guns.'<sup>102</sup> Of the three charges, the first allegation was undoubtedly the most toxic. As Esme Cleall has argued in her study of the indenturing of the Bechuana rebels by the Cape Government in this period, slavery 'operated as a key signifier for imperial wrongs, racism and violence in British imperial discourse'.<sup>103</sup> With a faith in the moral superiority of the British Empire, or at least a faith in an idealised vision of what the Empire should be, lying at the heart of assumptions regarding the supposed

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<sup>101</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 10 Jan. 1896.

<sup>102</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, Vol.51 c.1097.

<sup>103</sup> Esme Cleall, "In Defiance of the Highest Principles of Justice, Principles of Righteousness": The Indenturing of the Bechuana Rebels and the Ideals of Empire, 1897-1900', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40:4 (2012), 605.

uniqueness of the British imperial experiment in contrast to the empires of other powers, the charge of slavery carried particularly devastating weight, and it is unsurprising therefore that Stanhope should seek to maximise his attacks on BSAC by making use of such charges.

Stanhope was not the only Liberal to draw a link between the criticisms of the Martin report and the Raid. In his October 1897 speech at Wormit, Asquith identified the problem of imperial administration in South Africa following the Raid as being not just one of restoring relations between the English and the Dutch in the region, but also of securing 'for the natives, particularly in that part of the territory in South Africa called Rhodesia, adequate protection'.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, Morley had used a similar speech to his constituents to reference events in Rhodesia as part of his wider justification for the committee of inquiry's conduct. Informing his Arbroath audience that he wished to address himself to 'a certain chapter in the proceedings to which too little attention has been paid', he proceeded to declare his disgust at Martin's findings in Rhodesia. Stating to cheers from his audience that 'compulsory labour is a long name for slavery', Morley challenged the denials from Lord Grey, installed in the aftermath of the Raid as the administrator of Southern Rhodesia, by deliberately stressing his links to Rhodes.<sup>105</sup> Remarking that, 'as men of probity do sometimes, Lord Grey has fallen into questionable company', Morley seized upon a remark that Rhodes had made upon Grey's appointment, namely that Grey very kindly took his advice, to imply that Rhodes was behind the scandal of compulsory labour in the territory. In any case, he argued, Martin's findings had not been disproven, and the result was

that in the dominions of the Queen, whose sixtieth year's reign we are celebrating this year, in the dominions of the queen at this moment there are men, under the Queen's flag, who are administering what is neither more nor less than a system tending to slavery.<sup>106</sup>

In invoking such patriotic tropes as the Queen's jubilee and the flag, Morley can be seen as emphasising the contrast between an idealised Empire and actual imperial practice under BSAC rule. In this manner then, the Black African

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<sup>104</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 13 Oct. 1897.

<sup>105</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 29 Sep. 1897.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

population were invoked in support of a humanitarian, anti-slavery narrative which emphasised the supposedly alien nature of Rhodes' operations to the standards expected of imperial servants.

What makes this rhetoric in response to the Raid all the more intriguing is that there appears to have been very little discussion of the non-white subjects of the SAR, despite the great focus placed on the treatment of the Black Africans by the Boers during earlier iterations of the South African question. The Pretoria Convention had imposed a British Resident in the retroceded Transvaal state so as to continue to administer affairs relating to the Black African population, and it is notable that even the greatly watered-down London Convention retained a prohibition against slavery.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, the British annexation of the fledgling trekker republics of Goshen and Stellaland had in part been a response to the tensions between the Tswana and the Boers in Bechuanaland while, as noted above, responses to the Malaboch War were also framed by humanitarian critiques of the Boers' conduct.<sup>108</sup> In the aftermath of the Raid however, the position of the indigenous population of the Transvaal barely featured at all in Liberal speechmaking: a significant development in the politics of the South African question.

One further aspect of Morley's account of the situation in Rhodesia worth considering is the direct link drawn between the actions of BSAC and the subsequent revolt. In consequence, Morley argued, 'of this compulsory labour, and of this seizure of cattle, there was a war, and those wretched savages were mowed down like swathes of grass by Maxim guns – like swathes of grass before the scythe'.<sup>109</sup> Again, this might be seen as evidence of an underlying humanitarian concern deployed so as to indict the reputation of BSAC. However, Morley went on to reinforce this charge by quoting from the writing of Sir Harry Johnston. Drawing a contrast between the philosophy of Johnston and that of Rhodes, he quoted Johnston as warning that

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<sup>107</sup> Schreuder, *Gladstone and Kruger*, p. 180.

<sup>108</sup> Leonard Thompson, 'The Subjection of the African Chiefdoms, 1870-1898', in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (eds) *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II: South Africa 1870-1966* (Oxford: 1971), pp.274-275; Makhura, 'Another Road to the Raid', 263.

<sup>109</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 29 Sep. 1897.

it must be borne in mind that the negro is a man with a man's rights; above all, that he was the owner of the country before we came, and deserves, nay, is entitled to, a share in the land commensurate with his needs and wishes; that in numbers he will always exceed the white man, while he may some day come to rival him in intelligence; and that finally, if we do not use our power to govern him with absolute justice, the time will come, sooner or later, when he will rise against us and expel us, as the Egyptian officials were expelled from the Soudan.<sup>110</sup>

Such a critique was essentially as much one of governance and security as it was one of humanitarianism. The implication was that a failure to govern with justice would jeopardise the Empire by increasing the likelihood of an uprising by the indigenous population, risking the entire imperial presence in the territory. Here then the Black African population is framed as a threat, or at least a hazard to imperial rule, as opposed to simply being the passive victims of colonial abuse. In linking this argument with the wider questions of the Raid's aftermath, Morley's speech was atypical for a high-profile Liberal. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that in the essential argument that British authority was contingent on the just administration of the Empire's subject populations, Morley's rhetoric echoed that which was to be deployed at the time of the crisis of 1899 with regards to the white settler populations. Ultimately however, such language in this context was rare, and to the degree that the non-white populations of South Africa were discussed by Liberal speakers at all, it was to present them not as political actors but as passive victims of a brand of British imperialism which Liberals sought to condemn.

The portrayals of the Boer and Uitlander populations on the Transvaal examined in this section demonstrate the degree of rhetorical scope available to Liberal speakers in terms of framing the South African question in the aftermath of Jameson. Critically however such characterisations of the Boer and Uitlander populations were not presented in isolation, but instead were expressed alongside wider narratives of Anglo-Dutch race relations across the whole region. As with Morley's discussion of the Black African populations of South Africa these ideas spoke fundamentally to questions of imperial governance, and this aspect of the rhetoric of white racial harmony is explored in the next section. More than this however, an examination of the ways by which Liberals

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

presented the state of relations between the British settler population and the Boers can reveal much about the wider dynamics of the South African question. These narratives of white race relations generally revolved around the premise that the Raid had disrupted a pre-existing state of white racial harmony across South Africa, with severe and potentially dangerous consequences. Just weeks after the Raid concerns for the damage done to relations between the British and the Boers formed a key aspect of Liberal responses to Jameson's action. In his by-election campaign, Morley stressed how the Raid, if it had succeeded, would have resulted in 'violent strife and passion kindled in the Cape Colony'.<sup>111</sup> Critically in this assessment, the warning is not just of damage done to Anglo-Boer relations at the diplomatic level, but to harm being inflicted upon racial harmony within the Empire.

Liberal rhetoric on the actual repercussions of the Raid rather than the theoretical impact also stressed that the question of race relations went beyond the borders of the SAR, and instead reflected wider dynamics throughout South Africa. Asquith was to adopt a similar line to Morley in a speech at Trowbridge on 9 May 1896, seeking to impress upon his audience the damage that had been done to the formerly good relations between the two settler populations in the region. The Raid, he argued 'had opened a rift which it might take years, and possibly a generation, to close between the British and the Dutch populations in that part of the world, in whose close co-operation the victory of civilisation over barbarism depends.'<sup>112</sup> Two elements are particularly notable in Harcourt and Asquith's rhetoric on Anglo-Dutch relations within South Africa. First, as discussed above, the underlying implication of both speeches was that a state of division between the British and the Dutch was a new development in South Africa, an unwanted consequence of the Raid which had broken down an existing state of balance and harmony. In practice, as noted earlier there had been a long history of tensions between the British colonial authorities and the different Dutch-speaking groups in the region, from the events of the Great Trek through to the controversies surrounding the annexation and subsequent retrocession of both Transorangia and the Transvaal. The specific

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<sup>111</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

<sup>112</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech of 9 May 1896, Trowbridge, reported in *Bristol Mercury*, 11 May 1896.

circumstances of the Raid, it is true, might be seen as having polarised the division more sharply, but it is interesting nonetheless that its consequences were portrayed as an entirely new development.

More significantly however, this assumption was accompanied by the suggestion that this development posed a serious risk to the Empire. Harcourt's description of the situation as 'perilous to our colonial empire', and Asquith's warning of the danger now posed to the 'victory of civilisation over barbarism' can be seen as evidence of an emphasis on the importance of Dutch sentiment to the security of Britain's position in South Africa. As with Morley's implicit warning about the risk posed by the Black African population, the Dutch-speaking settler population was likewise presented as a group whose support would be essential to the continuity of imperial rule in the region, suggesting a fundamental insecurity about the fragility of Empire within Liberal rhetoric.

An emphasis on the need to restore relations between the British and the Dutch was not just a feature of the immediate response to the Raid, but notably also framed Liberal responses to the committee of inquiry. In his intervention in the debate on Stanhope's motion of censure, Campbell-Bannerman concluded his speech with the declaration that

the only hope of peace and prosperity in South Africa was not in the aggravation, but in the extirpation of that miserable spirit of enmity and jealousy which had too much prevailed among the races, and in using the various gifts, qualities, and powers of those races for the common welfare of the country in which they resided.<sup>113</sup>

Likewise, Asquith's speech at Wormit on 12 October 1897 identified the problem as being one of 'how to restore the relations broken for the time being – it would almost seem hopelessly broken by the criminal enterprise – between the English and the Dutch populations' further underlines the continuity of this narrative.<sup>114</sup> The persistence of the idea of race harmony might well be attributed to the realities of the diplomatic situation and political environment in South Africa after the Raid: by late 1897 any hope of a speedy reconciliation between the SAR and Britain looked increasingly distant, while the formation

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<sup>113</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, Vol.51 c.1162.

<sup>114</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 13 Oct. 1897.

and spread of the South African league underlined the degree to which politics in the Cape and Natal were increasingly operating along sectional lines.<sup>115</sup> However, we might also see in the emphasis on the restoration of Anglo-Dutch relations a wider focus on the role of local collaborators in the Liberal vision of Empire, crucially in the form of non-British populations as well as the imperial authorities 'on the spot'.

Yet alongside this narrative of cooperation must be added an important caveat: a restoration of good relations between the English and Dutch populations did not necessarily imply equality of position. In a speech at South Queensferry on 20 January 1898, Campbell-Bannerman offered a significantly qualified version of this collaborative vision of imperial South Africa. Declaring that he believed British power would dominate south of the Zambesi river, he went on to state his hope that 'the Dutch will not only be content to fall in with that predominance, but that they would form a most valuable part of that community.'<sup>116</sup> There is then a hierarchy implied in such rhetoric, and while therefore there is evidence more generally of a semi-pluralist idea of empire, at least in regards to the empire of white settlement, there can be seen to be limits to this notion. The significance of Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric should not of course be overstated, and it is certainly the case that such explicit hierarchical discussions were not commonly occurring features of Liberal rhetoric on race. Nonetheless, Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric serves as a corollary to the narratives of white racial harmony and cooperation and, as will be seen in the next chapter, hints at some of the themes which were to become more prominent in the crisis atmosphere of 1899.

Race rhetoric thus represented a complex component of the Liberal response to the Jameson Raid and was, in many ways, notable for the degree to which it did not represent a simple continuity of past narratives. Although in some of the more double-edged descriptions of the Boers we might identify the continuation of earlier critiques of Boer society, the characterisation of the Uitlanders was notably a far more novel development, if anything borrowing tropes more from

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<sup>115</sup> For more on the activities of the South Africa league, see Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic*, pp.161-170.

<sup>116</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech of 20 Jan. 1898, South Queensferry, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 21 Jan. 1898.

the history of the Irish question than from Britain's past experiences in South Africa. Similarly, the role of the Black African population reflects something of a new development in Liberal rhetoric on the South African question, with an increased tendency to portray them in passive terms, so as to support other causes such as the critiques of BSAC rule, rather than as the regional actors they had been considered to be during earlier iterations of the South African question. Finally, while questions of cooperation were hardly a new feature of the South African question, the importance assigned to such factors by Liberal speakers suggests that a marked focus on idea of white racial harmony emerged out of the politics of the Raid. Given that these were all narratives which went on to frame later debates at the time of the 1899 crisis, we might therefore see the Liberal rhetoric on race and the Raid as laying many of the foundations for subsequent discussions of race and the South African question, even if in the immediate aftermath of the Raid this did not yet coalesce around one central narrative. Instead, such narratives served to reinforce the final element of Liberal rhetoric examined in this chapter: the rhetoric of governance.

### **The Governance of South Africa and the Rhetoric of the Raid**

That questions of imperial governance loomed large in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid is unsurprising, given that questions over the character of British imperialism and the nature of the populations of South Africa invariably spoke to the processes and mechanisms by which British authority over the region was enforced. The Jameson Raid sparked considerable debate over the nature of, and basis for, British rule in South Africa, with the importance of good relations between the white settler populations and the role of BSAC in particular becoming subjects of discussion. Wider questions about the constitutional relationship between the British Empire and the South African Republic also played a role, as did debates on the political system within the Transvaal, a precursor to the franchise debates at the time of the crisis of 1899. All these issues represent what might be termed the rhetoric of imperial governance, which can be defined as political language used in the discussion of imperial questions which emphasises the structures and dynamics of British imperial rule, intertwined with a stress upon Liberal governing ideals such as self-government and good government.

The latter in particular has in recent scholarship been identified as a key element of Victorian political rhetoric in the long nineteenth century. James Thompson identifies three strands of this language of good government: a Whiggish, moralistic language dominant in the early Victorian era; a focus on administrative competence in the mid-Victorian era; and finally a language of progressive good government and material improvement at the end of the century.<sup>117</sup> Thompson touches on the subject of Empire only briefly, but notes nonetheless the persistence of the two more traditional narratives of good government in imperial administration and politics. In relation to the South African question, at least at the time of the Jameson Raid, this assessment appears to hold true, albeit with an important qualifier. In keeping with this idea of a language of good government defined by the effectiveness of government, Thompson's definition places emphasis upon the ends of government rather than the process. This might well be the case for domestic questions, but in the imperial context it was important for Liberal audiences not only that good government be done, but also that good government be seen to be done: desirable ends, such as potentially the reform of the SAR, could not justify the means of misgovernment. To this it might also be added that the languages of moralistic good government and competent good government were not always necessarily stand-alone entities but, as discussed below, could form part of one and the same critique.

The question of governance occurred in one sense at the regional level: who ruled in South Africa, and what was the nature of this rule? As explored above, a key part of this dynamic was founded upon the idea of white racial harmony, and particularly the idea that existing British rule depended on its maintenance. An emphasis on the risk posed to imperial rule at the Cape in particular formed a key part of this narrative. Morley's warning at Arbroath during his by-election campaign, that had the Raid succeeded then there would have been 'violent strife and passion kindled in the Cape Colony', was to become a persistent refrain of the Liberal response to the Raid.<sup>118</sup> Harcourt, for example, referenced this argument during the 8 May debate on supply. Not only, he noted, had

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<sup>117</sup> James Thompson, 'Good Government', in David Craig & James Thompson (eds), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: 2013).

<sup>118</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

British relations with the SAR and the Orange Free State been damaged, but 'more serious still, a social animosity has been engendered at the Cape and throughout South Africa between the Dutch and the British races, most perilous to our colonial empire.'<sup>119</sup>

Indeed, Harcourt went on to explicitly invoke the political situation of the Cape as evidence of the further damage being done to imperial authority in the region. 'What chance', he asked,

Have you of restoring peace in the Cape Colony between the two races when you continue there the very men who have caused this animosity between them? I see it stated in the papers to-day that there is a chance of getting up a Rhodes Party in the Cape. Supposing you did, what would you accomplish?<sup>120</sup>

An emphasis on the importance of race harmony as a foundation for imperial governance thus operated in one sense at a level internal to the formal empire, and concerned with the management of the relationship between different subject populations in a self-governing colony. This narrative of race harmony and imperial government was replicated at the regional level. The stress placed upon the specific need for co-operation at the Cape was accompanied by a wider characterisation of the imperial government as acting along the lines of an 'honest broker' in the region. In his Newton Abbot speech, Rosebery advanced ideas along this line, declaring that 'we owe it to South Africa to show that in this matter we mean to do impartial justice, that we mean to deal fairly between neighbour and neighbour.'<sup>121</sup> In this vision of Britain's role in South Africa then, impartiality and fairness became central to the task of governing South Africa.

This idea of a British responsibility for managing relations between the different states and populations within South Africa touches upon the wider question of the exact nature of British authority over the region, and particularly over the Transvaal. The insistence of a right of suzerainty over the Transvaal was to prove a central factor in triggering the outbreak of the South African War, and the exact nature of British authority over the SAR was thus a major point of contention within political debate. These questions were by no means as central

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<sup>119</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40 c.898.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., cc.903-04.

<sup>121</sup> *Western Times*, 16 May 1896.

to the debates on the Raid, but nonetheless formed key elements of some Liberal speeches on the topic. It is useful therefore to explore the ways in which Liberals sought to articulate the governing relationship between Britain and the SAR at the time of the Raid. Gladstone's comments in his letter of 17 January 1896, stating that he had 'always thought the Transvaal had rather peculiar claims upon us', illustrates well the degree to which the position of the SAR had been left ambiguous following the London convention.

In his speech at Leicester on 16 January, Mundella characterised the SAR as 'a neighbouring friendly state, which was under the protection, or at least the suzerainty, of the Queen'.<sup>122</sup> Such a characterisation is notable for two reasons. First, Mundella implies a continuation of the suzerainty introduced in the Pretoria Convention, despite the absence of the word from the London Convention and Derby's obfuscation over the term. Second, Mundella's reference to the SAR as 'under the Queen's protection' implies a rather different relationship between Britain and the SAR than that of a self-governing state subject to restraints on its actions, instead implying a relationship of British responsibility more akin to the idea of a protectorate. Morley implied a similar relationship to Mundella's protection in his speech of 30 January, suggesting that the role of Britain was to act as the guarantor of the Transvaal's independence: 'Could we', he asked his audience, 'have sent a force to put down the Boers, who were defending their own independence which we had guaranteed to them?'<sup>123</sup> Such rhetoric is suggestive of a relationship between Britain and the SAR in which the independence and self-government of the republic is the intended result of British imperial governance, rather than a complicating factor.

This somewhat reimagined suzerainty in Liberal rhetoric also featured in Harcourt's response to the Raid. In his speech during the May debate on Colonial Office supply, Harcourt questioned how there could possibly be a settlement between Britain and Kruger if a Rhodes party were to be set up at the Cape. 'If this', he asked,

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<sup>122</sup> *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 18 Jan. 1896.

<sup>123</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

is the treatment that he has received from those who exercise the powers of that state which calls itself suzerain, how can you complain that he should look for support elsewhere? If he is to be attacked by his suzerain, and the people who attack him are to be continued in their authority, how can you expect to make a reasonable settlement?<sup>124</sup>

Here then, the implication of Harcourt's rhetoric is that Britain had failed in its duties as suzerain power: that by failing to act against the perpetrators of the Raid, Britain was failing to fairly govern South Africa as a region, and thereby failing in its responsibilities to the SAR. In contrast to Mundella, Harcourt's rhetoric is also notably more equivocal in its discussion of suzerainty: referring to Britain as a state 'which calls itself suzerain' notably stops short of actually stating that a relationship of suzerainty exists. Nonetheless it is notable that, given the extent to which large sections of the Liberal leadership would reject the existence of suzerainty prior to the South African War, speakers such as Harcourt made reference to the concept in articulating their responses to the Raid. The key factor might therefore be that, in contrast to the suzerainty of 1899, the Liberal understanding of suzerainty of 1896 was concerned with the obligations and responsibilities of Britain to defend the SAR, rather than an arrangement granting a right of intervention.

Nonetheless, closely related to this question of suzerainty was the issue of how the Transvaal itself was governed, and by implication the scope for British action to correct misgovernment. As noted in the previous section, Liberal speakers often attacked the premise of the Raid by not only implying that the Raiders were motivated by gold, but by implying that the Uitlanders themselves did not wish for such an action. One way in which this was done was to downplay the question of the Uitlander franchise by dismissing the situation as akin to the limited franchise in Britain. In his public letter responding to the Raid, Morgan remarked that

No doubt their electoral system is open to grave criticism, but the same thing might be said, and indeed is still said, of our own Parliamentary franchise. I know many ladies who complain bitterly that they have to pay taxes, without having any voice in their imposition. But I have not yet heard that any of them has

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<sup>124</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.903.

proposed to call in the aid of an armed foreign force to redress their grievances.<sup>125</sup>

In his Arbroath by-election speech later that month Morley adopted a similar, if less entertaining line, combining the argument with an attack on the Unionist record on domestic political reform. 'The plea for all this lawless mischief' he declared,

is that President Kruger will not confer political rights, and I notice that that plea is very much used by writers and gentlemen who were never very keen, so far as I recollect, to extend political rights to their own countrymen.<sup>126</sup>

Given the cheers with which Morley's line of attack was received, it may be that this simply represented an excuse to break out a more established party line, and thus win over the support of his audience with a topic more familiar to them than that of the South African question. Yet in both Morgan and Morley's rhetoric on the Uitlanders we can also see an attempt to neutralise the franchise issue by deflecting it.

The question of the Uitlander franchise invariably touched upon wider questions of how the SAR operated as a state. By the crisis of 1899 charges of Boer misgovernment and corruption were common recurring features of the political debate, yet in the immediate aftermath of the Raid they played little role in Liberal rhetoric on the questions of governance in the region. Indeed, in a speech at Rochdale on 28 April 1896, Rosebery explicitly condemned Chamberlain for having described Kruger's administration as 'eminently corrupt', remarking that 'if this is the method by which the new diplomacy conciliates the person with whom it is negotiating, it is a very new diplomacy indeed.'<sup>127</sup> Rosebery's criticism was not aimed at the actual allegation of corruption itself but at the somewhat contradictory impulses embodied in Chamberlain's diplomatic methods, but nonetheless it is striking given that by the crisis of 1899 Rosebery had made the misgovernment of the Transvaal a central theme of his own rhetoric on the South African question.

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<sup>125</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 Jan. 1896.

<sup>126</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1896.

<sup>127</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech of 28 Apr. 1896, Rochdale, reported in *Morning Post*, 29 Apr. 1896.

Questions of misgovernment could also be advanced through an emphasis upon the ideal of self-government. Following on from Salisbury's attack on the Transvaal as an example of 'extreme home rule', Morley used a speech at Forfar on 3 February 1896 to speak mockingly of the fact that

while the Queen wrote a letter to the President of the Transvaal recognising his magnanimity and the wisdom with which he used his power, the Queen's Prime Minister made a speech in which he implied that President Kruger ought never to have had any power to use or abuse.<sup>128</sup>

Salisbury, it was implied, was wrong to criticise the actions of Kruger's government, as to do so would be to attack the self-governing principle of the SAR. The notion that self-government might trump any criticisms of misgovernment can also be seen in Morgan's comments on the Raid. In his letter responding to the Raid, Morgan remarked that

To these people we, by the Treaty of London, gave absolute power to manage their own affairs. It is now said that they have not made the best use of their privileges, that their views on the distribution of political power are hopelessly antiquated and illiberal, and that they have failed to appreciate the merits of those gentlemen who, while putting some millions in their own politics, have 'developed' the country and made it the El Dorado which it is now reported to be.<sup>129</sup>

Partly this served to further reinforce Morgan's criticism of the mining interests in the Transvaal. However it might also be seen as an attack on the notion, generally applied to the indigenous populations of colonised territories rather than white settler populations, that the European assumption of control over the territories was justifiable on the basis that the indigenous populations were not in position to take advantage of the material resources of the land that they occupied. Again it must be stressed that Morgan's comments in this regard were somewhat atypical, and not generally to be found in the rhetoric of leading Liberals in the aftermath of the Raid. Nonetheless, such language can be seen as part of a wider rhetorical effort to stress the self-governing nature of the SAR in response to critiques of misgovernment.

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<sup>128</sup> John Morley, speech of 3 Feb. 1896, Forfar, reported in *Dundee Courier*, 4 Feb. 1896. The letter from the Queen he refers to appears to relate to the message conveyed to Kruger in response to the decision to release Jameson and his fellow prisoners to the British authorities.

<sup>129</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 Jan. 1896.

Ultimately however, while as examined there was initially a degree of discussion of Boer misgovernment, it was in criticisms of BSAC rule that critiques of government primarily emerged in Liberal rhetoric on the Raid. The critique of the character of the imperialism that Rhodes and BSAC represented, discussed above, occurred alongside direct attacks on BSAC, and chartered companies more generally, as instruments of governance. The device of the chartered company had long formed a feature of the British imperial system, most famously in the example of the British East India Company. However, the latest wave of imperial enterprise represented by BSAC had also taken place against the backdrop of a revolution in the role of financial corporations in British public life, fuelling anxieties about the relationship between commercial and political power, as well as the instability of these new ventures.<sup>130</sup> It was thus in relation to these wider critiques of corporate immorality and recklessness as well as with appeals to the ideals of British imperial rule that Liberal critics of BSAC set about attacking the company's fitness to govern.

The conduct and critically also the competence of the Chartered Company's directors came under specific attack in Liberal rhetoric. The directors of the Chartered Company, Harcourt charged appeared to be comprised of 'two sets of men – one set of men who are capable and not honest, and another set of men who are honest but entirely incapable.'<sup>131</sup> Such an attack presented BSAC as having fallen short of two of the standards of good government Thompson identifies, both questioning the morality of the Chartered Company and its governing capabilities. Stanhope was to deploy similar rhetoric in his motion of censure upon the South African committee. Criticising the report that had been produced, Stanhope asserted that the purpose of the Committee had not so much been to 'inquire into the circumstances of the raid as to inquire into the circumstances of the Chartered Company and as to the fitness of that company to perform the great imperial duties which it was now fulfilling in South Africa'.<sup>132</sup>

Stanhope thus presented the issue as not so much one of establishing guilt or responsibility for the Raid, but as one of investigating the governing structures of British rule in South Africa. Indeed, his subsequent description of the

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<sup>130</sup> See Searle, *Morality and the Market*; Johnson, *Making the Market*.

<sup>131</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.901.

<sup>132</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, Vol.51, c.1095.

Chartered Company's holdings in Rhodesia as having been 'one succession of scandalous maladministration', and his criticisms of what he termed the 'ornamental' directors of the company as men 'who had proved to be grossly negligent or quite inefficient', further underlines the extent to which narratives of competence were combined with those of culpability in Liberal attacks upon BSAC. Again, such criticisms also reflected many of the wider trends within Victorian commercial culture: as Johnson notes, the mid-century banking failures owed as much to the incompetence of managers as to outright dishonesty.<sup>133</sup>

As with the discussions of the character of BSAC's brand of imperialism, these criticisms of misgovernment attacked the principle of Chartered Company rule, as well as the practice. In his speech at the opening of Parliament, Harcourt attacked the position of chartered companies as 'a very anomalous one; it is one of limited liability for themselves, and unlimited liability for us'.<sup>134</sup> Harcourt's choice of language further demonstrates the influence of financial debates upon the Liberal critique of Chartered Company rule. As G.R. Searle has explored, the introduction of limited liability companies in Britain prompted concerns of a resultant lowering in commercial morality.<sup>135</sup> By adopting the language of company liability, the suggestion of irregularity and misconduct was thus again emphasised in Harcourt's rhetoric.

Continuing, Harcourt further asserted that 'the state which seeks to obtain power without responsibility obtains instead responsibility without power'.<sup>136</sup> Such language of responsibility and duty might be seen as an extension of the moral critique of the use of Chartered Companies. Significantly however, Harcourt went on to stress that 'if we choose to delegate sovereign power we are answerable for the conduct of our delegates' and that BSAC's charter 'must be revised under the superintendence and authority of Parliament.' This was in essence a centralising demand, overturning the wisdom of the colonial 'man on the spot' by stressing instead the direct chain of authority, and indeed implicitly criticising the means by which it had been delegated. When Parliament debated

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<sup>133</sup> Johnson, *Making the Market*, p.131.

<sup>134</sup> HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, cc.94-95.

<sup>135</sup> Searle, *Morality and the Market*, p.87.

<sup>136</sup> HC Deb., 11 Feb. 1896, fourth series, Vol.37, cc.94-95.

that Reid again in May, Harcourt again advanced a similar line. 'The histories of chartered companies', he argued

when left to their own devices and without control have not been fortunate. They have been defined as a valuable instrument for the cheap extension of Empire. We have been told that they are a means of obtaining power without responsibility and wealth without expenditure, but we may find that we pay too dear a price for this.<sup>137</sup>

Campbell-Bannerman was to deploy a similar critique on the principle of chartered company rule in his speech on the Stanhope debate of July 1897. Having outlined the circumstances of the evidence given to the committee of inquiry, Campbell-Bannerman went on to address the wider questions raised about the use of chartered companies. 'The government', he argued,

must have learnt how dangerous it was to intrust the administration of a great territory to a trading company - or rather not to a trading company but to a speculative financial company – with administrative powers. They have learnt how readily such powers might be abused, and how necessary was the close supervision of the impartial imperial authority.<sup>138</sup>

In many ways, Campbell-Bannerman's language in this speech emphasises some of the most interesting features of this attack on the idea of imperial government through the use of mechanisms such as BSAC. First it can again be seen in Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric this fundamental wariness of the principle of Chartered Company rule, not simply its practice. This stress upon the 'impartial' also echoed Rosebery's notion of the imperial government as mediator between the different populations and governments of South Africa. Furthermore, the emphasis upon 'close supervision' might also be seen as further evidence of a centralising instinct that further rejected the idea of chartered companies as instruments of arms-length imperial rule. Without therefore directly engaging with some of the wider questions of imperialism, the rhetoric of governance in Liberal attacks on the Chartered Company can nonetheless tell us much about the assumptions and impulses that shaped the political response of the Liberal leadership to the South African question in this period.

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<sup>137</sup> HC Deb., 8 May 1896, fourth series, Vol.40, c.898.

<sup>138</sup> HC Deb., 26 Jul. 1897, fourth series, Vol.51, c.1162.

The rhetoric of governance ultimately played a key role in shaping Liberal responses to the Jameson Raid. Notably many Liberals, and particularly those on the Radical wing of the party, sought to use the Raid to articulate and critique the specific governing structures of British rule in South Africa. The politics of Chartered Company rule may have proved to be a short-lived controversy given that by the time of the South African War the position of BSAC had changed significantly, not least because the British government was now playing a direct role in the dispute with the SAR. Nonetheless, the means by which company rule was critiqued, suggesting a concern for imperial misgovernment occurring under the British flag, highlights what was to become an important feature throughout subsequent iterations of the South African question. The apparent centralising instinct embodied in Liberal criticisms of BSAC might also be seen as a precursor to the controversy over 'Chinese Slavery' in the reconstruction period following the war, and also serve to challenge assumptions about the supposed decentralisation of the Empire that Liberals notionally advocated. Finally, the understandings attached to suzerainty and the relationship between Britain and the SAR are significant, because such rhetoric demonstrates the degree to which the understanding of such terms could be shaped in different ways, making what would be an unhelpful term for pro-Boer Liberals in 1899 a useful rhetoric line in 1896. Even if therefore many of the specific ways in which the rhetoric of governance was deployed in response to the Raid were not to be subsequently replicated, the language and arguments used to advance such critiques played a key role in shaping the ways in which Liberals talked about the South African question, as one ultimately concerned with British authority and the means of Empire.

### **Conclusion: the Rhetorical Foundations of 1899?**

The Jameson Raid was not the central issue driving British politics in this period, or indeed even the central imperial question. As this chapter has demonstrated however, the Liberal response to the Raid was nonetheless significant and, critically, was not simply concerned with the superficial narratives of personal culpability and political scandal. Rather, Liberals of all stripes seized the Raid as an opportunity to advance broader critiques of not only the South African question more generally, but also the more fundamental nature of the Empire and the impulses of British imperialism. Their reasons for

doing so varied: it might be remarked that among the Liberal leadership the primary concern was both the opportunity the crisis offered the party for critiquing the new government's handling of imperial affairs and the genuine desire to minimise the harm the events of the Raid might do to the reputation of the Empire at large, whereas Radical speakers saw the Raid as an opportunity to expose the true nature of the capitalistic imperialism they opposed. Yet despite this difference, Liberal speakers from across the party nonetheless sought to advance these goals with reference to the ideals of Empire. An examination of the language and rhetorical techniques deployed by leading Liberals in response to the Raid thus offers a number of insights into the dynamics shaping the South African question as a political issue prior to the crisis of 1899.

First, Liberal rhetoric on the Raid was essentially introspective, concerned more with what the episode revealed about the nature of Britain and its imperial position, than with events in the Transvaal. Although Liberals it is true did make use of racial characterisations of the Boers and the Uitlanders, and did engage with questions of the Uitlander franchise, such language is notable for its relative scarcity and lack of prominence. Instead, the highest profile Liberal interventions on the South African question after the Raid concerned the Empire: whether it was concern about the morality of the Raid, the character and competence of the Chartered Company, or the damage done to the foundations of imperial authority by white racial harmony, the primary focus of Liberal rhetoric was on Britain's existing imperial position. This focus is suggestive of a wider concern, or even anxiety, among Liberals as to the direction of imperial policy. Indeed, as this chapter has explored the notion that British imperialism had with the Raid diverged from a previously correct and ideal course of development was an assumption which underscored many Liberal responses to the Raid.

Second, an examination of Liberal responses to Jameson's action suggests that there was a degree of departure from earlier iterations of the South African question. Liberal rhetoric on the Black African populations was framed so as to present them as largely passive or secondary to considerations about the imperial situation in South Africa, useful for illustrative purposes but not the subject of discussion in their own right, a substantial development in the politics

of the South African question. The positive characterisation of the Boers and of the Kruger administration in particular likewise represented a break from prior narratives in the history of the South African question, though in this case this development was more partial and ultimately a temporary divergence from established trend. It is of course important not to overstress this point, and it is certainly the case that some elements such as the rhetoric of slavery continued narratives from earlier instances of the South African question. Nonetheless, the notable degree of departure from previous themes and arguments serves to emphasise the extent to which the South African question, at the time of the Jameson Raid, was as a political issue a relatively novel one, granting Liberal speakers considerable scope as to how the situation was to be framed.

Finally, an analysis of the rhetoric used by Liberals to discuss the South African question in the aftermath of the Raid, although disparate, can be seen to contain within it many of the elements which would go on to form key narratives at the time of the South African War, and in subsequent debates. The focus on the idea of white racial harmony, for example, would become central to pro-Boer campaigns, as well as featuring in the language of some Liberal Imperialists, at the time of the crisis of 1899. Likewise, many of the critiques of character and competence surrounding BSAC would be replicated in subsequent years, albeit with the criticisms transferred directly to the imperial authorities after the Chartered Company's eclipse as a major regional power. The invocation of the charge of slavery against the use of indentured labour in Rhodesia might likewise be seen as a precursor to the Chinese slavery controversy following the end of the war. Ultimately then, while the politics of the Raid did not by any means simply represent a dry run for the controversies to come, an analysis of Liberal rhetoric on the Raid nonetheless serves to illustrate the background to many of the themes and narratives which were to emerge during the crisis of 1899, the rhetoric of which the next chapter will now explore.

## 2. 'A POSITION OF MENACE': IMPERIALISM AND THE TRANSVAAL CRISIS OF 1899

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In and of itself, the Jameson Raid did not directly lead to the outbreak of war. Yet in increasing the salience of the Uitlander question in imperial politics, as well as crystallising the dispute as one between the South African Republic and the Imperial government directly, the repercussions of the Raid had laid the foundations for further conflict, and by the end of the decade the storm clouds of war were gathering over South Africa. With the option of an uprising against the Kruger government no longer viable, the opponents of the SAR's government within the Transvaal and across South Africa at large instead organised a series of petitions from the Uitlanders at the end of 1898 and again in the spring of 1899 directly appealing to the Imperial government for redress.<sup>1</sup> This appeal was controversial, both in the claim of the petitions to truly represent Uitlander opinion and in the characterisation of the Uitlanders as British subjects. Nonetheless, the effect was to push the South African question to the forefront of British politics, with the imperial government taking up the cause of Uitlander grievances and particularly the question of franchise rights. With the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference in June to settle the issue, the situation became one of crisis, although a revised franchise proposal from Pretoria and the parliamentary recess served to calm excitement over the issue to a degree up until the end of August. Nonetheless, autumn saw the situation deteriorate rapidly as the question of the franchise became entangled with that of a British right of intervention in the affairs of the SAR. For the backers of the Unionist government's policy, the struggle was increasingly becoming one for British predominance in South Africa, while on the Liberal side those most opposed to the threat of war increasingly began to agitate against the policy of confrontation. The situation rapidly deteriorated, and with the Boer ultimatum of 10 October 1899, the South African War began.

As is well known, the conflict which erupted in the autumn of 1899 swiftly became first a war of annexation, and then a protracted exercise in imperial counter-insurgency. The political repercussions of the latter development in particular, which sparked the row over British 'methods of barbarism' in South

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<sup>1</sup> For details see Iain R. Smith, *The Origins of the South African War, 1899-1902* (London: 1996), ch.7 & ch.8.

Africa and pushed tensions within the Liberal Party to breaking point, are explored in depth in the next chapter. The focus of this chapter however is on what can be termed the immediate crisis period surrounding the outbreak of the war, spanning broadly from the ratcheting up of tensions between Britain and the SAR in the summer of 1899 to the first few weeks immediately following the formal outbreak of the conflict. Although this represents a relatively small window of inquiry in a strictly chronological sense in comparison with the periods examined in the other chapters of this thesis, the specific political dynamics of the Transvaal Crisis nonetheless provide critical insight into how the South African question was conceptualised by Liberal speakers. Critically, the political focus on the position of the Uitlanders and the right of British intervention, both questions which were to become largely eclipsed once the war was fully under way, required Liberal speakers to articulate competing visions as to the nature and extent of the British imperial presence in South Africa. This thesis now explores the rhetorical frameworks that underpinned this process.

This chapter begins by surveying the wider historical debates on the origins of the South African War and briefly reflecting on the nature of the Liberal Party's divisions on the eve of the conflict, before going on to explore how the nature and position of British imperial rule was presented in Liberal responses to the crisis. Looking both at Liberal efforts to use the crisis to provide a commentary on the nature of the Empire or imperialism at large and at the more detailed arguments as to the basis for British intervention in the affairs of the SAR, it will be demonstrated that far from the debates over intervention simply revolving around the justice of British policy, Liberal rhetoric on such questions rested on far more significant assumptions about the nature of imperial responsibility and the obligations of imperial rule. This chapter also uses the rhetoric of the Transvaal Crisis period as a case study through which to examine the role of ideas of patriotism, jingoism and emotional restraint in the politics of the South African question, looking in particular at how ideas about the role of the Press in driving jingoistic sentiment were reflected in the struggle to represent a Liberal approach to Empire. This chapter then proceeds to examine the role played by race in Liberal rhetoric on the Transvaal Crisis, looking both at how the South African question was conceptualised as a problem of Anglo-Boer relations and

at the ways in which ideas of the British and Boer character were deployed in Liberal rhetoric. Finally, this chapter explores the tension between the Liberal imperial ideals of good government and self-government in their application to the politics of the South African questions, as Liberal speakers alternately framed their support for and opposition to a confrontationist approach in terms of the implications of such an action for the future governance of South Africa. In doing so, this chapter will demonstrate how common Liberal ideals and assumptions of Empire produced a fragmented rhetorical response to the Transvaal Crisis, but a response which nonetheless serves to highlight the key narratives and conflicts at the heart of the fin-de-siècle Liberal Party's imperial politics.

### **The Causes of the War**

In seeking to assess the nature of the Transvaal Crisis as an issue within British Liberal politics, it is first necessary to situate the developments of 1899 within their wider imperial and political contexts. In particular, the rhetorical responses of Liberal speakers to events in South Africa in the run up to the outbreak of war need to be understood as occurring against the backdrop of the various influences and factors which drove the Empire and the SAR along the road to conflict. The exact reasons behind the outbreak of the South African War have of course formed the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Quite apart from the questions of individual motive and war guilt which have long fascinated biographers and historians of the war's high politics, the position of the war as a high-profile imperial conflict at the turn of the century has naturally led many historians to examine its origins in an effort to divine the wider impulses of fin-de-siècle British imperialism. While the task of evaluating the exact combination of factors which triggered the conflict lies beyond the scope of thesis, the broader themes identified by many scholars of the war's origins can nonetheless serve to illuminate some of the key assumptions upon which Liberal speakers constructed their rhetorical responses.

The scope of historical debate on the origins of the war is vast, not least because of the legacy of the contrasting narratives of blame advanced by the British and Afrikaner historiographical schools which, as with the history of the

Jameson Raid, shaped much of the earlier work on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Moving beyond the question of establishing the guilty parties, the efforts of historians to explain what ultimately proved to be the violent expansion of British imperial rule within South Africa can be loosely sorted into the two categories of political and economic explanations. Considering the former category first, the historiographical focus on what can be termed the broader political causes of the war has generally served to emphasise what were essentially defensive British concerns over the imperial position in the region. In Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians* the conflict represented part of a wider process by which the Empire was expanded through the perceived need to respond to growing nationalist pressures and international rivalry: the South African War was a result of the 'official mind' of Victorian imperialism reacting against a threat to existing British supremacy, rather than consciously acting to expand it.<sup>3</sup>

Along similar lines, Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw have characterised the war as the product of a British determination to secure the Empire's power and prestige.<sup>4</sup> On this reading, 'power' is identified in terms of the Empire's military and economic strength, while 'prestige' is considered as the extent to which British power, and Britain's willingness to make use of it, was perceived.<sup>5</sup> Hyam and Henshaw argue that the decision-makers in London believed the economic growth provided by the Rand mining industry was supplying the Transvaal with the means to break free of, and to ultimately supplant, British influence in southern Africa. As this would have amounted to an unacceptable loss of power and prestige, again this represented an essentially defensive understanding of British imperial actions. Critically however, it is important to consider that while

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<sup>2</sup> In this respect, J.S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (Oxford: 1961) can be seen as serving a roughly analogous role to that of Jean van der Poel's contribution to the debates on the Jameson Raid. For a wider historiographical survey on the causes of the war, see Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1961), ch.xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge: 2003), p.43.

<sup>5</sup> These definitions are discussed in greater depth in Ronald Hyam, 'The primacy of geopolitics: The dynamics of British imperial policy, 1763–1963', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27:2 (1999).

the focus of such political accounts has generally been on the view of governments and administrators, such concerns over imperial power and position, particularly the perception of vulnerability, might also be expected to be found in the public politics of imperialism at the metropole.

The position presented by economic explanations for the causes of the South African War is somewhat more complicated. If British expansion in South Africa is to be understood primarily within the framework of the demands created by British monopoly capitalism, then in one sense the economic explanations for the war's origins become of less relevance to the task of this thesis.<sup>6</sup> The historiographical focus on the conflict's economic causes is nonetheless significant for understanding the contexts in which the politics of the war occurred, not least because of the near-contemporary economic theories of imperialism which were to emerge in Britain in response to the conflict. Indeed, the contemporary critiques of the war by J.A. Hobson, the unorthodox liberal economist, are generally regarded as marking the beginnings of this economic interpretation of empire, with his 1902 work *Imperialism* having broken new ground with its direct identification of capital pressures as fuelling imperial conflict.<sup>7</sup> Yet while certainly the underlying Radical suspicion of the influence of the role of capital in South Africa influenced the rhetorical responses of the pro-Boers in particular, it is important not to allow the subsequent significance of Hobson's theories of imperialism to overstate their contemporary importance within British politics: the open anti-imperialism of Hobson's arguments won little support among Liberal parliamentarians at the time.<sup>8</sup>

In reflecting on the significance of the economic drivers of British imperialism, it is useful also to consider the gentlemanly capitalism thesis advanced by Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins. Under this model, the economic penetration of the colonial sphere by British elites, the traditionally landed gentlemanly capitalists who required new incomes to sustain their social position, sparked development crises which invariably necessitated British intervention. Applying this thesis to

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<sup>6</sup> The applicability of this model of economic imperialism to the South African war is discussed at length in Shula Marks, 'Scrambling for South Africa', *Journal of African History* 23:1 (1982).

<sup>7</sup> J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: 1954 [first published 1902]).

<sup>8</sup> P.J. Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism: Radicalism, New Liberalism, and Finance 1887-1938* (Oxford: 2002), pp.161-64.

the events of 1899, Cain and Hopkins argue that the occupation of Southern Africa was 'a result of Britain's growing stake in the region, where her investments had risen substantially following the discovery of minerals'.<sup>9</sup> Although careful not to endorse the idea that the war was triggered on behalf of the mining interests, the threat posed by Kruger's republic to the future of Britain's economic interests was a key factor in bringing about the conflict. One does not have to necessarily accept the specific thesis of a gentlemanly capitalist class as characterised by Cain and Hopkins to appreciate the wider relevance of this explanation for the outbreak of the South African War. Indeed, while the conflict is explained as the product of the economic framework of British imperialism, this account nonetheless echoes the defence of British interests model advocated by political accounts of the war's origins. Significantly, Cain and Hopkins also consider events in the Transvaal to have closely mirrored those in Egypt in the early 1880s, suggesting that in the process of the annexation, 'the image of the Boers, like that of the Egyptians, was downgraded to provide moral justification for aggression'.<sup>10</sup> Not only does this relate to many of the questions of character surrounding the justification of British ideals, explored later on in this chapter, but it also highlights the connections between economic interests and the need for British intervention, financial considerations and moral imperative forming two sides of the same coin.

Given that both political and economic interpretations of the war's origins place significant emphasis on the Rand and its Uitlander population, the former in terms of the region's significance for future British power in the region and the latter as the centre of capital within the Transvaal, it is worth also examining further the nature of the Uitlander factor in terms of bringing about the events of 1899. One of the key contentions of J.S. Marais' challenge to the traditional British and Hobsonian interpretations of the war's origins was that the significance of the Uitlanders and the mine-owners in bringing about the war

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<sup>9</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: 1688-2000*, second edition (Harlow: 2002) [first published 1993], p.337. The point was previously outlined in P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British expansion overseas II: new imperialism, 1850-1945', *Economic History Review* 40:1 (1987).

<sup>10</sup> Cain and Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 13.

had been overstated.<sup>11</sup> Yet while ideas of a Rand-led conspiracy have largely fallen out of favour in historical explanations of the war, it does not follow that the role of the Uitlander population has been considered as ultimately marginal. Notably, the Uitlanders feature prominently in the assessment of imperial expansion proposed by John Darwin in his 1997 article 'Imperialism and the Victorians'. The critical factor in determining the expansion of formal imperial control, Darwin argues, was the ability of imperial bridgeheads to develop at the periphery and the metropole. In the South African context, this meant that the British willingness for intervention sprung as much from a desire to reinforce the position of the existing imperial bridgehead groups, such as the Uitlanders, as it did from wider strategic and commercial concerns.<sup>12</sup> The Uitlanders in this sense took on a greater significance in bringing about the events of the war, not so much for their own actions but because they came to represent, in the view of the imperial authorities, a group upon whose position Britain's wider imperial position came to depend. Indeed, this can be broadly seen as being in line with Iain Smith's analysis of the build-up to the war: the imperial focus on the Uitlander question owed less to a genuine desire to alleviate Uitlander complaints, but instead reflected the issues' status as representing the wider struggle for British authority in the region, as well as a means to an end through which concerns over the challenge posed by the SAR could be addressed.<sup>13</sup> Uitlander concerns thus became critically linked to the wider need to reinforce the British position in South Africa.

In considering the rhetorical responses of Liberal speakers to the events of 1899, the perceptions of Kruger's government as a threat to British authority, the strategic-economic repercussions of the Rand's development, and the need to defend or be seen to defend the Uitlanders matter less as potential factors in bringing about the war, but instead take on a greater significance in terms of what they reveal about perceptions of why the crisis was emerging. As will be explored in the debates on British paramountcy and the militaristic misgovernment of the SAR, the crisis in South Africa was continually framed by Liberal speakers as one relating to questions of maintaining British power in the

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<sup>11</sup> Marais, *Fall of Kruger's Republic*, pp.323-25.

<sup>12</sup> John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *English Historical Review* 112:447 (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *The Origins of the South African War*, pp.417-23.

region, including by Liberal opponents of the conflict who pointed to the harm that would be inflicted upon Britain's existing position in South Africa by a resort to war. Likewise, debates over the extent to which the Uitlander question necessitated British intervention and risked destabilising not just the Transvaal but the balance of power in South Africa as a whole formed a core component of how the politics of the South African question were framed. In proceeding to examine Liberal rhetoric on the Transvaal Crisis, it is important therefore to take into consideration the ways in which contemporary political actors understood and portrayed the nature of the confrontation between Britain and the SAR, not only with a view to the parallels that might be drawn between such arguments and historical explanations for the war's outbreak, but critically also for what such arguments implicitly reveal about the wider assumptions of imperial politics which the events of the Transvaal Crisis brought to the fore.

### **The Transvaal Crisis and the Liberal Split**

In addition to the wider forces at work in bringing about tensions in South Africa, Liberal responses to the Transvaal crisis were also fundamentally shaped by the growing factional splits within Liberal politics in Britain, divisions which the crisis of 1899 both exacerbated and brought clearly into public view. Yet while the events of 1899 were undoubtedly crucial in bringing about the open three-way split within the Liberal Party which lasted through to the infamous 'war to the knife and fork' of 1901, the nuanced nature of the divisions within the party must be taken into account in seeking to understand the nature of the party's rhetorical response to the developing crisis. This section thus briefly surveys the literature on the party's divisions over the outbreak of the war, with a view to illuminating the wider context in which often competing understandings of British imperial politics were articulated by Liberal speakers from opposing wings of the party. Although divisions within the leadership of the Liberal Party, most notably the breach between Lord Rosebery and Sir William Harcourt, had been a standing feature of Liberal parliamentary politics for some time, the resignation of Harcourt from the leadership in 1898 in response to Rosebery's intervention over the Fashoda Crisis brought the extent of Liberal disarray to the very forefront of public attention. Critically, Harcourt's resignation along with John Morley's concurrent withdrawal from the Liberal front bench was framed in part as a campaign against the influence of jingoism and imperialism on Liberal

politics, setting the stage for imperial questions to form the most visible fault lines within the party under the leadership of Harcourt's successor, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman.

Ultimately, when the spark came in the form of the Transvaal Crisis, the party split three ways, an anti-war block led by Morley and Harcourt countered by the Roseberyite Liberal Imperialist group, with an uneasy centre position occupied by Campbell-Bannerman, a division most clearly illustrated by the divisions within the Liberal contingent of the House of Commons in the emergency session following the outbreak of war. However, while the idea of a straight split over imperialism into neat categories makes for useful shorthand in terms of understanding Liberal disunity, the nature of the Liberal divisions should not go unquestioned. For one thing, in an echo of the debates over the wider influence of imperialism on fin-de-siècle British politics, historians have disagreed as to extent to which the split really concerned questions of Empire, as opposed to wider complaints about the style of post-Gladstonian Liberal politics: George Bernstein for example has characterised the divisions as fundamentally a process brought about by the need to reconcile the principles of liberalism and imperialism, whereas by contrast Ian Packer stresses that the split owed more to debates about the expected behaviour of a democratic opposition in wartime in relation to the national interest.<sup>14</sup>

The question is further complicated by the focus of historical interest on the factional battles over the Liberal leadership, particularly in relation to the Roseberyite challenges to Campbell-Bannerman in the aftermath of the 'methods of barbarism' controversy and in the form of the Chesterfield platform, as well as on the performance of the various Liberal groupings in the general election of 1900. While such a focus is not without its uses for the purposes of this thesis, and indeed is discussed in more depth in the next chapter, it is nonetheless important not to risk reading the battle lines of these subsequent struggles backwards into the divisions of 1899. This section thus briefly surveys the nature of the Liberal divisions over the Transvaal Crisis, and suggests a need to avoid taking the factional splits within the party at face value.

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<sup>14</sup> George L. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal politics in Edwardian England* (Boston, MA: 1986), p.167; Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905-15* (Basingstoke: 2006), pp.2-4.

Although the Liberal pro-Boers have sometimes been characterised as an explicitly anti-imperialist movement, John Auld suggesting that the movement represented ‘the tempering strain of faith in self-government and humanitarian concern [...] which enabled the British eventually to renounce the imperial enterprise’, there is a need for caution in equating the anti-war agitations of 1899 with a wider reaction against Empire.<sup>15</sup> Indeed as the evidence explored in this chapter reflects, many of the anti-war arguments advanced by Liberal opponents of the war were explicitly presented as necessary for the defence of Empire. Furthermore, as Bernard Porter notes, the label ‘pro-Boer’ in itself was assigned to anti-war speakers by their political opponents, rather than a self-adopted mantle advanced by a homogeneous group: with very few exceptions within the party, the majority of pro-Boer Liberals certainly wanted to see a British victory in South Africa, and were keen to express their disapproval of the governance of the SAR.<sup>16</sup> The situation is also complicated by the leadership given to the anti-war movement by Morley and Harcourt during at the time of Transvaal Crisis. Having been in private agreement with Harcourt for some time that the government’s South African policy would have to be firmly opposed, Morley dramatically challenged the government in a major speech to his constituents on 5 September 1899, giving national prominence to a cause which had largely beforehand attracted only modest attention through the activities of Radical groups such as the Liberal Forwards.<sup>17</sup> The Liberal anti-war campaign thus had less in common with the Radical reaction to the events of the Jameson Raid than might be assumed, although Morley in particular shared platforms alongside some of the more established pro-Boer speakers. The Liberal anti-war movement in 1899 should therefore not be seen as simply part of a wider anti-imperial tradition within the party, but also in many respects a specific product of the Transvaal Crisis.

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<sup>15</sup> John W. Auld, ‘The Liberal Pro-Boers’, *Journal of British Studies* 14:2 (1975), 98

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Porter, ‘The Pro-Boers in Britain’ in Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Harlow: 1980), pp.240-41.

<sup>17</sup> Morley however spoke out himself only after Harcourt made clear his reluctance to lead the charge on the issue. John Morley to Sir William Harcourt, letter dated 1 Sep. 1899, Bodleian Library: Oxford, Harcourt Papers, MS Harcourt dep.33 ff.1-2.

In opposition to the pro-Boers stood the Liberal Imperialists, supporters of Rosebery among whose numbers included H.H. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and R.B. Haldane. As with the Liberal pro-Boers, the extent to which the Liberal Imperialist revolt against Campbell-Bannerman's leadership of the party was driven by imperial questions has been the subject of some debate. In his seminal work on the movement, H.C.G. Matthew characterised the Liberal Imperialists as primarily a reaction against the direction of the Liberal Party after Gladstone, in terms of both the 'sectional' causes it championed and its political style which increasingly marginalised the scope of movement for traditional party elites. Imperialism, under this thesis, was seized upon as a convenient basis upon which to oppose the Radical elements of the party, with the Transvaal Crisis a prominent opportunity in which an alternative patriotic and 'national' appeal could be advanced.<sup>18</sup> Bernard Semmel by contrast has identified imperialism as the key cause of the Roseberyites' breach with their colleagues, although the Liberal Imperialists were also eager to distance their own brand of imperial politics from that of the government's, even while granting unconditional support to Unionist policy in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> Along similar lines, Andrew Thompson has identified strong links between the imperial language of the Fabians and the Liberal Imperialist movement, representing a key if ultimately unsuccessful effort to contest the Unionists' dominance of the language of imperialism.<sup>20</sup> If the question as to whether imperial questions formed the heart of the movement's ideology is up for debate, there is nonetheless wide recognition that imperial concerns at least served as the premise for the open breach, with the prospect of war in South Africa a key test for the Liberal Party's capacity to act in the imperial interest.

However, what is striking about the Liberal Imperialist reaction to the events of the Transvaal Crisis is the patchiness of the response: as Matthew notes, a belief in the patriotic need to refrain from criticising the government's conduct of the negotiations ensured that Liberal Imperialist speakers generally said little of

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<sup>18</sup> H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian elite* (Oxford: 1973) pp.171-78.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914* (London, 1960) p.62.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew S. Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914', *Journal of British Studies* 36:2 (1997), 155-61

substance on the question until the actual outbreak of war, at which point they embarked on a swift rhetorical campaign aimed at capturing Liberal opinion in the country by seeking to isolate the party's 'little Englanders'.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the later struggles between Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal Imperialist reaction to the outbreak of war should as such be seen as more concerned with changing the attitude and perception of Liberals in respect to the South African question.

In considering the pro-Boer and Liberal Imperialist positions on the eve of the South African War, it is worth reflecting on why the events of the Transvaal Crisis served as an opportunity for both factions to engage in a struggle over the direction of the Liberal Party. The responses of both groups, while naturally concerned with the genuine dilemmas posed by the South African question, nonetheless were also undoubtedly conducted with a view to the wider balance of power within the Liberal Party. For the Liberal Imperialists, the crisis not only represented a moment of national urgency which might conceivably have seen Rosebery answer a popular summons out of retirement, but also served as a favourable basis on which the final breach with the more radical elements of the party might be undertaken. This situation did not constitute a concerted effort to split the party, but nonetheless necessitated that the Imperialist position not be overridden by the Little Englanders.<sup>22</sup> In turn, the Liberal pro-Boers saw the 'patriotic silence' of the Liberal Imperialists as a worrying impediment to the party being used as an effective vehicle for opposing the march to war.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, these calculations also took place in a context in which Campbell-Bannerman was for much of the time absent from the scene: although the Liberal leader led the party's response to the early stages of the crisis, when Parliament rose in the summer of 1899 he left the country for Marienbad, only returning to London at the beginning of October.<sup>24</sup> Campbell-Bannerman's

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*, pp.39-44.

<sup>22</sup> Leo McKinstry, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (London: 2005), pp.417-18.

<sup>23</sup> Morley expresses this concern to Harcourt in a series of letters in early October 1899, stressing in particular his alarm that Campbell-Bannerman's Maidstone speech appeared to endorse the principle of the position. See John Morley to Sir William Harcourt, letters dated 2 Oct. and 9 Oct. 1899, Bodleian Library: Oxford, Harcourt Papers, MS Harcourt dep.33 ff.47-50, 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> John Wilson, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London: 1973), pp.310-11.

absence caused considerable anxiety to Liberals from across the party: Asquith emphasised that joint action within the party would be impossible until the Liberal leader returned, while Morley complained to Herbert Gladstone that Harcourt and himself had been left 'like sheep without a shepherd'.<sup>25</sup> In such circumstances, it is therefore unsurprising that the responses of Liberal politicians to the crisis should also have taken on further significance as attempts to be seen as representing the true voice of the Liberal Party as a whole.

The divisions within the Liberal Party over the events of 1899 were not a simple split over events in South Africa, but related more fundamentally both to the internal factional struggle over the direction of Liberal politics in Britain and to wider questions about the role of imperial appeals within British politics. However, the division of the party into these groupings was not in any sense strictly defined, even at a parliamentary level. As will be explored in this chapter, there were significant variations in the arguments adopted by both Liberal supporters and opponents of the war, as well as important common rhetorical tropes that were similarly shared by both Liberal Imperialists and the Liberal pro-Boers. Considering the pro-Boer and Liberal Imperialist labels as broadly opposing positions on a continuous spectrum of Liberal responses to the crisis, rather than as separate factions operating within a narrowly defined scope for political action, is instead a more useful approach. Indeed, the existence of a continuous broad spectrum of Liberal responses to the conflict ensured that the South African question could serve as a proxy for the wider divisions between British Liberal politics in this period, as all sides sought to present themselves as speaking on behalf of majorities within Liberal opinion. In exploring the differing Liberal rhetorical responses to the events of the Transvaal Crisis therefore, this chapter proceeds by seeking not simply to compare the language deployed by the different factions within the party, but also to uncover the wider assumptions of imperial politics which shaped the nature of the divisions which were ultimately brought about by the outbreak of the war.

Finally, in considering the responses of Liberal speakers to the outbreak of the South African War we must also take into account their immediate audiences.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; John Morley to Sir William Harcourt, letters dated 24 Sep. 1899, Bodleian Library: Oxford, Harcourt Papers, MS Harcourt dep.33 ff.36-38.

Liberal speakers did not have the luxury of striking out different claims to represent the Liberal position on the crisis and advancing different understandings of imperialism in the abstract, but instead had to shape their interventions to the circumstances in which they were speaking. Most obviously, for the Liberal pro-Boers this could necessitate actively combatting a hostile audience, as was the case for Morley in his speech at Manchester. Beyond such immediate pressures however, considerations such as whether an audience was comprised of Liberal supporters or was notionally cross-party, or whether the speech was given at a meeting held for the purpose of discussing the crisis or had been scheduled for some other occasion, certainly would have shaped the form of argument and focus adopted. In comparing and contrasting the rhetoric of Liberals on the Transvaal Crisis, as this chapter now proceeds to do, we must also keep in mind the practical circumstances that framed Liberal speeches as well as the language deployed.

### **Imperialism, Liberal Politics and the Crisis**

The bulk of Liberal responses to the events of 1899 tended to focus on the specifics of the Transvaal Crisis, rather than more abstract questions about the nature of imperialism or the Empire at large. In particular, the focus tended to be over issues such as the nature of the Empire in South Africa, its specific capacity for expansion or its vulnerability to threat, and the contrast in values between the situation in South Africa then existing and the likely future for South Africa whether under British or Boer rule. Nonetheless, the crisis did serve as an opportunity for Liberal speakers to directly outline a wider vision of imperial politics. While such explicit addresses on the wider nature of the Empire were relatively rare, this section briefly examines three such approaches which did indeed adopt this wider viewpoint, looking alternately at the visions of Empire and imperialism contained within the rhetoric of Campbell-Bannerman, Rosebery and Grey. In doing so, this chapter not only explores the nature of the wider imperial outlooks advanced by the three speakers, but also considers how each reflected the complex role played by ideas of imperialism in the political environment of fin-de-siècle Britain, and the rhetorical pressures placed upon each speaker in engaging with the language of imperialism.

In his responses to the crisis, Campbell-Bannerman characterised imperialism as a somewhat suspect doctrine that Liberals would do well to avoid, reflecting

Gladstone's pejorative use of the term in the Midlothian campaign.<sup>26</sup> Speaking at the City Liberal Club on 30 June, Campbell-Bannerman made use of the Transvaal crisis to explicitly reject the idea that he was an 'imperialist', or that his policy was one of 'imperialism'. Commenting that certain Liberal politicians has recently engaged in 'an amiable by-play about the meaning of the word imperialism', in reference to the open divisions over imperialism that had erupted over Harcourt's resignation the previous year, the Liberal leader stated that,

I declare I dislike the word Imperialism, and I dislike it for this plain reason, that, define it as you may, it covers, according to the man who utters it, either the plainest duty or the wildest folly.<sup>27</sup>

The 'plainest duty' which Campbell-Bannerman identified was that embodied in the view taken of Empire by the 'sensible men' who held 'that we ought quietly to meet the responsibilities which we have undertaken' and 'when necessity arises to accept the smaller responsibilities to which our greater responsibilities have an acquired faculty of giving birth.'<sup>28</sup> Significantly, this definition of imperialism as one framed in relation to the obligation and ability for British action would prove a key foundation for the Liberal leader's understanding of British paramountcy in South Africa. As an approach to Empire, it was also an essentially conservative and reactive one in which inherited existing obligations were maintained while new responsibilities were to be taken on only if the situation developed to the point in which such involvement was necessary.

By contrast, the 'wildest folly' strain of imperialism that Campbell-Bannerman identified was a far more active approach to Empire. Returning to his 'sensible men', Campbell-Bannerman argued that they were uninterested in 'new enterprises, which are for the most part visionary enterprises, distant in time as well as in space, and which, although they may bring down some empty glory

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<sup>26</sup> On Gladstone's use of imperialism see: Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (London: 1964), ch.6; P.J. Durrans, 'A Two-Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10:3 (1982).

<sup>27</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech of 30 Jun. 1899, City Liberal Club, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 1 Jul. 1899.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

for the time, yet are not demanded by any immediate necessity'.<sup>29</sup> The imperial policy Campbell-Bannerman advocated was thus one of scepticism at the idea of imperial expansion and development. In particular, it was one of disapproval of any attempt to deliberately expand or reshape the Empire by Imperial statesmen. Campbell-Bannerman thus carefully positioned himself so that he was neither 'imperialist', in the sense that he did not wish to pursue a grand vision of Empire, nor 'anti-imperialist', in the sense that he did not consider Britain's empire to be beneficial or have wider responsibilities. In this fashion, the Liberal leader can be seen as operating in the rhetorical climate identified by Richard Koebner and Helmut Schmidt, in which positive and pejorative understandings of imperialism existed in tension with each other within the same rhetorical space.<sup>30</sup> Erring on the side of caution, Campbell-Bannerman therefore presented both attitudes as running counter to his own ideals of Empire. Although this may seem somewhat paradoxical, given the seemingly antithetical nature of these definitions of imperialism and anti-imperialism, there was nonetheless something of a basis for contrast against both. Campbell-Bannerman stressed in his rhetoric that the Empire was extant, inherently determined by past and continuing responsibilities, some of which inevitably resulted in the further expansion of Empire. What the Liberal leader seems to have opposed, then, is what might be termed any artificial change to the Empire, whether that be a refutation and dismissal of existing obligations or whether that be a grand scheme for expanding or recasting the Empire.

In stark contrast to Campbell-Bannerman, Rosebery willingly embraced the imperialist label in his response to the crisis. In a major speech at a notionally non-party function in Bath several weeks after the outbreak of war, Rosebery declared to his audience his belief that 'the party of Liberal Imperialism is destined to control the destinies of this country.'<sup>31</sup> Rosebery's choice of language here is significant given the general instability of the party system in this point. The divisions within the Liberal Party, the precedent of 1886 and Rosebery's estrangement from many of his former colleagues combined to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See in particular the discussions on 'true' and 'false' imperialism in Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, pp.153-56.

<sup>31</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech of 27 Oct. 1899, Bath, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899.

ensure that Rosebery was spoken of as someone who might return to office at the head of a new ministry in a reconstructed national politics.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, Rosebery himself appears to have envisaged any return to power as one that would be in answer to the call of the nation and 'untrammelled by the despised party system'.<sup>33</sup> The call for a party of liberal imperialism thus not only represented a pitch for Rosebery's programme, but also contained within it the implicit suggestion of political realignment. In this sense, Rosebery's speech possibly had a wider audience than might be anticipated for an explicitly Liberal appeal, although the very limited nature of the steps Rosebery took in pursuit of this goal suggests against weighting this aspect of its appeal too greatly.

Characteristically, Rosebery provided little detail as to what this Liberal Imperialism actually represented, and indeed failed to even clarify whether it was a movement that had any great relation to imperial affairs at all. Nonetheless, Rosebery's expression of affinity with Pitt the Elder as 'the first Liberal Imperialist' represented a stark focus on the Empire as the core component of his Liberal Imperialist doctrine. Pitt's administration, he argued, had added 'the largest share to that Empire which we are mainly entrusted with the duty of maintaining'.<sup>34</sup> Rosebery's first Liberal Imperialist then was one who had actively expanded and reshaped the Empire, suggesting that in outlook his Liberal Imperialism was one in which the Empire was developed through the actions of Imperial statesmen, rather than the passive, organic maintenance of the status quo espoused by Campbell-Bannerman. In the same speech however, Rosebery also challenged this expansionist vision of Britain's imperial destiny. Expressing bewilderment at the ill-feeling of the other powers towards Britain, Rosebery argued that Britain was the only empire in the world which 'should only be too glad at this moment to strike a bargain with the rest of the world that every frontier in the world should remain as it is at present'.<sup>35</sup> The vision of Empire expressed by Rosebery in this sense was therefore one more in accord with that advocated by Campbell-Bannerman: an Empire to be

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<sup>32</sup> Winston Churchill was one such figure attracted to this idea, particularly following the advent of the tariff reform campaign. See Richard Toye, *Lloyd George & Churchill: Rivals for Greatness* (London: 2008), pp.29-30.

<sup>33</sup> Leo McKinstry, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (London: 2005), p.417.

<sup>34</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

maintained and conserved rather than to be deliberately expanded. At its heart therefore, the politics of Empire espoused by Rosebery might therefore be said to have rested upon a willingness for Britain to actively intervene in order to maintain the Empire's world position: a rhetoric of maintenance, but one far more forcible than that advocated by the Liberal mainstream.

Rosebery was far from the only Liberal Imperialist to use the Transvaal Crisis as a means of discussing Empire more generally. Grey also used the conflict as a means of addressing the wider nature of the Empire. A key supporter of Rosebery, Grey gave a speech at Glasgow on 25 October in support of the former's candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University, taking the opportunity to also make known his views on the war. Notably, he prefaced his discussion of events in the Transvaal with a section declaring that the British Empire 'was not only the greatest empire the world had ever seen – it was the only Liberal empire which the world had ever known'.<sup>36</sup> In this manner, Grey was in accord with Rosebery's rhetoric on British exceptionalism. However, Grey's vision of Empire differed from both Rosebery's and Campbell-Bannerman's. Specifically, it was one framed not in terms of the Empire's place in the world and its maintenance against external threats, as was the case with both Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman, but with its internal structure and governance. Liberalism, according to Grey, was premised above all things upon a 'fairness of mind', both in domestic and imperial matters, and it was because of such fairness of mind that Grey was able to declare that

The great pride of our Empire was that though we had our race living in many lands, separated by great distances, and living all under the same imperial supremacy, yet wherever our race ruled there was a free democratic Government and not a centralised Government, and our pride was that the Empire was held together, not by conquest, not by force, but by the bond of affection between free communities.<sup>37</sup>

Grey's rhetoric is striking not just because of the conceptualisation of centralised government as antithetical to democracy and the notion of an Empire bound by sentimental ties, a recurring theme in rhetoric emphasising the self-governing nature of the settler empire, but critically also because Grey

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<sup>36</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech of 25 Oct. 1899, Glasgow, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Oct, 1899.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

sought to present such ideas as representing an exceptionally British and indeed an explicitly Liberal approach to imperial rule.

Ultimately, the extensive discussion of the wider characteristics of British imperialism and the Empire at large represented only a small element of the Liberal Party's rhetoric on the Transvaal Crisis. The speeches examined in this section additionally also represent the views of those who are elite figures prominent within the party at this point. There is no reason to assume that the conceptualisations of Empire advanced by the party's leaders did not find reflection at the backbench and grassroots level. The Sheffield Liberal Arthur Markham, for example, adopted similar language to Grey in a public meeting on the outbreak of the war, stressing that the Empire was exceptional because unlike past Empires, it was founded 'on the principles of freedom, justice and equality.'<sup>38</sup> However, it is possible that opinion and language within the wider party was more reflective of the more critical ideas of Empire advanced by liberal and progressive thinkers in the country at large.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, the approaches examined in this section are highly revealing in terms of demonstrating the varying methods by which Liberals sought to outline and justify their approaches to imperial questions in a period in which Unionist speakers were taking full advantage of their dominance of the language of imperialism, while older pejorative conceptualisations of imperialism also retained considerable weight with Liberal audiences. For Campbell-Bannerman, the solution was to seek to position himself outside of the framework which emphasised a struggle between imperialism and anti-imperialism, instead espousing a defensive and responsible approach to the maintenance of the Empire. Rosebery and Grey, by contrast, challenged both the anti-imperial elements within British Liberal politics and the Unionists' control over the language of imperialism by stressing the inherently Liberal nature of the Empire, deploying an exceptionalism narrative designed to counter the negative associations of imperialism as an alien doctrine to British rule. Furthermore, many of the same underlying tropes were also to be found in Liberal

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<sup>38</sup> Arthur Markham, speech of 14 Oct. 1899, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 16 Oct. 1899.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the wider intellectual reaction against Empire in this period, see for example Mira Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late Victorian Britain* (London: 2011).

conceptualisations of the nature of Imperial rule specifically in South Africa. Indeed, the visions of Empire put forward by Campbell-Bannerman and Rosebery, and even the more inward-facing vision of Grey are best seen not so much as the isolated ideals of individual Liberal figures, but instead the most immediately visible elements of the much broader set of assumptions about the ideals of imperial rule which lay at the heart of the Liberal response to the Transvaal Crisis. This chapter now proceeds to further explore some of these underlying ideals by examining Liberal rhetoric on the nature of British imperial authority in South Africa.

### **Suzerainty, Paramountcy and the Limits of Empire**

Although the key elements of the Transvaal Crisis initially related to how the grievances of the Uitlanders might be redressed, by the autumn of 1899 both the dispute with the SAR and the political debate in Britain had crystallised around questions over the scale and nature of the British right of intervention in the republic's affairs. Pointing to the terminology used in the Pretoria Convention of 1881 Chamberlain insisted that Britain retained a formal suzerainty over the Transvaal. While the term was absent from the subsequent London Convention of 1884, Chamberlain argued that the continued existence of restrictions on the republic's sovereignty, such as the ban on negotiating treaties with foreign powers, demonstrated that the SAR remained effectively subject to imperial authority, and thereby had to submit to imperial intervention in its internal affairs. Yet beyond the technical idea of a formal suzerainty, the Imperial government's right of intervention was also declared to be founded on the more fundamental idea of British paramountcy or supremacy over South Africa, an authority granted by the Empire's status as the predominant power in the region. Debate over the nature of this paramountcy and the potential consequences of the crisis for its retention constituted a key aspect of Liberal debates over the rapidly developing crisis. Critically, such debates were not limited to the narrow question of whether or not British intervention and conflict could be justified, but fundamentally related to the nature and limits of British imperial authority in South Africa, drawing upon many of the same notions of imperial responsibility, ties of affection and the need to defend the existing position of the Empire as examined above.

Campbell-Bannerman's public position on Britain's role in South Africa and the question of its relationship to the two Republics was a complex one. Like the pro-Boers, Campbell-Bannerman came out strongly against the idea that Britain exercised a formal suzerainty over the South African Republic. Speaking at Maidstone, the Liberal Leader asserted that with regards to the idea that Britain had a legal right to a degree of intervention in the internal affairs of the Transvaal stemming from the Pretoria Convention, 'this claim has been exploded once and for all by Sir William Harcourt and Sir Edward Clarke'.<sup>40</sup> In doing so, Campbell-Bannerman apparently ranged himself alongside pro-Boer opinion even on the eve of war. However, in referencing the position of Clarke, the Conservative MP and former Solicitor-General, as well as the position of Harcourt, Campbell-Bannerman may have been trying to avoid full association with radical pro-Boerism. Indeed, in positioning his response in this manner, Campbell-Bannerman was likely seeking to exploit the genuine cross-party currents running against Chamberlain's policy prior to the outbreak of the war. Although minor in comparison with the Liberal split, a number of Unionist parliamentarians also adopted a strongly anti-war position during the crisis of 1899, strengthening the force of Campbell-Bannerman's criticisms of the government.

Nonetheless, in contrast to Harcourt's more explicitly pro-Boer position Campbell-Bannerman made clear that his rejection of suzerainty did not constitute a rejection of a general British authority over the Transvaal, or indeed South Africa at large. Speaking at Maidstone, the Liberal leader expressed his concern that many of his fellow countrymen had committed

the error of confounding the technical word suzerainty, which is valueless, with a great fact, which is cardinal and essential, of the supremacy, the predominance, the preponderance, the

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<sup>40</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech of 6 Oct. 1899, Maidstone Corn Exchange, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 7 Oct. 1899. Harcourt and Clarke had in separate interventions the previous month both explicitly rejected the idea of British suzerainty: see Sir William Harcourt, speech of 20 Sep. 1899, New Tredegar, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899; Sir Edward Clarke, speech of 28 Sep. 1899, Plymouth, reported in *The Times*, 29 Sep. 1899.

paramountcy, choose which name you like, of the British power in South Africa.<sup>41</sup>

In complete contrast to suzerainty, British paramountcy in South Africa was thus, for Campbell-Bannerman, both extant and desirable. This was in essence a distinction without any real difference, made for opportunistic reasons: by defining suzerainty narrowly the Leader of the Opposition was able to in effect attack the government's handling of the crisis while at the same time allowing for a right of intervention, meeting to a degree both of the conflicting requirements expected of his position. Notwithstanding the immediate political advantages of such a position however, within the specific context of the Transvaal crisis a distinction between suzerainty and paramountcy could have specific implications: the suzerainty question was closely associated with the Pretoria and London Conventions, whereas ideas of paramountcy and supremacy were not. Indeed, the assignation of a circumstance-specific notion of suzerainty during the crisis was widespread enough for *The Times* to criticise Campbell-Bannerman on the grounds that he was stating what the British people already knew to be the case.<sup>42</sup> Yet by drawing a distinction between the two, Campbell-Bannerman was able to shift the focus of his rhetoric away from the technical specifics of treaty interpretation, and to discuss the nature of British Imperial power far more broadly.

Campbell-Bannerman presented paramountcy as giving Britain both the right and the obligation to intervene throughout the entirety of South Africa. At Ilford on 17 June, the Liberal leader asserted that the inherent danger present within the continuing Uitlander dispute 'not only justifies us, but compels us' to bring about a resolution to the issue.<sup>43</sup> In his speech at the City Liberal Club, Campbell-Bannerman described the Transvaal situation as 'only one of the incidents we must expect to arise from our world position – a position which imposes on us obligations and raises problems we are bound to deal with'.<sup>44</sup> At Maidstone, he made this point more explicitly, arguing that if Britain was to claim the right to redress the Uitlander grievances,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>43</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech of 17 Jun. 1899, Ilford, reported in *Daily News*, 19 Jun. 1899.

<sup>44</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 Jul. 1899.

we do so not the least in virtue of this so-called suzerainty, but on the grounds of international obligations and with the additional authority which is given to us by the fact that we act in the interests of the whole South African communities at large for whose wellbeing we are in the main responsible, and to whom the prolongation of the present evil relations between the Government of the Transvaal and those of the Outlanders must be a constant source of disturbance and danger.<sup>45</sup>

Britain, the implication was, had a responsibility for the wellbeing of the inhabitants of all South Africa and, necessarily following from this obligation, a responsibility for the maintenance of order in this region. Such obligations might further involve a specific obligation to British citizens across the world or indeed to world order more generally, although such notions were not central to Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric. The outlook of Empire that emerged then was one in which British power and British obligations were not solely internal to the formal Empire, but instead spread beyond its technical borders.

Indeed, in a telling comment during his speech on the loyal address, Campbell-Bannerman remarked that, in having asserted British responsibility for the region, 'I do not stand upon any technical ground whatsoever; our natural position in South Africa makes us principally responsible for this quiet and contentment, and places upon us the duty of seeing that any impediment is removed.'<sup>46</sup> This rejection of not just a singular technical, or legalistic, interpretation of the situation but of the very idea that the right course of British action in South Africa could be determined on technical grounds was key to Campbell-Bannerman's framing of Britain's imperial position in the region. For the Liberal leader, it would seem, the responsibilities of the Empire did not end at its borders, but rather extended into all areas where the British position could be utilised for the common good. Given the emphasis often placed upon constitutionalism and the rule of law as a means of ensuring good governance in Liberal thinking on the Empire, an emphasis indeed very much present in Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric throughout the period of the crisis and the war, this apparent substitution of a legalistic basis for intervention with a moral basis is somewhat striking. However, as the work of Jonathon Parry has demonstrated, mid-century British Liberalism paired a stress on English

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<sup>45</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>46</sup> HC Deb., 17 Oct. 1899, fourth series, Vol.77, c.73.

constitutionalism with an ethical emphasis, enabling and indeed necessitating interventionism in pursuit of a moral good such a liberty, and to a degree Campbell-Bannerman's understanding of paramountcy follows such a pattern.<sup>47</sup>

For the Liberal Imperialists, the question was one of defending British paramountcy rather than defining it. Rosebery warned his audience at Bath that the aggression of the Transvaal government risked bringing about a situation in which the British were 'to become a subject nation in our turn in South Africa', presenting paramountcy and subservient status in oppositional terms, with no in-between status for British power.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Grey warned his audience at Glasgow that 'the Boers have been taking advantage of every opportunity to build up their position, build up their strength, not only with the object of maintaining their independence, but also with the object of undermining our authority in South Africa.'<sup>49</sup> Again, the focus was not so much on elucidating the nature of this authority, but instead emphasising an urgent need to defend the status of the Empire in the region. Additionally, while Rosebery and Grey were supportive of the Salisbury government's handling of the crisis, neither made mention of the suzerainty argument. This may simply have been because the course of events had moved on to the degree that it was no longer considered relevant, but nonetheless it serves to reinforce the idea of an inherent British authority over South African affairs, rather than a specific right of intervention in the Transvaal.

Certainly, this was the position reflected in Asquith's rhetoric. Speaking at Dundee on the first night of the war, Asquith devoted considerable attention to both the suzerainty question and to British paramountcy. He characterised the Transvaal's objections to British intervention as being premised upon the idea that the Convention of 1884 represented a 'complete and exhaustive embodiment' of the Transvaal's relations with Britain, and that as such British

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathon Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge: 2006), pp.392-94.

<sup>48</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899. Intriguingly, Rosebery's language in this instance bears a close resemblance to the conquest-driven Conservative language of imperialism identified by Jon Wilson in relation to India. See Jon Wilson, 'The Silence of Empire: Imperialism and India' in David Craig and James Thompson (eds), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: 2013), p.225.

<sup>49</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Oct, 1899.

pressure for the Uitlander franchise constituted having 'tampered, without legal or moral title, with their internal autonomy'.<sup>50</sup> Importantly, Asquith conceded that if the Boer interpretation of the situation was correct, 'then no doubt we are out of court', seemingly agreeing that there was nothing in the conventions themselves which allowed for British intervention.<sup>51</sup> On the specific notion of whether the conventions granted Britain suzerainty over the Transvaal, he argued that it was 'a controversy of a scholastic character, for it cannot be too clearly understood that the word suzerainty conveys no definite rights and imposes no definite obligations'.<sup>52</sup> Asquith's rhetoric on the question of suzerainty was this in this respect strikingly similar to that that of his party leader.

Indeed, on the broader point of paramountcy he explicitly backed Campbell-Bannerman's interpretation, declaring to his audience that

we have, as Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman asserted in the clearest terms the other day, the right of intervention in the circumstances that have arisen based, not upon parchment treaties or arrangements, but upon the general principles of international law and equity and upon our special responsibilities as a paramount power which in the last resort has to preserve peace and order throughout South Africa.<sup>53</sup>

Asquith's staunch backing of Campbell-Bannerman's position stands in stark contrast with that of other Liberal Imperialists, Haldane for example on the very same evening overtly endorsing Rosebery's lead on the crisis at a meeting in North Berwick.<sup>54</sup> Yet beyond the factional manoeuvring over the Liberal leadership, what is most significant about Asquith's comments is the degree to which they reinforced this idea of an obligation-driven basis for imperial authority in South Africa, with not just a right but a duty of intervention derived from a British responsibility for the maintenance of order throughout the region.

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<sup>50</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech of 11 Oct. 1899, Dundee, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Richard Haldane, speech of 11 Oct. 1899, North Berwick, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

The pro-Boer approach to these matters was somewhat different from both of the above positions, particularly on the question of a British paramountcy. Superficially, however, there was a great deal of similarity between the rhetoric of the pro-Boers on the specific issue of suzerainty and that of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith. For Harcourt, the claim to suzerainty was 'a pretension wholly unfounded'. Speaking to an audience at New Tredegar, the former Liberal leader argued that the use of the term had led to 'misconception and misunderstanding', as the Transvaal had in effect 'home rule' with Britain merely retaining a veto over the Republic's external relations.<sup>55</sup> Morley similarly criticised the claim to suzerainty. Speaking at Arbroath on 5 September, Morley declared the question of suzerainty to be one of etymology, although he warned that this made the word no less dangerous as 'most of the bloodiest and most obstinate struggles in the history of mankind have been struggles about words'.<sup>56</sup> Further still, the word suzerainty had he claimed 'a flavour of sovereignty in it', making it still less desirable a descriptor as 'from a lawyer's point of view the citizens of the South African Republic are not Queen's subjects'.<sup>57</sup> On the question of suzerainty then, there was at least something of a collective Liberal opposition to the use of the issue to justify intervention within the Transvaal.

However, on the question of British paramountcy in South Africa, the Liberal Party's statesmen were fiercely divided: while Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith limited their criticisms to suzerainty, as a particular form of British authority over the Transvaal, the pro-Boers attacked the notion of British authority over the Transvaal in general. British supremacy and paramountcy, Morley informed his audience at Arbroath, 'is derived from the facts of the case, from the enormous wealth, from the ideas and institutions which great Britain carries with her'. Crucially however, Morley argued that this position did not grant Britain the right to dictate to the Transvaal, and indeed that on the question of the SAR's internal affairs Britain's 'only claim is the right of friendly

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<sup>55</sup> Sir William Harcourt, letter dated 2. Oct. 1899, published in *The Times* 4 Oct. 1899; *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

<sup>56</sup> John Morley, speech of 5 Sep. 1899, Arbroath, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

counsel in the state of South Africa'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, at New Tredegar Harcourt argued that 'of course we are supreme in South Africa [...] we have the command of force', but with the caveat that 'it is not what we can do, but what it is right we should do, and what we ought to do. That is the only supremacy which I claim for the English nation'.<sup>59</sup> For the pro-Boers then, British supremacy meant an existing advantage in the region, but not one that granted Britain any overarching governance of the region, or rights of intervention in the affairs of the two republics.

Indeed, in the run up to the conflict pro-Boers sought to ridicule these claims of any general rights of intervention by hypothetically applying them to the Orange Free State. The position of the OFS had proved a tricky one for the Unionist Press to square with the government's claims of a British supremacy in South Africa, *The Times* for example insisting that 'the English people do not and cannot acknowledge' any sovereign international state in South Africa apart from the British Empire, 'with the single exception of the Orange Free State'.<sup>60</sup> Sharing a peace platform with Morley at Manchester on 15 September, the renegade Liberal Unionist MP Leonard Courtney expressed his astonishment at 'the argument that we must in the interests of Empire insist upon the supremacy of Great Britain throughout South Africa, except the Orange Free State. Why that exception if supremacy was so urgently wanted elsewhere?'<sup>61</sup> This line of attack was likewise adopted by Harcourt in his New Tredegar speech a few days later: 'is this word "paramountcy"', he asked his audience,

intended to tell the Orange Free State that you intend to interfere with their affairs, too, in all particulars? Is that a wise and statesmanlike thing to flaunt at the moment in the face of the Orange Free State in South Africa?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, 8 Sep. 1899.

<sup>61</sup> Leonard Courtney, speech of 15 Sep. 1899, Manchester, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 16 Sep. 1899. Along with his Liberal Unionist colleague Frederic Mackarness, Courtney played a key role in the formation of the South Africa Conciliation Committee: see Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War* (London: 1972), p.16.

<sup>62</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

By extending the arguments from the specific circumstances of the Transvaal crisis to the wider principle involved, Courtney and Harcourt hoped to demonstrate in their rhetoric that a right to intervention derived from paramountcy was incompatible with a Liberal interpretation of Empire.

Morley adopted a similar tactic, extending the principle of paramountcy to Britain's own imperial possessions: at Arbroath he argued that Britain in fact 'is not paramount in a single one of her self-governing Colonies', as in none of Britain's colonies would British statesmen attempt to dictate internal matters such as the nature of their franchise or legal system. If they did, Morley argued, 'you would have the Empire shattered in a month'.<sup>63</sup> This represented in essence an appeal to the ideal of a self-governing Empire. What is striking about this comparison however is that Morley was essentially deploying the principles of British imperial rule to a state which he insisted lay beyond the lawful reach of imperial authority. This was therefore a rhetoric which attacked interventionist notions of paramountcy for the principal reason that the underlying assumptions behind such a justification for action were not only being misapplied to the Transvaal, but fundamentally represented a departure from established British imperial practice.

The pro-Boer attacks on supremacy and paramountcy were in part a product of necessity. A British right to intervene and a British responsibility to intervene were perceived as being inherently linked; if the Liberal opponents of the conflict were to oppose British intervention, they would also need to address the question of whether Britain had a right to intervene, which meant challenging the notion of paramountcy. Yet they also underlined a more fundamental division over where the limits of empire lay in South Africa. Across the party there was a rejection of Unionist rhetoric on suzerainty, with even Liberal speakers supportive of British intervention declining to frame the question in legalistic or technical terms. Yet whereas the Liberal pro-Boers presented British imperial authority as ending at the borders of its formal empire, the assumptions underlying the rhetoric of both the Liberal Imperialists and Campbell-Bannerman characterised Britain's position of strength as naturally furnishing the Empire with wider rights and responsibilities in the region,

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<sup>63</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

including over the governance of the two Boer republics. However even this division was not as simple as it initially appears, with pro-Boer speakers using the ideals of a decentralised self-governing settler Empire to attack the very notion of paramountcy within the bounds of the formal Empire, let alone outside it. Liberal rhetoric on the claim to paramountcy thus not only served as a basis for expressing the wider ideals of Empire, but also represented the wider need for Liberal speakers to advance understandings of the nature of Britain's existing imperial rule in South Africa and the basis for its continuation.

### **'Perverted patriotism' and Political Temperament**

In framing their responses to the crisis of 1899, Liberal speakers from across the party critiqued not simply the basis by which it was argued Britain had a right to intervene in the SAR, but also more fundamentally the manner in which the most enthusiastic advocates of war in Britain advanced their cause. In a political climate in which Liberal opponents of the war were readily attacked for supporting the Empire's enemies, and in which Rosebery's Liberal Imperialist project was seeking to shake off the sectional legacies of the Gladstonian era by emphasising the idea of the national interest, the language of patriotism became one of the key rhetorical battlefields upon which Liberal speakers defended their positions. Along related lines, the charge that it was a jingo campaign that was pushing Britain toward a war with the SAR proved a steady refrain of the Liberal pro-Boers, although the spirit of jingoism also came in for intense criticism from Liberal supporters of the conflict. Indeed, Liberals actively framed their positions in opposition to the jingo impulses present within the Transvaal debate. To an extent, the debates over patriotism and jingoism reflected the inevitable political dilemmas facing an opposition party at a time of international crisis. Yet these debates also went to the heart of the politics of Empire that characterised Liberal rhetoric on the Transvaal Crisis. As seen in the debates on the Jameson Raid, the ideals of imperial rule invoked by Liberal speakers related not just to how the practices of Empire were done, but how they were seen to be done, the manner with which political actors in Britain addressed imperial affairs forming an important part of this dynamic. The efforts of Liberal speakers to triangulate their own positions between the nebulous concepts of patriotism and jingoism, reinforced with specific attacks on the supposedly excessive emotional political behaviour of their opponents, served

not just an immediate political purpose but also emphasised an idealised form of imperial statesmanship founded upon assumptions about the character of Britain and its Empire.

Liberal appeals to patriotism at the time of the Transvaal Crisis were complicated, as Liberal speakers sought to navigate a rhetorical landscape largely favourable to the party's opponents. As Readman has argued, despite the Unionist dominance of patriotic languages in this period, particularly over the issue of the South African War, Liberal speakers from across the party sought to contest the government's ownership of patriotic appeals, framing their own positions in similar language.<sup>64</sup> However, the success with which the Unionists exploited patriotic appeals also served to disrupt this process, with Liberal appeals to patriotism often sitting uneasily alongside direct attacks on the language of patriotism. For example, at Ilford Campbell-Bannerman mockingly referred to the un-Britishing of the Uitlanders through the grant of Transvaal citizenship as a policy to be carried out in the 'name of British patriotism'.<sup>65</sup> Yet by the time of his Maidstone speech, the Liberal leader found himself defending his relative silence on the Transvaal over the parliamentary recess on the grounds that Liberal speakers had 'been forced, from patriotic motives, to keep silent'. Continuing, he declared that appeal to prevent the outbreak of a war was one 'in which every thoughtful man and every really patriotic man must join'.<sup>66</sup> This change in tone was likely in no small part due to the increased seriousness of the Transvaal Crisis in the beginning of October relative to the summer, but the two very different engagements with the idea of patriotism nonetheless serve to demonstrate the Liberal dilemma in how to respond to the government's appeals.

The uneasy integration of patriotism within wider Liberal anti-war rhetoric in particular can be seen in the contrasting rhetoric of Harcourt and Morley. Speaking at Carnarvon in early October, Morley assured his audience that he repudiated 'entirely the notion of disloyalty or treachery, or want of patriotism, or want of love of my country, or sympathy for those who suffer wrongs in foreign

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Readman, 'The Liberal Party and Patriotism in Early Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 12:3 (2001).

<sup>65</sup> *Daily News*, 19 Jun. 1899.

<sup>66</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 7 Oct. 1899.

lands'.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, in a letter published in *The Times* a few days beforehand, Harcourt derided 'what is called the "patriotic spirit"', which he charged was the 'true spirit of the party who are endeavouring to manoeuvre the country into war'.<sup>68</sup> Again, patriotism was both utilised in pro-Boer Liberal appeals, but also characterised and attacked as essentially synonymous with jingoism.

Both these tactics served a Liberal need to refute the charges of unpatriotic behaviour levied against them, yet both risked reinforcing the political narratives of their opponents. The need to dispel accusations of unpatriotic behaviour while also challenging at the very least the more explicit war party efforts to advance an exclusive claim to patriotism can be seen as lying at the heart of Asquith's use of patriotism in his speech at Newburgh. Responding to the suggestion that it was the 'duty of the patriot' to remain silent during negotiations and afterwards acquiesce in the outcome, Asquith declared that this was 'a perverted patriotism' which he entirely repudiated.<sup>69</sup> Asquith's characterisation of his opponents' arguments as representing a 'perverted patriotism' parallels the distinction between true and false imperialisms deployed by Liberal and Radical political actors in an effort to contest the expansionist, Anglo-centric visions of Empire embodied by the New Imperialism.

Indeed, Asquith's counter-attack against 'perverted patriotism' echoes the Radical attacks on the patriotism of the stock exchange at the time of the Jameson Raid: although couched in different terms and deployed in sharply contrasting contexts, both served the essential purpose of qualifying, and thereby denigrating the patriotism of their political opponents, which in turn served to strengthen the speaker's own claim to represent at the very least a version of imperialism. Yet as much as the crisis of 1899 was to bring into the open the divisions within the Liberal Party, in which ideas of patriotism and representing the national interest were to play no small part, the overall usage of patriotic themes by the Liberal leadership in this period was relatively limited, suggesting an unease with the ideas of patriotism being propagated by Unionist

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<sup>67</sup> John Morley, speech of 6 Oct. 1899, Carnarvon, reported in *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899

<sup>68</sup> *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1899.

<sup>69</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 13 Oct. 1899.

rhetoric, but an unease which nonetheless had not yet fully aligned itself to existing Liberal rhetorical tropes in an effort to advance alternative forms of imperial politics.

If the rhetorical minefield of patriotism posed difficulties for Liberal speakers in articulating their responses to the Transvaal Crisis, Liberal attacks upon jingoism represented a clearer line of approach. In his speech at Manchester, Morley declared that he was not answerable to 'those people who by temperament are inclined to vote for feeding the fire and flame – who are never so happy as when they are in opposition to some other nation'.<sup>70</sup> Morley's association of support for a possible conflict with jingoism led on this occasion to the Liberal *Sheffield Independent* coldly commenting that 'Mr. Morley's rebuke to Jingoism was excellent; but ordinary level-headed Englishmen are not Jingoists'.<sup>71</sup> In this fashion the Liberal pro-Boer attack on jingoism could also serve to call into question the position of Liberal politicians and newspapers which supported the government's stance on South Africa, casting ostensibly more imperial positions as failing to live up to the idealised standards of imperial politics.

Such attacks on jingoism did not necessarily represent a direct attack on the supporters of the government however. Indeed, following on from Morley's speech Courtney sought to characterise Chamberlain's 'penultimatum' of September 1899 as a 'rebuke to the fire-eaters', enabling him to narrow the charge of jingoism to include only those more pro-war than the government.<sup>72</sup> Courtney's position as a Liberal Unionist, for the time being at least, undoubtedly shaped in part his reluctance to publicly accuse Chamberlain of jingoism, although notably Morley also shied away from directly making such a claim of the government, rather than the government's supporters. Indeed, in this sense Morley and Courtney's attacks on jingoism had less to do with casting aspersions on specific political opponents, but rather instead on emphasising jingoism as an immoral and unrespectable form of imperial politics, in contrast to the enlightened approach their own anti-war stance represented.

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<sup>70</sup> John Morley, speech of 15 Sep. 1899, Manchester, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 16 Sep. 1899

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. For details of the despatch, see Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, pp. 368-70.

Critically however, attacks on jingo behaviour were not limited to pro-Boer demonstrations. At Dundee, on the day of the war's outbreak, Asquith launched into a forceful attack on 'the irresponsible fire-eaters, the professional breeders of mischief between nation and nation, the bubblers and the bullies who at times like this always make themselves heard in the back slums of British journalism'.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, a critique of jingoism was to be readily found in the rhetoric of the Liberal leader. By the time of the debate on the loyal address, Campbell-Bannerman had adopted a position of qualified support for the war, even if he reserved judgement on the government's actions in the run up to the conflict. Yet even from the position of begrudging support for the conflict, Campbell-Bannerman nonetheless felt compelled to condemn in his speech the 'the noisiest applauders and acclaimers of the war amongst certain classes of the community'.<sup>74</sup> Like Asquith, the Liberal leader significantly did not elaborate on who actually formed the 'noisiest applauders' of conflict. Indeed, the most noticeable aspect of these attacks on jingoism is their apparent failure, deliberate or otherwise, to specifically identify who the jingoes actually were. Again, this rhetoric suggests that the primary function of such attacks on jingoism was less to do with vilifying the actions of individual political actors, but rather instead to denigrate the practice of jingoistic imperial politics. Indeed, for Liberals who adopted positions to a greater or lesser extent supportive of the conflict, being seen by Liberal audiences to attack jingoism enabled Liberal speakers to convey that they still supported and embodied Liberal ideal of imperial politics in their approaches, as well as forestalling Radical criticism.

While Liberal speakers may have been reluctant to directly accuse their opponents of endorsing jingoism, one group which did regularly come in for intense criticism was that of the newspaper industry. In the run up to the Transvaal Crisis attacks on the 'jingo Press' increasingly became a common feature of Liberal rhetoric on South Africa. Asquith's scathing attack on those who lurked in 'the back slums of British journalism' found itself echoed, albeit in a more moderate tone, by his party leader.<sup>75</sup> Speaking in Parliament in July, Campbell-Bannerman drew a comparison between the 'violence of tone'

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<sup>73</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>74</sup> HC Deb., 17 Oct. 1899, fourth series, Vol.77, c.76.

<sup>75</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

engaged in by the South African Press and the tone adopted by the British Press, referring

not only to the modern sensation journals which live in and by excitement, but to certain old, staid, long established newspapers [interruption] the writers in which would almost induce me to believe that they regard reason and moderation as crime, and that they look upon an appeal to force as something in itself as actually and specifically desirable.<sup>76</sup>

The character of the British Press was likewise attacked by Campbell-Bannerman's predecessor. At Rhymney, Harcourt heavily criticised 'the war Press – I was going to call it the Rhodes Press – in England and at the Cape to aggravate the position of affairs', accusing such newspapers of perverting the facts in order prevent any peaceful settlement of the conflict.<sup>77</sup> Along these lines, the politics of the 1899 crisis echoed Liberal criticisms of the jingoistic response by elements of the Press, as well as the poet laureate, to the events of the Jameson Raid. This language might also be said to reflect Simon Potter's findings on contemporary understandings of the role of newspapers in the new imperialism. Critics of the South African War, Potter argues, condemned the jingo Press not simply for misrepresenting events in order to exacerbate tensions, but actively whipping up the passions of the wider public rather than appealing to reason.<sup>78</sup> This tendency to see the Press as a corrupting force, and indeed the primary means by which jingoes could achieve their goals, explains why anti-war Liberals were keen to pinpoint the jingo Press specifically as a target for censure.

As with the broader charge of jingoism, there was likewise a complaint from those supportive of the conflict at the association of all pro-war Press with the charge of jingoism, not least because as Kenneth O. Morgan notes the overwhelming majority of British newspapers held a pro-war stance.<sup>79</sup> In response to an attack by Morley on the 'jingos of the press', the *Glasgow Herald* retorted that 'he is so maddened by the war party that he apparently no longer

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<sup>76</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, c.687.

<sup>77</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

<sup>78</sup> Simon J Potter, 'Jingoism, Public Opinion, and the New Imperialism: Newspapers and Imperial Rivalries at the fin de siècle', *Media History* 20:1 (2014), 44-45.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)', *Twentieth Century British History* 13:1 (2002), 5.

sees clearly or thinks honestly', and that 'the fiercest writer in the Jingo press has got closer to the facts than Mr Morley'.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, a heated dispute arose between the avowedly Liberal *Sheffield Independent* and Benjamin Pickard, the Lib-Lab member for Normanton. Pickard was not a high-profile Liberal, and the incident did not receive national attention. Nonetheless, its unusual nature as a direct confrontation between two wings of Liberal politics makes it worthy of examination. The dispute erupted into the open with a heavily critical letter from Pickard to the *Sheffield Independent*, which the newspaper opted to publish in full in early October. Addressing his remarks to the editor, Pickard accused the newspaper of running 'leading articles [...] of the most advanced Jingo type', and declared that

if the Liberal Press in Sheffield and some other parts of the country consider for the time being themselves entitled to go the whole hog in jingoism and in goading this country into war with a peaceful set of farmers, let them take the full responsibility.<sup>81</sup>

Pickard went on to assert that the *Sheffield Independent*, along with other pro-war Liberal newspapers and politicians, 'are now claimed as supporters of the Tory party', and that it ill-fared the Liberal party when 'Liberals can throw off their cardinal principles as they throw off their clothes'.

Pickard's intervention is significant because of his direct contrast of Liberal credentials with jingoistic behaviour, and it was this provocative comparison that prompted an equally withering counterattack from the newspaper. The *Sheffield Independent* chose to respond to Pickard's letter by devoting a substantial section of its leading article to its response. Protesting against the assumptions that 'he is honest and we are not; that he is Liberal and we are not; that he hates war, and we do not', the newspaper attacked Pickard's 'intolerant and illiberal anger'. 'Is Mr Pickard', the newspaper asked, 'speaking the language of truth and soberness, or the language of wild passion and utterly unjust imputation?'<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>81</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 11 Oct. 1899.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

This exchange, though relatively untypical in its openness and ferocity, highlights the role jingoism played in the rhetoric of Liberal politics and Empire. Both in Pickard's letter and in the *Sheffield Independent's* response, jingoism is recognised as being antithetical to Liberalism; the two pieces differ only in their interpretation of what constituted jingoism. The response of the *Sheffield Independent* to the Pickard letter is also notable for its criticism of his attitude, not just in terms of denying the newspaper's Liberalism but also in terms of the public emotionality of his and other pro-Boer arguments. The newspaper branded Pickard's letter as being typical of the attitude of the 'passionate people' who made up the pro-Boer cause and misrepresented the Liberal position, and attacked the 'passionate haste' with which Pickard had made his attack.<sup>83</sup> This denigrating use of the word 'passionate', combined with the newspaper's insinuation that Pickard had abandoned the 'language of truth and soberness' for the 'language of wild passion and utterly unjust imputation', reveals the importance placed upon emotion in Liberal rhetoric on the Transvaal Crisis, and as such the extent to which charges of emotionality could be levied by supporters of the war on their pro-Boer opponents, countering charges of jingoism.

Indeed, such debates over the relationship between emotion and the charge of jingoism can be said to touch upon the wider significance of public displays of emotion in the practice of late-nineteenth century Liberal politics, relating in particular to ideas of temperament and character. In his analysis of the 'emotional economy' of post-war Conservatism in Britain, Martin Francis has argued that an important dimension in 1950s British political culture was that of a tension between self-expression and self-control, with the latter, a 'coda of restraint', being seen as desirable. Critically, Francis identified such values of political presentation as part of a longer, though not unchanging, trend in British political culture, based upon 'nineteenth-century constructions of the restrained middle-class persona'.<sup>84</sup> Along similar lines, John Belchem and James Epstein have identified the Gladstonian tradition of public politics as founded in no small part upon ideas of respectability, demonstrated through the 'ability to rise above

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Martin Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963', *Journal of British Studies* 41:3 (2002), 359.

sensual instincts and passions through sobriety, self-help, frugality, duty, effort, industry and “temperance in all things”.<sup>85</sup> Such ideas surrounding the temperament of the political speaker can further be seen as closely linked to broader ideas on the importance of character in the politics of late-Victorian imperialism. Cain has argued that the era saw the language of character deployed by ‘ultra-imperialists’ to justify the possession of Empire, character in Cain’s conceptualisation representing the virtues of ‘energy, industry (in its broad meaning), thrift, prudence, perseverance, [and] honesty’.<sup>86</sup> While the Liberal speakers examined here are by contrast those whom Cain would term the ‘more pragmatic supporters of empire’, the question of character, and particularly the aspects of character attached to prudence and honesty, can nonetheless be seen as evident in Liberal rhetoric on the Transvaal crisis, in the sense that they bound not just how a Liberal statesman was to behave on the platform, but also how a Liberal statesman was to conduct the business of Empire.

Such criticism of displays of excessive emotion can be found in the rhetoric of both pro-Boer and pro-conflict Liberal speakers. Much of this took the form of allusions to what might be termed as unrespectable platform behaviour, in particular the idea of excessive clamour. In attacking jingoism, Campbell-Bannerman explicitly criticised the ‘the noisiest applauders and acclaimers of the war’, the implication being that it was not their support for the conflict which ran contrary to the ideals of Liberal Empire, but the vocal means by which they expressed their support for the war.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, speaking at the beginning of September at Leven, Asquith attacked those who favoured annexation as ‘noisy but insignificant shouters’, while two days later at Arbroath Morley spoke dismissively of how ‘the clamours and vociferations of fire-eaters’ would never persuade him that the country as a whole supported the government’s policy.<sup>88</sup> This focus of Liberal speakers on the tone of those eager for conflict suggests that it was not just their enthusiasm for the war but their apparent disregard for

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<sup>85</sup> John Belchem and James Epstein, ‘The nineteenth-century gentleman leader revisited’, *Social History* 22:2 (1997), 187-88.

<sup>86</sup> P.J. Cain, ‘Empire and the Languages of Character and Virtue in Later Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Modern Intellectual History* 4:2 (2007), 252.

<sup>87</sup> HC Deb., 17 Oct. 1899, fourth series, Vol.77, c.76.

<sup>88</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 4 Sep. 1899; *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

emotional restraint that rendered their approach to Empire incompatible with Liberal values.

Such emotionality was presented in contrast to the restraint which Liberal speakers considered to be embodied in the Liberal approach to Empire, appeals to calmness and moderation being prominent in speeches running up to the crisis. In his speech at the City Liberal Club, Campbell-Bannerman spoke of their need to deal with the crisis 'with courage, but with prudence, and above all things to keep our heads'; indeed, in the same speech it is worth noting the emphasis he placed on the need for Britain to 'quietly' meet its obligations.<sup>89</sup> This was a line of argument he repeated during the debate on supply later that month: appealing 'for moderation and for guarded language', Campbell-Bannerman declared that, in contrast to the attitude of the Press, 'it behoves on us at least in this House to maintain a calm tone'.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, the Liberal leader remarked that, in order to maintain this calm tone, he would endeavour 'not to make polemical advantage' out of the situation, an apparent suggestion that the pro-Boers could likewise stray from this Liberal framework of restraint. The pro-Boers for their part likewise sought to clothe themselves in the mantle of emotional restraint: Morley, ironically one of the more fiery Liberal orators on the subject of the Transvaal, promised his audience at Carnarvon that he would not make, 'even if I were competent to make, a speech of rhetorical fireworks'. Instead, he argued that in contrast to the 'Bedlamite' war party, he had promised himself that he would 'observe the language of good temper and moderation'.<sup>91</sup> At the very least, Morley's remarks suggest an awareness of the vulnerability of his own position to the charge of excessive emotionality and the importance of respectability to the anti-war cause, even if in relation to other aspects of his autumn campaign Morley rhetoric echoed that of the traditional Radical platform speaker.

This idea of respectability and soundness of character was not simply confined to public behaviour however: instead, as Morley's 'Bedlamite' label suggests, Liberal rhetoric on temperament and Imperial policy also drew upon notions of sound and rational thinking. Attacks on jingos and jingoistic behaviour were

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<sup>89</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 Jul. 1899.

<sup>90</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, c.687.

<sup>91</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899.

accompanied by a suggestion of unsoundness of mind and character in those who opposed the Liberal approach to Empire. By contrast Liberals presented their own ideas as representing sanity and thoughtfulness. Harcourt for example spoke at Rhymney of how 'in the arrogance of irresistible might and lust of insatiable dominion the minds of men are inflamed'.<sup>92</sup> A few weeks later, he would go on to characterise the debate as being one which pitted the 'unthinking masses' in opposition to the 'sober masses', a framing of the debate which notably alludes to the Liberal cause of temperance and with it pre-existing associations of drunkenness as a failing of character.<sup>93</sup> At Arbroath Morley likewise sought to contrast 'the humour of the rabid dog', encouraged in his view by the pro-war Press, with an attitude befitting 'responsible and rational citizens of the most powerful State in the world.'<sup>94</sup> Similar language was also to be found in the speeches of Campbell-Bannerman. As examined above, Campbell-Bannerman praised the imperial attitude of the 'sensible men' who were uninterested in grand schemes of Empire, a theme he was to echo at Maidstone in his assertion that 'right-thinking men' would repudiate any designs on the Transvaal's independence.<sup>95</sup> The suggestion inherent in such rhetoric was then that the Liberal policies advocated by the speakers were fundamentally based on reason and sense, while the character of their opponents was such that they could not help but advocate such irrational positions.

Liberal rhetoric on the conduct of political actors in responding to the Transvaal Crisis demonstrates the ways in which the politics of the South African question and indeed the politics of Empire as a whole were shaped by tropes of character and temperament. In this sense, the rhetoric examined in this section related not simply to the Liberal ideals of imperial rule, but to the Liberal ideals of imperial politics: how a statesman should conduct himself, and how public opinion should seek to be guided. Liberal speakers had to articulate their positions with care in a context in which accusations of jingoism or want of patriotism needed to be evaded. Yet these concepts also afforded political actors with the rhetorical tools needed to demonstrate their own commitment to

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<sup>92</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

<sup>93</sup> *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1899.

<sup>94</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>95</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 7 Oct. 1899.

Liberal ideals of imperial politics, defined in opposition to a jingo Press. Further still, the space afforded to emotion within the performance of Liberal imperial politics, ideas of emotional restraint being equated to respectability and soundness of character, served to emphasise not simply the fitness for individual speakers to pronounce upon imperial questions, but also ideas about the character of the Empire itself. Rather than viewing the performative aspects of the Liberal response to the Transvaal Crisis as concerned with the processes of imperial politics rather than the principles, it is better to understand Liberal rhetoric on patriotism, jingoism and emotional politics as part of a wider rhetorical framework of imperial politics in which governing ideals and political practices were viewed as fundamentally interconnected.

### **Fusion or Hatred? Race and the Transvaal Crisis**

If ideas of emotion and temperament formed rather abstract bases on which to found a Liberal approach to Empire, the questions surrounding race represented a strand of debate with more solid grounding in the specifics of the Transvaal Crisis. From the outset, Liberal rhetoric, and indeed British political rhetoric on the crisis in general, cast the potential conflict as being not just between the South African Republic and the British Empire, but being between the Boer and British, or Dutch-speaking and English-speaking settler populations both within the Transvaal and across South Africa as a whole. This framework provided a basis for Liberals to discuss the relationship between race and British authority in South Africa, constructing a Liberal rhetoric of Empire premised in part upon the supposed welcoming position afforded to the non-British 'civilised' subject races under British rule. However, as will be examined, this same rhetorical framework which enabled Liberal speakers to conceptualise the Transvaal crisis as one of potential conflict between the Boer and British communities, somewhat anomalously assigning the Uitlanders to the latter category, also served to reinforce assumptions about the superior character of the British race and the extent to which the Boer character was capable of meeting such expectations.

In the crisis atmosphere of 1899 the question of race was almost exclusively one which referred to the white races of the British and the Boers. The position of the not-inconsiderable Indian population of South Africa, for example, received no attention from major Liberal speakers; it was Chamberlain who was

left to condemn the 'brutal outrages which are constantly being committed on the Indian subjects of the Queen, and on the coloured men, who are also British subjects'.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, the Black African majority of the region was often excluded from Liberal rhetoric on the crisis altogether, and even when mentioned it was generally only in support of other narratives. Outlined briefly, Liberal rhetoric on the Black African population fell broadly into two key strands. On the one hand, there emerged from some Liberal speakers a humanitarian narrative concerning the treatment of the Black African population under Boer rule and British rule respectively. Grey expressed the hope that from the conflict would emerge, among other things, 'that humane treatment for the native coloured population which is the pride and the glory of every other part of the Queen's dominions'.<sup>97</sup>

However, this narrative sat uneasily alongside a sense that the native population posed a threat to the British. Morley and Rosebery, in spite of their otherwise opposing positions in the crisis, both made reference to the Black African population as a potential source of danger. Speaking at Arbroath, Morley warned that by sparking a conflict the British will have

stirred up a spirit of restlessness among the native population of South Africa. And, considering their vast superiority in numbers and the horrors of a war between the white races and these Kaffirs, you cannot exaggerate the mischief of such a proceeding as that.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, Rosebery at Bath cautioned his audience that the British settlers 'were losing face [...] in the eyes of the natives' and that in the forthcoming struggle between the white races of South Africa, 'people, including that vast native population, are all watching which is to be the predominant race'.<sup>99</sup> This rhetoric thus further underlined the risk posed by white racial conflict to the future of colonial South Africa, and in Morley's case also served to minimise the differences between the British and the Boers by framing the dynamic as one of white settlers threatened by native unrest. This narrative of threat was also not necessarily inconsistent with Grey's emphasis upon humane treatment, the

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<sup>96</sup> Joseph Chamberlain, speech of 26 Jun. 1899, Birmingham, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 27 Jun. 1899.

<sup>97</sup> *Glasgow Herald* 26 Oct, 1899.

<sup>98</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>99</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899.

successful management of subject populations in theory at least representing one of the key elements of the British model of imperial rule. Yet this in itself served to highlight the point that, to the limited extent to which the 'native question' was raised at all by Liberal in response to the crisis of 1899, it was almost exclusively in terms of its relevance to the governing ability, the security, and the position of the British settlers. At least as far as the Transvaal crisis was concerned, the Empire in Liberal rhetoric was very much the Empire of white settlement.

Liberal speakers thus approached the racial dynamics of South Africa with the white races in mind, invariably presented as a binary division between the British and the Boers. Driven no doubt in part by the notional focus of the Transvaal Crisis upon the specific rights denied to the Uitlanders, Liberal speakers from across the party framed the issue as one of equality between the white races of South Africa. In his letter of 11 October, Rosebery asserted that the British aims in the Transvaal were to redress Uitlander grievances and secure 'equal rights for the white races in South Africa'.<sup>100</sup> Speaking that same evening at Dundee, Asquith similarly argued that under the Majuba Hill settlement the Boers had already promised that 'the British minority would have equal rights and privileges with the burgher citizens'.<sup>101</sup> Equal rights, it must be stressed, in this context effectively meant specific improvements in the position of the Uitlanders rather than any wider-reaching changes: indeed, it was the failure of the SAR to adopt a regime of equal rights similar to that existing in the two British colonies which in this narrative necessitated intervention in the Republic's internal affairs, emphasising an approach to equality enshrined in ideals of pluralism and the rule of law as a Liberal ideal of British imperial rule. Notably, this ideal of white racial equality was also invoked by Liberal opponents of the war: Morley, for example, attacked the programme of the war party on the grounds that conflict would not produce 'not equality, but the superiority of the English'.<sup>102</sup> Precisely because an armed conflict with Kruger's government would not bring about equality, such an action was incompatible with a Liberal approach to Empire.

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<sup>100</sup> *Bristol Mercury* 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>101</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>102</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899.

Yet this emphasis on racial equality as an ideal of Empire should not be overstated, and indeed there appears to have been reluctance outside of the Liberal Imperialist wing to embrace a narrative of equal rights in relation to the white races of South Africa. Campbell-Bannerman notably steered well clear of the argument in his speeches on the crisis. This may have been down to pragmatic considerations: Chamberlain had stated that the government's stated rationale in pushing for the Uitlander franchise was precisely that it would remove the need to agitate for the Uitlanders' other rights, thus lowering the risks of confrontation.<sup>103</sup> Wanting to prevent a conflict, it is unsurprising that anti-war elements in the party may have balked at the idea of demanding full equality, which would largely serve to further the narratives of their political opponents. Furthermore, while Rosebery and Asquith may have called for equal rights for the two races, it does not necessarily follow that equal rights meant full racial equality in terms of status, or even participation in government, rather than simply a technical equality before the law. Indeed, Rosebery's subsequent remark in his speech at Bath, that the native population were waiting to see which race would become 'predominant', suggests that full white racial equality was not what he had in mind.<sup>104</sup> An interesting parallel might well be drawn here with the debates on the colour bar in South Africa which were to emerge later on in Edwardian politics, a technical equality and opposition to an explicit racial barrier under British colonial rule nonetheless stopping far short of undermining British primacy within the settler states.

Instead, Liberal rhetoric on race in South Africa crystallised around the ideal of racial harmony. Liberal speakers from across the spectrum of opinion in the party placed characterised racial harmony between the British and the Boers as both a critical object of British policy in South Africa, and indeed a state of affairs which had existed in the region prior to the collapse in relations between Britain and the SAR. In the debate on the vote of supply, Campbell-Bannerman expressed his belief that it was the duty of Britain to bring about a situation so that they will find 'the Dutchmen and the Britishers more and more contented, more and more friendly, and co-operating in building up the prosperity of that

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<sup>103</sup> HC Deb. 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, c.706

<sup>104</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899.

great community of which in their different States they are a part'.<sup>105</sup> In his speech at Arbroath, Morley referenced a similar line of argument, commenting approvingly that 'great progress has been made' in uniting the two sections of the South African population, progress which he considered the conflict put at risk.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, at Dundee Asquith further praised the spirit of racial harmony, claiming to his audience that it was 'that unanimity of feeling, that loyalty of sentiment, that harmony of co-operation upon which our Imperial position in South Africa depends'.<sup>107</sup> The importance of good relations between the British and other white subject races was then a key assumption underpinning Liberal ideals of imperial rule.

This point is further underscored by the general condemnation of racial hatred or ill feeling by Liberal speakers. In his characterisation of the conflict as a race war, Rosebery was atypical. From the outset Campbell-Bannerman had cautioned against casting the conflict as such, warning in July against any public figure saying anything which could 'intensify or embitter race and sectional and party feeling in South Africa'.<sup>108</sup> Asquith by contrast presented the Transvaal's actions as harmful to British interests precisely because they would cause such tensions, arguing that 'you cannot isolate the causes of hatred, resentment, and estrangement which have developed. They spread insensibly, gradually, inevitably, till they poison the whole life of the great South African dominion'.<sup>109</sup> In invoking this idea of race hatred as a contagion, Asquith was actually adopting a line deployed by Chamberlain earlier on in the crisis, the latter having spoken in July of race inequality as a 'source of poison' which 'cannot be prevented from spreading'.<sup>110</sup> For the pro-Boers, it was the war itself that would produce racial strife. At New Tredegar Harcourt argued that the war would produce 'an inheritance of undying hatred in the hearts of people amongst whom you will still have to live'.<sup>111</sup> In this manner, both Liberal supporters and opponents of a confrontationist approach in the Transvaal positioned themselves as defending South Africa from the risks of race hatred.

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<sup>105</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, c.696.

<sup>106</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>107</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>108</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, c.687.

<sup>109</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>110</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, c.702.

<sup>111</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

Instead, Liberal speakers championed the elimination of racial divisions in South Africa through a process of fusion. At Arbroath, Morley declared to his audience that ‘the British and the Dutch have got to live together in South Africa – fuse them’.<sup>112</sup> Drawing an example from elsewhere in the Empire, the following month Morley argued that in Canada fusion and good race relations had been achieved between the British and French settlers, declaring that ‘what I want to do is apply to South Africa [...] the same principles as were so successful in Canada, and made Canada one of the most united portions of the Queen’s realm’.<sup>113</sup> The Canadian comparison had also been deployed by Campbell-Bannerman earlier on in the crisis: in the supply vote, he remarked that in Canada ‘two races not nearly so akin as those in South Africa’ had ‘obliterated the difficulties and differences that separated them’.<sup>114</sup> Why, he asked, should there be so little faith that such a process could be repeated in South Africa?

There also appears to have been support for this idea of fusion from the Liberal Imperialist wing of the party, although such support was more muted. At Dundee Asquith expressed regret at the interruption of the process by which the British and the Dutch at the Cape were ‘becoming every year more and more fused into one community of loyal subjects of the British Empire’, implying support for the process of fusion throughout post-conflict South Africa, but not explicitly calling for its introduction in the Transvaal.<sup>115</sup> Again, this may have been in part due to the context in which the Liberal Imperialists’ interventions were taking place: acknowledging the need for fusion to take place in the Transvaal would create a need to address the pro-Boer charge that such fusion would be difficult, if not impossible, following a conflict in the region. Nonetheless, Asquith’s usage of ideas of fusion served to further underline the idea of the Uitlander crisis acting as a destabilising influence upon the essential processes which supported existing British imperial rule in South Africa. While both Liberal supporters and opponents of the government’s stance towards South Africa were able to advocate the idea of fusion therefore, it was again

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<sup>112</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>113</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>114</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, cc.696-97.

<sup>115</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

presented as a question of managing threats to the status quo of Anglo-Boer relations in South Africa.

As Morley's attack on a war which would bring about English 'superiority' in the Transvaal demonstrates, Liberal rhetoric on the ideas of white racial equality and fusion in South Africa was matched by an explicit disavowal of any prospect of establishing an explicit ascendancy of the British over the Boers. Indeed, even for those Liberal speakers who wished to see what would in effect have been a new Uitlander-backed administration in Pretoria, such an outcome would have been the product of what was to ultimately prove an illusory Uitlander majority in the territory, rather than the result of the legal elevation of the Uitlanders over the Boers. Yet as much as Liberal speakers espoused an ideal of imperial rule which emphasised the essential unity of the white races, and to a lesser degree an even broader pluralistic ideal which sought to minimise race as an explicit factor within British imperial rule, Liberal rhetoric on the racial dynamics of the Transvaal Crisis was nonetheless steeped in assumptions about the respective character of the British and Boer settler populations of South Africa. As the work of Cain has demonstrated, assumptions over character were not only important to the conduct of political actors in late-Victorian Britain, but were also key to the conceptualisation and justification of imperial rule, the virtues of the British continually characterised as essentially superior to the attributes of the Empire's subject races.<sup>116</sup> Certainly, as will be examined Liberal speakers framed the racial dimensions of the South African question in a manner which emphasised the supposed strengths of the British character. Yet while Cain and Hopkins identify a wider trend within British imperial rhetoric founded in part on the debasing of the Boer race, such tactics saw relatively limited usage within Liberal rhetoric on the crisis of 1899.<sup>117</sup> Instead rather, the dynamic was more one of contesting the degree of similarity between the British and Boer races, and in particular the claims of the latter to possessing the virtues of the former.

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<sup>116</sup> P.J. Cain, 'Character and imperialism: The British financial administration of Egypt, 1878–1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34:2 (2006).

<sup>117</sup> Cain and Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British expansion overseas II', 13.

Both Liberal supporters and Liberal opponents of the conflict sought in their public interventions to convey to their audiences ideas of the Boer character. Although some elements of Liberal Imperialist rhetoric sought to create distance and emphasise difference between their British audiences and their Boer subjects of debate, if anything Liberal rhetoric on the Boer character tended to focus on emphasising the lack of difference between the British and the Boers. In the debate on the loyal address Campbell-Bannerman commented that the Boers had 'some good qualities and a good many bad ones', suggesting that he wished to avoid praising or condemning the Boers, or promoting or denying their similarities as a race to the British.<sup>118</sup> Despite this disclaimer however, Campbell-Bannerman had begun his speech by declaring that 'we are entering a war directed against a European people, a Christian people, a Protestant people', clearly drawing links of association even as he later sought to present himself as doing no such thing. This line of association had similarly been expressed by Asquith: speaking at the outbreak of the conflict, Asquith likewise described the Boers as men of the 'same blood, the same colour, the same religion as ourselves'.<sup>119</sup> Grey likewise shied away from the rhetoric of racial conflict, casting 'the Boer oligarchy and the Hollander clique' as the enemy, rather than the Dutch settler population at large.<sup>120</sup> Even among those Liberal speakers ultimately supportive of the conflict therefore, far from participating in an active process of framing the Dutch of South Africa or even the Boers of the Transvaal as inferior on the grounds of racial character there was instead an emphasis upon their essential similarities to the British.

Anti-war Liberal rhetoric on the character of the Boers in particular sought to emphasise the shared protestant heritage of the British and the Boers with a view to asserting the common values of freedom and independence which such

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<sup>118</sup> HC Deb., 17 Oct. 1899, fourth series, Vol.77, c.75. The selection of attributes which he invited his parliamentary colleagues to consider good or bad as they saw fit was a somewhat more positive one than might have been expected by his preface: the Transvaal Dutch were 'stubborn', 'self-sufficient', 'unimpressionable', 'shrewd' and 'brave', many of which were values readily associated with Victorian ideals of character. See for example Stephen Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Life and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: 1991), p.100.

<sup>119</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>120</sup> *Glasgow Herald* 26 Oct, 1899.

a Whiggish account of history supposedly demonstrated. For example, at Manchester Morley cast the Boers as being a race whose forefathers

drove out the Spanish tyrant from the Netherlands and set up in Holland there that Government from which the cause of freedom – freedom of life, freedom of thought, freedom of belief – which all Europe and England especially included, has derived priceless blessings.<sup>121</sup>

Harcourt similarly drew attention to the Boer's Dutch ancestry, declaring that 'the men who won the independence of Holland from the oppressive rule of Philip II. of Spain – they [the Boers] inherit from them their unconquerable love of freedom and liberty.'<sup>122</sup> Given that Liberal rhetoric emphasised not only the unique character of the British Empire as one founded upon and governed according to ideals of freedom and liberty, but also fundamentally the independent spirit of the British race, imagined here as an extension of the English, this was then essentially a narrative which served to impress upon their audiences the essential Britishness of the Boer character. Indeed, the invocation of the struggle against Philip of Spain is particularly significant in light of Morley and Harcourt's primarily Liberal audiences because, framed as the conflict was against the backdrop of the Reformation in Europe, it was as much a religious struggle of Protestantism against the established Catholic faith as it was a war of independence. Given this, the emphasis placed on the Boers' history served to invite comparisons with Nonconformist struggles and the anti-Ritualism campaigns of late-Victorian Liberal politics, serving to highlight still further the Liberal credentials of the pro-Boer position.

Significantly, Liberal opponents of the conflict did not just stress similarities between the Boers and the British, but also between the Boers and the Celtic races. Harcourt in his New Tredegar speech attempted to elicit sympathy from a Welsh audience for the Boers, arguing that the British 'drove them from the place of their birth and made them abandon the land of their fathers – words musical to the ears of Welshmen'.<sup>123</sup> Yet such a comparison was likely not just a rhetorical device for casting the Boers as victims of injustice, but also a means by which Harcourt could present the Boers as a race as being not so different

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<sup>121</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 16 Sep. 1899.

<sup>122</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 Sep. 1899.

from those he was trying to persuade against conflict. Morley deployed similar tactics at Arbroath: discussing the questions of suzerainty and paramountcy, Morley remarked to his Scottish audience that 'suzerainty and paramountcy were what Edward I. alleged – and I think you did not much approve of it, if I remember'.<sup>124</sup> Such remarks are interesting as they suggest that the Welsh and the Scots might be to some degree more receptive of their argument that conflict was unjust than the British public at large, or that at least Morley and Harcourt believed that this might be so. These comments also lend some credence to John S. Ellis' argument that pro-Boerism in Britain helped foster ideas of British pluralism at home, with the themes of the subordination of small nations having 'held particular relevance for Irish and Welsh opponents who saw echoes of their own history', although Ellis' thesis curiously excludes the Scots from the process.<sup>125</sup> In any case, such remarks can be seen as further evidence of the rhetorical efforts by Liberal pro-Boer speakers to stress degrees of association between the Boers and the British, and by extension the Celtic home nations.

Liberal speakers thus articulated the crisis of 1899 as one fundamentally concerned with the relationship between the British and the Boer populations of South Africa. Confrontation with the SAR was presented as either risking the processes of increasing racial harmony by alienating the Empire's Dutch subjects or alternatively as necessary to prevent the increasing tensions arising out of the Uitlanders' grievances in the Transvaal. In this fashion Liberal speakers essentially articulated an approach to South African affairs which stressed the pluralist ideal of Empire, rather than one which established a British ascendancy. Yet in framing the racial dynamics of the Transvaal crisis in this manner, Liberal speakers also served to reinforce wider narratives which emphasised the virtuous character of the British race, even as they sought to minimise Anglo-Boer differences by emphasising a common heritage, religion and values. This narrative ultimately stressed the capacity of the Boers to match up to the exacting standards of the British character, the fusion of races in effect representing the integration of the Boers within British imperial norms.

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<sup>124</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>125</sup> John S. Ellis, "The Methods of Barbarism" and the "Rights of Small Nations": War Propaganda and British Pluralism', *Albion* 30:1 (1998).

Furthermore, the tendency to view the Transvaal Crisis as inherently related to the question of Anglo-Boer relations throughout South Africa would also have important consequences for how Liberals addressed questions of the Transvaal's governance, which this chapter now explores.

### **Good Government and Self-government**

As seen in the debates on the role of BSAC at the time of the Jameson Raid, a faith in the traditional governing structures of Empire and a hostility towards the idea of misgovernment represented a key element of the idealised Empire. This was a pattern which was to be repeated in relation to the Transvaal Crisis, with Liberal speakers again stressing the importance of ensuring the ideals of good governance and self-governance in British rule in South Africa. Critically however, the range of questions raised by the Transvaal Crisis saw Liberal speakers apply the language of governance to the conflict in starkly contrasting ways. An emphasis on the need for racial harmony in South Africa as a fundamental basis for good government in Britain's existing colonies was contrasted with the alleged misgovernment of the South African Republic by the Boers. Similarly, the ideal of self-government was invoked both in support of the Boers' right to govern their own lands free of imperial authority and in support of the Uitlanders' demands for the franchise and a stake in the running of the country, in which it was assumed they were in a majority. The question of imperial governance in South Africa was thus another challenge for Liberal speakers to navigate during the crisis, providing an excellent basis from which to explore their underlying assumptions.

In his speeches on the crisis, Campbell-Bannerman stressed that a British mishandling of the situation, in the form of provoking an armed conflict, risked jeopardising the prospects for good governance in the region. Speaking in the debate on supply, he drew upon his prior warnings about racial tensions to caution that a conflict would produce a 'race feud extending through the whole of our colonies and possessions, which would make the good government of that continent impossible'.<sup>126</sup> Presented in this manner, Campbell-Bannerman advanced by this statement two key lines of argument. In the first instance, by equating the outcome of conflict with the impossibility of good government, the

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<sup>126</sup> HC Deb., 28 Jul. 1899, fourth series, Vol.75, cc.690-91.

Liberal leader could effectively counter the argument deployed by those supporters of the war, discussed in depth below, that the war could be considered a remedy for the state of misgovernment within the South African Republic.

Yet, as with his rhetoric regarding the questions of supremacy and suzerainty, it is Campbell-Bannerman's emphasis on not just the Transvaal itself but 'the whole of our colonies and possessions' and the 'continent' that speaks volumes. On the basis of Campbell-Bannerman's phrasing, it was not just in a post-annexation Transvaal that good governance would be impossible, but also in the pre-existing British colonies, where from a Liberal perspective good governance may be presumed to have been extant. The Liberal leader was not then just cautioning of future difficulties for the good governance of empire, but by implication warning that the conflict posed a threat to the already existing good governance of the Empire. Again we see from Campbell-Bannerman an outlook on Empire that was conservative, fundamentally concerned with the preservation of the Empire's existing Liberal elements, and reactive against those threats such as armed conflict which stood to disrupt such elements.

Campbell-Bannerman was to return to this theme later on in the crisis. Speaking at Maidstone, he once again drew a direct link between the risk of racial enmity and the prospects for the region's governance. Cautioning again that the results of war would be racial tension 'not only in the territories of the Republics, but throughout the whole of South Africa', Campbell-Bannerman declared to his Kentish audience that

every wise and prudent statesman who has had any responsibility in South African affairs, has found the cardinal principle of good government to lie in the maintenance of the best feeling between the Dutch and English elements in the population.<sup>127</sup>

The stress on maintaining racial harmony as a basis for good government within the existing British colonies of South Africa is again evident, underscoring the inherently conservative nature of Campbell-Bannerman's rhetorical line. On this particular aspect of the debate the Liberal leader found himself aligned alongside Morley, who, speaking at Carnarvon that same evening, likewise

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<sup>127</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 7 Oct. 1899.

sought to justify his opposition to the conflict on the grounds that it stood in opposition to the existing good governance of the Empire. 'The cause of peace', Morley stated to his audience, was 'also the cause of good government and of wise policy'.<sup>128</sup> Yet the basis for Morley's good governance of Empire differed from that of his party leader. Although it might be inferred from his other remarks on race that Morley would most likely have indeed regarded racial harmony as a key component of good imperial governance, that was not the line of argument which he chose to deploy.

Instead, Morley linked the question of imperial governance squarely with that of the centralisation of Empire. Criticising the British government for its apparent desire for broad intervention with regards to the Transvaal's internal affairs, Morley declared that

I do not believe any clever man sitting down at a desk in Whitehall and writing out on a piece of paper the administration that the Transvaal requires, I do not believe in it. Talk of paradox! Why, what incongruity could be greater, what more absolute departure could there be from all the teachings of our own rich and fruitful experience, and all the principles that have made the steady and self-developed growth of good government in our own dominions the envy of the world.<sup>129</sup>

The government's Transvaal policy, Morley charged, thus stood in marked contrast to prior British imperial practice. Notwithstanding the wider questions about the extent to which the 'new imperialism' really represented a departure in British policy, Morley sought to frame the government's actions as novel, in that they represented a centralisation of imperial decision-making. As, in Morley's view, statesmen and administrators at the metropole would inevitably be inferior to the task of imperial governance when contrasted with those at the periphery, the resulting governance of a post-conflict South Africa would ultimately fall short of Britain's established record for good imperial governance. Morley's assertion that good government in the dominions was 'self-developed' is also particularly interesting, as the implication that it would develop of its own accord within the wider British imperial framework would appear to chime with ideas of the development of the Empire as an organic, evolutionary process.

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<sup>128</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

As with the prospects of imperial expansion, both Campbell-Bannerman and Morley regarded the question of good governance as one essentially conservative and reactive in nature. Good government was something already extant, achieved through the inherent superiority of the British approach to Empire. The prospect of war with the SAR represented both a departure from this allegedly tried-and-tested approach to Empire, a policy which would not reproduce good government in the Transvaal, and a direct threat to the existing good governance of British South Africa, through its violation of the principles of good race relations and administration by those on the periphery.

The question of good governance was also a key trope of those Liberals who supported the conflict. However, in stark contrast with the position adopted by Campbell-Bannerman and Morley it was not the prospects for British good governance that proved central to the rhetoric of the Liberal Imperialists, but the extent of Transvaal misgovernment. In his speech at Bath, Rosebery made the character of the Kruger regime a key foundation for his views on the crisis. Charging that the discovery of gold had 'produced great corruption in the Transvaal', Rosebery condemned the 'appalling record of the way in which the Government of the Transvaal was carried on'.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, so bad was the misgovernment from Rosebery's point of view that it had brought about the Jameson Raid: a 'symptom of a deplorable state of things', Rosebery declared that 'no English gentleman would have engaged in what may be called a filibustering raid had it not been for the strong cry of distress that proceeded from within the Transvaal'.<sup>131</sup> Intriguingly then in Rosebery's rhetoric on the crisis, we have Boer misgovernment not only forming a basis for the conflict's justification, but also serving as a force that might provoke British colonisers into abandoning their higher imperial principles out of desperation, echoing while at the same time countering Campbell-Bannerman's warning of a threat to existing good British imperial governance.

Rosebery's attack on the misgovernment of the Transvaal followed on from the use of similar rhetoric by his leading followers. In his speech at Dundee on 11 October, Asquith had slammed Pretoria for having responded to the Jameson Raid by 'legislation more reactionary, administration more oppressive, [and]

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<sup>130</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

military expenditure more profuse'.<sup>132</sup> The inclusion of the charge of excessive spending alongside the more explicit claims of misgovernment is notable: while this no doubt in part represented a desire on Asquith's part to stress to his audience the idea of the Transvaal as a military threat, it might also be seen as symptomatic of a wider Liberal wariness towards military power, implying a degree of synonymy between misgovernment and militarism. Indeed, in this sense the Liberal Imperialist critique of Boer misgovernment bore a striking similarity to the traditional radical critique of imperialism as representing the triumph of despotic power over the rule of law.

Grey likewise invoked the notion of oppression in his speech at Glasgow. As noted in the previous section, Grey shied away from the rhetoric of racial conflict in his address to the students of Glasgow University, with the result that the object of his attack became the record of the Kruger regime specifically. 'The blame for the war', Grey charged, 'rests upon the Boer oligarchy and the Hollander clique [...] which has misled their country and their countrymen'; the war was, in his view, fundamentally 'a war against an oligarchical and oppressive Government'.<sup>133</sup> By framing the question as one of Boer misgovernment, rather than potential British misgovernment, supporters of the conflict were thus able to appeal to a key Liberal touchstone in their efforts to rally Liberal opinion to their cause, while at the same time avoiding having to directly engage with the narrative of potential British misgovernment. Attacks on Boer misgovernment were of course not limited to Liberal circles: Chamberlain for example, in seeking to set out the government's line on Uitlander oppression, launched an attack on the 'corrupt, inefficient officials' of the Transvaal.<sup>134</sup> Even if such rhetoric was however being deployed in government circles as well, themes of misgovernment nonetheless formed an important feature of Liberal rhetoric on South Africa, and it is worth noting that Chamberlain's own account came in an address to a pseudo-Liberal audience in the form of the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association.

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<sup>132</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>133</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Oct. 1899.

<sup>134</sup> Joseph Chamberlain, speech of 26 Jun. 1899, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 27 Jun. 1899.

A central feature of this attack on Boer misgovernment was a critique of the alleged injustice perpetrated by the Kruger regime. Writing in a public letter on the day of the war's outbreak, Rosebery declared his support for the 'simple and reasonable objective of rescuing our fellow countrymen in the Transvaal from intolerable conditions of subjugation and injustice'.<sup>135</sup> Haldane similarly charged that the Boers had 'refused to grant the most elementary justice' to the Uitlanders.<sup>136</sup> This sentiment was also reflected by more centrist opinion in the Liberal Party: the *Daily News* declared as early as June that the position of the Uitlanders was a 'crying injustice', the removal of which should be of 'special concern' to Liberals.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, even while urging caution and patience from the British position, Campbell-Bannerman nonetheless acknowledged at Ilford that the Uitlander complaints were well-founded.<sup>138</sup> There was thus among Liberal speakers from the centre and imperialist components of the party a clear narrative of justice, or rather injustice, with regards to the Uitlander position in the Transvaal. Significantly, this appears to have been a narrative which Liberal opponents of the war felt required to engage with. At Carnarvon, Morley declared that 'there is no man known to me who denies our obligation to protect our British fellow subjects from injustice' and at Manchester even going as far as to say that 'the cause we are here advocating, is the cause of Justice and peace, because we are not advocating the Boer cause', although notably in neither case did he actually concede that injustice was actually taking place.<sup>139</sup> The pro-Boers were thus compelled to cast their rhetoric within this notion of injustice in the Transvaal, even as they rejected the suggestion that this injustice was for the British to correct by whatever means necessary.

The misgovernment identified by the Liberal Imperialists also included a financial dimension. Speaking at Gullane, Haldane expressed his outrage that not only had the Uitlanders been denied their elementary rights, but also that they had 'at the same time [been] taxed for the purpose of placing the South African Republic in a position of menace to the peace and good government of

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<sup>135</sup> Lord Rosebery, letter dated 11 Oct. 1899, published in *Bristol Mercury* 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>136</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899.

<sup>137</sup> *Daily News*, 12 Jun. 1899.

<sup>138</sup> *Daily News*, 19 Jun. 1899.

<sup>139</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899; *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 16 Sep. 1899.

the whole of South Africa'.<sup>140</sup> Rosebery likewise denounced the taxation of the Uitlanders in his speech at Bath, alleging that 'almost all the taxation of the country was drawn from our fellow-countrymen'.<sup>141</sup> On a related theme, Rosebery also attacked the financial corruption of the Transvaal more generally, condemning the Pretoria regime for its excessive public salaries. This focus upon financial governance is interesting as it suggests to us that for as much as the Liberal Imperialists represented a reaction against Gladstonian Liberalism they were nonetheless prepared to draw upon a Gladstonian rhetoric of retrenchment, or indeed earlier radical critiques of the link between taxation and representation, in order to advance their claims on Liberal opinion.

On the pro-Boer side, there was generally little direct engagement with the Liberal Imperialists' line of attack. As with the questions of race and Uitlander rights, there was often a cursory recognition that the situation in the Transvaal was unacceptable, but otherwise there was minimal discussion of or challenge to the Liberal Imperialists' rhetoric of misgovernment. Indeed, the brief discussion of the nature of the Transvaal government in Morley's speech at Arbroath can be seen as the exception that proves the rule. To laughter, Morley declared that 'we are told that the Boers of the Transvaal are a set of pig-headed oligarchs', before launching into a section attacking the Conservative Party for its history of resisting political reforms within Britain itself.<sup>142</sup> Morley was thus then attempting to ridicule the language deployed by the Liberal Imperialists rather than trying to directly engage with their arguments, a tactic that prompted the Liberal Unionist *Glasgow Herald* to accuse him of discounting the role of 'Boer misgovernment and corruption' in bringing about the crisis.<sup>143</sup>

Criticism of Morley's reluctance to address the issue was also to be found in the non-schismatic Liberal Press. The *Daily News*, which was ultimately to adopt a

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<sup>140</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 13 Oct. 1899.

<sup>141</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Oct. 1899.

<sup>142</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>143</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Sep. 1899. A Harmsworth newspaper, the *Glasgow Herald* had abandoned its earlier Gladstonian position for Unionism in response to Irish Home Rule. Its position at the turn of the century was not uniformly Unionist however, on occasion backing Liberal Imperialist causes and candidates against the Unionist government. See Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Volume I: The Nineteenth Century* (London: 1981), pp.288-89, 395.

pro-conflict position but in September could be still regarded as holding a broadly centrist position within British Liberal politics, welcomed Morley's speech but nonetheless commented that

in the present condition of the Transvaal, which prompted his wise counsels to Mr Kruger, no doubt he [Morley] had a thought of Ireland too. No doubt he thought of experiences which enable him to trace the troubles of the Transvaal to misgovernment.<sup>144</sup>

In making this analogy, the *Daily News* turned on its head Morley's attempts to draw a favourable parallel between the Boer population and the Irish, instead encouraging its readers to associate the Kruger administration with the discredited governing practices of the landlord classes in Ireland. This can be seen then as further evidence of the attempts by both sides of the debate to frame the crisis and the questions of empire it raised in terms of existing Liberal political issues. The raising of the Irish comparison in relation to misgovernment also touches upon a wider question of imperial governance however.

The ideal of good governance was clearly evident in the rhetoric both of those Liberals who supported the conflict and those who opposed it. However, such rhetoric existed in tension with that of a rival ideal of imperial governance: the ideal of self-governance. The assumption that the British Empire was a self-governing Empire was one shared by both the radical and Liberal Imperialist wings of the party, although as with the principle of racial equality this was not an ideal extended to the non-white population. A striking degree of similarity exists between Morley's warning against the administration of the Empire from London and Grey's boast that 'wherever our race ruled there was a free democratic Government and not a centralised Government'.<sup>145</sup> However, with regards to the specific question of the governance of the Transvaal, the cause of self-government was very much the domain of the pro-Boer Liberals.

For opponents of the conflict, self-government was not simply an effective and just means for the administration of the Empire: it was also an ideal form of governance which Liberals should support on principle, which necessarily translated into opposition towards any action in South Africa which would rob

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<sup>144</sup> *Daily News*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>145</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899; *Glasgow Herald* 26 Oct, 1899.

the Transvaal Boers of their right to govern themselves. This idea of British intervention jeopardising self-government was discussed at length by Morley at Carnarvon. In a stance notably more critical than in his earlier interventions, Morley criticised not just the potential conflict but the broader negotiations themselves for their attack on the self-government of the Transvaal. Having stressed that franchise reform was the only policy capable of 'reconciling reform with independence and self-government', Morley condemned the suggestion that if the franchise could not be negotiated Britain should press for other reforms, arguing that said reforms 'were to affect the judiciary, the constitution, the Civil Service, the jury system, the system of Municipal Government. How much self-government, I wonder, is left when you reckon all that up.'<sup>146</sup> On the prospects of any self-government remaining after an actual conflict, Morley was similarly dismissive. Mocking the programme of the 'war party' for the reconstruction of South Africa following the conflict, he joked that

having got them [the Boers] into good humour and into the frame of mind for proper self-government by this soothing and agreeable process then, in the words of the 'Times' newspaper, you are to establish some form of independent government at the earliest opportunity. Yes, not long before the day of judgement I think.<sup>147</sup>

Self-government, it was implied, was not just a desirable object of policy but instead a fundamental good which was not to be interfered with.

In casting doubt upon the likelihood that supporters of the conflict would ultimately introduce self-government, the pro-Boers also made reference to previous imperial episodes relating to the Boers in which a lack of self-government had become a Liberal concern. Morley addressed British failure to translate a wish for Boer self-government into reality before, noting in his address at Arbroath that following the first annexation of the Transvaal Britain had promised to grant self-government, but had been unable to deliver on it.<sup>148</sup> In his New Tredegar speech, Harcourt reached back even further for an example of this. The former Liberal leader declared to his audience that the very reason for the emigration of the Boers from Cape Colony and the establishment

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<sup>146</sup> *Daily News*, 7 Oct. 1899.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

of the Transvaal state stemmed from the desire for self-government: 'all the grievances of the emigrants arose from one cause – they desired self-government, and under British administration this was denied to them.'<sup>149</sup> In presenting his audience with this information, Harcourt was able to cast the question of self-governance as the original basis for tension in South Africa, presenting the Boers as a people whose desire for self-governance could be sympathised with while at the same time insinuating that a return to British administration might mean a revocation of self-government.

Pro-Boer exploration of the self-governance issue also drew upon analogies with the Irish question. The Irish question was of great significance to questions of imperial self-government. Harcourt's comparison of the Transvaal's status under the conventions as 'Home Rule' was as much about his own form of Liberal politics as it was an aid for comparison: given that the *Sheffield Independent* reported that his audience cheered the reference to home rule, it would seem likely that this was a clear attempt to generate opposition to the conflict through appealing to a radical Liberal issue.<sup>150</sup> Likewise Morley's description of the likely outcome of conflict as being 'Ireland all over again' was founded upon the question of governance, with Morley justifying his comparison on the grounds that, as in Ireland, a post-conflict Transvaal would be made up of a 'sort of loyalist Ulster', in that it would have 'a loyalist district, and outside of that an enormous territory, as I say, saturated with sullen disaffection'.<sup>151</sup> In this manner, the framework of the Home Rule debate was almost grafted onto the Transvaal question, with the unreformed situation in Ireland held up as a counter-example demonstrating a failure to apply Liberal values of imperial governance. Additionally, the use of the Irish analogy also served to highlight parallels between the white racial divisions in Ireland and in South Africa, and as with other imperial questions provided supporters of Home Rule and Irish nationalism with the additional means of drawing attention to Irish grievances.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 21 Sep. 1899.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 6 Sep. 1899.

<sup>152</sup> On the relationship between Empire and the Irish question, see Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: 2000).

Again, there was little by way of direct engagement with these arguments from the Liberal Imperialist wing of the party. While Asquith did indeed disavow the annexation of the Transvaal, and Grey stressed that the war would bring 'democratic government', neither suggested that the outcome of the war would be a return to self-government by the Transvaal Dutch.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, it might be speculated that the focus many pro-conflict speakers placed upon the granting of franchise rights to the Uitlanders was not just a reflection of the crisis' development but also a way of acknowledging, even if not engaging with, the Liberal ideal of self-government, as they may well have expected a democratic election to produce a British majority. Nonetheless, even if this was an underlying implication, it was not one that was explicitly made, or indeed could be made within the framework of Liberal debate on Empire. The ideal of self-government, was thus a Liberal touchstone 'owned' by the conflict's opponents, and one which posed a severe challenge to the Liberal Imperialists' use of the ideal of good governance in order to cast the Transvaal government as contrary to Liberal ideals of Empire.

An examination of the rhetoric of leading Liberals thus reveals an inherent tension surrounding the question of imperial governance. In seeking to frame a Liberal approach to Empire prominent Liberals sought to draw upon established ideals of good government and self-government, ideals which would be recognisably 'Liberal' to their audiences. However, while there was an underlying Liberal assumption these two ideals could theoretically coexist, the attempt to apply these ideals of governance to the questions of Empire raised by the Transvaal Crisis brought about a divergence between them that Liberal speakers struggled to reconcile. The issue of self-government naturally lent itself to the pro-Boer cause, with supporters of the conflict unable to effectively use the ideal as a touchstone in their own rhetoric, instead simply opting to avoid discussion of it. The issue of good government was more contested, being deployed by both sides of the debate, but even in this regard there was little direct confrontation over the issue: the pro-Boers had no answer to the charge of misgovernment in the Transvaal, while the Liberal Imperialists did not respond to suggestions that the conflict would bring about misgovernment under British rule. From this lack of explicit counter-argument from either side, it

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<sup>153</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Oct. 1899; *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Oct, 1899.

can be seen that there were indeed underlying assumptions that a Liberal approach to Empire would necessarily be dependent upon both good governance and self-government. The interplay between these two ideals of imperial governance will be explored in more depth in later chapters; in the context of the Transvaal Crisis, however, the internal fault lines of the Liberal rhetoric of governance ultimately proved irreconcilable.

### **Conclusion: Rhetoric and the Legacy of the Transvaal Crisis**

Ultimately, the Liberal response to the Transvaal Crisis can best be characterised as that of a politics of Empire severely disrupted by events, the deteriorating relations between Britain and the South African Republic creating a perfect storm within which the growing factional tensions within the Liberal Party could openly fracture over questions of Empire. Yet just as there was not a clear-cut divide within the party between the Roseberyites and the pro-Boers, but instead rather a spectrum of positions within which individual Liberal actors were free to move, neither can the Liberal splits over the outbreak of the South African War be understood a simple division between imperialism and anti-imperialism, or between support and opposition for the expansion of Empire. The divisions which emerged in Liberal rhetoric on the crisis instead represented a far more nuanced and multifaceted debate over how the politics of Empire should be conducted, both in relation to the ideals which were said to be critical to the strength of British imperial rule and with regards to the expectations placed upon the behaviour and character of political actors in Britain.

Significantly, despite the diverse and often opposing narratives advanced by Liberal speakers from across the party in response to the crisis, these ideals and assumptions represented a common rhetorical framework for Liberal speakers which was if anything further reinforced by the debates on the crisis. Both supporters and opponents of British intervention in the Transvaal put forward a rhetoric which emphasised the strengths of the British character, the idea of imperial responsibility and the ideals of a well-governed, self-governing settler Empire, even as they deployed these themes in starkly contrasting arguments. Yet despite these shared Liberal assumptions of Empire and imperial politics, the complex problems raised by the Transvaal Crisis in terms of Transvaal misgovernment, Anglo-Boer relations, the grievances of the

Uitlanders and the nature of British authority over the SAR all served to produce a situation in which the competing ideals of Empire could not all be effectively applied, resulting in the articulation of a fractured and contradictory rhetoric of Empire.

Critically, Liberal speakers were not simply engaged in trying to persuade their audiences of the legitimacy of the emerging conflict or indeed how best to redress the problems of the Transvaal, but more fundamentally were engaged in a process of conceptualising the essential nature of the South African question itself. In characterising the problems of South Africa as relating fundamentally to the relationship between the British and Boer populations of the region, Liberal speakers adopted a rhetorical framework which was to emphasise ideas of white racial harmony as a key goal of British policy in the years that would follow, marginalising the position of South Africa's non-white populations in the process. Likewise, while the twin ideals of imperial governance, good government and self-government, were to prove an unstable and contradictory basis for Liberal rhetoric in response to the Transvaal Crisis, in emphasising these ideals Liberal speakers established the question of governance as a key consideration of subsequent South African policy, which as the next chapter will explore could more readily be expressed in relation to the conduct of the war and the debates on the eventual peace.

Further still, as the debates over the nature of the Empire and the role of jingoism and character examined in this chapter have shown, the rhetoric of Liberal speakers on the outbreak of war established the methods by which the struggle of politicians to appear 'Liberal' over questions of Empire was to be conducted, a pattern which was to be continued through to the Roseberyite challenges following the election of 1900. While the politics of the Transvaal Crisis represented a brief and turbulent episode in the Liberal Party's history, it was nonetheless one which brought into sharp focus the competing narratives and instincts at the heart of the party's imperial politics.

### **3. 'METHODS OF BARBARISM': LIBERALS AND THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR, 1899-1902**

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The outbreak of the South African War left the Liberal Party badly divided, with the Liberal Imperialists presenting the conflict as necessary for the security of the Empire and the Liberal pro-Boers railing against a war which they claimed risked doing permanent damage to the political and social fabric of South Africa. Yet the war which broke out in October 1899 soon defied many of the initial expectations of both its supporters and opponents: as early as Lord Rosebery's speech at Bath, it was becoming clear that the military strength of the two Boer republics had been severely underestimated, and that the war was unlikely to result in a quick victory. If John Morley's predictions that the war would result in annexation did indeed prove prescient when the regular governments of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State fell in mid-1900, the subsequent descent into guerrilla warfare and the brutal counter-insurgency tactics adopted by the British added still further unforeseen new developments to the politics of the war. Against the backdrop of the general election of 1900 and the leadership struggles of 1901, the period of the South African War thus represented a critical period for the relationship between the Liberal Party and the politics of Empire.

This chapter focuses on three key aspects of the war's conduct which made up key elements of the Liberal rhetorical response to the conflict. The first examines the annexation of the two republics: given that the case for war had been framed as one of defence rather than territorial expansion, the annexations represented a critical shift in rhetoric on the war, as well as exacerbating divisions between the centrist and pro-Boer elements of the Liberal Party. The second focus of this chapter is on the connected issues of the British tactic of farm-burning and the setting up of concentration camps, policies which would be famously denounced by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as the 'methods of barbarism'. The agitation against British war tactics has often been interpreted as a humanitarian critique of British imperialism and the ideals of Empire: yet as this chapter will explore, Liberal speakers who advanced such a critique also explicitly invoked the rhetoric of imperial governance and notions of race harmony, as well as drawing links

between the tactics and the imposition of martial law at the Cape. Finally, this chapter considers Liberal rhetoric on the settlement of the conflict and the nature of British imperial rule over the conquered Boers. As the subsequent chapter will explore, the restoration of self-government in South Africa represented a key point of political contention in the reconstruction of the region after 1902. However, this was not a situation which simply arose following the final cessation of hostilities, but as will be demonstrated was one which Liberals discussed at great length throughout the conflict, casting considerable light on the Liberal Party's approach to the politics of Empire.

Additionally, one of the most notable consequences of the war for British politics was that it brought about an open but very public split within British Liberalism, particularly following the disappointing Liberal performance at the 1900 general election. If the embryonic ideas of Liberal Imperialism had started to become apparent in the autumn of 1899, the progress of the war itself saw the movement crystallise into a specific sectional identity within Liberal politics, albeit one which was still not clearly demarcated either in terms of policy or personnel. The increasingly public nature of the division coincided with the Roseberyite faction's increasing challenges to the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman, most notably expressed in the so-called 'war to the knife and fork' and the most high profile of Rosebery's many re-entries into public life with the 1902 Chesterfield speech. This chapter examines the rhetoric used to frame the public debates about the relationship between Liberalism and Empire that the Liberal split prompted, in order to build further upon the existing scholarship of the party's wartime high politics. Regardless of the extent to which imperialism actually formed the core of Liberal Imperialist politics, the prominence given to the imperialist label encouraged speakers from across the party to articulate explicitly Liberal principles of Empire in relation to the South African question to a greater degree than in 1899. Additionally, the climate of the general election of 1900 also saw an increased tendency of Liberal speakers to contrast their party's approaches with jingoism and Tory imperialism. This chapter therefore examines these broader debates alongside the specific issues raised by the war, in order to assess the South African question as an imperial political issue in these years.

The politics of the war were complex, and naturally the rapidly changing situation in South Africa brought about in its turn substantial changes in debates over Empire in Britain, reshaping the key rhetorical tropes which Liberals deployed in their rhetoric on South Africa. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated, the changing foci of Liberal debates on the war, against a backdrop of high political divisions within the party, actually masks a degree of rhetorical continuity on the South African question. On the key points of good imperial governance, race harmony, self-government and the national honour, as well as with the recurring tropes of character and the idea of a Liberal approach to Empire, the key elements of Liberal rhetoric ultimately stood essentially unchanged from the debates of 1899 and earlier.

### **Debating Significance: the Political History of the War**

The subtitle of Andrew Porter's centenary essay charting the South African War's impact on the metropole, 'A Question of Significance?', aptly highlights the central debate within historical writing on Britain's wartime politics.<sup>1</sup> With the years 1899 to 1902 witnessing an open split within Liberalism and a heated election campaign seemingly focused on questions of patriotism and imperialism, one of the key concerns of much historical writing on the period has to been to try and assess the extent to which the South African question represented the key driver of political events, or simply the backdrop against which they took place.

In part, this reflects the wider use of the South African War as a case study for many historians of British imperial society. Alongside the First World War, the Boer War emerges as a key influence in John Mackenzie's analysis of imperial propaganda, providing a basis for the dissemination of imperial ideas throughout British society.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the British experience of the South African War features heavily in Bernard Porter's thesis of 'absent-minded imperialism'. Challenging the notion of a Britain enthused with imperialism, Porter considers the production of imperial propaganda for young readerships

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<sup>1</sup> A.N. Porter, 'The South African War and Imperial Britain: A Question of Significance?', in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh and Mary-Lynn Suttie (eds) *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902* (Athens, OH: 2002).

<sup>2</sup> John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: 1984).

and the prevalence of patriotic songs among the working classes during the South African War as evidence for the limitations of imperial pervasiveness within British culture.<sup>3</sup> The period of the war has also been seized upon in terms of explaining the shifting meanings of imperialism in this period. Koebner and Schmidt held that the war was primarily responsible for imperialism's 'reversion to the status of partisan abuse' within politics, not just in Britain but also internationally.<sup>4</sup> While few today would entirely back such an analysis, many would still consider the war a key moment in shaping British imperial sentiment. Andrew Thompson, for example, argues that the one of the most significant effects of the war was to dampen enthusiasm for the 'new imperialism' of the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> With such considerations in mind, it is therefore worthwhile examining how Liberal articulations of Empire and imperialism changed, or indeed remained consistent, over the course of the war.

In assessments of the politics of the war, debates over the nature of the 'khaki' election of autumn 1900 loom particularly large. Held less than a year after the outbreak of hostilities and framed by the Unionist government in strongly imperial terms, the election result swiftly became to be identified as dramatic proof of jingoism and popular imperialism which gripped the political life of fin-de-siècle Britain. Indeed, the narrative of a government seeking to exploit the war for political gain was one that was advanced before polling had even begun, the *Daily News* of 22 September attacking Tory electioneers for advocating the 'confinement of the election controversies to the single issue of the war'.<sup>6</sup> Following the government's success, both Liberals and Unionists interpreted the result as primarily driven by popular imperialism, not least because it represented the first clear re-election of a government since the Second Reform Act.<sup>7</sup> This conventional wisdom is reflected in early historiography on the topic, J. A. Spender's biography of Campbell-Bannerman

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: 2004), especially ch.8 & ch.9.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (Cambridge: 1964), p.221

<sup>5</sup> Andrew S. Thompson, 'The language of imperialism and the meanings of empire: imperial discourse in British politics, 1895-1914', *Journal of British Studies* 36:2 (1997).

<sup>6</sup> Editorial, *The Daily News*, 22 Sep. 1900.

<sup>7</sup> E.H.H. Green, *The crisis of conservatism: the politics, economics, and ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: 1995), p.67.

attributing the Liberal defeat to the average voter's 'practical instinct [...] that the defeat of the Government would be construed by the Boers and by foreign Powers as a censure of its entire South African policy'.<sup>8</sup> Likewise Elizabeth Enstam, while placing stress on the organisational weaknesses of the Liberal Party in determining the election result, similarly identified the war as a key factor in bringing about the Unionist victory.<sup>9</sup>

This interpretation came under significant challenge however in the 1970s with Richard Price's *An Imperial War and the British Working Class*. As part of a wider thesis questioning the narrative of popular working class support for imperialism during the South African War, Price conducted an analysis of constituency results by demographic composition and the position of the Liberal candidates on the war, suggesting that only in pro-Boer constituencies was the conflict a 'live issue'.<sup>10</sup> Arguing instead for a greater understanding of Unionist appeals to social reform as a central element of the election, Price concluded that 'imperialism as an electoral issue was of very little force in working-class constituencies'.<sup>11</sup> Price's analysis of the election is echoed in Andrew Porter's assessment of the war's impact on political life. Considering South African questions to have been 'a source of such embarrassment that party leaders wished to be rid of them as quickly as possible', Porter paints an account of the 1900 general election which consigns the war to a background role.<sup>12</sup> The faltering course of the war, by this analysis, drained Chamberlain's imperial politics 'of any moral and political capital', with the result that 'there was widespread avoidance of war issues by Unionist candidates' during the election.<sup>13</sup> Porter goes further than most in this assessment, but nonetheless the argument that attitudes to the war imperialism cannot explain the election's outcome have been broadly accepted until relatively recently.

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<sup>8</sup> J. A. Spender, *The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London: 1923), vol. 1, p.290.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth York Enstam, 'The "Khaki" Election of 1900 in the United Kingdom' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Duke University, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902* (London: 1972), ch.3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>12</sup> Porter, 'The South African War and Imperial Britain', p.290.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.291.

The main challenge to this assessment emerged from the work of Paul Readman. In a quantitative study of the election addresses of both Unionist and Liberal candidates at the election, Readman argues that the South African War did play a significant role in the election, most significantly in providing a framework within which Unionist candidates could launch patriotic appeals to the electorate.<sup>14</sup> The nature of the political language of patriotism as identified by Readman has already been discussed in the previous chapter, so will not be further discussed here, except to note again that Readman's understanding of patriotism is by no means synonymous with ideas of imperialism or jingoism. The need to differentiate between the two is a point recently also stressed by Luke Blaxill, who argues nonetheless that the 1900 election was indeed characterised by imperialist appeals, albeit in the hands of the Unionist an appeal that was deliberately conflated with patriotism.<sup>15</sup> The Price interpretation of the election of 1900 has also come under fire from other quarters.<sup>16</sup> Although it will be difficult to ever fully establish the degree to which different issues shaped the nature of a general election, a point which indeed Price himself recognised and stressed, there has certainly been a growing trend in recent years of recognising the impact of the South African question on the politics of the election.

The connections between the politics of the conflict and divisions within the Liberal Party have also been the subject of much historical inquiry. Although it remains the case that the impact of the war upon Liberal politics is often passed over astonishingly swiftly in many general histories of the Liberal Party, there remains nonetheless a solid body of literature on the fracturing of the party

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Readman, 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism, and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies* 40:1 (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Luke Blaxill, 'The Language of British Electoral Politics 1880-1910' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Kings College, 2012), ch.4.

<sup>16</sup> See in particular discussions of the election campaign in M. D. Blanch, 'British Society and the War' in Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Harlow: 1980), pp.222-25; Thompson, 'The language of imperialism', 155; Andrew S. Thompson, 'Imperial Propaganda during the South African War' in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh and Mary-Lynn Suttie (eds) *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902* (Athens, OH: 2002), p.303; and Iain Sharpe, 'Empire, Patriotism and the Working-Class Electorate: The 1900 General Election in the Battersea Constituency', *Parliamentary History* 28:3 (2009).

between 1899 and 1902, particularly concerning the high politics of the struggle over the party leadership.<sup>17</sup> Peter Jacobson, David Gutzke, and George Bernstein all provide informative surveys of the relationship between the official leadership of Campbell-Bannerman and the Roseberyite wing. All three consider the very public emergence of the Liberal Imperialist section during the war as part of cumulative process with its roots in earlier divisions, although there is a less of a consensus on the extent to which it was a question of policy or ideology. For Jacobson, the term Liberal Imperialist is best considered as the 'rhetoric of party infighting during the Boer War'.<sup>18</sup> Gutzke and Bernstein, in contrast, identify a more genuine split along the questions of imperialism and war policy, Gutzke in particular noting a degree of continuity with earlier divisions over Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

In H.C.G. Matthew's assessment, the politics of the war play only a small part, in line with Matthew's characterisation of the group as an elite formation within Liberalism that sought to articulate a wide-range of post-Gladstonian positions. Nonetheless, Matthew's work is useful in that identifies the questions of annexation, the peace settlement, and the relationship with Alfred Milner as key flash points which divided the faction from the bulk of party opinion.<sup>20</sup> The latter question was more of a war issue than an imperial one, although it was certainly related to questions over the 'methods of barbarism'. The annexations and the ultimate settlement of the conflict in any case represent two of the central elements of imperial Liberal rhetoric during the course of the war, making Matthew's work an invaluable basis for further inquiry.

There has also been a considerable body of scholarship on the relationship between the Liberal Party and the pro-Boers. In his assessment of Liberals and

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<sup>17</sup> Notable exceptions to this trend within general histories of the party are George L. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England* (London: 1986) and Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice 1868-1918* (London: 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Peter D. Jacobson, 'Rosebery and Liberal Imperialism, 1899-1903', *Journal of British Studies* 13:1 (1973), 83.

<sup>19</sup> David W. Gutzke, 'Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman: the Conflict over Leadership Reconsidered', *Historical Research* 54:130 (1981); George L. Bernstein, 'Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Imperialists', *Journal of British Studies* 23:1 (1983).

<sup>20</sup> H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian élite* (Oxford: 1973), ch.5.

the war, Bernard Porter characterises the pro-Boer wing of the party as primarily concerned with demonstrating the injustice of the conflict and rejecting the idea of a *casus belli*.<sup>21</sup> While this is a fair description of some of the more radical elements within the pro-Boer wing of the party, it ignores the extent to which an assessment of the war's origins was combined with imperial questions arising from the conduct of the war. Porter's assessment of the neglect of the black African population in pro-Boer rhetoric certainly rings true however, and represents one of the more interesting silences in anti-imperialist rhetoric on the war.<sup>22</sup> John W. Auld provides a more in-depth assessment of the pro-Boer position in this period, identifying a traditional concern for humanitarianism and (white) self-government as the main drivers behind pro-Boer Liberal sentiment during the war.<sup>23</sup> Even this however reflects only part of the pro-Boer appeal, and as recent scholarship on the humanitarian response to British war methods has shown, Liberal pro-Boer politics can be considered to have embodied a more complex relationship with Empire.

One aspect of the conflict that has attracted considerable attention from both historians of the Liberal Party and of the politics of the war more generally is that of the British war methods of farm-burning and the implementation of concentration camps, controversially characterised by Campbell-Bannerman as the 'methods of barbarism'. More than any other two elements, the twin policies have come to represent the height of the controversies within Britain over the South African War.<sup>24</sup> For Bill Nasson, the reaction to the system of concentration camps represented the 'most single-minded political issue of the war', and certainly it looms large in political histories of the years following the election of 1900. The reaction to the camps took on two related but distinct

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<sup>21</sup> Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*, second edition (London: 2008) [first published 1968], pp.62-63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.65-69.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Auld, 'The Liberal Pro-Boers', *Journal of British Studies* 14:2 (May 1975).

<sup>24</sup> It is important to remember that for many years the trend within British historiography was to downplay the scale of the tragedies of the camp system and assign blame to the failings of the Boers, either for want of political leadership or for a failure to meet the standards of civilisation required for camp living. For a good survey of the literature on the operation of the camps, see Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'The Concentration Camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, 1900-1902', *History Compass* 7:1 (2009).

forms: the first a specific controversy relating to Campbell-Bannerman's political charge that the war was being waged by 'methods of barbarism', and the second a wider humanitarian reaction within British society upon which the Liberal charge was based. Partly due to the uproar generated by the specific cry of 'methods of barbarism', historians of British Liberal politics have tended to focus on the role of Campbell-Bannerman in bringing the issue to the political foreground. Assessments about the impact of Campbell-Bannerman's intervention have varied considerably. For A. J. P. Taylor, the new line of attack was nothing less than 'a stroke of genius' which brought about the reunification of Liberals and Radicals, characterising the new Liberal approach as 'moral fervour revived free from any awkward moral problems'.<sup>25</sup> In Spender's interpretation however, the charge alienated the 'faithful' centre rather than binding it with the Liberals, while John Wilson has questioned whether there was any 'political purpose' to the intervention.<sup>26</sup> In his analysis of the Liberal Imperialist response, Matthew considered that significance of the speech had more to do with the appearance that Campbell-Bannerman was vacating the centre of the party than ultimately with any real differences over imperial policy.<sup>27</sup>

Yet moving away from questions of high politics, others have seen a distinctly imperial element to the Liberal critique of British war tactics. John S. Ellis has argued that the rhetoric of 'methods of barbarism' served to advance a pluralistic Liberal vision of Empire and Britishness against the new imperialism of the Conservatives. Liberal pro-Boers, Ellis argues, presented the policies of farm burning and the concentration camps as an attack by the strong on the weak and a parallel to the Empire's assault on the rights of the Boer nations; by contrast, the Liberal alternative presented a Gladstonian vision of a multinational Empire.<sup>28</sup> Ellis' thesis of a narrative of barbarism underpinning a pluralistic Liberalism is echoed by Kenneth O. Morgan in his examination of Lloyd George's pro-Boer activities. Morgan characterises Lloyd George's

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<sup>25</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939*, Penguin Books edition (Harmondsworth: 1985) [first published: 1957], p.109.

<sup>26</sup> Spender, *Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, vol. 1, p.336-338; John Wilson, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London: 1973), p.351.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*, pp.63-66.

<sup>28</sup> John S. Ellis. "The Methods of Barbarism" and the "Rights of Small Nations": War Propaganda and British Pluralism', *Albion* 30:1 (1998).

imperialism as that of a belief in imperial partnership, although he considers this a secondary factor to Lloyd George's repulsion towards the corrupting effect of jingoism and a profiteering imperialism on Britain itself.<sup>29</sup> Given the race dynamics already identified in the politics of the South African question, it is worth exploring the extent to which pro-Boer narratives, and indeed other aspects of Liberal rhetoric, implicitly or explicitly linked the vision of a pluralistic Empire with the humanitarian response to the farm burnings.

Additionally, a rich body of scholarship has in recent years explored the gendered dimensions of the concentration camps controversy. Paula Krebs' cultural study of the conflict and British imperial culture, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*, rightly identifies the significance of gender ideology both in the newspaper reporting of the scandal, and in shaping the government and the military's official responses to the episode.<sup>30</sup> On the figure of Hobhouse in particular, Marouf Hasian Jr.'s rhetorical analysis provides a useful account of the efforts by British administrators to frame Hobhouse's campaign as evidence of 'hysteria' and a failing of national character, even as Hobhouse's revelations were seized upon by the pro-Boers who found the humanitarian critique a more effective narrative than previous agitation over annexation and reconciliation.<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, Zoë Denness' recent article on the camps controversy highlights the extent to which both critics and defenders of the camp system invoked gendered tropes in their descriptions of Boer women, which in turn were linked to ideals of civilisation and Empire.<sup>32</sup> Denness' work is also notable for her assessment that the concentration camp controversy was closely linked to discourses on Boer whiteness and Anglo-Boer similarity, which as seen in the previous chapter represented a key element of pro-Boer rhetoric prior to the outbreak of the war. Additionally Morgan's work on the Boer War and the British press has stressed the importance of the female readerships in the reporting of

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Lloyd George, Keir Hardie and the Importance of the "Pro-Boers"', *South African Historical Journal* 41:1 (1999).

<sup>30</sup> Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Marouf Hasian Jr., 'The "hysterical" Emily Hobhouse and Boer War concentration camp controversy', *Western Journal of Communication* 67:2 (2003).

<sup>32</sup> Zoë Denness, 'Women and warfare at the start of the twentieth century: the racialization of the "enemy" during the South African War (1899–1902)', *Patterns of Prejudice* 46:3-4 (2012).

the concentration camp atrocities and the subsequent shift in the public opinion.<sup>33</sup> These debates have largely not engaged directly with the party political element of the controversy; nonetheless, in considering the rhetoric of 'methods of barbarism' the wider rhetorical framework of the camps controversy serves to provide important context for Liberal rhetorical strategies.

In seeking to trace the evolution of the South African question in Liberal rhetoric through the years of the South African War, there is then a substantial body of existing research which serves to act as a foundation for further inquiry. In particular, the large body of literature surrounding the high political struggles over the Liberal leadership and the nature of Liberal factionalism in this period serves to provide political context to many of the speeches examined in this chapter, as well as highlighting the key points of contention. However, the focus on personalities rather than the principles of the issue, as well as the focus in the studies of the 1900 election on the relative importance of imperial issues rather than way in which it was discussed renders much of the existing historiography of only limited use for our purposes. Only really on the issue of 'methods of barbarism' itself have the rhetorical nature of the campaigns been studied in significant depth. While taking into account the themes raised by the existing literature therefore, this chapter largely steers clear of the high political conflict comprising the 'war to the knife and fork' and similar episodes, except so as far as the rhetoric deployed casts light on wider imperial attitudes and assumptions. Similarly, the purpose of this chapter is not ultimately to assess the importance of the South African question to either the general election of 1900 or to the politics of wartime more generally. Rather, it is with the aim of mind of establishing how, when the question was raised by Liberal speakers, the imperial questions at the heart of the conflict were articulated and framed.

### **The Liberal Party and the Wartime Politics of Empire**

As examined in the previous chapter, the descent into warfare in the autumn of 1899 served as a catalyst for discussions about the relationship between Liberal Party politics and the Empire. This was a process not just driven by the nature of the South African War as an imperial conflict, but also by the dynamics of British party political culture at the end of the nineteenth century. The legacy of

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<sup>33</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)', *Twentieth Century British History* 13:1 (2002), 11-12.

imperial concerns as the chosen basis for Harcourt's resignation, and the adoption of the 'imperialist' label to describe the anti-Radical faction that developed around Rosebery, helped ensure that much of the public discourse surrounding the Liberal split was framed in terms of questions of imperialism as well as the divisions over the war. While as noted above the degree to which genuine divisions over the Empire lay at the root of divisions within the party has been seriously questioned by historians, the very fact that imperialism formed the notional battleground within the party created rhetorical spaces for the articulation of Liberal visions of empire and Liberal expressions of imperial politics. Additionally, the need to set out the relationship between Liberal politics and imperial questions was also created by the necessity of countering an ascendant Unionist politics which sought to claim ownership over imperial languages, not only at the election of 1900 but throughout the course of the war. This section therefore examines the ways in which Liberal speakers drew links between the politics of the war and the wider role of the Empire and imperialism within British Liberal politics.

Liberal speakers sought to rebut Unionist claims that the party could not be trusted with the responsibilities of managing the Empire by drawing upon British Liberalism's record of imperial management. For example, James Bryce, President of the Board of Trade under the Rosebery government and a critic of the war, used a speech at Aberdeen in the summer of 1900 to declare that the Empire had 'expanded enormously under Liberal Governments', which had protected its interests and vindicated its rights as well as any Tory administration.<sup>34</sup> Given the degree to which a suspicion of expansionist imperialism ran through sections of the Liberal Party supporter base in this period, such efforts could sometimes backfire on speakers. For example, in a speech at Stoke Newington on 17 November 1899 Lord Tweedmouth attempted to rebut the charge that Liberals did not care for the interests of the Empire by asserting that 'it had been during Liberal administrations that the largest annexations had been made', only to be greeted with laughter and heckled with

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<sup>34</sup> James Bryce, speech at Aberdeen, 4 Jun. 1900, reported in *Dundee Courier*, 5 Jun. 1900.

cries of 'shame' from his audience.<sup>35</sup> Confronted with this, Tweedmouth could only reply that perhaps it was a shame, but it was nonetheless a fact, which he swiftly contrasted with 'the biggest loss the Empire ever sustained – namely, the loss of the American colonies' under the Tory administration of Lord North. Although it is difficult to judge from newspaper reports the extent to which the hecklers were representative of the mood at large, the incident serves to highlight nonetheless the challenge that faced Liberal critics of the conflict in seeking to defend their imperial credentials without alienating radical sentiment.

The charge that it was under Tory rule that the United States was lost to the Empire was a regular staple of Liberal speeches during the South African War. Campbell-Bannerman had himself adopted this line early on in the war. In a speech at Manchester on 14 November 1899, the Liberal leader invited his audience to imagine a contest between two men, one a Liberal and one a Tory, in which each sought to argue that their party had done the most for the Empire. The contest would not go on for long, he said, because the Liberal would argue that 'to add to empire was something, but to prevent a great loss to it was surely better, and he would put down this, that it was the Tory policy that cost the North American colonies.'<sup>36</sup> The Liberal Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone made a similar charge at the time of the general election the following year. Speaking at Leeds on 18 September 1900, Gladstone declared that:

The development of our colonies has been chiefly due to the Liberal party. It was the Tories who lost us the United States of America; it was the Tories who would have lost us Canada but for the action of the Liberal Party; and it was Lord Beaconsfield, the great Tory Imperialist, who spoke of the colonies as "those wretched colonies".<sup>37</sup>

This represented an audacious bid for the mantle of imperialism from Gladstone, not least given the degree to which his father's assault upon

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<sup>35</sup> Lord Tweedmouth, speech at Stoke Newington, 17 Nov. 1899, reported in *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 Nov. 1899.

<sup>36</sup> Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Manchester, 14 Nov. 1899, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Nov. 1899.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Gladstone, speech at Leeds, 18 Sep. 1900, reported in *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 19 Sep. 1900.

Disraelian imperialism had become an article of faith for many within the party.<sup>38</sup> The invited contrast between the United States and Canada is also significant: as will be examined, Liberals presented the development of responsible self-government in Canada as demonstrating the effectiveness of the Liberal approach to Empire, as well as citing Canada as an idealised model for the settlement of South Africa, combining race harmony and self-governing federation.

Similar efforts were made to distinguish between the imperialism of the Liberal Party and that of the Unionist government. In a speech at St Andrews University on 10 January 1900, R. B. Haldane asserted that 'there was a great deal which marked Liberals off from the Jingo Imperialism which was associated with some prominent members of the Ministry.'<sup>39</sup> The latter, he charged, lay behind the mishandled diplomacy and planning in the run up to the war, and failed to appreciate that the government of South Africa could only be carried out with respect to the prejudices and feelings of their neighbours in the region. Later that month Gladstone was to advance a similar case to his constituents at Holbeck, explicitly contrasting the new imperialism represented by Chamberlain's tenure at the Colonial Office with the Liberal Imperialist platform. Rejecting what he characterised as the imperialism of 'the critical events, the anxieties, and the wars and alarms of the past five years', Gladstone instead endorsed the 'true and sound Imperialism which had been expounded by Mr Asquith and Lord Rosebery' which, he argued, 'had extended freedom and self-government in our colonies, and which had, without brag or bluster, devoted itself beneficially to the development of our vast colonies and territories'.<sup>40</sup> The positioning of Liberals as representing a 'true' imperialism was also to be reiterated in the heated context of the election, with Grey arguing at Berwick-on-Tweed that 'the Opposition must be Imperialist, but it ought not to be an aggressive Imperialism', charging the government with the latter and urging

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<sup>38</sup> For an analysis of the Liberal critique of Disraeli's imperial policy, see P. J. Durrans, 'A Two-Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10:3 (1982).

<sup>39</sup> R. B. Haldane, speech at St Andrews, 10 Jan. 1900, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 11 Jan. 1900.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Gladstone, speech at Holbeck, 19 Jan. 1900, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 20 Jan. 1900.

instead to embrace the 'true imperialist feeling' of a 'Liberal Empire'.<sup>41</sup> In this way, criticisms of the government's imperialism tended to focus on questions of character, competence and statesmanship, a dynamic which also served to further stress Liberal efforts to present their South African policies as following a traditional, successful pattern.

Grey's rhetoric at Berwick-on-Tweed closely reflected the language of his Glasgow speech at the time of the initial moment of crisis, and might likewise be seen as an effort to expound the Roseberyite position on Empire.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Gladstone's endorsement of the imperialism of Asquith and Rosebery, although framed in opposition to Chamberlainite imperialism, could not help but also serve to highlight the Liberal Imperialist platform. Throughout this period, however, both the Liberal Imperialists and their opponents within the party were inconsistent in their efforts to frame questions of imperialism as the basis for the Liberal split. From the Liberal Imperialist camp, Grey adopted at different times a variety of rhetorical efforts to articulate his personal position in relation to imperialism and internal Liberal politics. In his speech to the City Liberal Club on 20 March 1900, Grey attacked the notion of 'pruning' the Liberal Imperialists from the party specifically in relation to imperialism, asserting that the party must instead extend its roots into 'the soil of imperial sentiment'.<sup>43</sup> Addressing his constituents in May 1901 however, Grey was instead to insist that, while the Liberal Party was currently split between those who looked on the war as a war of aggression and those who saw it as a war of defence, 'this difference, however, need not constitute a difference on Imperialism.'<sup>44</sup> Like Asquith, Grey also notably did not raise the question of imperialism at the Reform Club meeting of the parliamentary Liberal Party, convened on 9 July 1901 to consider a confidence motion in the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman. Instead, Grey simply asserted his right to express his own views on the specifics of the South

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<sup>41</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Berwick-on-Tweed, 26 Sep. 1900, reported in *Daily News*, 27 Sep. 1900.

<sup>42</sup> See discussion in previous chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at the City Liberal Club, London, 20 Mar. 1900, reported in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 Mar. 1900.

<sup>44</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Berwick-on-Tweed, 30 May 1901, reported in *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 31 May. 1901.

African question.<sup>45</sup> Even allowing for the careful stage-management of the Reform Club Meeting, it is striking nonetheless that Grey did not even notionally seek to characterise his difference in opinion as an imperialist one.

In contrast to his supporters in the House of Commons, Rosebery did seek to frame the leadership crisis of summer 1901 as an imperial question, albeit indirectly. Speaking at the City Liberal Club ten days after the Reform Club meeting, Rosebery outlined the view that the latest divisions within the Liberal Party formed a part of longer-running schism within Liberalism over foreign and imperial questions predating the secession of the Liberal Unionists. The paralysis of Liberalism and the party's defeat at the general election, he charged, arose from doubts over the 'competency of the Opposition to deal with the imperial crisis which lay outside domestic affairs'.<sup>46</sup> Yet even this assessment fell considerably short of the explicit 'Liberal Imperialist' programme he had outlined at Bath at the beginning of the war, and while Rosebery's much-heralded Chesterfield speech in December 1901 did advise his Liberal colleagues not to dissociate themselves from the 'new sentiment of the empire', it is notable that the essence of his platform for Liberalism revolved instead around the specific debate over 'methods of barbarism' and the rejection of Irish home rule.<sup>47</sup>

If Liberal Imperialists did not always seek to frame imperialism as the cause of Liberal divisions, neither did their opponents. Although in a speech at Forfar on 24 January 1900 Morley declared his dislike for the word 'empire' and famously likened Liberal Imperialism to 'Chamberlain wine with a Rosebery label', such direct attacks upon the Liberal Imperialist platform should not necessarily be taken as typical of the pro-Boer position, either in terms of presenting imperialism as the cause of the breach or in the explicit rejection of the imperialist label.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, many Liberal opponents of the war and its conduct

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<sup>45</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at the Reform Club, London, 9 Jul. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Jul. 1901.

<sup>46</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech at the City Liberal Club, London 19 Jul. 1901, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 Jul. 1901.

<sup>47</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech at Chesterfield, 16 Dec. 1901, reported in *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 Dec. 1901.

<sup>48</sup> John Morley, speech at Forfar, 24 Jan. 1900, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 Jan. 1900.

sought to deliberately cast themselves in the imperialist mould. Bryce, in his speech at Aberdeen on 4 June 1900 was to insist that:

there is no man in the Liberal party holding any responsible position [...] who desires to circumscribe the influence of Britain abroad, or who is indifferent to the maintenance of our power and the discharge of our Imperial duties. There is no difference of opinion in the Liberal Party as to the dignity of the mission entrusted to us, as to the energy with which we should fulfil it.<sup>49</sup>

Critically, this insistence coming from a Liberal critic of the conflict, that the party was united on imperial questions, was accompanied by a direct invocation of Liberal Imperialist programme, with Bryce declaring that ‘if their Imperialism was to be truly Liberal it must, as Lord Rosebery has well said, be a “sane and unaggressive imperialism.”’<sup>50</sup> Bryce would advance similar rhetoric later on in the conflict. Speaking again at Aberdeen on 9 January 1902, Bryce again sought to stress that there was no difference in opinion within the Liberal party ‘as to what is called the sentiment of empire’, instead insisting that it ‘is as Imperialists that we condemn this war. We condemn it because we want to save South Africa for the Empire’.<sup>51</sup> Again, we can see in Bryce’s rhetoric the effort both to play down imperial matters as the cause of the divisions within the party, and to claim the ‘imperialist’ label for the opponents of the conflict.

Similarly, in a speech at Conway on 24 January 1900 William Jones, the Welsh nationalist and pro-Boer Liberal MP for Arfon, declared himself to be ‘a firm believer in imperialism and in empire’, asserting that ‘the principles of Welsh Nationalism were in harmony with the principles of enlightened imperialism’.<sup>52</sup> Like Bryce, Jones then was also seeking to characterise his opposition to the conflict as an imperialist position, challenging both Unionist efforts to own the language of imperialism in this period and the Roseberyite wing’s claim to represent imperialism within the party. Jones’ efforts to link his imperialism to his Welsh nationalism are also notable, commenting that ‘as a Welsh Nationalist he was proud of the great empire of which Wales formed a part. It was Wales

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<sup>49</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 5 Jun. 1900.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> James Bryce, speech at Aberdeen, 9 Jan. 1902, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Jan. 1902.

<sup>52</sup> William Jones, speech at Conway, 24 Jan. 1900, reported in *Liverpool Mercury* 25 Jan. 1900

which had commenced the creation of the British Empire when it placed the Welsh Tudors on the British throne.<sup>53</sup> Jones' comments in this regard are suggestive of a pluralistic vision of Empire, at least in relation to the nationalities of the United Kingdom, along the lines suggested by Ellis and Morgan. Certainly, they in any case serve to illustrate one way in which the imperialist label could be co-opted to Radical causes.

With respect to doctrines of imperialism and their relation to Liberalism, Campbell-Bannerman for his part largely continued with the strategy he adopted in the autumn of 1899, namely questioning the multitude of meanings associated with imperialism while seeking to stress Liberal support for the Empire and minimising differences within Liberalism. In a speech at Birmingham on 24 November 1899, Campbell-Bannerman observed that 'everyone nowadays appears to cultivate some peculiar species of his own of what is called Imperialism, and try to fit some qualifying adjective of his own before the word.' His own brand, he declared, would be 'commonsense Imperialism', which encouraged the development of imperial sentiment and loyalty coming from 'a well-governed, and if possible, a self-governed people.'<sup>54</sup> The references to good government, self-government and imperial loyalty echo the language deployed by Campbell-Bannerman and others within the Liberal Party prior to the outbreak of the war. Similarly, speaking at Bath on 20 November 1901, Campbell-Bannerman characterised his imperialism as a readiness 'to defend our imperial interests, and to add to the Empire if it is necessary', but not in the form of a 'swaggering, hectoring, blustering, and filibustering Empire', reflecting a focus on the character and practice of imperialism as seen in earlier debates on the South African question.<sup>55</sup> Notably, the Liberal Leader's position at Bath allowed for the expansion of the Empire in order to defend imperial interests. Campbell-Bannerman's definition of imperialism accommodated the annexation of the two republics, by this point generally accepted as irreversible by the bulk of the party.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Birmingham, 24 Nov. 1899, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 Nov. 1899.

<sup>55</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Bath, 20 Nov. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1901.

One further aspect of Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric on imperialism worth analysing is the language he deployed in his speech at Leicester on 19 February 1902, during the final stages of the conflict. Both for contemporaries and for later historians, the Leicester speech was primarily notable as an explicit rejection of the 'clean slate' proposed by Rosebery at Chesterfield, anticipating the shift in focus to Irish Home Rule as the battleground upon which Liberal divisions were to be fought. However, the speech also contained a lengthy exposition on the notion of imperialism, which Campbell-Bannerman demarcated into 'foreign' and 'domestic' imperialism. The former represented very much the vision of empire he had previously articulated, characterising it as the 'desire and endeavour to defend and promote the interests of and strengthen in every way our Empire'. Characteristically, the Liberal leader also poured scorn on 'ridiculous' jingo behaviour and presented his own brand of imperialism as not 'some novel doctrine', but a 'doctrine as old as the Empire itself'. More unusual however, was his description of domestic imperialism, 'which we know under the name of Caesarism'.<sup>56</sup> Domestic imperialism, he charged

magnifies the executive power, it acts upon the passions of the people, it conciliates them in classes and in localities by lavish expenditure, it occupies men's minds with display and amusement, it inspires a thirst for military glory, it captures the electorate by false assertions and illusory promises, and then, having by these means a plebiscite, in the servile Parliament thus created it crushes opposition and extinguishes liberty.<sup>57</sup>

This explicit characterisation of imperialism as Caesarism was not a regular feature of Campbell-Bannerman's discussions of imperialism, and appears in this case to have been prompted by the political row surrounding the Government's proposals to amend the standing orders of the House of Commons. Nonetheless, in his references to the passions of the people, the thirst for military glory and the capturing of the electorate, Campbell-Bannerman can be seen to at least implicitly reference the South African War and the politics of the general election.

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<sup>56</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Leicester, 19 Feb. 1902, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Feb. 1902.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

The invocation of Caesarism thus serves to highlight a number of aspects about the wider rhetoric on imperialism within Liberal circles in this period. First, the invocation of Caesarism as a definition of imperialism would appear to support the assessment of Koebner and Schmidt, that the course of the South African War witnessed a transition in the meaning of imperialism back towards its earlier pejorative associations, or at the very least that the language of Caesarism remained a part of the Liberal rhetorical arsenal. Campbell-Bannerman's speech also reflects wider Liberal and Radical concerns about the risk of a detrimental domestic impact on Britain from an undesirable imperialism. As Porter notes in *Critics of Empire*, anti-imperialist Liberals were aghast at the domestic implications of imperialism.<sup>58</sup> Not only did imperialism in their view enable reactionary forces in Britain to stave off the demand for social reform, but also the despotic nature of imperial rule was actively harmful to the British constitution due to its corrupting influences on public sentiment and political character. Indeed, in Miles Taylor's analysis the prevalence of such arguments serves as an explanation for the strength of the backlash against the 'new imperialism' in the time of the South African question, the negative critique of empire revived 'only when the resilience of democracy at home seemed in doubt'.<sup>59</sup> For all the specific contexts of Campbell-Bannerman's intervention therefore, his rhetoric was drawing upon significant pre-existing anxieties in Radical and progressive circles. Additionally, the rhetorical link drawn between imperialism, liberty and governing structures serves to underline the focus on governing structures within Liberal party debates on imperialism and, as will be examined later on, many Liberal critiques of the methods of the war, particularly in relation to the imposition of martial law at the Cape and discussions relating to self-government following the war's conclusion, would deploy rhetoric on these lines.

The relationship between British Liberalism and the language of imperialism during the period of the South African War was a complex one. Liberal speakers did not consistently advance comprehensive definitions of imperialism, which could be taken to refer respectively to the objects, methods or character of

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<sup>58</sup> Porter, *Critics of Empire*, p.90.

<sup>59</sup> Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19:1 (1991), 14.

British imperial policy. Neither was the question of differences over imperialism consistently linked to the differences that existed over the South African War either between the Liberal opposition and the Unionist government, or within the Liberal Party. Nonetheless, there are a number of insights which can be drawn from the characterisations of imperialism found within Liberal speeches. First, in spite of their name the Liberal Imperialist faction did not consistently emphasise imperialism as the basis for their breach with the radical wing of the party and, from 1901, the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman. As will be examined later in this chapter, it was primarily on specific questions of South African policy that the Liberal Imperialists sought to demarcate their position.<sup>60</sup> Second, while the Radical critique of the war advanced anti-imperialist arguments in the general sense, and certainly figures such as Morley continued to express their unhappiness with the language of empire, many Liberal critics of the war nonetheless sought to frame their positions as imperialist. This relates to a third observation that might be made, namely that in articulating visions of imperialism, Liberal speakers often presented a contrast between their own version of imperialism and an undesirable 'other' imperialism, which might be variously labelled Tory, jingoistic or Caesarist imperialism, which stood to harm the Empire. In this respect, many of the elements of Liberal rhetoric on imperialism during the course of the war reflected a pre-war focus, suggesting a degree of continuity despite the outbreak of hostilities.

As with the crisis of 1899, explicit Liberal debates on ideas of imperialism represented only the most visible element of Liberal rhetoric on the Empire. As will be examined, the issues raised in relation to the course of the war in South Africa provided Liberals with further opportunities to frame imperial policies both implicitly and explicitly in Liberal terms. The nature of the debates over the relationship between Liberal politics and the Empire should as such be seen as the wider context within which the specific controversies of the South African war were articulated, and it is these controversies which this thesis now examines.

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<sup>60</sup> From the Chesterfield speech onwards, the focus would increasingly switch the question of Irish Home Rule.

## **Annexation and its Consequences**

The early phases of the South African War had not gone at all well for the British: the swift Boer offensive into Natal and the Cape Colony took many by surprise, and the military defeats of 'Black Week' in December 1899 proved a serious shock to both British policy makers and the general public. By the spring of 1900 however, the tide had been reversed, and British forces were now advancing steadily into Boer territory. The Orange Free State (OFS) capital of Bloemfontein was captured in March, prompting the government of President Marthinus Steyn to hastily relocate to Kroonstad, which itself fell in early May. On 24 May, less than a fortnight later, Lord Roberts proclaimed the annexation of the OFS, which was now to become the Orange River Colony. Pretoria fell on 5 June, and likewise the SAR was annexed as the Transvaal Colony soon after.<sup>61</sup> As events would soon demonstrate, the annexations would prove to be far from the end of the conflict, which swiftly entered a protracted guerrilla phase. In terms of the political situation however, the annexations were highly significant.

The way in which Liberals discussed the annexations of the SAR and the OFS reveals much about the party's response to the rapidly shifting aims of the war. Crucially, to its critics the prospect of annexation was condemned not just as a breach of Liberal principles but as a dangerous development for the Empire. Once annexation had been accomplished, and was presented by the Unionists as a key point of contention at the general election, the Liberal leadership swiftly articulated a new position, recognising the incorporation of the Boer republics as irreversible. However, this position was not merely defended as the recognition of 'an accomplished fact'. Instead, the rhetoric of necessity was deployed and combined with pre-war rhetoric on race disharmony and imperial governance to advance a new critique of government policy, insisting on the swift implementation of a settlement along self-governing lines.

The question of annexation was addressed head-on by Campbell-Bannerman early on in the course of the war, in his speech at Birmingham of 24 November 1899. Noting with approval the earlier declaration by the Prime Minister that Britain sought neither gold fields nor territory from the war, the Liberal leader

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<sup>61</sup> Denis Judd and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (London: 2002), pp.182-183.

cautioned that there were nonetheless those in the country and in the Press 'who would repudiate this disclaimer' and were arguing for the complete absorption of the republics into the Empire.<sup>62</sup> Questioning whether the annexationists had really considered what their plans amounted to, Campbell-Bannerman declared that

We are to conquer the two States, and then we are to annex their territory without much ado. But they are each of them – each in its own fashion – in the enjoyment of representative government. [...] But when these two Republics are vanquished, does anyone think that their population will be in such a frame of mind that it will be possible to administer them by free representative institutions? No, sir; they will have to be governed directly, autocratically, without free institutions at all in the manner of our Crown colonies.<sup>63</sup>

This was essentially an extension of the argument along the lines of that advocated by Morley and Harcourt prior to the conflict, namely that Britain would find itself in the undesirable position of administering a hostile settler population which could not be safely granted self-government.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, in bringing about an 'autocratic' system of government in the Transvaal, Britain would be placing itself directly at odds with its stated policy aims prior to the outbreak of war. 'Look at the position we should then find ourselves in', Campbell-Bannerman continued,

before the astonished eyes of the world. Having gone to war as the champions of constitutional government in order to procure the franchise for the outlanders, and ending it by refusing that franchise ourselves and by taking it away from the natives.<sup>65</sup>

It was disingenuous of Campbell-Bannerman to present the franchise as the cause for war, given that even prior to the Boer ultimatum the main point of contention in Anglo-Boer relations had already switched to questions over suzerainty and British paramountcy. The characterisation of Boers as 'the natives' is also unusual, serving to reinforce the idea that the Boers had a right to Transvaal territory. Nonetheless, it can be seen that Campbell-Bannerman sought to stress the importance of constitutional government and the franchise

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<sup>62</sup> *Aberdeen Journal* 25 Nov. 1899

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> See previous chapter.

<sup>65</sup> *Aberdeen Journal* 25 Nov. 1899.

in speaking of a post-conflict settlement, with the result that annexation was presented in opposition terms to the Liberal ideal of a self-governing settler empire.

Campbell-Bannerman's focus on the consequences of annexation for the future government of South Africa was to be echoed by other Liberal speakers in the new year as the prospect of annexation grew ever more likely. In his speech at Conway, Jones attacked the 'Jingoes' who declared that 'the British flag must fly over Pretoria and Bloemfontein'. Such an outcome, he charged, meant a stationing of a garrison in the two Republics, followed by martial law, noting to laughter that 'they do not call it martial law, but a firm administration – a sugar-coated pill, the same as the garrison in Ireland.'<sup>66</sup> Again, annexation is attacked not primarily in terms of acquisition of the territory, but in terms of its consequences for the government of South Africa. The focus on martial law in particular can be seen as tapping into Liberal anxieties over the subversion of constitutional rule, while once again the comparison of South Africa with Ireland serves as an example of imperial failure and race ascendancy. On the point of race in particular, Jones likewise contrasted the supposed aims of the war with the consequences of annexation, asking his audience 'Who would come under this martial law? The Dutch in Cape Colony or the British? The Dutch of necessity. Where, then, would be the equal rights for which they were contending?'<sup>67</sup> Invoking the Dutch of the Cape Colony in this warning served to further highlight the risk annexation posed to the constitutional rule of the existing Empire, and in this sense Jones' comments might be considered an early precursor of the controversy which was to subsequently develop over the practices of martial law in the Cape later on in the war.

More surprisingly, a similar line of argument was also advanced by Sir Edward Grey, despite his general support for the government's war policies since the outbreak of hostilities. Unlike Campbell-Bannerman and Jones Grey did not condemn a policy of annexation outright, but nonetheless in his speech on 20 March 1900 he cautioned about its consequences for the Empire. Stating that a friend had remarked to him that 'any fool can annex', Grey warned his audience

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<sup>66</sup> *Liverpool Mercury* 25 Jan. 1900

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

that 'annexation does not take you a step further out of difficulty'.<sup>68</sup> Continuing, Grey suggested that annexation would invariably require crown colony rule, which was certain to alienate the Empire's new Boer subjects.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, Grey was returning to his earlier theme of the need to take into account settler opinion when formulating South African policy, however with the crucial difference that in this case it was the position of the Boers under British rule that risked causing concern. This critique of annexation does however need to be seen in light of other comments by Grey on Boer independence during the early stages of the war. In a speech at Peebles on 4 November 1899, Grey asserted that Boer independence 'had come to mean race ascendancy and misgovernment', a statement which, while not going so far as to advocate annexation, is certainly suggestive of a hostility to any post-conflict restoration of independence.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, Grey's speech at the City Liberal Club is at least illustrative of the unease and apprehension within Liberal circles at the prospect of imposing imperial rule by force over a white settler population.

Contrasts between annexation and an idealised vision of Empire were also deployed by Liberal speakers opposed to the Republics' incorporation into the Empire. At an anti-war meeting in Bangor on 11 April 1900, Lloyd George attacked the suggestion of annexation by branding it 'a fatal policy to the Empire', declaring that,

the last annexation of an independent State after a war was that of Poland. Russia, just emerging from barbarism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had done this. No; Britain, now in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, going to emulate barbarous Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? [sic]<sup>71</sup>

In light of the later rallying cry of 'methods of barbarism', the comparison to 'barbarous Russia' by Lloyd George early on in the course of the war is a fascinating one, and serves to highlight the point that barbarism was not simply a humanitarian charge, but could also be applied to the methods of imperial government.

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<sup>68</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post* 21 Mar. 1900

<sup>69</sup> The specific attack on crown colony administrations as a means of imperial rule is discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>70</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Peebles, 4 Nov. 1899, reported in *Glasgow Herald* 6 Nov. 1899

<sup>71</sup> David Lloyd George, speech at Bangor, 11 Apr. 1900, reported in *Liverpool Mercury* 12 Apr. 1900.

This moralistic critique, essentially asserting that Britain had abandoned the modern standards of civilisation in mimicry of the savagery of earlier centuries, was to be echoed in the Radical assault upon annexation during the debate on the motion of censure against Chamberlain on 25 July. By this point the OFS had already been annexed some weeks previously, although the debate represented the first opportunity to substantially address the issue in the House of Commons. Opening for the Radicals, Sir Wilfred Lawson, the MP for Cocker mouth, condemned the annexation for how it reflected on Britain's national character and world image. 'We have lost our character', he declared. 'Never again can England pose as the friend of freedom, the protector of the weak, the guardian of the oppressed.'<sup>72</sup> In similar fashion, Lloyd George attacked the consequences for British Empire's image of the shifting aims of the war which the annexation represented, accusing the government of having

entered into these two Republics for philanthropic purposes, and remained to commit burglary. In changing the purpose of the war you have made a bad change. That is the impression you are creating abroad. Our critics say you are not going to war for equal rights and to establish fair play, but to get hold of the goldfields; and you have justified that criticism of our enemies by that change.<sup>73</sup>

In this respect, the Radical critique of annexation was in many ways similar to the reaction against the Jameson Raid, in the sense that the actions of the government were seen to be causing both apparent and actual damage to the nation's character, and betraying the principles which had previously been held to govern imperial policy.

Along similar lines, both Lawson and Lloyd George echoed Campbell-Bannerman's earlier rhetoric in seeking to present annexation as contrary to the stated ideals over which Britain was supposed to have gone to war. Lawson sought to undermine the claim that the war was primarily a war for freedom and against Transvaal misgovernment, attacking 'the crushing out of two independent Republics' and noting that 'one was the Orange Free State; but you have blotted out the "free" now'. That it had been the OFS which was annexed first provided particular ammunition to the Radicals, as it allowed them

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<sup>72</sup> HC Deb., 25 Jul. 1900, fourth series, Vol.86, c.1175.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., c.1211.

to further contrast the stated aims of the war with its consequences. Describing the government of the republic as 'the very best as regarded freedom and comfort the world had ever seen', Lawson charged that Britain 'was fighting at this moment to prevent the government being carried on'.<sup>74</sup> Lloyd George similarly sought to challenge the idea that annexation would bring about self-government and white racial equality in a reconstructed South Africa. 'We started the war', he stated, 'to obtain the franchise for everybody, and we end it with franchise for nobody. It is true that you establish a kind of equality between the white races there, but it is not equal rights, but equal wrongs.'<sup>75</sup> In this fashion, the Liberal pro-Boers were able to deploy the rhetoric used in support of a confrontational policy prior to the outbreak of war in order to challenge the policy of annexation.

By the time of the Radical protest against annexation in the House of Commons however, the public position of the Liberal leadership had already shifted in favour of the two Republics' incorporation. In a speech at Glasgow on 7 June, Campbell-Bannerman criticised the government for having acted so quickly in annexing the OFS, before remarking that the act 'having been done, we have, of course, to treat that as an accomplished fact'.<sup>76</sup> Campbell-Bannerman's position might be seen as yet another attempt to steer a middle course on a South African question between the pro-Boers and the Liberal Imperialists, and indeed his positioning in this regard were criticised by the *Daily News*, which following his abstention on the annexation debate declared that 'what we cannot understand, and what we fear the country will fail to understand, is the indeterminate position [...] which finds two lobbies not enough, and which halts between two opinions'.<sup>77</sup> However, whatever the tactical consideration behind the 'accomplished fact' line, this was not the limit of Campbell-Bannerman's remarks on annexation in his Glasgow speech.

Instead, the Liberal leader went on to advance a case for why annexation was a desirable option, or at the very least the least undesirable outcome of the war. Referring to the opponents of annexation, Campbell-Bannerman remarked that

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., c.1174.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., c.1207.

<sup>76</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Glasgow, 7 Jun. 1900, reported in *Daily News*, 8 Jun. 1900.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial of the *Daily News*, 26 Jul. 1900.

he sympathised with those who desired that 'some kind of national independence should be restored to the Boers'.<sup>78</sup> Again, the Liberal leader's choice of phrasing here raises interesting questions about notions of Boer nationhood. As has already been seen, the distinctive cultural and historical attributes of the Boers were often conflated with ideas of the wider South African Dutch-speaking community in British Liberal rhetoric, including in the language of Campbell-Bannerman. The national independence referred to by Campbell-Bannerman thus appears to refer more to ideas of statehood. Yet even then, this was a reflection of cultural and racial attitudes to Boer nationhood, British rhetoric on Boer independence having traditionally emphasised their own structures of governance, as distinct from British imperial methods, and their capacity as a population for genuine self-government. Invocation of Boer nationhood, in this context at least, thus again drew upon the wider conceptualisations of race and self-governance that characterised Liberal rhetoric on South Africa.

In any case, in his Glasgow speech Campbell-Bannerman however went on to question the value of a form of independence where:

the State is not to have any relations whatever with foreign Powers, the State is to be prohibited from acquiring or using arms and to be subjugated to constant supervision and interference which that prohibition would entail. The franchise to be used is to be dictated from outside. [...] The language to be spoken in their Parliament is to be prescribed from the outside, the languages to be taught in their schools are to be prescribed. Why, what is left of the reality and dignity of independence?<sup>79</sup>

In many ways, this section echoed Morley's speeches in the autumn of 1899; but whereas then Morley was seeking to persuade his audience of the intolerable nature of British intervention in the Transvaal's internal affairs, at Glasgow Campbell-Bannerman deployed these arguments in support of annexation. Significantly, the arguments of the Liberal Imperialists at the time of the Colonial Office vote followed along parallel lines. In a shift from his earlier position, Grey used his speech opposing the motion of censure against Chamberlain to state his support for annexation, arguing that 'If you do not have annexation [...] you will have again Conventions, and you will have again that

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<sup>78</sup> *Daily News*, 8 Jun. 1900

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

weary treadmill of which we have had experience, and the whole country kept in a state of unrest'.<sup>80</sup> Grey's position was framed in the language of necessity and security, rather than Campbell-Bannerman's appeals to considerations of the Boer position. Ultimately however, the underlying position was the same: a return to imperial management by convention, presumably along the lines of the 1881 convention, was less desirable than formal annexation.

The annexation of OFS was soon followed by that of the SAR, and the resulting general election was framed in part by the Unionists as a ratification of the annexations. Chamberlain in particular sought to cast the contest as revolving around the question of whether British gains in the war were to be secured or discarded.<sup>81</sup> In response, Liberals again sought to stress that they accepted the moves as accomplished fact. Gladstone attacked the notion that disagreements over annexation justified the dissolution of Parliament, given that 'there is no wide divergence of opinion in the Liberal Party on the question of annexation as a result of the war, as an already accomplished fact'.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Liberal speakers sought to place particular stress on the unity of the party on this issue. For example, Hugh Hoare, the Liberal candidate and former MP for Chesterton, declared in an address at Mepal on 24 September that 'There is only one settlement possible, and that course is recommended by Sir William Harcourt, Lord Rosebery, Mr Morley, Mr Asquith, and other leaders of the Liberal party, and it is annexation.'<sup>83</sup> Hoare was somewhat disingenuous in his suggestion that Morley actively advocated annexation: in his election address, the former Chief Secretary for Ireland remarked that if he might be said to approve of annexation, it was in 'much the same cheerful sense in which a man who had lost his money in a mismanaged company approved of liquidation and had no fault to find with winding-up'.<sup>84</sup> Such criticism aside however, a key concern for many Liberals at the election was to rebut the charge that the party as a whole supported independence.

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<sup>80</sup> HC Deb., 25 Jul. 1900, fourth series, Vol.86, c.1253.

<sup>81</sup> Enstam, 'The "Khaki" Election of 1900'.

<sup>82</sup> *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 19 Sep. 1900.

<sup>83</sup> Hugh Hoare, speech at Mepal, 24 Sep. 1900, reported in *Cambridge Independent Press*, 28 Sep. 1900.

<sup>84</sup> John Morley, election address, reported in *Derby Daily Telegraph* 24 Sep. 1900.

Again however, Liberal support for annexation was also explicitly linked to idea of self-government. Speaking at Ladybank on 15 September, Asquith asked his audience to consider the alternatives to annexation, given that whatever the settlement Britain would need to ensure its position in South Africa could not be threatened again. 'Any measures actually effected for this purpose', he argued, 'would require at least as much interference with the sovereignty or independence in any real sense of these two Republics, as their incorporation into the British Empire'. Continuing, he warned against 'a little grant of protected or vassaled States, with their privileges and obligations, defined or sought to be defined, by written conventions, possessing neither the reality of independence, nor the full status of partners in the empire'.<sup>85</sup> In this manner, annexation was portrayed as the option best able to deliver self-government following the conclusion of the conflict. This line of argument was echoed in the Press reaction to the speech, the editorial of the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* praising Asquith's assessment and stating that 'only by annexation can the central object of wise, equal, free government be obtained'.<sup>86</sup>

Asquith was to return to this theme during his re-election campaign in East Fife, declaring in a speech to his constituents that:

The annexation of the two Republics was the first step towards a free, contented, and loyal South Africa, and it was only as a first step in laying the foundation of the edifice which was ultimately to be built up that the Liberal Party acquiesced in building up the structure which was to be raised upon that foundation.<sup>87</sup>

In a speech at Stirling on 26 September, Campbell-Bannerman likewise stressed that 'annexation is not the end. It is the beginning. Annexation is not settlement: it is the thing on which settlement is to be built.'<sup>88</sup> The debates surrounding the question of self-government and the eventual settlement of the conflict are considered later in this chapter. Nonetheless, for our present purposes it is important to note the ways in which Campbell-Bannerman and

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<sup>85</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech at Ladybank, 15 Sep. 1900, reported in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17 Sep. 1900.

<sup>86</sup> Editorial of the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 17 Sep. 1900.

<sup>87</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech at Tayport, 24 Sep. 1900, reported in *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 25 Sep. 1900.

<sup>88</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Stirling, 26 Sep. 1900, reported in *Daily News* 27 Sep. 1900.

Asquith sought to reframe the question of annexation so as to detach the action from a Unionist narrative which presented the new colonies as the hard-won results of British sacrifice, instead contextualising the annexations within a new narrative focused on the incorporation of the new colonies within the self-governing British Empire.

The link between annexation and eventual self-government was reinforced by an emphasis on the prior misgovernment of the SAR, drawing upon similar rhetoric used during the initial crisis of 1899. In its editorial in response to the annexation of the Transvaal, the *Daily News* asserted that the action would 'give to its inhabitants that true independence, that real enjoyment of the blessings of self-government, which they have so long been denied', posing the question: 'is the independence enjoyed by the communities under the British flag less or greater than that which has been experienced under a Republic which has only been a Republic in name?'.<sup>89</sup> This was a line of argument readily adopted by Liberal speakers in their autumn campaigns. In his Ladybank speech, Asquith stated that he regretted

the necessity of the extinction of small States with a history and a patriotism of their own and the enlargement of the areas of the burdening of British responsibilities. But no lover of freedom need shed any tears for the disappearance of the South African Republic – an unhappy specimen of one of the worst kinds of political imposture, a caricature or mockery of liberty under a democratic form.<sup>90</sup>

Such attacks made use of earlier narratives of Boer misgovernment to frame the anticipated grant of self-government following annexation as a new development, rather than as a restoration of existing rights, as well as providing justification for the act of annexation itself. Arguments along such lines built upon earlier narratives of the SAR's conditional independence, with the Kruger regime's record of misgovernment invalidating any right to free self-government.<sup>91</sup> It is also possible to draw parallels in this respect with the wider justification of imperial rule in mid-century liberal thought that stressed the

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<sup>89</sup> Editorial of the *Daily News*, 4 Sep. 1900.

<sup>90</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17 Sep. 1900.

<sup>91</sup> For examples of such arguments, see Grey's speech at Peebles, *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Nov. 1899.

acceptability of removing the freedom of a people judged incapable of exercising it.<sup>92</sup>

The question of annexation within Liberal politics was then one which evolved significantly over the course of the first year of the war, moving from general opposition to the incorporation of the two republics into the Empire to a position in which the bulk of the party accepted and indeed sought to justify the move. Critically however, while the narrative of 'accomplished fact' did indeed form part of the basis by which Liberal speakers sought to defend the annexations, the action was also justified by Liberal speakers from across the party as a move in the interests of the governance of South Africa, precisely the basis on which the prospect of annexation had been previously opposed. The prospect of a return to an intensified form of suzerainty was in this manner now presented as denying self-government to the Boers, who instead would enjoy free self-government within the British imperial system as a result of the settlement of the war. This imperial-constitutional rhetorical framework thus served as a means by which Liberals could defend a resulting post-war order in South Africa. As will be seen however, the focus placed by this argument on the Boer as citizens and beneficiaries of a reconstituted British rule in South Africa would present other complications in relation to British war tactics and debates over self-government in the new colonies.

Ultimately, after 1900 the issue of annexation increasingly became eclipsed by other questions over South Africa. Some speakers on the Radical wing of the Liberal Party continued to attack the acts of annexation as unwise or immoral: at a demonstration in Exeter in May 1901, James Bryce for example condemned the deprivation of self-government and the annexation of the 'goldfields' of the Transvaal.<sup>93</sup> Critically however, such interventions rarely called for a restoration of the Republics' independence. Debate instead shifted to the conduct of the war, and the nature of the settlement which was to follow.

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<sup>92</sup> See discussions in Stephen Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Life and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: 1991), pp.147-48.

<sup>93</sup> James Bryce, speech at Exeter, 29 May 1901, reported in *Western Times*, 30 May 1901.

## **Farm Burning, the Concentration Camps and Martial Law**

Campbell-Bannerman's charge, made in a speech at the Holborn Restaurant in London on 14 June 1901, that war in South Africa was being waged with 'methods of barbarism', triggered one of the most prominent controversies of the war. It was in many senses one of the first substantial points of South African policy which the Liberal Party leadership had directly opposed the government on, and in terms of the Liberal Party's internal struggles the claim triggered an open breach with the Liberal Imperialists, dubbed the 'war to the knife and fork'. Although certainly the reaction against farm burning and the concentration camp system was not just a political campaign but formed part of a wider humanitarian movement, the Liberal Party's rhetorical response to the British army's tactics was not simply concerned with the morality of such tactics, but with their viability as imperial policy. In addition, while Campbell-Bannerman's speech might have helped bring the debates over British tactics to political prominence, this intervention had not taken place in a vacuum, but against a backdrop in which Liberal speakers from the Radical wing of the party had already been campaigning on this issue for some time. Neither did the Holborn Restaurant speech definitively establish the rhetorical framework within which the question would be discussed. Instead, in the months following 'methods of barbarism' the Liberal critique of the government also increasingly incorporated attacks on the imposition of martial law at the Cape Colony. This section therefore examines the role played by the tactics of farm burning, the humanitarian crisis of the concentration camps, and the imposition of martial law at the Cape within British Liberal politics, suggesting that all three formed part of an overarching Liberal critique of the conduct of the war as imperial mismanagement.

Although the policy of farm burning had been initiated relatively early in the war, it was primarily during the later guerrilla phase of the conflict that figures on the Radical wing of the Liberal Party began to raise objections to the policy in late 1900. In a letter printed in *The Times* on 17 November, Morley detailed an account provided to him by a correspondent at the Cape, describing the story of how the women of a Boer family had suffered the destruction of their farm and were now due to be sent to a concentration camp. Significantly, Morley added his own comments to the end of the account, remarking that 'I will not give

offense to-day by intruding any unfashionable reflections about humanity, pity, and the like.' Instead, he urged, 'consider the unwisdom of these fireraisings and all their attendant abominations. Consider the resentment that is being accumulated in the mind of every Dutch-speaking man and woman in South Africa.'<sup>94</sup> This then represented a critique of farm burnings not in relation to the humanitarian consequences of the policy, although Morley makes his views here very clearly known, but in terms of its consequences for the Dutch-speaking population's attitude to Britain throughout South Africa. A similar stance was adopted by the Liberal MP for Flintshire, Samuel Smith, who raised the issue in Parliament during a debate on War Office supply on 11 December. Comparing British tactics in South Africa with those used in the American War of Independence, Smith charged that through farm burning they 'were storing up for ourselves a heritage of hatred which would last for generations.'<sup>95</sup> In this focus on a heritage of hatred and concern for Dutch sentiment, Morley and Smith were continuing many of the anti-war narratives expressed prior to the outbreak of the conflict, and this was to set the pattern which would be increasingly followed by radical speakers in the first half of 1901.

Campbell-Bannerman's assault on the government's war tactics at the National Reform Union dinner at the Holborn Restaurant was comprised of two main elements. The first of these was undoubtedly a moral and humanitarian critique. The policy being urged on the government by the Unionist Press, he charged, was that:

now we have got the men that we have been fighting against down, we should punish them as severely as possible. It is that we should devastate their country, that we should burn their homes, that we should break up their instruments of agriculture and destroy the machinery by which food was produced. It was that we should sweep, as the Spaniards did in Cuba - and how we denounced the Spaniards! - sweep the women and children into camps in which they are destitute of all the decencies and comforts and of many of the necessaries of life, and in some of which the death-rate rose so high as 430 in the thousand.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> John Morley, letter dated 16 Nov. 1900, published in *The Times*, 17 Nov. 1900.

<sup>95</sup> HC Deb., 11 Dec. 1900, fourth series, Vol.88, c.572.

<sup>96</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at the Holborn Restaurant, London, 14 Jun. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Jun. 1901.

Although he was careful to state that he did think this was an outcome deliberately sought by the government, he nonetheless attacked the fact that this was being done in the name 'of this most humane and Christian nation.' Taking advantage of the government's difficulties with a situation in which a state of war existed in South Africa well after they had presented the war as practically finished, Campbell-Bannerman mockingly asked, 'When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.'<sup>97</sup> Quite apart from the shocking details of the policies' impacts themselves, the contrast the Liberal leader drew between the idea of a 'humane and Christian nation' and the policy of barbarism struck at the heart of the notion of a moral imperial policy. Similarly, the equation of British tactics with that of the Spanish Empire in the Cuban War of Independence represented an assault on the notion of the exceptionalism of British imperialism, an idea firmly grounded in hierarchical ideas of world civilisation and supposedly demonstrated by the exceptional humanity of British policy.<sup>98</sup> There is no reason to suppose that this outrage at the results of British imperial policy was not genuine: both Spender and Wilson consider Campbell-Bannerman to have been genuinely moved by Hobhouse's account of the conditions in the camps.<sup>99</sup> Critically however, in converting personal indignation into political argument, Campbell-Bannerman did not just rely on a moralistic appeal.

Instead, the Liberal leader declared that 'this is not a question of humanity alone', but that 'it has come to be condemned on grounds of policy'. The policies of farm burning and the concentration camp system, Campbell-Bannerman argued, would only build up further problems for imperial

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Although covering a later time period, the work of Emily Baughan on imperialism and British humanitarianism is particularly useful here. Baughan identifies that both imperialist and internationalist humanitarian campaigns in inter-war Britain utilised an imperialistic rhetoric which emphasised British humanity within a hierarchical understanding of world civilisation. See Emily Baughan, 'The Imperial War Relief Fund and the All British Appeal: Commonwealth, Conflict and Conservatism within the British Humanitarian Movement, 1920-25', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40:5 (2012); Emily Baughan, "Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!" Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain', *Historical Research* 86:231 (2013).

<sup>99</sup> Spender, *Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, vol. I, p.335; Wilson, *CB*, pp.348-49.

government in South Africa: 'this insane policy of subjugation and obliteration', he charged, 'will perpetuate the very evils and danger from which the war was designed to deliver us – if, indeed, there was any design in it.'<sup>100</sup> This represented a clear revival of his rhetorical strategy prior to the outbreak of the war, in which Campbell-Bannerman had warned of the dangers posed by a conflict to white racial harmony and the future of South Africa.<sup>101</sup> The Republics had become British colonies, he reminded his audience, and British colonies were only held without difficulty 'because we treat them as equals, because we leave their identity untouched, because we don't interfere with their customs and laws, because we respect their perfect legal independence'. When the true scope of suffering was known after the conflict, he declared, the result would not only be the racial and political enmity of those who as a result of the annexation 'are our fellow-citizens already', but also a 'personal hatred, an ineradicable sense of personal wrong'. Even if, he conceded, there was a military advantage to be gained from farm burning, it was one which came at the price of a 'heavy, overwhelming, irredeemable mortgage on the peace and contentment of South Africa.' Given this, he declared himself to be confident that when they realised these facts, his fellow countrymen and countrywomen would instantly demand the cessation of these activities.<sup>102</sup> This second part of his speech thus squarely placed his critique of British tactics within the context of its material consequences for the Empire, rather than relying on what might be considered the emotional appeal to humanity and morality.

Despite the controversy of the speech, initial Press reaction was initially relatively muted. Although the editorial of *The Times* the following day attacked the suggestion of 'methods of barbarism' on the grounds that there was little proof to support such accusations, the bulk of its critique was focused along existing Unionist lines, namely that the war was just and that Liberal criticisms risked encouraging the Boers and delaying the end of the war.<sup>103</sup> Subsequently however, the speech swiftly gained notoriety, with Campbell-Bannerman's

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<sup>100</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Jun. 1901

<sup>101</sup> See for example Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Maidstone, 6 Oct. 1899, reported in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 7 Oct. 1899, discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>102</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Jun. 1901.

<sup>103</sup> Editorial of *The Times*, 15 Jun. 1901.

political opponents accusing him of having attacked the British Army as barbaric, an interpretation of the phrase 'methods of barbarism' which the Liberal Imperialists would also seize upon in their rebuttals of the leadership's platform.<sup>104</sup> Amidst the tumult the speech created, less attention seems to have been focused on the argument that the 'methods of barbarism' were unwise imperial policy. No doubt this was in part due to the sensationalism of the charge of barbarism, both as originally intended and as it was construed by the Liberal leader's opponents, but this process may also have been exacerbated by the way in which the speech was reported: *The Times*, for example, significantly conflated the latter portion of Campbell-Bannerman's speech, serving to further impede the Liberal leader's attempts to frame his critique of the war's conduct within an imperial-governmental framework as well as a moralistic one.<sup>105</sup>

Nonetheless, in the weeks and months that followed Campbell-Bannerman and his supporters within the Liberal Party continued to critique the government's war methods as bad imperial policy due to the impact the measures were having on the attitude of the Dutch population. Opening an adjournment debate in the House of Commons the Monday after the Holborn Restaurant speech, Lloyd George focused primarily on the specific details of the humanitarian situation in the camps, and indeed was prevented by the ruling of the Speaker from discussing the degree to which the policy risked extending the war. Nonetheless, he concluded his speech by warning that 'when children are being treated in this way and dying, we are simply ranging the deepest passions of the human heart against British rule in Africa.' Continuing, he cautioned that 'it will always be remembered that this is the way British rule started there, and that this is the method by which it was brought about', suggesting as well that the legacy such actions might be uprisings in the future.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, at the Reform Club meeting called in July to discuss his leadership, Campbell-Bannerman urged his colleagues to

avoid, as a matter of policy, if from no higher motive, any action in military operations which is likely to leave behind it a sense of unnecessary harshness, and to give fresh substance and point

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<sup>104</sup> Wilson, *CB*, pp.350-351.

<sup>105</sup> *The Times*, 15 Jun. 1901.

<sup>106</sup> HC Deb., 17 Jun. 1901, fourth series, Vol.95, c.583.

to those racial and political animosities which we know to exist today.<sup>107</sup>

Given the political calculations behind the Reform Club meeting, it is unsurprising that the direct charge of 'methods of barbarism' was not repeated here, although Campbell-Bannerman had repeated the charge a week previously in a speech at Southampton.<sup>108</sup> Again, the persistence of this narrative of concern for Dutch sentiment in South Africa can be seen in evidence, with Lloyd George and Campbell-Bannerman effectively framing their critique of British tactics on the grounds of imperial mismanagement.

While the tactics of farm burning and the concentration camps formed the mainstay of this race-alienation argument, they were by no means the only 'methods of barbarism' to form part of this critique. The practice of compelling the neighbours and family members of captured Boer fighters to witness their executions was similarly condemned by Liberal critics of the war. In a speech at Arbroath on 31 October 1901, Morley was to attack the policy, stating that he 'did not believe such a proceeding as that has been adopted by any civilised community or Government for many a long generation.'<sup>109</sup> Mockingly referring to Unionist newspapers which boasted that the effect of the action was that the restive Boer population would never forget the fate of those who defied the British, Morley declared that

No, it never will be forgotten. The things that were done in the new Ireland which you are building up in South Africa are more like what was done in the old Ireland on the repression of the rebellion of 1798.<sup>110</sup>

Again, with the comparison to Ireland we can see Morley continuing with one of his earlier rhetorical strategies, invoking the unhappy precedent of British rule in Ireland as an example of imperial mismanagement producing long-lasting and insurmountable resentment from the subjugated population. Continuing, Morley went on to stress the race element in this dynamic, warning of 'civil war, with its ingredient of race feud, race jealousy, race animosity' and charging that 'all this

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<sup>107</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Jul. 1901.

<sup>108</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Southampton, 2 Jul. 1901, reported in *Dundee Courier*, 3 Jul. 1901.

<sup>109</sup> John Morley, speech at Arbroath, 31 Oct. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Nov. 1901.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

has aggravated the essential mischief of the situation and that for days that will pass beyond the time of any of us here these transactions will not be forgotten.<sup>111</sup> In this manner, the anti-war arguments deployed prior to the conflict which warned of a generic risk posed by war to Anglo-Dutch relations in South Africa were reiterated as specific criticisms of the methods by which the war was being waged, whether in relation to farm burning, the concentration camps or to the system of executions.

The policy of farm burning in particular was also slammed for the material damage it was inflicting upon the two annexed republics. In his letter to *The Times* in late 1900, Morley cited his South African correspondent as writing to him that 'you [Morley] compared annexation to compulsory liquidation in bankruptcy, but what liquidator ever destroyed the assets in the estate by way of settlement?'<sup>112</sup> Similarly, rising in reply to Campbell-Bannerman's speech at the Holborn Restaurant, Harcourt drew upon the facts of annexation to attack the policy of farm burning, declaring that 'we are exhorted every morning in some telegram to rejoice that we are slowly devastating a country which is our own, that we are killing and wounding a people whom we have recently made our subjects.'<sup>113</sup> The moral critique of the policy was in this manner again framed in the context of the changing constitutional situation in South Africa.

In a speech at Stirling on 25 October 1901, Campbell-Bannerman sought to combine this element with his warning of the obstacle being created for South Africa's future governance. Attacking Unionist optimism that the new colonies could be easily pacified following the end of the war, the Liberal leader insisted that South Africa could only be ruled through self-governing institutions. 'And where', he asked,

are the elements to be found for a settlement in the condition to which you have reduced South Africa? The whole country in the two belligerent States, outside the mining towns, is a howling wilderness; the farms are burned; the country is wasted; the flocks and herds are either butchered or driven off; the mills are

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> *The Times*, 17 Nov. 1900.

<sup>113</sup> Sir William Harcourt, speech at Holborn Restaurant, London, 14 Jun. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Jun. 1901.

destroyed; the furniture and implements of agriculture are smashed.<sup>114</sup>

Following the war, he continued, 'the 50,000 prisoners of war will of course return to what by some sort of irony we may perhaps be permitted to call their homes; these are the materials for your new self-government.'<sup>115</sup> The consequences of the government's methods were presented therefore not just as 'barbarous', but as further undermining the practical basis for the incorporation of the annexed republics into the self-governing empire of settlement.

Liberal speakers also sought to undermine the legitimacy of the government's tactics by presenting them as lying beyond the pale of Britain's imperial traditions. Echoing the comparisons made between British policy and the actions of the Spanish Empire in Cuba, at Arbroath Morley attacked the government for citing precedent for the methods used in South Africa, characterising the precedent as being 'Russia in Poland or the Caucasus, Austria in Bosnia, and so on. Was there ever such a sinister parallel drawn in the history of this country?'<sup>116</sup> In making this charge, Morley presented the government's methods as more akin to continental despotism than to British imperialism. A similar tactic was deployed by Campbell-Bannerman in his Stirling speech a few days earlier, in which he mockingly referred to the government's policy as being one of 'up-to-date twentieth century methods', prompting laughter from his audience. 'Oh, but they are the twentieth century methods', he continued, 'because we are told on the highest authority that the old Victorian methods [...] are out of date altogether, either in politics or in morals.'<sup>117</sup> In this fashion, we can again see the Liberal leader seeking to cast the tactics in South Africa as a departure from the traditional practices of Victorian imperialism, as well as implicitly seeking to cast his own position along traditional lines.

As noted above, the charge of 'methods of barbarism' served to crystallise the divisions between Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Imperialists, most

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<sup>114</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Stirling, 25 Oct. 1901, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 26 Oct. 1901

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Nov. 1901.

<sup>117</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 26 Oct. 1901.

notably placing Asquith in direct opposition to him and triggering the 'war to the knife and fork'. Indeed, it was over the question of British tactics that Asquith most clearly signalled his heterodoxy, stressing that he rejected the view of those who 'think that to this initial crime [of the war] we have added, day by day, month by month, year by year, countless further crimes against the code of humanity', declaring instead that 'there is no ground for any general charge of inhumanity against either side.' Continuing, he specifically rejected any charge of cruelty against Milner, asserting that 'there is no man throughout the length and breadth of the British Empire more penetrated with the spirit of humanity than Lord Milner.'<sup>118</sup> This response to Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric at the Holborn Restaurant was to become something of a standard formula for the Liberal Imperialist response: conflating the critique of war methods with wider opposition to the justice of the war, denying a charge of general inhumanity on the part of Britain, and defending in particular the conduct of Milner. In this respect, Rosebery was as ever more outspoken: in his speech at the City Liberal Club, the former Prime Minister characterised the party as being split between those who thought the war just, and those 'who think it utterly wrong and carried on by methods of barbarism', conflating the criticism of war methods with the pro-Boer position out outright opposition.<sup>119</sup>

Liberal Imperialist speakers also indirectly echoed some of the direct attacks upon Campbell-Bannerman by drawing a link between the charge of barbarism and the character of British soldiers. At Chesterfield, Rosebery condemned what he described as the language of 'papers abroad', stating that he felt it very strongly when he heard the British army 'spoken of as mercenaries and held up to execration for their barbarous methods', before declaring that he acquitted 'our government, or anyone of British birth, of any barbarity in this matter.'<sup>120</sup> Speaking at Liverpool on 13 November 1901, Grey similarly condemned as 'a foul and filthy lie the charges made against us in the Continental press of having established the camps in order to exterminate the Boers', while at a meeting of his Leith constituents on 5 December, R. C. Munro Ferguson defended his membership of the Liberal Imperialist League by stressing that it gave its

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<sup>118</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech at Liverpool Street Station Hotel, London, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 21 Jun. 1901.

<sup>119</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 Jul. 1901.

<sup>120</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 Dec. 1901.

members the opportunity 'to more effectively repel charges as to the barbarous methods which had been repeated in the country with the effect of creating divisions'.<sup>121</sup> Notably, these criticisms were not directly framed as an attack on Campbell-Bannerman, the foreign Press providing the target of choice. However, given that such remarks were made in the context of a sustained Unionist effort to characterise Campbell-Bannerman as an enemy of the British soldier, it is reasonable to assume that at the very least such remarks would have been interpreted as implicit rebuttals of the pro-Boer position.

The Liberal Imperialist response also defended the British tactics from a position of military necessity. In a speech at Leeds on 2 November, Asquith echoed the official reasoning for the establishment of the concentration camps, stressing that they 'became an absolute necessity in the conditions prevailing at the time, unless women and children were to be left to starve on the veldt'.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, at Chesterfield Rosebery characterised the 'refugee camps' as the necessary result of farm burning.<sup>123</sup> This was a position which came under heavy attack from Liberal critics of the war, although again the focus of such attacks was on their jingo opponents and the Press, rather than the Liberal Imperialists directly. In his speech at Bath, Campbell-Bannerman attacked the *Methodist Times* for having praised the policy of camps as an act of British generosity: 'is our hypocrisy so great', he asked, 'as that we actually flatter ourselves upon our great humanity because we have saved from starvation those whose danger of starvation we have caused?'.<sup>124</sup> Henry Labouchere was to adopt a similar line at Northampton on 27 November, commenting on the death rate in the camps that he had 'seen in a Jingo paper the statement that it was kind of us to relieve the Boers of their domestic duties. At this rate Herod was a philanthropist'.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, the Liberal Imperialist rejection of the 'methods of barbarism' narrative served as a rebuttal to the notion that policies

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<sup>121</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Liverpool, 13 Nov. 1901, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 Nov. 1901; R. C. Munro Ferguson, speech at Leith, 5 Dec. 1901, reported in *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 Dec. 1901.

<sup>122</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech at Leeds, 2 Nov. 1901, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 Nov. 1901.

<sup>123</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 Dec. 1901.

<sup>124</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1901.

<sup>125</sup> Henry Labouchere, speech at Northampton, 27 Nov. 1901, reported in *Northampton Mercury*, 29 Nov. 1901.

pursued by Milner in the two annexed republics were either unnecessary or immoral on Britain's part: indeed, it was because they were necessary that they were justified.

If Liberal Imperialists felt able to condone farm-burning and the concentration camp system from a position of necessity however, Milner's policies in the Cape Colony, particularly relating to the expansion of martial law, were to prove an additional challenge for Liberal speakers. Struggles between the Cape government, the military and imperial authorities on the spot, and the imperial government in Britain had been ongoing since the very start of the war, and the steady advance of martial law over much of the colony became one of the key exacerbating factors in Cape politics. Within British politics however, the debates over martial law took on a life of their own, as Liberal speakers sought to present Unionist policy as not merely damaging the prospects of a lasting settlement in the two former republics, but also jeopardising British rule over the Cape. In order to understand why this came to form such a central element of the Liberal response, we need to first take into account the role which had been assigned to the Cape Colony within British political rhetoric in order to justify the conflict in the first place.

As noted in the previous chapter, prior to the outbreak of the conflict both supporters and opponents of Unionist policy sought to present the Cape as representing an idealised form of imperial rule in South Africa: depending on the speaker, the Cape came to represent the model of white racial harmony and inclusive self-government which was either lacking in the Transvaal, justifying intervention, or was threatened by a resort to war which would irrevocably divide the British and the Dutch settler communities. Liberal speakers continued to advance such narratives during the early stages of the conflict. For example, in a speech at Wolverhampton on 9 November 1899, the Liberal Imperialist and former Indian Secretary Sir H. H. Fowler described the war as not just being one for the defence of British territory, but also 'one for the defence of the white races of South Africa, and the placing them upon that equality which was at present enjoyed in Cape Colony'.<sup>126</sup> Speaking at Manchester a few days later, Campbell-Bannerman likewise stressed that the war risked damaging the Cape

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<sup>126</sup> Sir H. H. Fowler, speech at Wolverhampton, 9 Nov. 1899, reported in *Daily News*, 10 Nov. 1899.

system, declaring that ‘for good and stable government in Cape Colony, the first essential condition is that we should have the best feeling between the two races’ and warning that the war against the republics would give ‘fresh bitterness to old jealousies and revive hatreds which ought to have expired’ among the Dutch at the Cape.<sup>127</sup>

The existence of collaborative constitutional rule at the Cape also served as a tool for rebutting the charge that the goal of the war was to establish British ascendancy: at Peebles, Grey attacked criticism of the war from foreign quarters, asking ‘how many of them would have permitted freely and frankly their own colony to be ruled by the Dutch as we had done Cape Colony?’<sup>128</sup> In this manner the constitutional settlement at the Cape played a significant role in framing British political rhetoric on the conflict. As such, as the system of government at the Cape became increasingly displaced by martial law, and Dutch participation in the colony’s governance was minimised, this provided Liberal critics of the government’s war methods with a powerful basis for challenging British policy in South Africa.

Liberal critics of the war presented martial law as an attack on the constitutional structure of the Empire. Speaking at Stirling in October 1901, Campbell-Bannerman dedicated a lengthy section of his speech to attacking the state of affairs at the Cape, declaring that ‘the suspension of the Constitution with the consent of the Imperial Government is a very grave and serious fact’ as well as noting that the Cape Parliament had not been summoned despite Chamberlain having previously stated that a failure to summon it would be a breach of the law. Charging that martial law was ‘nothing but the arbitrary rule of soldiers’, the Liberal leader declared that ‘no man is safe in property, in liberty, or in life’.<sup>129</sup> In this critique then, martial law was presented as an attack on the rights of the citizen and the rule of law, as well as on the ordinary institutions of representative government. Critically, the use of martial law was also implicitly characterised as going against British traditions, Campbell-Bannerman remarking ‘why, gentlemen, with what indignation should we denounce such

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<sup>127</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 16 Nov. 1899.

<sup>128</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Nov. 1899.

<sup>129</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 26 Oct. 1901.

proceedings in other countries.<sup>130</sup> Morley was to deploy a similar line of argument a few days later at Arbroath: citing legal opinion stating that the government could not use martial law to bypass the civil legal system while such courts continued to exist, Morley insisted that a civil administration should be set up so 'that the law of the sword shall cease'.<sup>131</sup> Unlike with the methods of barbarism controversy this was also a point echoed by some on the Liberal Imperialist wing of the party: in his speech at Liverpool, Grey stated that while martial law might be necessary 'to stop the importation of Boer arms', it might nonetheless be possible to incorporate a civil element into the Cape's administration.<sup>132</sup> In this manner, Liberals from across the spectrum of opinion in the party publically expressed their discomfort with the imposition of military rule in South Africa.

Liberal criticisms of the practice of martial law also focused on the lack of transparency by the authorities in South Africa. In a speech at Dunfermline on 10 December 1901, Campbell-Bannerman declared that:

it is an intolerable thing, and in my judgement it is grossly unconstitutional, that the British people should have so little official information as we have as to the extent to which and the numbers to which martial law is applied.<sup>133</sup>

On an issue which concerned the 'civil rights of our fellow-citizens', he argued, 'it is our duty to inquire into it, and surely someone in this constitutional Empire – and after all, we still profess to be a constitutional Empire – must be responsible.'<sup>134</sup> The secrecy surrounding the implementation of martial law, and the restrictions on the flow of information from the Cape to Britain thus served to further reinforce the unconstitutionality of the policy in Liberal rhetoric.

As with the tactics of farm burning and the concentration camps, Liberal speakers likewise presented the imposition of martial law in the Cape as undermining the support of the Dutch-speaking population for the Empire, damaging British rule in South Africa in the longer term. As early as November

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Oct. 1901.

<sup>132</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 Nov. 1901.

<sup>133</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Dunfermline, 10 Dec. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Dec. 1901.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

1899 Asquith had sought to stress that Britain ought to 'assure our Dutch fellow subjects in the Cape Colony and the Natal that they had no reason to fear the destruction or curtailment of their constitutional rights and liberties.'<sup>135</sup> While not exactly a direct criticism of martial law, Asquith's comments do demonstrate an early concern voiced within Liberal circles that Dutch sentiment in Britain's existing colonies risked being alienated not just from the war against their kinsfolk, but through the direct impact of the war on existing imperial structures in South Africa.

Following the rise of the 'methods of barbarism' narrative, Campbell-Bannerman and his supporters in the party sought to further stress the harm that military rule in the Cape was doing. Speaking at Stirling, Campbell-Bannerman stated that they had 'reason to fear that martial law is but a form of undeclared war upon the Dutch population.'<sup>136</sup> Critically, the Liberal leader condemned this as a matter of imperial policy:

Have these ministers of ours not learned that it is not by suppression of civil liberties, not by harshness, not by coercion and force in any form, that a free people can be kept quiet and contented? How has their policy worked in the colony? It has alienated thousands of both races, it has sapped loyalty, it has turned friends into rebels, and it has filled the ranks of the men in the field against us, and yet they wonder why it is that the war is not concluded.<sup>137</sup>

This represented a direct echo of his rhetoric on farm burning and the concentration camps, branding martial law as a policy which actively harmed British rule in the region by alienating the Empire's Dutch subjects through coercion. Campbell-Bannerman's critique of martial law also warned of the alienation of 'both races', suggesting that the abandonment of constitutional rule additionally risked undermining the support of the British settler population at the Cape.

The charge that martial law was destroying the previous loyalty of the Cape Dutch to the British Empire was similarly stressed by Morley, who at Arbroath quoted a young Winston Churchill, at this point still a Conservative, describing

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<sup>135</sup> H. H. Asquith, speech at Ashington, 25 Nov. 1899, reported in *Daily News*, 27 Nov. 1899.

<sup>136</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 26 Oct. 1901.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

the situation as 'a festering wound, eating into the flesh in the Cape Colony and into South Africa, and it is eating into ourselves also'.<sup>138</sup> Morley was being disingenuous here, as Churchill's actual comments, made in a speech at Leicester a few days previously, appear to have had little to do with the question of martial law.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, Morley directly linked this metaphor to the position in the Cape, charging that as a result of martial law, 'one war has grown into two wars. A war against the enemy outside our border has added to itself a civil war within our own borders in the Cape Colony'.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, at the start of 1902 Bryce attacked the effective suspension of the Cape Constitution, charging that as a result there was in the Cape:

intense bitterness between Englishmen and Dutchmen, who before had lived in harmony, and intense irritation on the part of Englishmen as well as Dutchmen at the oppressions of martial law; the great bulk of the Dutch embittered against British rule, and most of the younger Dutch in arms against us.<sup>141</sup>

The crux of the Liberal argument was essentially an inversion of the logic with which the government sought to justify the suspension of civil rule in the first place. Rather than the policy being necessitated by the threat of rebellion and the disloyalty of the Dutch population, Liberal critics of the war charged that it was creating the very problems it supposedly addressed. In this manner, as with earlier narratives on white racial sentiment underpinning Britain's position in South Africa, the Liberal critique of martial law could be characterised as a rhetoric of imperial maintenance in the face of the threat posed by the government's tactics.

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<sup>138</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Nov. 1901.

<sup>139</sup> Winston Churchill, speech at Leicester, 23 Oct. 1901, reported in *Daily Mail*, 25 Oct. 1901. According to the *Daily Mail's* account of the speech, Churchill characterised the war as a 'suppurating wound where the doctors applied caustic', before joking that he was the caustic. The focus of his speech was however on the continued significance of the conflict and a need for a renewed military strategy. Churchill's position on the government's war tactics was a complex one, as while he continued to defend the humanity and necessity of the conflict in public, privately he expressed doubts about the effectiveness of British tactics. See Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World that Made Him and the World He Made* (London: 2010), pp.81-85.

<sup>140</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Nov. 1901.

<sup>141</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Jan. 1902.

Although the Liberal attack on martial law resembled in many ways the politics of 'methods of barbarism', in practice the issue appears to have neither generated the same level of prominence or controversy. This in part may have been due to questions of coverage: although Campbell-Bannerman in particular began to devote substantial sections of his speeches on the war to the question of martial law from the summer of 1901 onwards, these were not always reflected in newspaper reports. Writing to Harcourt in December 1901, the Liberal leader commented that his speech at Dunfermline 'was miserably reported in the London papers', complaining in particular that the *Daily News* left out long sections on martial law and the situation at the Cape Colony.<sup>142</sup> The rhetoric on martial law was also not as provocative as that accompanying the attacks on farm burning: while the underlying arguments shared many key elements, there was no equivalent charge of 'methods of barbarism'. For this reason, unlike with British tactics in the Transvaal, there was no sustained Liberal Imperialist rejection of Campbell-Bannerman's position. Although at Chesterfield Rosebery, in characteristic fashion, attacked the government for having not introduced martial law sooner, the issue was one generally avoided by Rosebery's supporters in the party.<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless, as demonstrated in this section, the question of martial law occupied a key place in Liberal rhetoric on the conduct of the conflict, and followed many of the same tropes and patterns as the debates on the 'methods of barbarism' in the two former republics.

The responses of Liberal speakers to the conduct of the war serve therefore to highlight the extent to which questions of policy were discussed in relation to a framework of imperial governance, rather than simply representing a moral critique. Given the degree to which, as Hasian identifies in his study of the Hobbouse campaign, the government and its allies sought to counter the wider humanitarian critique of the war by characterising the debate as hysterical and framing it in emotional, gendered terms, the stress placed by Liberal critics of the government's policies in particular on the 'methods of barbarism' as unwise imperial policy might be seen as an attempt to evade capture in this particular rhetorical trap. Indeed, Morley's remarks that he would avoid any 'unfashionable

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<sup>142</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to Sir William Harcourt, letter dated 12 Dec. 1901, Bodleian Library: Oxford, Harcourt Papers, MS Harcourt dep.77 ff.179-80.

<sup>143</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 Dec. 1901.

reflections about humanity, pity, and the like' would appear to suggest at the very least some awareness that adopting the rhetoric of imperial governance offered a more successful route for opposition.<sup>144</sup> Likewise, concerns over the need to avoid charges of unpatriotic behaviour in drawing attention to the suffering of 'the enemy' may have played a role.<sup>145</sup> However, the mainstream Liberal critique of 'methods of barbarism', and that of martial law at the Cape, did not occur in a vacuum but represented in many ways a continuation of Liberal rhetoric on the South African question from prior to the outbreak of war. Likewise, the rhetoric of necessity in the Liberal Imperialist defence of farm-burning and the concentration camps can be seen as a continuation of pre-war narratives justifying the need for British action. Most importantly however, unlike the debates over the justice or otherwise of the war, these debates over the government's tactics were fundamentally linked to the question of the war's settlement, which this chapter now considers.

### **'Unconditional surrender' and the Return to Self-government**

Both as a result of the South African War's *casus belli* in the form of the Uitlander question and as a result of the premature expectations of victory from 1900 onwards, the question of the war's settlement formed a key component of Liberal speeches on the conflict. As discussed above, a central part of the 'methods of barbarism' narrative was not simply that it was damaging Britain's long-term position in South Africa, but also that in a practical sense the policies were not bringing about an end to the conflict. This formed part of a wider Liberal critique of what became known government's policy of 'unconditional surrender', although again this formed the basis of a split between the Liberal Imperialists and the bulk of the party. For critics of the government, the policy of seeking a complete and total victory over the Boers was both jeopardising the chances for peace and further alienating Dutch sentiment. Alongside the debates over how and when the settlement was to be achieved, Liberal speakers also focused on the specifics of the political-constitutional situation in South Africa following the conflict, particularly in relation to the eventual grant of self-government. Significantly, while superficially Liberals from across the party

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<sup>144</sup> *The Times*, 17 Nov. 1900.

<sup>145</sup> Again, the work of Emily Baughan on interwar humanitarian activism proves a useful point of comparison. See Baughan, 'The Imperial War Relief Fund', 848.

championed a swift return of the conquered republics to self-government, the ways in which such positions were framed and justified differed considerably.

The characterisation of the government's position as that of unconditional surrender began to be advanced relatively early in the conflict. In a wide-ranging speech during a House of Commons debate on War Office Supply on 12 December 1900, Bryce declared that 'the greatest of all mistakes made is the demand for unconditional surrender', stating that the government's position had lengthened the conflict, whereas a more conciliatory approach might have swiftly secured the surrender of the bulk of the Boer forces.<sup>146</sup> Campbell-Bannerman was to raise a similar point in the House of Commons debate on the loyal address the following February, criticising the insistence on unconditional surrender and instead calling for a settlement for the Boers which 'may assuage their fears, save their dignity, restore their personal rights, and thus induce them to lay down their arms'.<sup>147</sup> In this form, the rhetoric of unconditional surrender was essentially more a feature of war politics than a question of imperial settlement, although the calls for a conciliatory approach might be said to have embodied an implicit suggestion of a liberal settlement for the Dutch-speaking population following the conflict. Critically however, as the war dragged on the charge that the government was seeking a total victory over the Boers came increasingly to be presented as a policy of annihilation.

Given the degree to which the conflict had been framed by supporters of the Unionist government as a war for white racial equality, the implication that the war was being continued indefinitely to introduce British ascendancy in the conquered territories served as a powerful rhetorical tool for Liberal critics of the war. In his speech at Arbroath in October 1901, Morley was to make precisely this point. Attacking the war for having 'completely changed in character', Morley charged that 'the policy of unconditional surrender, of unconditional subjugation, which is the present policy of the Government [...] means the policy of extermination and annihilation'.<sup>148</sup> Strikingly, when heckled by an audience member that a policy of extermination was justified 'if necessary',

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<sup>146</sup> HC Deb., 12 Dec. 1900, fourth series, Vol.88, c.624.

<sup>147</sup> HC Deb., 14 Feb. 1901, fourth series, Vol.89, c.89.

<sup>148</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Nov. 1901.

Morley invited his Scottish audience to consider how they would react in the face of an English policy of extermination:

Supposing you had got into a war with England, and that we had come down and laid your lands waste and stuck your women and children into concentration camps and hanged men whom we called rebels and flogged lads and then said: "Now we are going to have you down on your knees. Unconditional surrender and unconditional submission! If you do not agree we will exterminate you." If I know anything about Scotland you would say, "Exterminate us if you can!"<sup>149</sup>

Morley's rhetorical efforts to invoke Scottish sympathy for the Boers echoes the language he deployed prior to the outbreak of the conflict and might be seen as further evidence of the pluralistic vision of Empire that Ellis identifies in Welsh pro-Boer rhetoric, although it must be recognised as well that Morley's rhetoric also served a more immediate purpose in keeping his audience in the room onside. In any case, Morley's tactic of conflating the continuation of the war with a policy of extermination served to stress the argument that the policy of unconditional surrender was not just ineffective but contrary to British imperial tradition.

Campbell-Bannerman was to deploy similar language at Leicester the following February, again identifying the Unionist government and particularly Milner's policy as one of insisting upon unconditional surrender: regardless, he stated, whether the policy had the aim of 'the ruin and practical annihilation of the Boer race' or merely represented the desire 'to beat the Boers to their knees and place them at our mercy', it was a policy 'which is mischievous and, if persevered in, fatal'.<sup>150</sup> Again, the narrative of annihilation can be seen as being presented not only as unpalatable, but one which would ultimately damage British interests in South Africa.

Indeed, the policy of unconditional surrender was explicitly presented as antithetical to any settlement which would lead to the former republics' incorporation into the Empire as self-governing colonies. In a speech at Inverness on 19 November 1901, Tweedmouth argued that if they followed the

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Feb. 1902.

line the government urged, deploying ever more vigorous methods against the Boers,

no doubt they would drive the Boer to the ground. They should nearly have exterminated him. They should make his country a waste without any male population. Was that a very fruitful ground on which to sow the seeds of a self-governing colony?<sup>151</sup>

Any British effort to crush the Boers, he continued, would only make it less likely that they would accept British rule, increasing the risk of a future war for independence. Similarly Lord Crewe, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland under Gladstone and Rosebery, used a speech at Manchester on 23 January 1902 to attack the government's policy on the grounds of the need for a future settlement. 'A conditional surrender', Crewe argued, 'is a much more valuable asset in the countries you are going to annex than unconditional surrender', as those who surrendered unconditionally would have 'no obligation to accept our rule'.<sup>152</sup> In presenting a negotiated settlement as securing an ideal imperial settlement in South Africa, such rhetoric allowed Liberals to critique imperial policy without appearing unsupportive of Britain's position in South Africa.

The Liberal Imperialists' position on unconditional surrender was a complex one, and was shaped by the varying tides of disunity within the Liberal ranks at the conflict went on. Liberal Imperialist efforts to counter the leadership's attack on the indefinite continuation of the war in many ways resembled aspects of the Unionist government's own response. In rebutting the charge of unconditional surrender in the February 1901 debate on the loyal address, Chamberlain insisted that the government's policy was for the 'unconditional surrender of the Governments' of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, rather than the unconditional surrender of the Boer peoples: the war was continuing, he argued, only because the Boers was still holding out for independence.<sup>153</sup> This was a line readily adopted by the Liberal Imperialists who sought to justify the continuation of the conflict, particularly in the heightened atmosphere of the 'war to the knife and fork'. In his speech at the Liverpool Street Station Hotel, Asquith

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<sup>151</sup> Lord Tweedmouth, speech at Inverness, 19 Nov. 1901, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 Nov. 1901.

<sup>152</sup> Lord Crewe, speech at Manchester, 23 Jan. 1902, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Jan. 1902.

<sup>153</sup> HC Deb., 14 Feb. 1901, fourth series, Vol.89, c.153.

declared that neither Liberals nor the Unionist government were seriously insisting upon unconditional surrender, stressing instead that 'it is impossible to restore the previous political situation of those two Republics', echoing the Unionist line that the alternative to continued fighting could only be independence.

Provocatively, Asquith also sought to invert the rhetoric of unconditional surrender by characterising the policy of the Liberal pro-Boers as one of 'unconditional surrender to the Boers', a remark which can be taken as a direct rebuttal to Campbell-Bannerman and which, if the *Aberdeen Journal* is to be believed, triggered considerable dissension within his audience.<sup>154</sup> Asquith was to echo this argument, albeit in less provocative terms, in his speech at Leeds at the start of November: rejecting the charge that on the war, he and his colleagues 'were opposed to its conclusion by an offer of reasonable terms', Asquith insisted that the war was continuing because 'the Boers now in the field still professed to be fighting for independence.'<sup>155</sup> Such a defence essentially drew upon the same narratives of necessity by which the charge of 'methods of barbarism' was rejected, insisting that the only alternative to the continuation of the war was a state of affairs which would harm British control over the region.

Liberal Imperialist justifications for the continuation of the conflict could also draw upon the race question as a barrier to an early settlement. In his speech at Leith, Munro Ferguson declared that if anything had been learned from the war, it was plain that:

it was not by proclamations or terms of peace any more than by farm burnings or by military executions that we should bring the war to an end, but solely by the defeat and capture of the remaining Boer forces in the field.<sup>156</sup>

Significantly, Munro Ferguson asserted that it was not just Boer demands for their independence which prevented a settlement, but also their opposition to white racial equality. Peace could not be declared, he insisted, until the Boers recognised that 'there would have to be absolute equality for the white races in South Africa and they would no more get a Boer to admit that voluntarily than

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<sup>154</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 21 Jun. 1901.

<sup>155</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 Nov. 1901.

<sup>156</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 Dec. 1901.

they would get a Hungarian to relax his domination over the Slavs.<sup>157</sup> If the critics of the war sought to present unconditional surrender as the basis for British ascendancy, Liberal Imperialists such as Munro Ferguson attempted to counter this argument with the notion of Boer ascendancy.

Speaking the following week at Bristol, Grey similarly invoked the position of the British settler population in South Africa in seeking to defend the continuation of the conflict. Rebutting in particular the notion that Milner should be recalled from South Africa to increase the chances of a settlement, Grey called his audience's attention to the 'some 30,000 British colonists' fighting for the Empire, warning against any act which 'alienated the sympathy and cost us the confidence of the British race there'. Echoing Rosebery's rhetoric from the early stages of the war, Grey warned that a failure to retain the support of the British in South Africa 'would lose us South Africa altogether'.<sup>158</sup> This was essentially a continuity of the rhetoric that the conflict was necessary in order to defend the position of the British settlers in South Africa, and that a failure to secure a clear victory over the Boers risked a return to Boer ascendancy and the alienation of British settler opinion.

Significantly however, at Chesterfield Rosebery adopted a somewhat different stance from his followers on the question of the war's conclusion. While echoing his supporters' arguments that the war must be energetically fought to the finish, he asserted that it needed to end precisely because its continuation 'adjourns and embitters the ultimate settlement of South Africa'. Similarly, although Rosebery echoed Grey's comments that the recall of Milner would alienate British sentiment, he also stressed the need for an amnesty in order to facilitate the pacification of South Africa, and urged his audience to remember 'that you do not wish to do anything to humiliate the Boers unnecessarily or to crush the Boers unnecessarily, for they are hereafter to be your fellow-subjects, and, I trust, loyal and important elements in your Empire'.<sup>159</sup> This rhetorical casting of the Boer as imperial citizen in many ways resembled the language of the Liberal critics of the war's conduct, although it was not inconsistent with

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Bristol, 11 Dec. 1901, reported in *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 12 Dec. 1901.

<sup>159</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 Dec. 1901.

Liberal Imperialist rhetoric during the crisis of 1899, or indeed in relation to the debates over annexation. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that following the Chesterfield speech, his followers were generally less critical of the idea of a negotiated settlement, and more positive towards the prospect of amnesties for the defeated Boer leaders.

In discussing the settlement following the conflict, the importance of self-government being granted to the new colonies formed a prominent feature of Liberal rhetoric. As examined in the previous chapter, the notion of good imperial government founded upon representative self-governing institutions played a central role in both pro-Boer criticisms of government policy and Liberal Imperialist justifications for supporting the government. The stress upon self-government continued to form a central element of Liberal rhetoric as the war developed. Speaking at Alnwick on 27 November 1899, Grey stressed that while it was premature to discuss the exact details of the settlement, following the conflict there had to be:

such a franchise throughout South Africa that it shall be certain that, whatever be their constitutions of Governments, the Governments shall be such as correspond to the numbers, the desires, and the needs of the population inhabiting the country, of whatever race it might be.<sup>160</sup>

In stressing the point of the franchise, Grey clearly had the position of the Uitlanders primarily in mind: he would go on to insist that never again must it be possible for an 'enlightened majority' to be oppressed by a 'backward and inexperienced minority', clearly referencing the situation in the Transvaal.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, in stressing the franchise as a question for the settlement throughout South Africa alongside race equality, Grey's speech can nonetheless be seen as furthering his earlier characterisation of the conflict as a war for democratic government. As discussed above, the principle of self-government was also deployed in relation to annexation, first by its opponents so as to demonstrate the incompatibility of territorial acquisition with the stated aims of the war, and then by Liberals from across the party in order to justify their acquiescence with annexation by framing it as part of a wider settlement in

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<sup>160</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Alnwick, 27 Nov. 1899, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Nov. 1899.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

South Africa. In terms of the settlement therefore, the call for a speedy restoration of self-government to the conquered territories became a key characteristic of Liberal debate.

Campbell-Bannerman in particular placed the question of the self-government at the centre of his rhetoric on the settlement of South Africa at the time of the annexations, attacking the suggestion that the former republics should be governed as Crown Colonies without representative institutions. In his speech at Glasgow in June 1900, Campbell-Bannerman attacked the recent statements from Chamberlain and Salisbury suggesting a substantial period of Crown Colony rule awaited the belligerent states, condemning in particular the Prime Minister's statement that the Boers should be stripped of 'every shred of independent government'.<sup>162</sup> Challenging the idea that following the cessation of hostilities the Boers can be easily integrated into the Empire, the Liberal leader declared:

How can you expect them to be hearty members if you take from them every shred of independent government, if you govern them as Crown Colonies, if you rule them from Downing Street, if you Anglicise them, if you impose upon them your laws instead of their laws, and your customs and ways instead of the ways and customs which they and their fathers before them have followed?<sup>163</sup>

A Crown Colony system, which was presented as direct, centralised rule from London, would under this analysis only serve to prolong Boer opposition to British rule in South Africa. The conflation of Crown Colony rule with a policy of Anglicisation is also notable, and can be seen as a precursor to later Liberal attacks on 'unconditional surrender' as a policy of annihilation. Significantly, Campbell-Bannerman also went on to present such a system as a barrier to eventual federation in South Africa: asserting that for federation to work it must be initiated by the member states themselves rather than being imposed top-down, he declared that as such 'there can be no federation whatever if you

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<sup>162</sup> *Daily News*, 8 Jun. 1900. Salisbury's exact phrase, according to *The Times*, was that there could be no security in South Africa 'so long as we leave a shred of real independent government to either Republic', which might suggest a narrower line of argument than implied by Campbell-Bannerman. See Lord Salisbury, speech at the Canon Street Hotel, London, 29 May 1900, reported in *The Times*, 30 May 1900.

<sup>163</sup> *Daily News*, 8 Jun. 1900.

have Crown Colonies among your constitutional Governments.’<sup>164</sup> In linking self-government to the long-running dream of a British-led federation of South Africa, Campbell-Bannerman can in this way be seen to have explicitly framed his position as one supportive of British imperial power.

Speaking at Stirling during the election campaign, Campbell-Bannerman again stressed his opposition to Crown Colony rule, declaring to cheers that he was ‘proud to remember that I promptly and publicly protested against the idea’, calling instead for the government to make clear how the new colonies will be governed once military rule is ended.<sup>165</sup> Significantly, the question of Crown Colony rule does not appear to have been one which generated much division in the party. In his speech to the City Liberal Club in March 1900 Grey cautioned against Crown Colony government, which he speculated would be the result of annexation, as being likely to cause unease throughout the Empire of settlement. Describing Crown Colony rule as an unpopular term, Grey stated that he did not ‘think any self-governing British colony liked the idea of any large white community being governed by a Crown colony Government. A Crown colony must be as provincial a system for any large community of white men as military occupation.’<sup>166</sup> While others on the imperialist wing of the party did on occasion express support for Crown Colony control, the Liberal MP for Ilkeston Sir Walter Foster for example using a speech at Langley Mill in July 1900 to call for a ‘necessary interval of government under the Crown colony system’, such interventions were relatively rare and did not envisage an extended or indefinite period without self-government.<sup>167</sup> Instead, Liberal speakers from across the party not only emphasised the self-governing future of South Africa within the Empire, but also generally stressed that such a measure could not be longer delayed.

In particular, Liberals sought to present the ideal settlement in South Africa as one which replicated the self-governing dominion model deployed in Canada and Australia, often combining this with a call for federation. Asquith for example used his speech at Tayport to declare that ‘liberty was the best

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> *Daily News*, 27 Sep. 1900.

<sup>166</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 Mar. 1900.

<sup>167</sup> Sir Walter Forster, speech at Langley Mill, 10 Jul. 1900, reported in *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 11 Jul. 1900.

antidote or medicine for discontent and disloyalty', and that, while any settlement would inevitably take time, they would be able to:

work out a future for South Africa as worthy of the great traditions of our Empire, and of the great principles of Liberalism as that experience which we had seen so successfully carried out under the analogous, if not identical conditions in Canada.<sup>168</sup>

Asquith was to echo this point the following summer in his speech at the Liverpool Street Station Hotel, again asserting that while there would invariably be a pause before self-government could be granted, the new colonies should be endowed with 'the full machinery and apparatus of autonomous government', so that after a short interval, 'they will be put on the footing of Canada and Australia.'<sup>169</sup> In Asquith's rhetoric, then, the two former republics were to be integrated into the Empire through the same self-governing methods of imperialism that applied to Britain's 'successful' dominions.

A similar position was advocated by Campbell-Bannerman at the Reform Club meeting of the Liberal Party: while acknowledging that a 'short interval of irregular government' would have to take place following the end of the war, he called on the country to promise the Boers that 'the free independent system of colonial self-government so familiar to us shall be set up, leading ultimately, if the several States so desire, to a federal constitution in South Africa.'<sup>170</sup> Rising in reply, the veteran Liberal MP Sir Joseph Pease put the point simply by declaring that 'nothing will satisfy us that does not ultimately produce in South Africa a Canada, if I may so call it, of free institutions loyal to the mother country.'<sup>171</sup> In this manner Liberals sought once again to frame the self-governing federations of the settler-Empire as idealised models to be applied to the settlement in South Africa, presenting the grant of free institutions as not just consistent with British imperial policy but an essential part of it. If this was a position advocated across the party however, the underlying justifications varied significantly.

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<sup>168</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 25 Sep. 1900.

<sup>169</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 21 Jun. 1901

<sup>170</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Jul. 1901.

<sup>171</sup> Sir Joseph Pease, speech at the Reform Club, London, 9 Jul. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Jul. 1901.

As examined above, many Liberal speakers presented the primacy of self-government to any settlement in South Africa primarily both as justifying annexation and as a principle of British imperial tradition. The grant of self-governing institutions, it was implied, served to redeem British rule in South Africa and would assist in the pacification and integration of the Boers. Such rhetoric was reinforced by narratives stressing the whiteness of the Boers, and hence the need to afford them with representative institutions. Such rhetoric might be identified as countering many of the decivilising narratives by which conflict with the Boers could be justified and the horrors of the 'methods of barbarism' explained away. Speaking at Plymouth on 19 November 1901, Campbell-Bannerman reminded his audience that the South African Dutch:

are not like some tribe of Pathans on the Indian frontier, or a herd of dervishes in the Soudan, whom it had become necessary to punish on account of some offense or misconduct on their part, and who, being barbarians or semi-barbarians, and recognising nothing but brute force, had to be punished in the only way they understood, and in the end must remain outside of our domination altogether or in acknowledged subjugation to us.<sup>172</sup>

Instead, he declared, they were 'Europeans, like ourselves, capable of the highest European civilisation', and that as such Britain 'cannot in the face of the world and in the face of our own conscience keep a European race under military subjugation.'<sup>173</sup> Campbell-Bannerman's rhetoric at Plymouth is fascinating, not least because of what it reveals about Liberal rhetoric on the treatment of the non-white subjects of the Empire, framed as his comments with reference to discipline and brute force. In relation to the settlement of South Africa, the main crux of his argument was that as the Boers were a white, European race, they could not be governed through the barbarian-tailored methods of 'acknowledged subjugation' or military rule. In this respect, the question of the settlement was one of the governance of the Dutch speaking population.

This was a line of argument which was also readily elevated into a point of principle as a key element of British imperial policy. In his speech at

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<sup>172</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Plymouth, 19 Nov. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Nov. 1901.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

Southampton the previous July, Campbell-Bannerman had declared that 'British power could not be maintained by force over the a community of men of European blood except with the consent of that community', because fundamentally the rule of force was 'contrary to the principles upon which our Empire was founded, and alien from the noblest traditions of our race.'<sup>174</sup> As well as serving to reinforce a 'Liberal' vision of British imperialism, this again represents an effort by Campbell-Bannerman to frame the question of governing the new territories in terms of the position of the Dutch population.

Inclusionist narratives were by no means limited to Liberal supporters of Campbell-Bannerman: as noted above, Asquith repeatedly stressed the notion of self-government for the Boers at the time of the debates over annexation. Some speakers on the Liberal Imperialist wing of the party, however, articulated the case for self-government as distinct and separate from that of the task of pacifying the Boer population. Instead, arguments in favour of the swift grant of representative institutions rested upon the widely-repeated claim that, in the Transvaal at least, the Boers had formed only a minority of the white population prior to the outbreak of the war, and the assumption that this state of affairs would resume following the conflict. As his attack on rule by the 'backward and inexperienced minority' in his speech at Alwick might suggest, Grey in particular sought to stress the need for self-governing institutions following the conflict as required by the British settlers rather than the Dutch.<sup>175</sup> In a speech at Newcastle on 28 September 1900, Grey told his audience to 'remember that when the war is over the British will outnumber the Boers two to one as they did before. Are you going to keep the British in the Transvaal without self-government?'<sup>176</sup>

Grey was to repeat this point the following February, in a speech to the Eighty Club, asserting that following the conflict 'a large white population – a very great proportion of it British – would flow back into the Transvaal. It was not possible that that population should be indefinitely kept without self-government.' Continuing, Grey suggested that any self-government was in effect conditional

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<sup>174</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 3 Jul. 1901.

<sup>175</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 Nov. 1899

<sup>176</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Newcastle, 28 Sep. 1900, reported in *Daily News*, 29 Sep. 1900.

on this British population, arguing that ‘the guarantee that within a measurable distance of time self-government must be the rule in South Africa was the inflow of the British [...] and what was given to them must be given at the same time to the Dutch race’.<sup>177</sup> While Grey did indeed present self-government as also requiring extension to the Dutch population, it was with a view to a British majority in the Transvaal that Grey anchored his argument.<sup>178</sup> Similar rhetoric was deployed by Munro Ferguson, who in his speech at Leith in December 1901 declared that:

as soon as the normal population returned to the Transvaal there would be a British majority, and the British would no more submit to a policy of military or Downing Street rule in the Transvaal than they would anywhere else.<sup>179</sup>

Again, we can see a Liberal Imperialist rhetoric of self-government, in the Transvaal at least, which was premised upon the idea of government by the British race: a system in which the Boers participated and were represented, but not one of Boer self-government. Fundamentally then, even if the swift introduction of self-government represented a consistent theme of Liberal speakers from across the spectrum of opinion in the party, there was a division in terms of the rhetorical strategy by which the advocacy of self-government was justified.

Yet if this proved a point of difference between the Liberal leadership and the Liberal Imperialists, what is striking is the degree to which the rhetoric of equal rights between the races, and of fair treatment for the defeated Boers, was consistent throughout Liberal speeches dealing with the settlement from speakers across the party. Not only was there a repeated insistence from figures across the party that there could be no formal British ascendancy

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<sup>177</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at the Hotel Cecil, London, 20 Feb. 1901, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Feb. 1901.

<sup>178</sup> Curiously, later on in the conflict Grey appears to have changed tack in this regard: speaking at Liverpool on 13 Nov. 1901, Grey is reported as insisting that while insisting the population must return to its ‘normal state’ before self-government can be granted, it would be impossible to long refuse the Boers self-government when they returned to their land. It is unclear from the text whether this represents a shift in characterising self-government as primarily Boer self-government, or whether the reference to the ‘normal state’ implied a British majority. See *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 Nov. 1901.

<sup>179</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 Dec. 1901.

established in South Africa, but there was also a sustained defence of the Boers' right to their own identity and cultural institutions within the new South Africa that was to be created. Campbell-Bannerman's attack at Glasgow on any attempt to 'Anglicise' the Boers, which he was to repeat in various forms in later speeches, was also echoed by those on the Liberal Imperialist wing.<sup>180</sup> In a speech at Newcastle at the beginning of 1902, Grey attacked any suggestion that the Boer language should be proscribed: language, he stated, 'has in it the spirit of a people. Short of trying to suppress men's religion, the nearest thing to trampling upon their soul is to try and suppress their language.' The Boer may differ from the British in many things, he continued, 'but the British Empire is a big thing, and there was room and must be room for him to breathe freely inside of the British Empire, even though all these differences exist.'<sup>181</sup> Undoubtedly Grey was seeking to follow Rosebery's lead into adopting a more conciliatory stance towards the Boers following Chesterfield, but nonetheless this can be seen as reflecting a wider pluralistic vision of Empire and a rejection of Milnerism in South Africa. Rosebery's own call, in a speech at Leeds on 30 May 1902, stressing the need to 'convert those who have been brave foes into brave friends and faithful fellow-citizens and subjects with us in a new and brighter South Africa', might likewise be seen as deploying similar language as that used by Liberal critics of the war's conduct earlier in the conflict, stressing the need to incorporate the Boers as citizens into the Empire.<sup>182</sup>

In this sense, the debates on the policy of unconditional surrender and the restoration of self-government which characterised Liberal rhetoric on the settlement of the war might be said to have been framed largely in the rhetoric of earlier narratives on the nature of imperial governance in South Africa, both in relation to the politics of the crisis of 1899 and those which emerged from the critique of the war's conduct. In particular, the key dynamic of the need to manage relations between the British and Dutch populations in South Africa was central to both debates. Most significant of all however is that, despite the difference in framing the justification for such a position, Liberal speakers from

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<sup>180</sup> *Daily News*, 8 Jun. 1900.

<sup>181</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Newcastle, 7 Jan. 1902, reported in *Morpeth Herald*, 11 Jan. 1902.

<sup>182</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech at Leeds, 30 May 1902, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1902.

across the party emphasised the need for a swift restoration of self-government to the two former republics. The eventual grant of responsible government to the new colonies was to become a critical imperial question following the Liberal return to power in 1905, one which became mythologised as that of the 'magnanimous gesture', and has subsequently been judged as driven by the need to find a solution to the controversy surrounding indentured Asiatic labour. Yet as this section has demonstrated, the question of the grant of self-government formed a central element of Liberal speakers' rhetoric on the South African War, itself drawing upon the earlier debates in connection with annexation and the origins of the conflict. As the next chapter will examine, many key elements of the rhetorical framework which informed the politics of the 'magnanimous gesture' had already been formed by the war's end.

### **Conclusion: a Continuity of Rhetoric**

Lasting two and a half years and dominating the attention of Britain's political class, the South African War ultimately had a wide-ranging impact on British political life, of which the elements studied in this chapter represent only a part. The fast-changing nature of events and the unforeseen consequences of British policy created new and unanticipated debates and rhetorical spaces through which British Liberals engaged with the politics of Empire. In many respects it is easy to see the politics of the war as bringing about considerable shifts relating to British Liberal politics and the South African question. The acquiescence of the bulk of the Liberal Party in the annexation of the two Republics represented a major break both from pro-Boer opposition to a provocative policy in South Africa prior to the outbreak of war and the justifications for the conflict provided by the Liberal Imperialists during the initial moment of crisis. Likewise, while the imagery of the destruction of war had certainly featured in Liberal rhetoric prior to the conflict, the descent of South Africa into guerrilla warfare and the resultant 'methods of barbarism' they prompted can be said to have opened up a new dimension in the politics of the South African question, in addition to shifting the factional tectonics of the Liberal Party by firmly aligning Campbell-Bannerman in opposition to the Liberal Imperialists. With a shift of debates over how to resolve the problems of South Africa in 1899 to debates over the conduct of the war and its consequences, it is relatively easy to consider the

war as permanently and drastically changing the role of the South African in the Liberal Party's approach to imperial politics.

Yet as this chapter has demonstrated, what is most striking is the degree of continuity present in Liberal rhetoric on South Africa throughout the war, even as the political background shifted. The key debates over the nature of imperialism and its relationship with the Liberal programme, although as fragmentary as ever, repeated the key themes which Liberals had raised in relation to South Africa since the time of the Jameson Raid. Whether on the questions of annexation, farm-burning, the concentration camps or the imposition of martial law at the Cape, Liberal speakers consistently framed these in relation to the long-running themes of imperial governance and the necessary equality of the white races in South Africa. The disputes over the policy of 'unconditional surrender', self-government and the eventual settlement of the conflict similarly adopted the elements of a constitutional-governmental framework for imperial politics, remarkably unchanged from those which were readily applied to pre-war South Africa, even if the events of the conflict had effectively superseded considerations of British supremacy or paramountcy in the region. Ultimately then, despite the trauma and disputes of the South African War, and in spite of the changing power dynamics within the party, the core elements of the Liberal Party's approach to the politics of the South African question emerged relatively unchanged and, as the following chapter examines, these were to go inform the politics of reconstruction in South Africa after 1902.

#### **4. 'A WITCHES' CAULDRON': CHINESE LABOUR AND RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT, 1902-1907**

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The years following the conclusion of the South African War were complex ones for Liberal politics in Britain. In one sense, many of the divisions within the Liberal Party over the South African question faded out of significance, as questions regarding the conduct of the conflict and the terms of settlement were largely superseded by events, and the political focus in Britain shifted on to other, more salient topics. Joseph Chamberlain's launch of the tariff reform campaign in 1903 and his subsequent exit from the government of Arthur Balfour, who had succeeded his uncle Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister after the war's conclusion, were particularly vital developments in this respect. Not only did the protectionist campaign fundamentally reshape the party political landscape, providing a unifying basis for the Liberal Party and shattering the Unionist coalition, but it was also critically an imperial political issue. Chamberlain's efforts to frame tariffs as a means of binding together the different elements of the Empire, and free trader efforts at countering this narrative, formed the central component of imperial politics in this period and indeed, South Africa was as likely to be brought up by political speakers in relation to tariffs as it was as a distinct political question in its own right.

Nonetheless, the reconstruction of South Africa was an important factor in British Liberal politics in the years following the war, generating a number of key controversies which in many respects reflected the politics of earlier iterations of the South African question. Some of these controversies might be characterised as only indirectly related to imperial matters. For example, the question of the Transvaal's financial contribution to the cost of the war formed a persistent feature of Liberal criticisms of Unionist policy. This was at heart however essentially framed as a critique of the government's fiscal competence rather than a question of South African matters, although Liberal speakers sometimes integrated this with rhetoric attacking the mine-owners on the Rand. Nonetheless, the politics of the reconstruction of South Africa saw two key imperially-focused controversies emerge in British Liberal rhetoric: the use of indentured Chinese labour in the Transvaal mining industry, and the methods and timeframe by which a form of self-government would be established in the

Transvaal Colony.<sup>1</sup> The two issues were closely linked both by contemporary Liberal speakers, and by subsequent historians. However, as this chapter argues, the latter should not simply be considered the extension of the former.

The political dynamics of the two controversies were further complicated by the Liberal ascent to office in December 1905. The fall of the Balfour government, which had been tottering for some time after the reconstruction of the ministry to exclude the most committed of both the Chamberlainite tariff reformers and the Unionist free traders, owed little directly to the South African question. Nonetheless, by placing the Liberals in office, it had significant consequences for how the party would approach South African issues: although the 1906 election could be fought largely upon the record of the outgoing ministry, for the party leadership at least the challenge soon became one of defending and justifying their own management of South African affairs. This development also increased the prominence of the Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office in the new ministry, Winston Churchill, who had defected to the Liberal Party in May 1904. Critically, upon taking office the existing tensions between good government and self-government took on a new dynamic, as the claim that responsible government would serve to eliminate the system of Chinese labour began to unravel.

Surveying the period from the end of the South African War through to the immediate aftermath of the Transvaal election in spring 1907, this chapter explores the rhetoric deployed by Liberals in seeking to engage with the debates surrounding the use of Chinese labour and the constitutional settlement of the Transvaal. It first examines the politics of 'Chinese slavery' from the perspective of its relationship to the British political tradition of humanitarian and anti-slavery agitation in imperial politics, alongside the characterisation of the ordinance as an assault upon white labour in the Transvaal. This chapter then goes on to explore the extent to which the labour controversy was framed as damaging to good government in South Africa and the degree to which the issue was framed as one which placed the Imperial government in opposition to colonial sentiment both within South Africa and throughout the white settler-empire. The debates surrounding the need to establish self-government in the

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed later in the chapter, the constitutional settlement for the ORC was generally side-lined in such debates.

Transvaal, and to a lesser degree in the Orange River Colony (ORC), are then examined. Critically, while the grant of self-government was regularly presented as the means by which the Chinese labour problem could be resolved, this section also considers the wider political context in which demands for full self-government and the rejection of the Lyttelton constitution took place, particularly in the light of the trends identified in the previous chapter. Finally this chapter concludes by examining Liberal rhetoric in the period following the general election of 1906 through to the immediate aftermath of the Het Volk victory in the Transvaal election of 1907, looking not just at the official justifications provided by government speakers but also the increasing Radical discontent over the Liberal leadership's imperial policy. In doing so, this chapter argues that for all the new issues raised by the politics of the reconstruction period, Liberal responses to the South African question continued to draw upon ideals of Liberal imperial rule, particularly relating the rhetoric of self-governance and white racial harmony. Critically, these debates would also increasingly demonstrate the underlying contradictions that had characterised the fin-de-siècle Liberal approach to the politics of Empire, paving the way for renewed divisions within the party as Radicals increasingly sought to reframe the South African question.

### **The Politics of Reconstruction**

For years the gold mining industry of the Rand had dominated the economy of the Transvaal, its requirements and interests playing a critical role at the heart of the political-imperial calculations that led up to the Jameson Raid and the outbreak of the war. By the end of the conflict, however, the industry was in chaos: quite apart from the general economic disruption and damage resulting from the conflict, an acute crisis had risen from the dispersal of the black African labour supply by the years of fighting.<sup>2</sup> In response, the mining interests and then the imperial authorities administering the newly-conquered territory adopted a policy of importing what eventually amounted to over 53,000 indentured labourers from China, who were subject to strict contractual

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Richardson, 'Chinese Indentured Labour in the Transvaal Gold Mining Industry, 1904-1910', in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834-1920* (London: 1984), pp.262-63.

requirements and close regulation.<sup>3</sup> It was in reaction to this policy, and particularly the alleged abuses that went along with it, that the 'Chinese slavery' controversy emerged as a major party political issue in Britain. In seeking to interpret the nature of the political controversy in Britain, however, it is important to first situate the introduction of indentured labour within the wider economic, political and imperial contexts of the early-twentieth century Empire.

In terms of the significance of Chinese labour for the Rand mining industry itself, the work of Peter Richardson represents one of the fullest assessments of the policy's economic dimensions.<sup>4</sup> Richardson notably challenges the interpretation espoused by contemporary critics of the Transvaal's mining interests that the problem was simply a labour shortage driven in part by an unnecessary drive for increased profits on the part of the mine owners. The industry, by contrast, was actually facing a widespread crisis of profitability worsened by a collapse in capital investment, putting the whole basis of gold mining and the Transvaal's economic recovery at risk.<sup>5</sup> This supports suggestions by Alan Jeeves that the relationship between the mine owners and the post-conflict Transvaal state was 'rather one of dependence than of domination', with the mining industry at points crippled by its own weaknesses.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Richardson stresses that the introduction of Chinese labour was not an isolated deviation in British imperial policy, instead following on from the practice of using Indian 'coolie' labour in Natal, and operated alongside efforts to increase the volume of black African labour recruited from Portuguese East Africa.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Torrance, *The Strange Death of the Liberal Empire: Lord Selborne in South Africa* (Liverpool: 1996), p.42.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Richardson's essay in Saunders' volume, see also Peter Richardson, 'Coolies and randlords: the North Randfontein Chinese miners' "strike" of 1905', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2:2 (1976); Peter Richardson, 'The Recruiting of Chinese Indentured Labour for the South African Gold-mines, 1903-1908', *Journal of African History* 18:1 (1977); and Peter Richardson, *Chinese mine labour in the Transvaal* (London: 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, 'Chinese indentured labour', pp.263-66.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Jeeves, 'The Control of Migratory Labour on the South African Gold Mines in the Era of Kruger and Milner', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 2:1 (1975), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Richardson, pp.260-61, 66.

Building on such studies, Rachel Bright's recent monograph on Chinese labour in South Africa stands as the most comprehensive analysis of the policy's political and cultural impacts, not only in South Africa but on an imperial and global scale.<sup>8</sup> Bright contextualises the opposition to Chinese labour within the wider history of the 'Asian menace' and the empire of white settlement, particularly in relation to the Cape Colony, Australia and New Zealand. In particular, Bright identifies ideas of 'white labourism' as a highly important factor in determining reactions to the policy in the Transvaal, in Britain and throughout the Empire, as well as situating the moral panic surrounding the supposed violence and vice of the Chinese within a racial framework that emphasised the threat of degeneration. While Bright's focus is not directly upon the British political dimension of the controversy, her work nonetheless provides an important basis for identifying the key influences and imperial connections which sustained the issue in British politics.

In relation to British politics, the agitation against Chinese slavery has generally been recognised as forming a significant part of the Unionist government's discomfiture in the mid-1900s and a key element in recovery of the Liberal Party's fortunes. George L. Bernstein characterises the Liberal campaign as based upon moral condemnation and the exploitation of white labourist arguments, arguing that 'the Chinese labour issue thus gave fresh impetus to the Liberal revival by offending both the party's Nonconformist and its working-class constituencies.'<sup>9</sup> In terms of the actual arguments advanced, G.B. Pyrah identifies the Liberal opposition to the policy as unfolding along three key lines. First, the party argued, the policy was unnecessary as the Labour shortage had only been created by the greed of the mine-owners; second, the party condemned the immorality of a system which resembled slavery, a critique compounded by the moral panics over alleged homosexuality in the Chinese camps; and third, Liberals attacked the government for having introduced the policy against the supposed wishes of the Transvaal's settlers.<sup>10</sup> Liberal

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel K. Bright, *Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1902-10: Race, Violence and Global Spectacle* (Basingstoke: 2013).

<sup>9</sup> George L. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England* (Boston, MA: 1986), pp.50-60.

<sup>10</sup> G.B. Pyrah, *Imperial Policy and South Africa: 1902-10* (Oxford: 1955), pp.189-193.

agitation against Chinese labour was not therefore singularly framed, but covered a broad area of debate bringing in wider themes such as the influence of capital, the legacy of slavery and the nature of the constitutional settlement in South Africa.

In seeking to assess the wider context in which the Liberal campaign was advanced, the work of Kevin Grant is particularly useful. Grant situates the Chinese labour controversy within the wider political and humanitarian reaction to the 'new slaveries' of early-twentieth century Africa. Critically, while the political reaction against Chinese labour adopted the abolitionist discourse of contemporary anti-slavery agitations such as the Congo reform campaign, Grant argues that it differed fundamentally in its characterisation of the Chinese, stating that 'there was no latter-day equivalent of the classic abolitionist image of the African in chains, imploring, "Am I not a man and a brother?"' By contrast, the Chinese were caricatured as conniving, depraved, ridiculous, and, occasionally, pathetic.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Grant argues, while the charge of slavery was certainly one which carried immense political weight in Edwardian politics, the core component of the British reaction against Chinese labour was at heart an expression of British class politics. Building on earlier critiques of the role of capital in the South African War, as well as the perception of an attack on trade union rights in Britain in the form of the Taff Vale judgement, Chinese labour was presented as a device by which the mine-owners of the Transvaal could cut costs and exclude unionised white labour from the Rand.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, such rhetoric formed a key part of the Liberal campaign, particularly for candidates with links to the Trade Union movement. However, as this chapter will explore, it was not entirely the case that the Chinese labourer only appeared as an accomplice rather than a victim in Liberal rhetoric, nor indeed were appeals for the defence of 'white' South Africa constrained to discussions of the labour market.

The Liberal use of the Chinese labour question has in particular been studied in relation to the landslide Liberal victory of 1906. Although the Liberal crusade against tariff reform undoubtedly represented the central issue of the election

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York: 2005), p.83.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.89-94

campaign, the party's opposition to the use of Chinese labour nonetheless played a central role. David Torrance, for example, attributes the enormity of the Unionist defeat to the impact of the Chinese labour question.<sup>13</sup> A.K. Russell, in his study of the contest, interprets the issue as having played a key role in generating working class support for the Liberals, or at least opposition to the Unionists, as Chinese labour came to be presented as an attack by capital on trade unionism and the rights of working men.<sup>14</sup> While making no direct assessment as to the impact of the issue on the result, Grant likewise identifies the Liberal class-based rhetoric on Chinese Labour as continuing into the election campaign.<sup>15</sup> Not all studies of the Liberal campaign have necessarily drawn this conclusion: Scott C. Spencer, for example, has characterised both Liberal and Unionist rhetoric on the issue as having placed stress on the ideals of British character, in the Liberal case ideals which centred around notions of liberty.<sup>16</sup>

In any case, the nature of the Liberal assault on Chinese labour at the election of 1906 was highly controversial, with speakers accused of practicing deception and underhand tactics: Pyrah characterises the Liberal campaign as one in which 'false accusations were bandied about in the most alarming and unscrupulous fashion; high principles were forgotten in the heat of the election campaign.'<sup>17</sup> Certainly, the party's opponents adopted the view that an unfair campaign had been waged against them: as Russell notes, after the question of free trade Chinese labour was 'probably the most important single issue of the election which many Unionists later seized on as a convenient explanation of defeat.'<sup>18</sup> The supposed underhandedness of Liberal electioneering also concerned not just the characterisation of the system as slavery, or indeed the willingness or ability of the Liberal government to actually bring about an immediate end to the system, but additionally the means by which the campaign

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<sup>13</sup> Torrance, *Strange Death of the Liberal Empire*, p.40.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p.196.

<sup>15</sup> Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, pp.98-105.

<sup>16</sup> Scott C. Spencer, 'British Liberty Stained: "Chinese Slavery," Imperial Rhetoric, and the 1906 British General Election', *Madison Historical Review* 7 (2010), 22.

<sup>17</sup> Pyrah, *Imperial Policy and South Africa*, p.192.

<sup>18</sup> A.K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbott: 1973), p.196.

was fought. As James Thompson notes, the imagery of chained Chinamen used in Liberal posters, and indeed in street demonstrations of mocked-up Chinese gangs, was particularly seized upon as a means of winning votes through allusions to slavery without making the explicit charge.<sup>19</sup> Although many Liberal candidates did not shy away from directly deploying the term slavery, the controversy surrounding Liberal imagery in the contest further serves to stress the significance of allusion to the politics of anti-slavery in relation to Chinese labour.

Given the volume of scholarship on the nature of Chinese labour as a political issue, it is in many ways surprising that there has been relatively little examination of the public politics of the question after the return of the Liberal government at the election. Grant briefly comments that after the election the Liberal ministry did not bring about an immediate end to the system, instead putting in place a means of voluntary repatriation and proceeding with the grant of full responsible self-government to the colony, but otherwise does not really explore the nature of these debates. While more in-depth studies such as Ronald Hyam's *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office* provide a detailed analysis of the debates Chinese labour sparked within the Liberal government post-election, the public political dimension of these debates is touched upon only briefly.<sup>20</sup> A notable exception to this trend can however be found in Richard Toye's study of Churchill's relationship with the British Empire. Although naturally focused on Churchill's own position, Toye's account nonetheless provides a solid account of the public political dimension of the South African question up to the victory of Het Volk in 1907. Contrary to the popular notion that the Chinese labour controversy largely faded from the public eye, Toye highlights the very public political rows connected not just with the vote of censure against Lord Milner over the revelation over the official sanction his administration in South Africa had given to the flogging of the Chinese, but critically also the suggestion that the imperial veto could be used to regulate any

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<sup>19</sup> James Thompson, "Pictorial lies"? —Posters and Politics in Britain c. 1880–1914', *Past & Present* 197 (2007), 177-78. It is worth noting that in making these charges Unionists often exaggerated the prevalence of such tactics in the Liberal campaign: see Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World that Made Him and the World He Made* (London: 2010), p.98.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office 1905 - 1908: the watershed of the Empire-Commonwealth* (London: 1968), ch.4.

legislation that a future self-governing Transvaal might pass on the issue.<sup>21</sup> These events are also contextualised within the other South African challenges facing Churchill at the Colonial Office, such as the political response to the Bambatha Uprising of 1906 and the protests accompanying the restrictions imposed upon non-white imperial subjects in the Transvaal.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, the bulk of scholarship on this period has largely represented a more traditional imperial-administrative focus on the relationship between key political figures, and the calculations behind the policy adopted. Older historical accounts have traditionally asserted that the Liberal decision to grant responsible self-government was in large part brought about by through the lobbying of the Boer leader J. C. Smuts, who is credited with having convinced Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and by extension the Liberal cabinet, of the potential to secure Boer loyalty through a magnanimous grant of full self-government.<sup>23</sup> Such assessments have been fundamentally challenged by the work of Ronald Hyam. Liberal policy in South Africa, Hyam charges, was not the result of genuine magnanimity but a practical calculation designed to firstly rid the government of the embarrassment of administering a system of Chinese indentured labour which it found it could not abolish, and secondly to quickly secure British supremacy in the Transvaal by introducing full self-government. Smuts' lobbying had little influence on the policy, and the suggestion of magnanimity was only subsequently adopted after the surprise victory of Het Volk, against the wishes and expectations of the Liberal ministry.<sup>24</sup> Certainly,

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<sup>21</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, pp.99-101.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.101-110.

<sup>23</sup> For examples of this interpretation, see Nicholas Mansergh, *South Africa, 1906-1961: The Price of Magnanimity* (London: 1962), pp.15-37. Pyrah, *Imperial Policy and South Africa*, pp.164-71; Max Beloff, *Imperial Sunset Volume I: Britain's Liberal Empire 1897-1921* (London: 1969), pp.122-23. Others have questioned the personal influence of Smuts but nonetheless adopted the broader thesis of magnanimity, G.H.L. Le May for example insisting that the Liberals were not 'prisoners of circumstance' but instead acting primarily upon Liberal principles: see G.H.L. Le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa 1899-1907* (Oxford: 1965), pp.185-187.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Hyam, 'The myth of the "Magnanimous Gesture": the Liberal government, Smuts and conciliation, 1906' in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin (eds), *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London: 1975). These arguments are stressed further and contextualised in Ronald Hyam, 'British Imperial Policy and South Africa 1906-10', in Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Harlow: 1980).

Hyam's thesis that the grant of responsible government was fundamentally linked to the question of Chinese labour is persuasive, and indeed as this chapter demonstrates Liberal speakers sought to make a virtue of the fact that it was a self-governing Transvaal which would ultimately make a decision on the policy. However, as examined in the previous chapter, calls for the restoration of full self-government to the Transvaal had for some years formed a significant component of the Liberal response to the South African question.

This chapter aims to build upon the existing scholarship on the Liberal government's motivations for the grant of self-government by exploring the political context within which the question of responsible government was articulated. As will be argued, Liberals advocated a swift grant of full self-government not simply as a solution to the problem of Chinese labour but as a measure grounded in past imperial practice and necessary for the good government of South Africa. Likewise, this chapter will demonstrate that while in many ways Chinese labour and the grant of responsible government have largely been treated as two distinct controversies in the existing historiography, the public political dimensions of both debates were not simply connected, but formed part of a wider continuity of Liberal imperial politics directly following on from the South African war.

### **Chinese Labour and Anti-slavery Rhetoric**

Given the famous characterisation of the Chinese labour ordinance as a system of slavery, humanitarian and abolitionist discourses played a central role in framing Liberal rhetoric on the controversy. Chinese labour was presented as an immoral aberration of imperial policy, a system fundamentally at odds with the history and character of the Empire. Although as Grant notes the agitation in Britain against Chinese labour did not simply represent the translation of contemporary anti-slavery politics into the field of South African policy, this section argues nonetheless that Liberal characterisations of the policy as a system of slavery were not merely a humanitarian gloss upon the surface of what was essentially a question of white labour. Instead, the Liberal assault upon Chinese labour represented the latest iteration of earlier anxieties about the methods of imperialism at work in the Transvaal.

While the main focus of the Chinese labour controversy was not to begin in earnest until 1904, the degree to which such themes featured in Liberal rhetoric on the South African question in the direct aftermath of the war is nonetheless striking. Sir William Harcourt, for example, gave a speech at Abertillery on 9 October which focused heavily on the consequences of the conflict. Although primarily concerned with the impact of the war on the nation's finances, in a surprisingly prescient section the former Liberal leader went on to discuss what he termed as the 'native labour problem'. The gold mines, he noted, had suffered from a labour shortage prior to the war, and the mine-owners were now seeking to deploy various schemes to address this problem. However, stressing that 'under the British flag there cannot be such a thing as forced labour', Harcourt condemned the proposal to force the Black African population to work through punitive taxation, warning that such a policy would risk the safety of the region: 'if we are going to have a Boer war followed by a native disturbance, that is about the most serious thing that could happen in South Africa.' Notably, given the degree to which his colleagues would subsequently present Chinese labour as an assault on white labour, Harcourt dismissed the notion that the mines could be worked with white labour, on the grounds that the 'the white man will not work with the black man.' Most strikingly however, he then went on to condemn 'the worst of all possible plans proposed, and that is to introduce Asiatic labour, by which I mean Chinese labour', a system which he described as having proved elsewhere to be 'so injurious to the population, so repugnant to the working white man there, that it has been universally discontinued throughout the whole of our colonies.'<sup>25</sup> Harcourt's rhetoric was unusual for 1902: nonetheless, in referencing the notion of slavery and the implications of Chinese labour for South Africa, Harcourt was touching upon many of the themes which were to become central to debate in the following years.

While Harcourt's direct attack on the potential for Chinese labour may have been exceptional for its time, the general problems arising from the labour shortages on the Rand were nonetheless to become regular features in Liberal speeches over the course of the following months. In particular, the policy of 'native taxation' as a means of expanding the availability of labour came in for

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<sup>25</sup> Sir William Harcourt, speech at Abertillery, 9 October 1902, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Oct. 1902.

severe criticism, with Liberal speakers adopting the language of abolitionism in advancing their critiques. For example, in a speech at Eccles on 23 January 1903 Herbert Samuel, the Member of Parliament for Cleveland and a future leader of the Liberal Party, declared that while 'the native of South Africa should pay a reasonable tax in return for the civilised government he got', if there was to be 'additional taxation in order to force him to go to the mines, that was a system of veiled slavery, and nothing else.' Continuing, Samuel asserted the war had been supposedly fought in part 'to improve the condition of the natives, who had been grossly misused by their Boer masters', and that to introduce an indirect system of slavery under British rule 'would be a gross betrayal, a grave political crime'.<sup>26</sup> Samuel would emerge as one of the leading backbenchers behind the campaign against 'Chinese slavery', so it is significant that in early 1903 he was already deploying the language of anti-slavery in relation to South Africa, even before the importation of indentured Chinese labour was added to the mix.<sup>27</sup>

Neither was Samuel the only Liberal figure to compare the use of Black African labour to slavery. Speaking at Hull the Wednesday after Samuel's speech, H.H. Asquith also touched upon the issue of forced African labour. While noting that 'only a charlatan could pretend to have in his pocket a solution of the native question', he nonetheless declared to his audience that the whole of the Empire was 'resolutely, uncompromisingly opposed to the establishment of the recognition in these territories, in any form or under any name, of open or of disguised slavery'.<sup>28</sup> The use of coerced labour was similarly condemned by Harcourt's son, L.V. Harcourt, a rising figure in the party who was to enter the House of Commons in the Rossendale by-election of 1904. Speaking at Failsworth on 3 March 1903, the younger Harcourt attacked the use of high taxation to force labourers either into the mines or into the gaol, declaring the policy to be 'only slavery at one remove in which they substituted the prison for

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<sup>26</sup> Herbert Samuel, speech at Eccles, 23 Jan. 1903, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Jan. 1904.

<sup>27</sup> Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, p.89. It is worth noting as well that Samuel was a key figure within the Congo reform movement in Britain.

<sup>28</sup> H.H. Asquith, speech at Hull, 28 Jan. 1903, reported in *The Times*, 29 Jan. 1903.

the lash.<sup>29</sup> Notably, Liberal speakers also drew upon appeals to British character and the role of abolitionism in the nation's identity in their attacks on the system: at a Liberal event in Rochester on 26 March 1903, the former Liberal minister George Leveson-Gower declared that 'it was with a feeling of shame that he considered it necessary to address any body of Englishmen in protest against a form of slavery', insisting that the duty of the humane man must be to 'protest against his Government constituting itself a "nigger-driver" for mining magnates'.<sup>30</sup> There thus existed already a significant anti-slavery critique within Liberal rhetoric on the reconstruction of South Africa prior to the advent of Chinese labour.

The terms of the Chinese Labour ordinance, which had been lobbied for by the mining industry and Lord Milner before finally securing the approval of the Imperial government at the end of 1903, established a system by which labourers would be recruited from China for fixed contracted periods. While the labourers were waged, the restrictions imposed by the ordinance on movement and property rights, as well as the alleged abuses such as the buying and selling of labourers between mines and ill-treatment in the compounds saw the system condemned as slavery by its opponents in Britain.<sup>31</sup> As discussed above, the explicit characterisation of Chinese labour as slavery formed by far the most controversial element of the Liberal campaign against the policy, at least in the eyes of their opponents. During the election campaign of 1906 the Unionist Press in particular focused their fury upon the use of the term slavery: the *Daily Mail*, for example, responded to the opening of Campbell-Bannerman's campaign with three consecutive editorials attacking the 'hoax' of slavery, its condemnation if anything intensified rather than mitigated by the Prime Minister's relatively brief reference to the subject in his election address.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, as Thompson notes, the attack on the lie of slavery represented a key strategy of the Unionist response in the debate on the loyal address, most famously leading to Churchill's admission that the policy cannot

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<sup>29</sup> L.V. Harcourt, speech at Failsworth, 3 Mar. 1903, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Mar. 1903.

<sup>30</sup> George Leveson-Gower, speech at Rochester, 26 Mar. 1903, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Mar. 1903.

<sup>31</sup> Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, p.90.

<sup>32</sup> Editorials of the *Daily Mail*, 9-11 Jan. 1906.

'be classified as slavery in the extreme acceptance of the word without some risk of terminological inexactitude', a formula nonetheless sufficiently vague so as not to entirely rule out the charge of slavery.<sup>33</sup>

For all the contention over the use of the term slavery, it was however far from a universal element of the Liberal assault: while many speakers certainly attacked Chinese slavery, many others avoided such direct characterisations. In a speech at Consett on 26 February 1904 John Morley, for example, insisted that he would not get into a discussion as to whether the conditions for the Chinese 'were or were not slavery', merely noting that Unionist arguments in the defence of the policy could be readily deployed in the defence of slavery.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Liberal speakers deliberately qualified their references to slavery. During the Rossendale by-election L.V. Harcourt charged that indentured Chinese labour was 'so slightly removed from slavery as to be almost indistinguishable'.<sup>35</sup> Others still sought refuge in what were effectively synonyms, Charles Trevelyan declaring in a speech at Manchester on 25 March 1904 that if the government objected to the word slavery, then he would call the system 'qualified slavery, bondage, serfdom – anything they pleased. But it was certainly not freedom.'<sup>36</sup> Such tactics, in effect, served as the rhetorical equivalent of the election posters of chained Chinamen, suggesting slavery to the audience while allowing for deniability on the part of the speaker. Ultimately, the furore around the specific term of slavery is best understood not so much as a dispute over the specifics of the scheme, but more in relation to the moral connotations of what slavery represented.

For this reason, the charge that the reputation of Britain and the Empire risked being tarnished represented a particularly important element of Liberal rhetoric on Chinese labour. For example, the Radical Member of Parliament for Manchester North, Charles Schwann, condemned the policy in February 1904 as a 'stain upon the British nation', insisting that public sentiment was opposed

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<sup>33</sup> Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies?', 177-78; HC Deb., 22 Feb. 1906, fourth series, Vol.152, c.555.

<sup>34</sup> John Morley, speech at Consett, 26 Feb. 1904, reported in *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1904.

<sup>35</sup> L.V. Harcourt, speech at Stacksteads, 11 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 12 Mar. 1904.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Trevelyan, speech at Manchester, 25 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Mar. 1904.

to Chinese labour.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, at a protest meeting in Sheffield on 30 March 1904, Thomas Shaw declared it to be 'defamatory and lowering to the British Empire to have such traffic in human life.'<sup>38</sup> In particular, Liberal critics of the policy drew upon the legacy of abolitionism in Britain in seeking to portray Chinese labour as an immoral departure from British imperial traditions. Campbell-Bannerman, for example, drew upon anti-slavery rhetoric in a speech at Hanley on 30 June 1904. Although he was careful not to characterise the scheme as slavery, referring instead to 'servile alien labour', the Liberal leader nonetheless declared:

Who would have imagined a British government advocating such a policy – a British government beseeching for it, clamouring for it, – and the Parliament of Great Britain – a Parliament in which Wilberforce sat and of which Fowell Buxton was a member – voting for it?<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, during the election campaign of 1906 T.J. Macnamara, seeking re-election for the seat of North Camberwell, used a meeting in his constituency to attack the Unionist government for having 'debauched and prostituted the great name of Englishmen by writing the words "Chinese slavery" across the name of Wilberforce'.<sup>40</sup> The historic force of British public sentiment was also often stressed: in his speech of February 1904 Schwann compared opposition to the government's complicity in the scheme to past cases of public outcry when the Royal Navy had been 'ordered by the Government to give up slaves who had taken refuge on board our vessels', noting that 'the order was repudiated by the entire English people', forcing the government to rescind it.<sup>41</sup> In this manner, Chinese labour was further characterised as a departure from and a betrayal of Britain's opposition to slave labour.

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Schwann, speech at Manchester, 27 Feb. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Feb. 1904.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Shaw, speech at Sheffield, 30 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1904.

<sup>39</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Hanley, 30 Jun. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Jul. 1904.

<sup>40</sup> T.J. Macnamara, speech at Camberwell, 3 Jan. 1906, reported in *The Times*, 4 Jan. 1906.

<sup>41</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Feb. 1904. This appears to be an allusion to the controversy over the surrender by the British authorities of an African slave at the port of Jeddah, who had taken refuge aboard a British man-of-war.

This attack on Chinese labour as a breach of British imperial tradition was further emphasised through comparison of the policy with schemes adopted by other imperial and colonial authorities. At a protest meeting in Bolton on 25 March 1904, the Liberal MP George Harwood argued against the introduction of Chinese labour, pointing out that:

The Portuguese Government tried indentured Chinese labour in South America, and it was to be employed under better conditions than those now proposed in South Africa. After ten years' trial, the scandal was found to be so great that the British government insisted that Portugal should drop this labour. Yet thirty years later we were going to do the same thing we then condemned.<sup>42</sup>

Harwood's rhetoric can be seen to have combined the idea of British imperial exceptionalism with notions of Britain's past as a regulatory power correcting the abuses of other empires in order to frame the policy as an aberration of British imperial methods, despite the use of indentured labour elsewhere in the British Empire. Another scathing comparison was made by the trade unionist and Member of Parliament Charles Fenwick: speaking at the May 1904 meeting of the National Liberal Federation, Fenwick noted that, in Britain's past treatment of the Boers of the Transvaal, there had been instrumented 'two solemn Conventions [...] in which our government laid it down that no slavery or even apprenticeship of the nature of slavery would be permitted within the state of the South African Republic', describing it as a 'cruel and bitter irony' that the British themselves were introducing forced labour to the Transvaal.<sup>43</sup> Liberal speakers were thus able to adapt earlier narratives attacking the moral character of the Boers at the time of the South African War in order to advance their critiques of Chinese labour.

In relation to this continuing politics of abolitionism, it is important to consider carefully Grant's assessment that the Liberal agitation against Chinese labour differed in relation to other anti-slavery campaigns in Africa because the Chinese were presented not as victims but as collaborators. Certainly it was the case that the Chinese were often framed by Liberal speakers as displacing

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<sup>42</sup> George Harwood, speech at Bolton, 25 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Mar. 1904.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Fenwick, speech at Manchester, 13 May 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1904.

white labour in the Transvaal and threatening the social fabric of the colony. At the same time, however, Liberal speakers certainly did on occasion characterise the Chinese as victims of the policy, in what can be seen as a further continuation of anti-slavery rhetorical tropes. Appearing alongside Morley and Churchill at a Liberal rally in Manchester on 13 May 1904, Schwann attacked the Chinese labour ordinance for the high mortality rate it was likely to inflict upon the Chinese. Mocking Balfour's claim in a recent speech to the Primrose League, that Unionists stood for imperialism and liberty, he declared:

We knew what Tory liberty was. It was liberty to the mine-owner to bring over Chinese to South Africa and keep them there in compounds for three years and then send them back – dead or alive – to China; and in his opinion more would be dead than alive when the three years were over. We had seen how the mine-owners treated the Kaffirs – those patient labourers, – and we could only expect the sjambok and the mortality would be still more strongly felt by the Chinese.<sup>44</sup>

In some respects, this was as much a moral criticism of the mine-owners as it was a discussion of the actual position of the Chinese. Nonetheless, the focus on the conditions the Chinese were to be subject to, and particular the suggestion that their condition would be worse than that of the Black African labourers in the mines, stands in contrast to the assumption that the characterisation of the Chinese was overwhelmingly negative. Additionally, the attack on 'Tory liberty', might also be seen as supporting Spencer's assessment of the controversy as one which was used as the basis for contesting the language of liberty in British party politics.

Other sympathetic characterisations of the Chinese labourer also stressed the denial of his rights as a worker, despite the wider narrative of competition for labour. In his speech at Sheffield for example, Shaw declared to his audience that 'he had no brief for the Chinaman, but if he was to go in let him go in with the rights of a free human being', notably also attacking the ordinance for dealing with 'human chattels and not men with human rights.'<sup>45</sup> Others attacked the conditions in which the Chinese were to be bound. Speaking at the Manchester Reform Club in April 1904, the Liberal peer Earl Beauchamp

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Schwann, speech at Manchester, 13 May 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1904.

<sup>45</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1904.

attacked Chinese labour explicitly on the grounds of 'common humanity', condemning the fact 'the Chinese labourer could not hold land, and no minimum rate of wages was laid down.' Significantly, Beauchamp noted that at the time of the South African War, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a prayer for 'equal justice between man and man. What the Church of England prayed for then they might fairly pray for now, whether the man be white, black, or yellow.'<sup>46</sup> The advocacy of equal justice of course did not mean full racial equality, but it was nonetheless significant that Liberal speakers also portrayed the Chinese as victims of economic injustice at the hands of the imperial authorities.

Concerns for the treatment of the Chinese resurfaced as the fall of the Unionist government and the election of 1906 drew nearer, although critically these later characterisations were often accompanied by, and indeed in cases secondary to, an implied threat by the Chinese to the social and moral fabric of South Africa. Speaking in support of Churchill's candidacy for Manchester North West in October 1905, Major John Seely, who had defected from the Conservatives to the Liberals in opposition to Chinese labour, identified the attacks by runaway labourers on the white population of the Transvaal as the inevitable result of the conditions in which they were forced to exist. If, he argued, 'we treated a man as a social outcast he would, in return, behave like a pariah dog. If we denied a man the elementary rights of freedom we brutalised him'.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, addressing a demonstration at Derby on 8 January 1906, John Burns, by this point President of the Local Government Board in Campbell-Bannerman's government, attacked the South African War as a war which had been fought:

To endow the Chinese coolies – to chain them in slavery and keep them in combines, to enclose them like beasts and to flog them like animals, and to subject them to undue abominations which a celibate industrial life always did and always would bring about.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Earl Beauchamp, speech at Manchester, 15 Apr. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Apr. 1904.

<sup>47</sup> Major John Seely, speech at Manchester, 9 Oct. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Oct. 1905.

<sup>48</sup> John Burns, speech at Derby, 8 Jan. 1906, reported in *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 9 Jan. 1906.

Continuing, Burns declared that the ordinance had prostituted British honour by 'enslaving the Chinese, the oldest and greatest people in the world.'<sup>49</sup> In both cases, the rhetoric is used to support the charge that the ordinance posed a threat to the life of the Transvaal Colony. Nonetheless, such language can also be seen as having further framed the Chinese as victims, rather than willing abettors, in the system of Chinese indentured labour.

Ultimately, while much of the sound and fury surrounding the Liberal attack on the Chinese labour ordinance might be characterised broadly as the politics of anti-slavery, the subsequent sections will demonstrate that this formed only part of the focus on the policy. Nonetheless, beyond the furore over the specific cry of slavery the dynamics of humanitarian politics played a significant role in shaping Liberal rhetoric on the subject. The controversy over Chinese labour did not simply emerge following the initial publicity given to the mine-owners' request for the ordinance, but was directly built upon earlier debates concerning the coercion of the Black African labour force. Likewise, the Chinese were not solely presented as collaborators in the system, but were also characterised themselves as victims of the policy. While the Liberal campaign against Chinese labour in South Africa was in many ways distinct from contemporary abolitionist causes such as that of the Congo Reform movement, the agitation was nonetheless effective at adopting the rhetoric of anti-slavery because it ultimately dealt with many of the same anxieties about the morality of imperialism, all the more so since it challenged the supposed exceptionalism of British imperial rule.

### **White Labour and Chinese Labour**

If the rhetoric of abolitionism furnished Liberals with a moral critique of the Chinese labour ordinance, it was the focus on the position of white labour in South Africa which gave the Liberal campaign much of its political force. Chinese labour, the scheme's opponents charged, demonstrated the true extent of underhand capitalist efforts to diminish the position of the working classes and represented a betrayal of the cause for which the Empire had fought during the war. Given the degree to which this argument was advanced against a backdrop of increased labour agitation in Britain, it is tempting to regard the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

campaign against Chinese labour as a reversal of earlier dynamics in the politics of the South African question: rather than positions on South Africa being articulated in relation to domestic political concerns and past controversies, here was a case in which an ostensibly imperial issue was used to advance wider concerns about the position of labour in Britain. However, while the extent to which the politics of Chinese labour resonated with working class concerns in Britain should not be understated, the essentially imperial dynamics of the controversy should not be ignored. As such, this chapter argues that the labour critique of the ordinance not only recalled earlier narratives framing capitalist interests as sectional and harmful to the wellbeing of the Empire, but was also used by Radical speakers to articulate wider anxieties over democracy and trade unionism within the Empire.

In many respects, it is unsurprising that attacks on the role of capital should have formed a key element of the most prominent post-war iteration of the South African question. As previously examined, in the actual debates on the causes of the war at time of the Transvaal crisis the focus was primarily upon the consequences of action or inaction for the governance of South Africa and the security of Britain's imperial position. Although it that had always been something of a running undercurrent in Liberal rhetoric following the aftermath of the Jameson Raid, the actions of the mine-owning capitalists on the Rand had generally been a secondary issue. Yet throughout the course of the war and after, Liberal figures who had opposed the justice of the conflict increasingly characterised the war as one fought on behalf of the mine-owners. Additionally, the dawn of the twentieth century had seen the rise of J.A. Hobson's theories of imperialism as a capital-driven enterprise.<sup>50</sup> The capital-focused critique of Chinese labour did not however simply reflect a translation of Hobson's analysis of imperialism into the rhetoric of Liberal politics: although many of the same tropes are recognisable, by and large Liberal speakers did not use the question of Chinese labour to advance Hobson's wider thesis. Instead, as with the arguments deployed following the Jameson Raid, the focus of Liberal attacks on mine-owning interests were often articulated as critiques of

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<sup>50</sup> See J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: 1954), [first published 1902].

character and the influence of sectional interests, as opposed to imperial interests.

Liberal attacks on the character and background of the mine-owners on the Rand primarily served to frame their interests as contrary to those of the Empire at large. Given that the Unionist government sought to justify the Chinese labour ordinance as necessary for the economic reconstruction of the Transvaal, there was thus an important rhetorical advantage in seeking to frame the mining interest as sectional in nature, even antagonistic and menacing, by characterising the mine-owners as a primarily foreign element. For example, in an address to his prospective constituents on 22 March 1904 the Liberal candidate for Manchester South, Arthur Haworth, attacked the exclusion of white labour from the mining industry, as he put it, by the 'gentlemen with the foreign names'.<sup>51</sup> Echoing Hobson, anti-Semitic rhetoric was similarly deployed to frame the ordinance as favouring alien interests over British interests. In the famous Hyde Park rally against the ordinance, Burns attacked the Unionist-dominated Parliament as the 'handmaid of the Jewish plutocracy' which was seeking to 'starve "Britishers" out of existence altogether'.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, appearing on the platform alongside Shaw at Sheffield the following week, the Liberal candidate John Tudor Walters declared that 'this country was not prepared to allow South Africa to be handed over to a company of German Jews'.<sup>53</sup>

Similar language resurfaced in the run up to the general election. For example, R.L. Outhwaite, the Liberal candidate standing in opposition to Chamberlain, used a speech in Manchester on 14 November 1905 to charge that 'the monopoly control of wealth in South Africa is very close, and entirely in hands of a group of cosmopolitan financiers', although intriguingly he went on to place the blame for Chinese labour not on the mine-owners themselves but on the imperial authorities whom had allowed themselves to be controlled by the

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<sup>51</sup> Arthur Haworth, speech at Manchester, 22 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Mar. 1904.

<sup>52</sup> John Burns, speech at Hyde Park, London, 26 Mar. 1904, reported in *The Times* 28 Mar. 1904.

<sup>53</sup> John Tudor Walters, speech at Sheffield, 30 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1904.

mining interests.<sup>54</sup> The force of anti-Semitic appeals in and of themselves should not be discounted in Edwardian political culture. Nonetheless, the explicit characterisation of the mine-owners as an alien interest served to undermine Unionist claims that Chinese labour was for the good of South Africa and for the good of the Empire, by presenting its key backers as an alien element with no wider interest in imperial affairs.

The imperial basis for the Chinese labour ordinance was further undermined by suggestions that the mining industry did not actually require assistance, or at least did not deserve it. Liberal speakers insisted that there was no necessity for the introduction of Chinese labour, a line of argument that served both to highlight the greed of the mine-owners and to link the issue firmly with wage-politics. The labour shortage in the mines, many Liberals responded, was primarily down to the mine-owners' refusal to pay the Black African labour force a reasonable wage, and was often explicitly linked to the earlier scheme of coerced labour in the Transvaal. In his speech to the National Liberal Federation on the subject, Fenwick attributed the labour shortage to a combination of low wages and the after-effects of the war, insisting that 'if wages were low and treatment bad [...] then we must not be surprised if labour did not gravitate to that particular industry.' It was not, he declared, 'the duty of the government to provide cheap labour for employers'.<sup>55</sup> This claim was repeated by no less than Campbell-Bannerman himself, who in an election speech at Chester on 10 January 1906 declared that:

There is plenty of labour in this country and there is plenty in South Africa at a price. The whole thing is a question of price. I have never been satisfied that black labour cannot be obtained in South Africa, and I have never been satisfied that white labour cannot be employed much more largely than it is.<sup>56</sup>

Again, the emphasis on the price of labour is used to explain away the shortfall in the workforce, characterising the situation as that of the mine-owners' own making. However, Campbell-Bannerman's statement also advanced this critique alongside what was to become the key charge of the Liberal campaign

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<sup>54</sup> R.L. Outhwaite, speech at Manchester, 14 Nov. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Nov. 1905.

<sup>55</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1904.

<sup>56</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Chester, 10 Jan. 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Jan. 1906.

against the ordinance: the argument that Chinese labour was closing down opportunities for, and indeed actively displacing, British workers.

Liberal speakers characterised the employment of Chinese labour as opposed to British labour as a betrayal of expectations for the reconstruction of South Africa. Speaking at Glasgow in January 1904, Campbell-Bannerman attacked the government for 'slamming the door in the face of British emigrants' by proposing to bring in Chinese labour.<sup>57</sup> Similarly Asquith, speaking the following month at Harrogate, condemned what he described as 'the importation into a colony of white men of this alien element', given that the British people had been led to expect the colony 'would become a widening field for the energy and enterprise of the subjects of his majesty'.<sup>58</sup>

In many cases, Liberal speakers framed the failure to deliver opportunities for the employment of British settlers as an explicit breach of the justifications given for the South African War. In his speech at Consett, Morley drew attention to the claims made in the early stages of the conflict that the opening up of South Africa would represent 'a grand field for our surplus population'. 'The surplus population', he continued, 'went out and found itself more surplus there than it was at home.'<sup>59</sup> This was a somewhat disingenuous argument from Morley: although it was the case that defenders of the conflict had advanced the claim that the Transvaal would be opened up as field of migration, this had never been a main focus of the debates on the war, which after all had been justified in its early stages as explicitly not a war for territorial gain and economic advantage. Indeed, to the extent it had ever been a miners' war, it was in relation to the Uitlanders rather than potential miners from Britain or elsewhere in the Empire, and even then concerned more with political status rather than questions of employment. Nonetheless, the suggestion that one of the primary causes of the war had been betrayed by the sectional interests of the Unionist government represented a powerful rhetorical line, adding further force to the Liberal assault upon the Chinese labour ordinance.

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<sup>57</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Glasgow, 27 Jan. 1904, reported in *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1904.

<sup>58</sup> H.H. Asquith, speech at Harrogate, 26 Feb. 1904, reported in *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1904.

<sup>59</sup> *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1904.

Beyond the utilisation of the Chinese labour issue as a means of attacking the premise of the conflict, the particular notion that Chinese labour had been adopted as an alternative to British labour, or more generally white labour, represented a specific focus on wage-politics. Although the mine-owners' desire to avoid paying high labour costs had already been blamed for causing the labour shortage in the first place, Liberal speakers nonetheless also presented the desire to drive down the wages of white labourers, so as to effectively exclude them from the industry, as not just the consequence of but the specific aim of the ordinance. In his speech at Sheffield, Tudor Walters asked what had become of 'the Cornish miners who left South Africa before the war began? They were waiting to return, but not at a rate of 6s. 3d. per week. They desired a fair return for their labour.'<sup>60</sup>

A similar point was advanced by Beauchamp, who drew upon his experience as Governor of New South Wales in order to advance his argument: in the gold mines of Victoria, he declared, 'white men were employed at the trade union rate of wages. If white men could be employed in Victoria in the mines why should they not be so employed on the Rand?'<sup>61</sup> Significantly, as Beauchamp's rhetoric suggests, this critique of Chinese labour not only argued that white labour was to be excluded for reasons of cutting cost, but also presented the ordinance as a deliberate attempt on the part of the mine-owners to exclude trade unionism from South Africa. In a speech at Bolton on 19 December 1905, Harwood recounted to his audience the meetings he had with the mine-owners during his visit to South Africa following the end of the war. Remarking that he had suggested to them at the time that there was no reason why the mines could not be worked with white labour, Harwood declared that their response had been 'we don't want any of your trade unionism over here'.<sup>62</sup> Chinese labour in this fashion was then characterised not just as a means of robbing the white working class of opportunities for employment, but as a device used to permanently stall the expansion of organised labour into South Africa.

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<sup>60</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1904.

<sup>61</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Apr. 1904.

<sup>62</sup> George Harwood, speech at Bolton, 19 Dec. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Dec. 1905.

Strikingly, Liberal speakers explicitly linked this language of labour politics with the franchise questions which had dominated debate during the crisis of 1899. White labourers were unwanted in the Transvaal, the argument went, because white working men would demand the vote, which in turn risked capitalist profits. For example, Thomas Horridge, who was to successfully unseat Balfour in Manchester East during the general election, used a speech in April 1904 to declare that 'if the British workman were allowed to go out there with decent wages he would want, what, indeed, the South African war was said to be for, a vote – and there was not a vote in South Africa now.'<sup>63</sup> Similar language was deployed by Shaw, who in a speech at Manchester on 9 December 1904 asserted that 'not only did the mining magnates want cheap labour by force; they wanted no political opinion which would conflict with the capitalist interest. At the back of the introduction of Chinese labour was the desire to have human chattels who would be under conditions of non-citizenship.'<sup>64</sup> Similarly Outhwaite identified the Chinese labour policy as having emerged from 'the mine magnates' dread and hatred of white democracy', noting that the mining Press in Johannesburg had insisted that there should be no emergence of a Labour party on the back of poor white migration, as there had been in Australia.<sup>65</sup>

Although naturally such arguments might be expected to occur more commonly among speakers on the Radical wing of British Liberal politics, they were by no means exclusive to those with established labour connections: in a speech at Dalkeith on 29 March 1906, Sir Edward Grey deployed the very same line of argument, declaring that 'the mineowners were afraid that South Africa might become like Australia – with the Labour vote in a majority – or, for that matter, like what they had at home.'<sup>66</sup> It is necessary to consider some of the more alarmist warnings about Chinese labour with such critiques in mind. Lloyd George famously warned, in a speech at Pwllheli on 16 January 1906, that if Chinese labour could be introduced in South Africa on grounds of cost then it

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Horridge, speech at Manchester, 24 Apr. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Apr. 1904.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Shaw, speech at Manchester, 9 Dec. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Dec. 1904.

<sup>65</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Nov. 1905.

<sup>66</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Dalkeith, 29 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 30 Mar. 1904.

could also lead to 'slavery on the hills of Wales'.<sup>67</sup> Such a line of attack was effective not so much because of any realistic anxiety about such a scenario, but, as Grant suggests, because of the wider anxieties about the perceived efforts to thwart the advance of working class politics in Britain in this period. Indeed, in this sense such rhetoric can be seen almost as a classed-based adaptation of the pejorative mid-Victorian understandings of imperialism, with the abuses of liberty in the colonial Empire at risk of corrupting society at the metropole.

The economic-labour dimension of the Chinese labour controversy thus played a vital role in not just shaping Liberal rhetoric on the issue itself, but in articulating a wider critique of the form of imperialism which it represented. Attacks on the background, character and motivations of the mine-owners served to contest the idea that Chinese labour was for the good of South Africa, instead presenting the Unionist government's policies as serving sectional rather than imperial interests. Furthermore, while Chinese labour was presented as an attack on the employment of white British labourers, it was not just the material displacement of British workers which was condemned, but what such actions came to symbolise: namely, the shutting out of trade unionism and labour democracy from a part of the Empire of white settlement. While this undoubtedly reflected home concerns, it also struck at the core of the liberal ideal of the self-governing Empire run in the interests of the many, rather than for the benefit of elite sections. Yet if this critique of Chinese labour is to be considered evidence of the spread of white labourism in Britain, its limitations also have to be acknowledged: unlike with the rhetoric which was to accompany imperial labour disputes later on in the Edwardian period, such as in relation to the 1914 deportations of white labour leaders from South Africa, there was little effort on the part of Liberal speakers to frame Chinese labour as an attack upon an imperial working class, rather than upon British workers directly.<sup>68</sup> In respect

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<sup>67</sup> David Lloyd George, speech at Pwllheli, 16 Jan. 1906, reported in *The Times*, 17 Jan. 1906.

<sup>68</sup> For discussions of white labourism in relation the events of 1914, see Jonathon Hyslop, 'The imperial working class makes itself "white": white labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa before the First World War', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12:4 (1999), 408.

to the Chinese labour controversy at least, the Liberal vision appeared largely fixated on the circumstances in Britain and in South Africa.

### **Race, Moral Panic, and Imperial Sentiment**

So far this chapter has examined the degree to which Liberal rhetoric on the Chinese labour controversy represented the re-emergence of earlier humanitarian and anti-slavery narratives, and the application of wider class-based political dynamics to the situation in South Africa. Both primarily dealt with the immediate unacceptability of the Chinese labour ordinance, attacking it either for replicating the immorality of slavery or for undermining the position of the white labourer in South Africa. Critically, the debates surrounding the ordinance also drew upon many of the longer-running themes of Liberal rhetoric on the South African question: in particular, Liberals presented Chinese labour not simply as a bad policy, but as a dangerous policy which threatened to undermine the basis of British rule in South Africa. This section examines how ideas of race and colonial sentiment were used to frame the policy as essentially one of imperial mismanagement which, if unchecked, threatened to undermine the whole basis for the future government of South Africa. Furthermore, it explores how Liberals framed the policy as one harmful to imperial sentiment, stressing settler opposition to Chinese labour both within South Africa and throughout the wider Empire.

Liberal speakers framed indentured Chinese labour as a policy which would further upset the racial balance within South Africa. Notwithstanding the Unionist government's insistence that the Chinese labour ordinance would only be a temporary measure, many Liberal speakers characterised the move as one which would establish a permanent Chinese population in the territory. At Dalkeith, Grey charged the government with 'laying it down that South Africa was not to be a white man's country'. Rather than being a 'temporary expedient', Grey insisted that 'once they got the Chinese into South Africa the difficulty of getting them out would be much greater than the difficulty of getting them in'.<sup>69</sup> Likewise at Consett a month previously Morley had mocked official claims that the need for the ordinance was only temporary, declaring to cheers that this claim was made by 'the same man who told them the war would cost

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<sup>69</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 30 Mar. 1904.

ten millions and be over in ten minutes'.<sup>70</sup> Such efforts deliberately framed the introduction of Chinese labour as likely to become a permanent feature of South Africa's racial makeup, which in turn enabled Liberal speakers to present the Chinese as a threat to the future stability and good governance of the Transvaal.

As seen in previous chapters, the South African question was regularly framed as one caused by the racial divisions within South Africa, articulated as either between the British and the Dutch or also additionally in relation to the Black African population. In a speech at Forfar on 20 October 1905, Morley characterised South Africa as already having had a problem of the three races, continuing by asking 'Do you think the Chinese will all go? They will not go, and therefore you will have four races.'<sup>71</sup> Along these lines, Liberals presented the introduction of the Chinese as the addition of yet another difficulty to an already precarious situation. This formed the heart of Campbell-Bannerman's argument in a speech at Dundee on 17 November 1904. The mine-owners' policy, he declared,

was the end of the hope of making South Africa a white man's country. What would it be? A country of mixed races, of mixed, antagonistic, jealous, and rival races, adding to the confusion already existing. Out of such a witches' cauldron as this what hope was there of reconstructing the colony in a way which the consciences of this country would sanction, and what hope of self-government, what hope of real government, and what hope of South African federation?<sup>72</sup>

The Liberal leader's message at Dundee was in essence premised on the same assumptions which had characterised his rhetoric on South Africa since 1899: it was the history of racial antagonism in South Africa which had consistently thrown up barriers to good imperial governance in the region, and any policy which further exacerbated or complicated the race situation would only serve to make the idealised vision of South African policy, a self-governing federation, all the more unlikely.

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<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1904.

<sup>71</sup> John Morley, speech at Forfar, 20 Oct. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Oct. 1905.

<sup>72</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Dundee, 17 Nov. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Nov. 1904.

Shaw adopted similar language in his speech at Manchester the following month. 'Did not shame cover us', Shaw asked his audience,

was not confusion upon our face as a nation, that we who went to war for the sake of 'equal rights for all white men' should have been the powerful instruments of introducing a new racial antagonism in that country?<sup>73</sup>

Likewise, in an address at the Manchester Free Trade Hall on 13 October 1905, Grey criticised the government for having further complicated the racial dynamic. While criticising the restrictive conditions which the Chinese were subject to, Grey stressed that he did not advocate their immediate lifting and allowing the Chinese rights of settlement on the grounds that 'race problems in South Africa are complicated enough already. The native problem is an exceedingly difficult problem [...] I would not make that problem still more difficult by importing the Chinese race in South Africa at all.'<sup>74</sup> Many of these interventions did not simply revive the earlier discourse of racial antagonism but explicitly framed the problem as one in which the 'white man's country' of South Africa was increasingly jeopardised.<sup>75</sup> Although the focus was unsurprisingly on the position of the Chinese, this rhetoric might also be seen in part as a return to earlier conceptions of the South African question which characterised the Black African population as a primary difficulty and concern of imperial policy, rather than the narrower Anglo-Boer focus of much of the previous decade.

The introduction of the Chinese into South Africa was not simply presented as a further complication however, but also as directly harmful to the social fabric of South Africa. In particular, Liberal speakers characterised the introduction of Chinese labour as a moral contamination. Notably, this was a narrative that preceded the moral panics of 1905: in his by-election speech at Stacksteads, L.V. Harcourt warned that the 'invasion' of the Chinese would constitute 'a danger to the health and morals of the people', while similarly Robert Reid, in a speech at Newton Stewart on 5 April 1904, characterised the presence of the

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<sup>73</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Dec. 1904.

<sup>74</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Manchester, 13 Oct. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Oct. 1905.

<sup>75</sup> Beyond the specific question of Chinese labour, it is worth noting that this was a narrative advanced in opposition to non-white immigration into the 'temperate' regions of the Empire more generally. See for example Cecil Harmsworth, *Pleasure and Problem in South Africa* (London: 1908), pp.14-15.

Chinese as 'a danger to morals and to sanitation'.<sup>76</sup> Neither Harcourt nor Reid actually went into detail as to what these risks might be, their audiences presumably able to infer from other sources the implications of their rhetoric. As the ordinance was put in place and the controversy developed, phrases such as 'danger to morals', and particularly references to the 'demoralising effects' of the compounds, became shorthand for allegations that the system established by the ordinance fostered homosexuality among the Chinese. In a letter published in *The Times* on 13 January 1905, Macnamara attacked the 'moral contamination' Chinese labour represented, quoting a letter from the Bishop of Winchester, who had referred in his own circumlocutory fashion to 'demoralization of a sort which I do not care to characterise more exactly'.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Burns' attack at Derby in the 1906 election campaign on the 'undue abominations which a celibate industrial life always did and always would bring about' drew upon the moral panic over Chinese sexuality and advanced a narrative of contamination, albeit one in which Burns' also characterised the Chinese labourers as victims of the system to which they were subjected.

Despite the indirect and constrained means by which Liberal speakers engaged with the moral panic around the sexuality of the Chinese labourers, it is nonetheless worthwhile considering the purpose such allusions served to the wider Liberal critique of the system. Beyond simply serving to further underline the immorality of the scheme, Liberal speakers' references to alleged homosexual practices within the compounds advanced a wider narrative of moral threat to South Africa. As Bright identifies, in the Transvaal itself and within imperial governing circles, anxieties over homosexuality among the Chinese labour force were accompanied by moral panics over the implication of the system producing a demand for Black African prostitution, which was seen as likely to cause further long-term social disruption in the Transvaal, and the suggestion that the system was facilitating sexual relations between white women and the Chinese.<sup>78</sup> Liberal speakers' references to 'unnatural vice' in the compounds were possibly able to act as a proxies for some of these wider

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<sup>76</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 12 Mar. 1904; Robert Reid, speech at Newton Stewart, 5 Apr. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Apr. 1904.

<sup>77</sup> T.J. Macnamara, letter dated 12 Jan. 1905, published in *The Times*, 13 Jan. 1905.

<sup>78</sup> Bright, *Chinese Labour in South Africa*, pp.123-129.

anxieties, which did on occasion find explicit mention in British political discourse: in a House of Commons debate on a Liberal motion condemning the policy on 21 March 1904, James Bryce warned of the dangers that would be posed by 'a race of mingled Chinese and Kaffirs' arising in South Africa.<sup>79</sup> Underlying fears that the Chinese labour ordinance would only further jeopardise the future of 'white' South Africa certainly seem likely to have played a further role in reinforcing political anxieties in Britain.

If the moral panic surrounding Chinese sexual behaviour proved a somewhat tricky subject for Liberal politicians, the stories of acts of violence committed by the Chinese which emerged throughout the course of 1905 made easier material for speeches. Liberal speakers presented Chinese violence against the white population of the Transvaal as further demonstrating the danger posed by the policy of indentured labour. Speaking at Warrington on 19 September 1905, Outhwaite attacked the capitalists of the Rand for having 'introduced Chinese wastrels to burn, murder, ravish, and work at a shilling a day', simultaneously presenting the policy as not only a threat to white labour but a threat to the settler population as a whole. Similar language was deployed by Churchill who, speaking at Manchester the following month, spoke of Chinese deserters from the mines as:

roaming about over those vast plains, crouching among the rocks, hunted like wild beasts, shot at sight, living by murder and rapine, the terror of the world, half the world between them and their own sunny China. Surely the grimmest spectacle of moral havoc for which this Christian and civilised nation has been made responsible within the lifetime of living men!<sup>80</sup>

In his characterisation of the Chinese as pitiable but also animal-like, Churchill can be seen as reinforcing the characterisation of the ordinance as fundamentally immoral in reducing the Chinese to such a position, while at the same time presenting the situation as one which threatened the settler population of South Africa. Additionally, his attack on the fact that Britain had been made responsible for the situation served as a further indictment on the policy of the Unionist government, drawing upon traditional imperial political

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<sup>79</sup> HC Deb., 21 Mar. 1904, fourth series, Vol.132, c.317.

<sup>80</sup> Winston Churchill, speech at Manchester, 6 Oct. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Oct. 1905.

tropes which stressed an aversion to the nation becoming involved in an undesirable extension of imperial responsibilities.

If the fear of exacerbated racial tensions and the moral panics prompted by Chinese labour represented some of the key threats to the future of imperial South Africa, the most serious threat from the Liberal perspective came from the potential alienation of settler opinion, both within South Africa and throughout the Empire as a whole. The charge that the policy had been introduced against the will of the colony's settler population represented one of the persistent Liberal attacks against the measure. In his speech at Newton Stewart, Reid argued that it should be for the white population of the Transvaal to decide on whether to import Chinese labour, arguing that 'if they wished the thing done we could not prevent them', but that the government 'had no right to force it upon them'.<sup>81</sup> Likewise in his Dundee speech, Campbell-Bannerman criticised the government for having 'forced' Chinese labour upon the Transvaal, asking:

If the importation of the Chinaman was undertaken for the good of the colony, why were not the people of the colony consulted? Why were the protests of the Boers, who, after all, knew a good deal about the country, and were our fellow-citizens in the country, flouted with contempt?'<sup>82</sup>

In a published statement of his views on South Africa in August 1905, Shaw similarly stressed that the policy was opposed by both white races in the Transvaal: the Dutch, he argued, 'resent the introduction of the Chinese, not only on industrial grounds, but because it is part of British policy notably antagonistic to that followed by President Kruger. The English population resist it both on industrial and political grounds.'<sup>83</sup> Given the persistent emphasis in Liberal rhetoric on the need to govern South Africa with the assent and cooperation of both white races, such opposition to the policy provided a powerful basis from which to condemn Chinese labour.

Critically, many Liberal speakers directly asserted that the Unionist government's failure to demonstrate the support of the Transvaal settler

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<sup>81</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Apr. 1904.

<sup>82</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 Nov. 1904.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Shaw, statement of South African policy, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Aug. 1905.

population over Chinese labour demonstrated their unfitness for imperial rule, and indeed warned that the Empire would be damaged as a result. In his speech in Manchester on 25 March 1904, Trevelyan attacked the Unionist government for having made no attempt to seek approval for the measure from the population of the Transvaal, claiming that in doing so they had demonstrated that 'they did not understand the very fundamental principles which should and must underlie the Government of the Empire'.<sup>84</sup> Burns likewise attacked the Unionist government and the imperial authorities for ignoring settler opinion in his speech at the Hyde Park demonstration: branding Milner a twentieth-century Lord North, Burns declared that Chinese labour would lose South Africa for the Empire just as America had been lost, adding for good measure that 'if the Chinese ordinance were not torn from the Statute-book it would be the beginning of the end of the British Empire'.<sup>85</sup> Just as in earlier iterations of the South African question, British imperial rule in South Africa was presented as vulnerable and dependent on the continued good will of both the British settler populations in the region and the support of its now greatly-expanded Dutch-speaking imperial subjects. By pursuing a course of action and overriding local opinion, Liberals argued, the Unionist government was actively mismanaging and indeed jeopardising the future of imperial rule in South Africa.

Most significantly however, Liberals did not just present the Chinese labour ordinance as alienating sentiment within the Transvaal, but throughout South Africa and the Empire at large. As Bright has ably demonstrated, the storm over Chinese labour was not confined to debates within South Africa, or indeed within Britain, but represented a controversy of global dimensions, as political elites and public opinion throughout the empire of white settlement mobilised in opposition to the policy.<sup>86</sup> In particular, the introduction of Chinese labour to South Africa triggered strong objections from Australia and New Zealand. Operating within a political climate heavily influenced by the doctrine of white labourism, the governments of Richard Seddon and Alfred Deakin actively cooperated not only to lobby the imperial authorities against the introduction of

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<sup>84</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Mar. 1904.

<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 28 Mar. 1904.

<sup>86</sup> Bright, *Chinese Labour in South Africa*, pp.4-5.

the policy, but also to coordinate public demonstrations and displays of imperial sentiment in order to impress upon British political opinion the strength of popular colonial views on the matter.<sup>87</sup> Notably, Deakin's position depended upon the support of the Australian Labor Party, which indeed would displace his ministry entirely in April 1904, particularly significant in context given the degree to which Liberal speakers in Britain characterised the Chinese labour ordinance as a capitalist effort to pre-empt the rise of labour politics in the Transvaal.<sup>88</sup> Critically, antipodean objections were not simply against the principle of Chinese labour, but sprang from direct economic interests: as Hyslop notes, by 1904 there were over 5000 Australian settlers in Johannesburg based within the mining and related industries, forming a core element of the trade union movement on the Rand, whose livelihoods were perceived to be directly threatened by the ordinance.<sup>89</sup> Given the circumstances, it might therefore have been expected that Liberal speakers in Britain would utilise the labour-orientated protests of colonial governments, and the position of the Australian miners in particular, in seeking to condemn the ordinance, and indeed such tactics were certainly not unknown. In November 1905 Outhwaite characterised the policy as one which saw Australians 'starving in the streets of Johannesburg'.<sup>90</sup> Strikingly, Liberal speakers as a whole generally did not connect colonial protests against Chinese labour with white labourist arguments, but instead revived earlier tropes of imperial sentiment and the delicate nature of the relationship between Britain and its colonies.

Liberals characterised Chinese labour as fundamentally opposed by imperial sentiment. In his Harrogate speech, Asquith urged his audience to 'look at Australia, at Canada, at New Zealand – were they going to dismiss the sentiments which these communities felt and which they pressed in no doubtful language?' The proposal to import Chinese labour, Asquith declared, 'deserved what it was receiving – the condemnation of the whole Empire.'<sup>91</sup> His former

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<sup>87</sup> For a detailed account of these efforts from a perspective of New Zealand politics, see Jeremy Martens, 'Richard Seddon and Popular Opposition in New Zealand to the Introduction of Chinese Labour into the Transvaal, 1903–1904', *New Zealand Journal of History* 42:2 (2008).

<sup>88</sup> Hyslop, 'The imperial working class makes itself "white"', 408.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 407-08.

<sup>90</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Nov. 1905.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1904.

mentor Lord Rosebery, in one of his occasional forays back into active politics, similarly used a speech at Newcastle on 12 March 1904 to attack the government for introducing Chinese labour to South Africa 'against the protest of every self-governing part of the Empire'.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, at the Manchester meeting of 13 May, Morley drew his audience's attention to the opposition expressed by colonial governments, noting that the parliaments of both the Cape Colony and of Australia had passed resolutions opposing the policy. Indeed, Morley declared, such was the level of opposition in Australia that 'the phrase, which some of us are not entirely unacquainted with of "pro-Boer" is now taken by the hostile phrase of "pro-Chow"'.<sup>93</sup> As well as emphasising the opposition of imperial sentiment to the scheme, the focus on the opposition as expressed through the Empire's self-governing institutions can be seen as placing further stress upon the absence of self-government in the Transvaal.

In addition to insisting that the policy was opposed throughout the Empire, Liberals also characterised the ordinance as a betrayal of the sacrifice shown by the self-governing colonies of the Empire in having supported Britain during the war. In his Dundee speech, Campbell-Bannerman implicitly accused the government of ignoring the sacrifice of Britain's colonies, demanding to know 'why the opinion of Australia and New Zealand, who had sent their sons to shed their blood in the war for the purpose of acquiring the colony' had not been considered by the government commission on the ordinance.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, in a speech at Arbroath during the election campaign, Morley quoted Deakin as having stated that:

Australia had been told that the war was a miners' war, and not for Chinese miners; a war for the franchise, but not for Chinese franchise. The truth, if it had been told, would have presented a very different aspect and would have made a very different appeal to Australia.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Lord Rosebery, speech at Newcastle, 12 Mar. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Mar. 1904.

<sup>93</sup> John Morley, speech at Manchester, 13 May 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1904.

<sup>94</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Nov. 1904.

<sup>95</sup> John Morley, speech at Arbroath, 5 Jan. 1906, reported in *The Times*, 6 Jan. 1906.

Critically, Morley used Deakin's remarks to challenge Unionist claims to speak for the Empire: attacking the South African War as a war which had been not for the improvement of civilisation but for the introduction of Chinese labour, Morley declared to an audience of his constituents that 'it is not only we whom they [the previous ministry] insolently and falsely called Little Englanders who say that, but our Colonial kinsmen, whose sentiments they so consistently charge us with rejecting.'<sup>96</sup>

In similar fashion, Liberal speakers sought to use the Chinese labour question to present their own positions as more in line with imperial sentiment. Speaking in January 1906 after the early results from the election campaign were already clear, the Liberal candidate for Eccles, George Pollard, demanded to know:

what right Mr. Balfour had to speak in the name of the real heart and soul of the Empire. He might better have claimed to speak in the name of the material system. Colonials would rejoice that the British people were condemning Chinese slavery as emphatically as they had condemned it in New Zealand and elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

In highlighting imperial opposition to the policy, Liberal speakers were therefore able to contest Unionist claims to speak for imperial sentiment, which had been so effectively deployed against the Liberal party during the politics of the South African War.

Although ultimately less distinct than the more prominent narratives of anti-slavery politics and the focus on the position of white labour, anxieties about the future position of South African society, and particularly Britain's prospects for successfully governing the region, lay at the heart of the Liberal Party's assault upon Chinese labour. The issue was one which allowed them to revive earlier rhetoric characterising the South African question as one ultimately dependent on the successful management of race relations in the region, while also allowing them to exploit concerns over the fragility of the imperial position in South Africa. Furthermore, through emphasising imperial sentiment in their rhetoric on Chinese labour, Liberal speakers were able to stress the imperial ideal of self-government, while also presenting the Liberal Party's position as

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> George Pollard, speech at Irlam, 18 Jan. 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 19 Jan. 1906.

one representative of the Empire of white settlement, contesting Unionists' previous dominance of the issue. In this fashion, Liberal rhetoric on the Chinese labour controversy, although incorporating new elements, was able to adapt to great effect the party's earlier narratives on the South African War to a new, more politically advantageous context.

### **Representative and Responsible Government**

Following on from the debates during the South African War, Liberal speakers consistently stressed the need for a speedy and full return to self-government in the newly-established colonies. As examined above, questions over the governance of the Transvaal in particular were closely linked with the controversies of Chinese labour: quite apart from the suggestion that Chinese labour represented a deliberate attempt by the mine-owners to pre-empt the establishment of a labour democracy in the Transvaal, and indeed that the further complication of the race dynamics of South Africa would only further harm the cause of self-government and eventual federation, demands for the grant of full self-government served Liberals as both an argument for delaying the introduction of the ordinance, and subsequently as a way for the long-term future of the system to be decided. Critically, the constitutional settlement of South Africa was not simply subordinate to the controversy over Chinese labour, but was in and of itself a key feature of Liberal rhetoric on the South African question throughout this period. This section therefore explores Liberal critiques of the Crown colony administration established in the Transvaal and the debates surrounding the party's opposition to the Lyttelton constitution, as well as the elements directly concerning the resolution of Chinese labour and the party's own support for full responsible government.

Although the issue was now decoupled from the debates on ending the war and the controversy over 'unconditional surrender', after the conclusion of the conflict the question of Transvaal self-government nonetheless continued to remain a feature of Liberal speeches on South Africa. In his Glasgow speech Campbell-Bannerman declared to his audience that it was humiliating to think that the two colonies were not only to be developed through indentured labour, but also that they were 'apparently without self-government'.<sup>98</sup> Similarly at

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<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1904.

Hanley the Liberal leader expressly attacked the government for failing to establish democratic government in the Transvaal, arguing that ‘the helots we heard of, for whom the war was undertaken, are not yet enfranchised. The Government will not even submit to the judgement of the people of the country the question of introducing some real helots from China.’<sup>99</sup>

However, Liberal speakers did not simply criticise the failure to introduce self-government on the grounds that it prevented the colony’s population from passing judgement on the ordinance, but also drew upon earlier narratives stressing self-government as a fundamental principle of British imperial rule. Speaking at Failsworth, L.V. Harcourt attacked the suggestion from government circles that self-government could only be granted once the Transvaal had demonstrated its loyalty to the Empire. Drawing comparisons with the history of Canada, Harcourt declared that ‘Home Rule was given to Canada almost in the midst of the rebellion, and it brought peace in its train’. Self-government, he continued, ‘should not be regarded as the reward of loyalty; it was itself the producer of loyalty.’<sup>100</sup> Such arguments represent a direct echo of the rhetoric deployed by Liberals during the settlement of the South African War, representing an essential continuity of emphasis in Liberal approaches to the South African question in the reconstruction period.

Significantly, criticisms of the failure to introduce self-government to the new colonies in South Africa were also accompanied by critiques of British misrule under Crown Colony government. In his speech at Failsworth, L.V. Harcourt criticised the illiberal nature of the British authorities in the Transvaal: attacking the draconian powers Milner’s administration retained, allowing the imprisonment of Boers without trial and a clamping down on dissent, Harcourt described the state of affairs in the colony as ‘the negation of all individual rights’ and the ‘destruction of all liberty of the subject’. Given this situation, he asked his audience, ‘Could they wonder that the Boers wanted “a little less Crown, and a little more colony?”’<sup>101</sup> Likewise, in a speech at Littleborough on 16 April 1904, Philip Stanhope criticised the lack of good government in South Africa, warning that it risked alienating the population of the region. There were,

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<sup>99</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Jul. 1904.

<sup>100</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Mar. 1903.

<sup>101</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Mar. 1903.

he declared, 'elements of dissatisfaction among both whites and blacks which might any day result in an explosion, due not to the bad government of the Boers, but to the bad government of Great Britain.'<sup>102</sup> Harcourt's and Stanhope's comments can be seen as a revival of earlier narratives which emphasised the dangers of disaffection arising from imperial misrule. Significantly, this tactic included directly comparing Boer misrule under Kruger with British misrule under Milner. In his speech at Consett, Morley pointed out that the war had been supposedly waged against a 'corrupt and despotic oligarchy. Was there no oligarchy now in the Transvaal?' Even if were not corrupt, Morley continued, 'it looked as if it were rather despotic.'<sup>103</sup> Given the degree to which narratives of misgovernment had characterised earlier Liberal rhetoric on the operations of the British South Africa Company and the government of the SAR under Kruger, such charges carried particular weight when levied against Britain's own post-war administration.

Alongside the arguments directly concerning Chinese labour, Liberal dissatisfaction with the failure to establish full self-government in the new colonies directly influenced the party's response to the Unionist government's proposals to establish a scheme of 'representative government' in the Transvaal, in what would become known as the Lyttelton constitution. The Lyttelton proposals, outlined briefly, would have seen the existing, appointed legislative council replaced by an elected assembly, but would not have constituted a system of 'responsible government', as the executive would have remained answerable to the governor rather than to elected representatives. Because of this provision, the scheme was criticised as one which would not actually represent a true system of self-government for the Transvaal at all, a charge compounded after it was revealed that the franchise proposed for electing the new assembly would likely exclude many Boers from the electoral roll, but would allow members of the British garrison to vote. With the exception of the Progressive Party in the Transvaal, the proposal received little support from the colony's political organisations, and when the Liberal government came to power in 1905 the constitution was abandoned entirely without ever

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<sup>102</sup> Philip Stanhope, speech at Littleborough, 16 Apr. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Apr. 1904.

<sup>103</sup> *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1904.

having been implemented.<sup>104</sup> Despite never having coming into force, however, the political debates it prompted in Britain, and particularly the Liberal Party's stated reasons for rejecting the constitution, are highly illustrative of the wider assumptions of imperial governance at the heart of Liberal rhetoric on the reconstruction of South Africa.

Even before the full details of the constitution were announced in March 1905, Liberal speakers attacked the proposed limited grant of representative institutions on the grounds that it was designed to artificially produce a majority in favour of the mining interest, and by extension in favour of continuing Chinese labour. In a speech at Margate on 24 September 1904, Macnamara warned his audience that:

the real danger in the situation in South Africa lay in the fact that to get a bogus vote in favour of the Ordinance for the purposes of the home general election the present government would put together a gerrymandered scheme of representation. That would at once set the Transvaal by the ears.<sup>105</sup>

The Unionist government, by this account, risked further alienating popular sentiment in the Transvaal by putting forward a rigged or incomplete system of representative government.

While not all Liberal speakers went as far as Macnamara in accusing the government of pursuing this strategy deliberately for electoral gain in Britain, the suggestion that Unionist policy was trying to artificially create a pro-Chinese labour majority in the Transvaal became a recurring feature of Liberal rhetoric on the subject. In his Dundee speech that November, Campbell-Bannerman protested that Parliament had been given no details of the planned scheme for representation in the Transvaal, and speculated that 'it would probably be only just enough of self-government and of representation to confirm the mine-owners in the freehold of the Chinese compound.'<sup>106</sup> Likewise, in his speech at Manchester the following month, Shaw characterised the grant of limited self-government as 'a proposal to load the dice in order to give those engaged in the

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<sup>104</sup> For details of the Lyttelton constitution, see Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office*, pp. 98-103.

<sup>105</sup> T.J. Macnamara, speech at Margate, 24 Sep. 1904, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Sep. 1904.

<sup>106</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 Nov. 1904.

gold industry larger representation and fuller control of the government.<sup>107</sup> In this manner, Liberal speakers were able to present the Unionist government's plans not as steps towards representation, but as a deliberate means of sabotaging real self-government in the interests of capital and the perpetuation of Chinese labour.

Critically, Liberals did not simply attack the prospect of an unrepresentative assembly on the grounds that it would likely endorse Chinese labour, but also criticised it for denying the citizens of the Transvaal, particularly the Boer citizens, a fair share in government. In his Manchester speech, Shaw pointed out to his audience that:

one of our objections to the Kruger *régime* was that Mr. Kruger was 'loading the dice' in a similar fashion, and so preventing – what we were now also going to prevent – a fair representation of all the whites in the country.<sup>108</sup>

By contrast, he declared, out of the ruins of South Africa it would be 'the good fortune of the Liberal Party to construct a great and a fair fabric of self-government, and to make that fabric so solid that it should rest on the goodwill of the peoples who were governed.'<sup>109</sup> The direct comparison between the Unionist model of representative government and the dysfunctional representative institutions of the South African Republic again demonstrates the ways in which Liberal speakers were able to draw upon the rhetorical legacy of the South African War in critiquing the government's proposals. Along similar lines, in a detailed speech on the subject to his constituents at Oldham on 26 April 1905 Alfred Emmott charged that no scheme to grant representative government had been offered to the ORC precisely because that territory had a Boer majority. Indeed, he argued, this motive was proved by the Lyttelton constitution's franchise provisions for the Transvaal, 'framed in such a way that almost every man, however bad, in the towns would have a vote, whilst in the country the grown-up son of the Boer farmer would have [...] great difficulty in getting a vote.'<sup>110</sup> Far from bringing the Boers into the administration of their

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<sup>107</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Dec. 1904.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Alfred Emmott, speech at Oldham, 26 Ap. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Apr. 1905. Given the behaviour of the Liberals once they assumed

territory, Liberals charged that the Unionist government was deliberately seeking to marginalise them, undermining the pluralistic basis of the Empire of white settlement.

At a more fundamental level, Liberal speakers attacked the Lyttelton constitution as liable to frustrate the good governance of the Transvaal by fostering political tensions. Speaking in London on 20 March 1905, Morley warned that any attempt to introduce a scheme short of full responsible government would be an error, as it was bound to 'cause a large amount of friction and irritation, which would be used as an argument against its further extension into a complete scheme of self-government'.<sup>111</sup> In his speech at Oldham Emmott similarly characterised the constitution as one which 'bore the form of a democratic constitution without the reality and created a desire for freedom which was denied. It was almost sure to generate friction between the elected and official members of the Legislative assembly.'<sup>112</sup> Significantly, this friction was presented not simply as causing problems within the Transvaal, but as having the potential to cause long-term harm to the relationship between the colony and the imperial government. This argument was deployed by Grey who, in a speech to the Eighty Club on 31 May 1905, predicted that:

the present hybrid situation would generate friction between our fellow-subjects in South Africa and the Imperial Government home, and that when responsible government came it would appear to come grudgingly as the result of that friction extorted

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office, Emmott's attack on the failure to grant representative institutions to the ORC is interesting. Emmott was not the only Liberal speaker to advance this argument, but overall this was a period in which Liberal speakers concentrated primarily on either the Transvaal specifically, or spoke in general terms of South Africa, with the ORC rarely mentioned directly. This tendency might be considered to reflect the extent of the controversy over Chinese labour, which served to concentrate the focus of the South African question on the Transvaal. Nonetheless, given the degree to which earlier Liberal rhetoric had presented the Free State government as an ideal self-governing state, it is striking the degree to which, after having been reinvented as a British colony, the territory largely vanished from discussions over the governance of South Africa.

<sup>111</sup> John Morley, speech at Queen's Hall, London, 20 Mar. 1905, reported in *The Times*, 26 Mar. 1905.

<sup>112</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Apr. 1905.

from us instead of being given willingly, as it might have been at the present time.<sup>113</sup>

A key element of the Liberal Party's faith in imperial self-government was the belief that only through such methods could imperial governance be effective. The Lyttelton constitution stood doubly damned in Liberal rhetoric not simply because it would fail to meet up to the Liberal ideal of true self-government, but because it would not represent an effective basis for governing the Transvaal either, instead serving only to exacerbate the challenges of imperial governance in South Africa.

Additionally, Liberal speakers drew upon past precedents in British imperial policy in order to further frame the offer of representative government as misguided. In his speech at Oldham, Emmott challenged the idea that it was normal for white settler colonies to pass through an intermediate phase before being granted full self-government. Echoing L.V. Harcourt's rhetoric at Failsforth, Emmott declared that far from Canada having passed peacefully through such a phase, the attempt to govern Canada through a representative but non-responsible system had pushed the country into open revolt. 'It was because the conditions of this form of government were so bad', he argued, 'that the friction occurred in Canada which led to the alteration of its constitution.'<sup>114</sup> Shaw likewise drew upon the Canadian parallel in his August statement of South African policy. The result of Lord Durham's policy, he argued, had been successful in so far as he had placed 'absolute trust in the people of both races to work out on constitution lines [...] their common destiny'; by contrast, he argued, it was Durham's efforts to produce an artificial British majority that led to decades of unrest, only resolved by a full grant of self-government to the provinces.<sup>115</sup>

Along such lines, Liberals drew upon past precedent to frame responsible self-government as an established imperial principle: speaking in October 1905, Grey mocked the suggestion that responsible government for the Transvaal would damage the Empire, declaring instead that 'every large white community

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<sup>113</sup> Sir Edward Grey, speech at Trocadero Restaurant dinner, 31 May 1905, reported in *The Times*, 1 Jun. 1905.

<sup>114</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Apr. 1905.

<sup>115</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Aug. 1905.

at a distance from the mother country can only in the long run be kept loyal to the Empire by responsible self-government.<sup>116</sup> Such rhetoric not only served to further emphasise the ideals of a decentralised Empire held together by common settler sentiment, themes which Liberal Imperialist speakers had often stressed in order to accentuate the acceptability of the British imperial model to Liberal audiences, but constituted a direct echo of Liberal anti-war arguments against the use of martial law and the policy of 'extermination'. In this sense, Grey's language might be said to indicate an evolving unity among Liberals on the politics of South African governance, although questions over the continuation of the ordinance by a responsible government in the Transvaal were to complicate this self-governing narrative.

Liberals explicitly framed their South African policy as one which would place the Transvaal on the same footing as the self-governing settler colonies, continuing a narrative that had been consistently deployed throughout the war itself. Shaw insisted in his statement on South African policy that 'the right which had been given to the populations of Australia and New Zealand cannot be long denied to these colonies', although he also noted that once granted responsible government it would ultimately be up to the settlers themselves to make a decision over Chinese labour.<sup>117</sup> This argument was repeated going into the election campaign of 1906: campaigning in Manchester, Churchill insisted that there was 'no reason why the Home Government should expect to exert a more intimate control over the purely domestic affairs of South Africa than they do and have over self-governing colonies like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand', adding that it would be Liberal policy to swiftly establish a Transvaal assembly under 'truly democratic conditions and operating by recognised colonial methods'.<sup>118</sup> Likewise in his election address, Grey emphasised that the ultimate solution to Chinese labour 'can only be reached when the Transvaal and the Orange Colony are put on the same footing as all self-governing colonies'.<sup>119</sup> Such comparisons did not simply serve as useful shorthand for the

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<sup>116</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Oct. 1905.

<sup>117</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Aug. 1905.

<sup>118</sup> Winston Churchill, speech at Manchester, 4 Jan. 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Jan. 1906.

<sup>119</sup> Sir Edward Grey, election address, reproduced in *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Jan. 1906.

nature of responsible government that the Liberal ministry wished to introduce but also emphasised that the policy being pursued was one of established imperial practice, as well as serving to normalise the position of South Africa within the framework of Empire.

In considering the links between the campaign for full responsible government and the Chinese labour controversy, a significant caveat emerged in the rhetoric of the Liberal leadership during the 1906 election. As noted above, by the time of the election Liberal policy had been recalibrated as an opposition to the issuing of any new licenses for Chinese labourers, but no immediate end to the importation of Chinese labour, let alone the abolition of the system outright. However, the charge of slavery, whether explicitly levied or simply implied, not only proved a source of Unionist outrage but also created difficulties for the Liberal government: if the system was after all akin to slavery, then there was surely a necessity to insist on it being ended, rather than leaving the issue to the judgement of a responsible government in the Transvaal. As Grant notes, the Liberal government attempted to act against such criticisms by introducing a scheme of voluntary repatriation.<sup>120</sup> While this may have been successful to some degree, Campbell-Bannerman was nonetheless compelled to clarify that there would be limits on the Transvaal's ability to determine the future of the policy.

In a meeting at Inverkeithing on 12 January 1906, Campbell-Bannerman was challenged by a questioner to set out the government's policy in the event of the Transvaal voting to retain the scheme. Replying, the Prime Minister stressed that while the system should 'be submitted to the people of the colony so soon as they had a completely representative and responsible constitution', he added the further proviso that 'if the rules and conditions under which the Chinese worked in the Transvaal were such as to be contain any seeds or signs of slavery or of servile labour', he would consider it be inconsistent with British imperial doctrine and would insist that it must be changed.<sup>121</sup> A week later at Inverness, Campbell-Bannerman was again compelled to stress that while the question of Chinese labour should be referred to the people of the Transvaal, 'if

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<sup>120</sup> Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, p.103.

<sup>121</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Inverkeithing, 12 Jan. 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 13 Jan. 1906.

the conditions under which they lived were found to be inconsistent with real liberty, then these must not be allowed to continue within the dominions of the Crown.'<sup>122</sup> This tension between a commitment to ending Chinese labour and the expressed determination to grant full responsible government would pose a serious dilemma for the government following the election.

While there was therefore a close connection between the Liberal Party's campaign against Chinese labour and their demands for a swift grant of responsible government for the Transvaal, the question was also one that made extensive use of existing Liberal rhetorical tropes on Empire, and of imperial ideals which had been stressed in relation to previous iterations of the South African question. The system of representative government embodied in the Lyttelton constitution was not simply attacked as gerrymandered in the mine-owners' interests or incapable of delivering good government, but in effect as a dangerous innovation in British imperial policy, departing from established systems of administering the empire of white settlement.

In considering this continued focus on self-government as an aspect of Liberal imperial politics following the South African War, it is worth noting two further points. First, for all the debates on the nature of the franchise under either the Lyttelton constitution or the Liberals' proposed alternative, the focus was exclusively on the position of the white population. Although in South Africa itself the debates of the reconstruction era did involve questions about the potential for a limited franchise for non-whites in the two new colonies, these questions were generally not reflected in the rhetoric of British Liberals.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, this might again be attributed in part to the language of the protests against Chinese labour: attacks on a war for the Chinese franchise might well have crystallised the question of self-government as one ultimately relating to the rights of white men.

Second, in light of the historiographical debate surrounding the magnanimous gesture it is striking the degree to which many Liberal speakers in this period continued to link the grant of self-government specifically with the attitude of the

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<sup>122</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speech at Inverness, 18 Jan. 1905, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 19 Jan. 1906.

<sup>123</sup> Pyrah, *Imperial Policy and South Africa*, pp.93-96.

Boers and the need to secure the loyalty of the former republics to the Empire. Naturally, just because Liberals presented their critique of representative government in this fashion does not mean that it was primarily designed with the goal of pacifying the Boers in mind, nor indeed did calls for the inclusion of the Boers in government necessarily mean Boer leadership. Nonetheless, as the Liberal government assumed control of imperial policy at the end of 1905, it did so against a backdrop in which it had consistently presented a vision of South Africa framed not simply in relation to idealised forms of good government and self-government, but a vision fundamentally inclusive of the Boer population.

### **After the Election: Defending Liberal Rule**

The British general election of 1906 resulted in a landslide victory for Campbell-Bannerman's nascent ministry, the Liberal Party and its allies gaining a combined majority of 356 seats over the Unionists, seemingly securing the government in office for some time to come.<sup>124</sup> The immediate consequence of this result for the South African question in British politics was that the Liberals were now firmly in control of imperial policy. The rhetoric examined in this final section, which covers the period following the election through to the immediate aftermath of the Het Volk victory in the Transvaal election of 1907, is therefore of a different order to the rhetoric examined so far in this thesis, in that rather than being fundamentally reactive in nature, Liberal speakers, or at least those supportive of the government, were instead having to justify their own management of imperial affairs. If it had sufficed in opposition to critique the Unionist government for failing to act in accordance with the idealised Liberal principles of imperial rule, in power the party had to present its actions as working to create the well-governed, self-governed South Africa that they had for so long insisted upon: a challenge that proved far more difficult.

Following the election, Liberal speakers continued to present full responsible government for the Transvaal as the solution to Chinese labour. For example, the Liberal member of Parliament for Reading, Rufus Isaacs, used a speech at Cambridge on 10 March 1906 to express his full confidence that the new constitution for the Transvaal would resolve the Chinese labour question, as

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<sup>124</sup> The figure used is that given in Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p.160. Due to the nature of party alignment in this period, other assessments may differ.

once responsible government had been granted he was 'perfectly certain that there would be no such condition of the ordinances permitted as had been permitted to the present day'.<sup>125</sup> A similar argument had been made by Harry Nuttall, the newly-elected member for Stretford, a week previously, although notably Nuttall had less optimism in the likely judgement of the new Transvaal assembly. While a responsible government would not, in his opinion, 'express any wish favourable to the retention of the Chinese on the Rand', he went on to reassure his audience that 'if they favoured anything approaching semi-slavery – the British Government would not allow it'.<sup>126</sup>

William Byles, who would become something of a Radical thorn in the side of the new Liberal administration over South African questions, likewise impressed upon his constituents that the Colonial Office veto would be imposed if necessary: while the decision would fall to the new government of the Transvaal, he argued, 'the Imperial government would not sanction servile or slavish conditions of labour'.<sup>127</sup> In each of these cases the grant of responsible government was not framed as an end in and of itself, but primarily as a means of abolishing Chinese labour; indeed, if the speeches of Nuttall and Byles are any indication, there seemed little faith, among Liberal audiences at least, that the newly enfranchised population of the Transvaal could be relied on to reject the ordinance, even if among the Liberal leadership the emphasis on self-government remained at the centre of the government's South African policy.

The prospect of Chinese labour being ended by Colonial Office veto was itself controversial, despite the issue having been brought up during the election campaign. A particular controversy erupted following ill-advised comments made by Churchill in a fractious parliamentary debate on 14 March. Following an intervention from Chamberlain challenging the government over whether a responsible government in the Transvaal would consult with the imperial government before introducing a measure on Chinese labour, Churchill, who was already in the middle of responding to a challenge from Seely over whether

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<sup>125</sup> Rufus Isaacs, speech at Cambridge, 10 Mar. 1906, reported in *The Times*, 12 Mar. 1906.

<sup>126</sup> Harry Nuttall, speech at Manchester, 3 Mar. 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Mar. 1906.

<sup>127</sup> William Byles, speech at Manchester, 31 Mar. 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Apr. 1906.

the government was really acting to halt Chinese labour, replied with the assertion that:

the Government will be prepared to use the veto of the Crown without shrinking if the conditions of any proposal that may reach us from the Transvaal, no matter by how great a majority it may be supported, are really derogatory to the fundamental and elementary principles of liberty, and, I may say, of decency also.<sup>128</sup>

As Toye has documented, the suggestion of a general right of interference in the affairs of a self-governing colony was readily exploited by the Unionist opposition, and provoked a hostile Press reaction in Britain, South Africa and throughout the Empire.<sup>129</sup>

Much of the criticism of Churchill's language was unfair, as immediately following his remarks Churchill had stressed that such a course would represent 'a very serious event in British colonial history' which he was hopeful could be avoided.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, neither was the controversy entirely manufactured by Churchill's Unionist opponents, the subsequent debate illustrating the problems the issue raised within the Liberal party. Aurelian Ridsdale, the Liberal Member of Parliament for Brighton, warned of the danger inherent in any use of the veto, urging the government 'to treat this matter as one to be left to the Transvaal and to the Transvaal alone', while his colleague Arthur Markham, the Member of Parliament for Mansfield, declared that the government must either trust the people of the Transvaal or postpone self-government: 'they could not have it both ways.'<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, the Colonial Office veto remained hypothetical: following Het Volk's victory in 1907, new ordinances were passed so as to retain existing Chinese labour on a temporary basis, the Liberal government opting to avoid confrontation with the new government in the Transvaal.<sup>132</sup> The episode nonetheless illustrated the difficulties facing the Liberal leadership in this period, demonstrating the degree to which, having emphasised a moral ideal of imperialism alongside the ideal of a self-governing Empire, the

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<sup>128</sup> HC Deb., 14 Mar. 1906, fourth series, Vol.153 c.1278.

<sup>129</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, pp.99-100.

<sup>130</sup> HC Deb., 14 Mar. 1906, fourth series, Vol.153 c.1278.

<sup>131</sup> HC Deb., 14 Mar. 1906, fourth series, Vol.153 cc.1300,1309.

<sup>132</sup> Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, pp.104-5.

government found itself vulnerable to criticism from Liberal quarters on both counts.

One further aspect of the politics of Chinese labour controversy was the controversy that erupted when it emerged that Milner, during his time as the High Commissioner in South Africa, had allowed for the flogging of Chinese labourers, in breach of both the law and the agreements which had been struck with the Chinese government. This revelation saw the Liberal government brought into direct confrontation with its Radical backbenchers after Byles brought forward a motion of censure in Milner's conduct on 21 March 1906. In a result that managed to alienate both Milner's supporters and his opponents, the government brought forward an amendment which stressed its condemnation of illegal flogging but refrained from making any personal censure. Although the government won the vote on the question, Churchill's speech on the occasion was seen as mocking Milner's fall from grace, alienating the very elements of South African opinion that the government had been keen to placate.<sup>133</sup> Byles, for his part, did not quietly accept defeat on this issue: addressing his constituents later that month, he attacked the government for having not censured Milner, declaring it to be 'a very queer net [...] which lets the big fishes through and catches all the little ones', adding his fear that similar abuses might now be encouraged following Parliament's failure to rebuke Milner.<sup>134</sup> Byles' defence of his actions in this way is significant, because it demonstrates that the question was not, in Radical eyes, simply about Milner's personal conduct, but the form of imperialism it represented.

Indeed, what is most striking about the whole episode is the way in which Milner's critics framed the question as one relating to good imperial governance. Moving the motion of censure, Byles stressed that he disclaimed 'all personal hostility to Lord Milner', but instead was acting because 'if illegality was condoned, if high officials were screened, and if injustice and cruelty were allowed to go unreprieved, then in his judgment the highest interests of this country were in danger.'<sup>135</sup> If the rule of law was not enforced, he continued,

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<sup>133</sup> See Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, pp.100-01,

<sup>134</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Apr. 1906.

<sup>135</sup> HC Deb., 21 Mar. 1906, fourth series, Vol.154, c.464.

then it would jeopardise the whole basis of the settlement in South Africa: the Boers, he declared,

were reputed to be a suspicious people. What would become of their confidence in us when they found breaches of the law sanctioned by the highest executive officer of the State, and sanctioned moreover in the interests of the very men whom they regarded as responsible for all the evils of the war, and for the wreckage of their country?<sup>136</sup>

If Britain was to retain the trust of its non-British imperial subjects, he cautioned, it could not condone such illegality.

Seconding the motion, Frederick Mackarness, the Liberal Member of Parliament for Newbury, took this analysis a step further by directly linking the question of imperial misrule with the moral panic over violence by the Chinese. Because flogging had been sanctioned, he declared,

The Chinamen were driven into a state of desperation by the treatment they received; they deserted from the mines, and, being forbidden by law from obtaining an honest livelihood, they were driven to commit crimes, and so the unfortunate people of the Transvaal, who had only just recovered from a devastating war, had inflicted upon them the calamity of having their houses broken into, their property taken, and often murders committed by the Chinese.<sup>137</sup>

The imperial authorities, by this assessment, had not only facilitated the outrages by introducing Chinese labour in the first place, but had actively encouraged them by abandoning the rule of law. Ultimately the flogging controversy was relatively short-lived, in the public eye at least. Nonetheless, it serves as a useful demonstration of how the Liberal government stood vulnerable to the very narratives of imperial misgovernment which had proved so effective for the Liberal party in opposition.

Further pressures on Liberal imperial policy emerged as relations with the Black African population of South Africa moved increasingly to the forefront of imperial politics following the Bambatha Uprising in Natal. The subsequent disturbances in many ways represented a perfect storm for imperial policy in South Africa: the Liberal government considered the Natal government's actions heavy-handed

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., c.468.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., c.473.

and counter-productive, while the Natal government reacted strongly to imperial interference in its affairs, threatening outright resignation at one point.<sup>138</sup> For reasons of brevity, the full debates surrounding these disturbances are not examined in this thesis; for our present purposes it suffices to note that the issue once again highlighted the tensions between the ideal of imperial self-government and the values the Empire was supposedly meant to embody. Speaking at West Hartlepool on 12 May 1906, Churchill was forced to negotiate between the two increasingly contradictory goals in addressing the subject, commenting that while the imperial government 'could not be indifferent to the welfare and interests of the great multitude of natives who were, after all, subject of the King', he stressed that he did not intend 'in any degree to impair the general principle of Liberal colonial policy, which was the principle of self-government'.<sup>139</sup> As Andrew Thompson has noted, this was a period in which Radical influences within British politics increasingly sought to advocate a vision of imperialism which emphasised ideas of trusteeship and the welfare of the Empire's non-white subjects, and in many respects the attitude of the Liberal government towards the Bambatha Uprising can be seen as representing this shift in opinion.<sup>140</sup> However, the co-existence of this vision of imperialism alongside the traditional Liberal emphasis on self-government inevitably generated serious difficulties for the Liberal government in relation to the constitutional settlement for the former Boer republics.

Early on in the life of the new Parliament, Liberal backbenchers had begun to raise the question of how the non-white population of South Africa would be affected by the new Transvaal constitution: opening a debate on the subject on 28 February 1906, Byles declared that 'while he was in favour of granting self-government to the Colonies he would not grant to the Colonies the freedom to deprive others of their freedom.' Past British practice in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, he asserted, had always been to maintain imperial oversight over

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<sup>138</sup> A good account of relations between the Liberal government and the Natal administration in this period can be found in Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office*, pp.239-62.

<sup>139</sup> Winston Churchill, speech at West Hartlepool, 12 May 1906, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 12 May 1906.

<sup>140</sup> Andrew S. Thompson, 'The language of imperialism and the meanings of empire: imperial discourse in British politics, 1895-1914', *Journal of British Studies* 36:2 (1997).

the position of the non-white population, and this was a principle that should not be abandoned in South Africa.<sup>141</sup>

Likewise, when the actual constitutions came before Parliament for approval in December, they were attacked in Radical quarters on similar grounds, particularly over the question of the franchise. Rising to speak in the House of Commons, Charles Dilke protested that so far the debate had entirely failed to consider that the proposed constitutions represented a major departure from existing British imperial policy: 'it might be inevitable, it might be impossible to resist it, but we were for the first time establishing a colour bar in the British Empire by the action of the Imperial Parliament.'<sup>142</sup> The introduction of an absolute colour bar, he continued, was contrary not only to British practices at the Cape, but indeed:

was contrary to the usage of great self-governing Colonies within the Empire; there was no such colour bar against the Maoris in New Zealand, or the Red Indians in Canada, the descendants of whom were among the most valued members of society...<sup>143</sup>

Churchill, in reply, could only state that 'nothing was more clearly stipulated in the Treaty of Vereeniging than that an extension of the franchise to the native population was not to take place before the grant of responsible government', although he expressed the belief that throughout South Africa the tendency would be for a move towards the Cape system.<sup>144</sup>

It is important not to exaggerate the political significance of these debates: although certainly the period 1906-07, and indeed beyond, would see extensive efforts by political actors in Britain and South Africa to secure political and civil rights for the non-white populations, particularly the substantial Indian population in South Africa, this was rarely a political issue which developed a wider salience in the imperial politics of the country at large. Nonetheless, two important elements might be identified in the Radical rhetoric deployed in relation to the constitutional settlement for the two former colonies. First, even if the arguments deployed can be seen as representing the emerging Radical

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<sup>141</sup> HC Deb., 28 Feb. 1906, fourth series, Vol.152 cc.1212-14.

<sup>142</sup> HC Deb., 17 Dec. 1906, fourth series, Vol.167, c.1090.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., c.1093.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., c.1133

vision of Empire in British politics in this period, it is striking the degree to which its advocates presented their positions not as new departures in imperial policy, but instead as defending the principles by which the Empire had supposedly been previously run. Just as the Liberal opposition sought to delegitimise the Lyttelton constitution by presenting it as a break with established wisdom and a departure from past policy, so too did Radical defenders of the non-white population seek to challenge the grant of responsible government without specific limitations. Second, it might be reflected that if this represented an extension of earlier critiques of the treatment of the non-white population in South Africa, it was not one which attributed mistreatment either to the specific character of the Boers or the mine-owners, but to the settler population of the territories as a whole.

Despite the cross-currents increasingly emerging from Radical quarters, however, the Liberal leadership and their moderate supporters in the party resolutely stuck to their earlier narrative of responsible government as the measure which would finally resolve Anglo-Boer tensions in South Africa. Speaking at Morley on 2 February 1906, Asquith for example stated that following the election, the Liberal ministry would now grant responsible government to the Transvaal as soon as possible,

in the confident belief and hope that in South Africa, as in Canada, it would result in the gradual effacing of racial distinctions, and in the combination and concentration of the common interests of a community to which both Boer and Briton belonged.<sup>145</sup>

Likewise, in his Cockermonth speech Churchill characterised the grant of responsible government as representing their intention 'to make the Boers practically partners in the British Empire', expressing his hope that 'this new Parliament will also be the signal for some cessation of that struggle, which has been so long protracted, between the Dutch and the British'.<sup>146</sup> Even if in other respects the South African question had increasingly been framed in terms of the relationship between the white population and the non-white populations, whether Chinese or African, the core justification for responsible government

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<sup>145</sup> H.H. Asquith, speech at Morley, 2 Feb. 1906, reported in *Aberdeen Journal*, 3 Feb. 1906.

<sup>146</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 26 Jul. 1906.

remained premised upon the idea of Anglo-Boer harmony as the key to successful governance of the region. Indeed, the persistence of this idea was further demonstrated by the continued characterisation of responsible government as the means by which the Transvaal would be rendered loyal to the Empire. Speaking at Wimborne on 6 August 1906, Churchill attacked Balfour as 'unpatriotic and unworthy' for having suggested that responsible government might be used by the Boers to launch a rebellion against British rule and seek a reversal of the war's outcome.<sup>147</sup> Having presented the Boers as co-participants in the British Empire, Liberals were now able to frame responsible government not simply as desirable, but as the only true patriotic and imperial outcome for South Africa.

Ultimately, when the results of the new constitution delivered a victory for Het Volk and installed General Louis Botha as the premier of the Transvaal, Liberals presented this as the ultimate proof that their strategy, of loyalty following true self-government, had been the correct one. At the April 1907 Liberal banquet for the Colonial Premiers, hosted at the very restaurant where Campbell-Bannerman had denounced Britain's 'methods of barbarism' in South Africa, it fell upon R.B. Haldane to propose the toast to the party's guests, including Botha himself. The former Liberal Imperialist, now installed as Secretary of State for War, referred to the Transvaal premier as:

the head of a new Government and a Government he believed would become a great Government, and that had come about suddenly and unexpectedly to those who observed only the surface movement of things, but in the nature of events to those who appreciated and understood that great unwritten, ever-changing, developing British constitution, which was the foundation of their liberties at home and across the seas, which held them together.<sup>148</sup>

Rising in reply, Botha declared that 'the Transvaal had received with gladness and gratitude the Constitution which had conferred upon them the inestimable privileges and rights of self-government.' Noting that in the election 'Englishmen voted for Boers and Boers for Englishmen', Botha stated that his government

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<sup>147</sup> Winston Churchill, speech at Wimborne, 6 Aug. 1906, reported in *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1906.

<sup>148</sup> R.B. Haldane, speech at Holborn Restaurant, London, 16 Apr. 1907, reported in *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1907.

'owed its existence in no small measure to the vote of the British community'. His only request, he declared to loud cheering, was for the imperial government 'to help them to establish a united federated South African nation under the protection of the British flag.'<sup>149</sup> If the Liberal government had not intended to grant self-government as a magnanimous gesture to the Boers, the long history of the party's rhetoric on the South African question nonetheless gave its leaders, and indeed Botha, the language through which to explain and justify the move.

The Liberal Party's transition from opposition to government is ultimately remarkable not so much for how the party's rhetoric on the South African question changed as a result, but also for how much it remained the same. The transformative effect of the grant of responsible government, the characterisation of Anglo-Boer relations as the key to resolving the South African question, and the need to avoid direct intervention in colonial affairs remained the key elements of the Liberal leadership's rhetoric in this period. Likewise, the government's growing base of Radical critics drew upon existing rhetorical strategies emphasising the primacy of established imperial practice and the insistence upon the good governance of Empire, even as they advanced new critiques emphasising protections and political rights for the Empire's non-white subjects. Once again, in addressing the South African question, Liberals from across the party drew upon earlier rhetorical techniques in order to articulate their positions on new controversies and present them as logical extensions of existing Liberal policy. However, the party's first year in charge of British South African policy nonetheless served to highlight the key tensions which had long existed at the heart of its imperial rhetoric.

### **Conclusion: the End of the South African Question?**

The Liberal Party's response to the politics of South African reconstruction followed naturally on from the party's rhetoric at the time of the South African War. Although the central divisions within British Liberal politics over that conflict had by the time that the party entered government largely faded from public view, or had at the very least been transferred into other arenas of Liberal policy, the idealised narratives of imperial governance which had dominated

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<sup>149</sup> Louis Botha, speech at Holborn Restaurant, London, 16 Apr. 1907, reported in *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1907.

Liberal rhetoric on South Africa continued to form the basis by which Liberals constructed and articulated their positions on the South African question. The push for full responsible government for the Transvaal, although certainly energised by the controversy over Chinese labour, represented a direct continuation of Liberal rhetoric from the time of the South African War, and indeed earlier debates. The idealised vision of an Empire of white settlement run on a self-governing, pluralistic basis remained at the very heart of the Liberal Party's approach to South Africa, a principle the party leadership clung to all the more in government as obstacles and objections mounted in other areas. Even as the controversy over Chinese labour shifted the focus of the South African question into new fields, particularly in relation to the rise of white labourism, Liberal speakers nonetheless drew upon established rhetorical trends emphasising British exceptionalism, suspicions of sectional interests, and a fundamental link between the idea of racial harmony and the successful good governance of South Africa. Although the pressure to directly compete with rival visions of Liberal imperial politics had faded, the legacy of the party's earlier battles over imperialism and the war continued to provide the rhetorical basis for Liberal rhetoric on South Africa, event after the party entered government.

With the grant of responsible government to the Transvaal, the period of this thesis' main focus of inquiry comes to something of a natural close. Although the colony's return to self-government did not, of course, represent the end of South African concerns within British Liberal politics, the politics of the South African question as had broadly existed since the time of the Raid largely came to a conclusion. While certain aspects of South African affairs did continue to attract attention, such as during the parliamentary consideration of the South Africa Act in 1909, the question was never to emerge again in the Edwardian era as such a dominant political issue. This was in part because the circumstances of the Liberal Party had changed: Liberal rhetoric on the South African question had been forged in opposition, driven by a need both to respond to the claims of Unionist imperial policy and the escalation of events in South Africa, while at the same time also serving as the key battleground in the struggles over the leadership and direction of the Liberal Party. It was a rhetoric

driven by a need to advance a specifically Liberal politics of Empire, yet by 1907 the political necessities which had driven this need had largely evaporated.

More than this however, the grant of responsible government represented the end of the South African question in British Liberal politics as it had been conceptualised since the events of December 1895. The focus of the politics of the Raid and the Transvaal Crisis of 1899 on the position of the Uitlanders brought about a situation in which the problems of South Africa were framed as the challenge of managing relations between the British and the Dutch populations, effectively constructing the South African question as a 'white' question, with issues relating to the non-white majority in the region largely marginalised in Liberal rhetoric. Likewise, the focus on the forms of misgovernment perpetuated by the British South Africa Company and the government of the South African Republic served to place further emphasis upon the ideal of British imperial rule as embodying the principle of good governance through a decentralised, self-governing model of settler imperialism, even if Liberal arguments differed substantially on how such an outcome could be achieved. Critically, these two factors in combination meant that Liberal rhetoric on the South African question ultimately advanced a vision of South Africa in which free self-governing institutions for the settler populations would serve both as guarantors of the good governance of the region and facilitate the reconciliation of the two white races, transforming the Boers into loyal imperial subjects.

The continuation of this rhetorical framework into the debates in the years following the war should not therefore simply be seen as an extension of Liberal rhetoric on the conduct of the war, but the natural result of how Liberals had conceptualised the nature of the South African question. Having identified Chinese Labour as continuing to exacerbate the same old problems of South Africa, responsible government was presented as the only obvious means by which the idealised Liberal vision of South Africa could be achieved. The grant of responsible government thus ultimately served to resolve the South African question as it had been understood. For the Radical opponents of this settlement, the continuation of Chinese Labour and the creation of the colour bar proved unacceptable to notions of good imperial governance, yet opposing such measures ultimately meant opposing the very settler self-government

which was supposed to remedy the problems of South Africa. As will be explored briefly in the conclusion, this new agitation would adopt many of the same rhetorical techniques which had characterised the Liberals' earlier battles over South Africa and Empire, but it was ultimately a very different sort of South African question upon which the Radicals subsequently campaigned.

## CONCLUSION: RHETORIC AND THE POLITICS OF EMPIRE

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From the Jameson Raid and the crisis of 1899, through the course of the South African War and into the reconstruction era, the spectre of a federal South Africa under the British flag had consistently loomed large in British debates on the South African question. It is something of an irony of history, therefore, that, when proposals to create a Union of South Africa were formally placed before Parliament in the summer of 1909, the debates over the plan were a mere echo of the heated Liberal controversies over South Africa which had gone before.<sup>1</sup> The proposals for federation, which had emerged from the National Convention at Durban the previous year and had been subsequently approved by the four colonial governments, envisaged a unitary structure for the new state with the aim of producing a strong centralised government. Critically, however, they also established an absolute colour bar for the new Union institutions while simultaneously establishing a constitutional mechanism by which the existing limited franchise for non-white imperial subjects in the Cape might be revoked.<sup>2</sup>

It was with respect to the latter elements in particular that the passage of the South Africa Act has earned the condemnation of history. As Martin Meredith notes, a wave of oppressive legislation against the Black African population followed on swiftly from unification, while the structures of the new state facilitated the eventual rise of the National Party, setting South Africa on the road to apartheid.<sup>3</sup> In reacting to the proposals for federation, the elements of the Liberal Party which had previously objected to the exclusive franchise in the Transvaal Colony again sought to make their concerns known. Sir Charles Dilke, among others, attempted to lobby the Colonial Office with the support of

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<sup>1</sup> However, much of the parliamentary opposition on the issue came from the Labour benches, with Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald particularly active across the two days of debate.

<sup>2</sup> The impetus for federation owed much to the activities of Lord Selborne as high commissioner; likewise, through Selborne the Colonial Office was closely involved in the proceedings at Durban, although it generally suited the Liberal government to portray the cause of federation as an organic one arising from the settler populations themselves. For details, see David E. Torrance, *The Strange Death of the Liberal Empire: Lord Selborne in South Africa* (Liverpool: 1996), ch.9; Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge: 2003), ch.4.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War: The Making of South Africa* (London: 2007), pp.521-522.

several colonial delegations opposed to the measures.<sup>4</sup> In terms of the public debate, however, this dispute over the terms of federation only generated significant interest when the South Africa Bill came before the House of Commons.

Leading the Liberal rebellion in the Commons, Dilke sought to undermine the government's stance by challenging the right of the colonial settler governments to speak for South Africa, attacking the bill for 'making the four Colonies masters, to a certain extent, of two-thirds of South Africa outside those four Colonies'.<sup>5</sup> Yet, even in seeking to disrupt the certainties which had underpinned Liberal rhetoric on South Africa, as in 1906 Dilke nonetheless also drew upon notions of a pre-existing idealised model of Empire, against which Union could be characterised as a dangerous departure. The South Africa Bill, he charged, would end the struggle of 'the old British principle as against the Boer principle - the principle of equality of rights', noting that the South African War had in part been justified as an assertion of the Cape system.<sup>6</sup> His colleague Ellis Griffith likewise adapted earlier narratives on the importance of race harmony for British governance, declaring that 'the security of white rule in South Africa, the security of Imperial supremacy in South Africa, depends to a large extent upon the willing and active loyalty of the subject races', loyalty which he argued Union would diminish.<sup>7</sup> In this manner, both Dilke and Griffith were falling back on established Liberal rhetorical tactics, even as they sought to reframe the South African question as one not of Anglo-Boer relations, but instead concerning the subject populations of the Empire. Their Liberal colleagues, however, responded by continuing to stress Anglo-Boer reconciliation and the need to obtain the support of settler opinion. A.C. Beck, the Liberal member for Wisbech, warned that it was imperial interference in native affairs which had estranged the Boers and triggered the Great Trek, insisting instead that the new government of South Africa would simply have to be trusted to adopt a statesmanlike position on the non-white races.<sup>8</sup> Bringing the debates on the bill to a close, Asquith acknowledged that all sides of the

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<sup>4</sup> Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, pp.82-83.

<sup>5</sup> HC Deb. 16 Aug. 1909, fifth series, Vol.9 c.975.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> HC Deb. 16 Aug. 1909, fifth series, Vol.9 cc.999-1000.

<sup>8</sup> HC Deb. 16 Aug. 1909, fifth series, Vol.9 cc.1023-1027.

House of Commons had reservations about the implementation of the colour bar, but declared nonetheless that it would be far better for any extension of the franchise 'be carried out spontaneously, and on the initiative of the South African Parliament, rather than they should appear to be forced upon them by the Imperial Parliament here.'<sup>9</sup> A backbench effort to disrupt the third reading failed, and the South Africa Bill passed the House of Commons entirely unamended.

Whatever anxiety Liberals felt over the consequences of union for the Black African and Asian populations of South Africa, it did not prevent the party from championing the measure as a triumph for Liberal imperial policy. In a speech at Branksome on 31 July 1909, Winston Churchill, by now elevated to the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade, hailed the 'miracle of South Africa' as a 'living testimony to the truth and power and solvent forces of Liberal principles when they were boldly applied'. Where before in South Africa there had been bitterness and hatred, he continued, 'there was now union and reconciliation and prosperity'.<sup>10</sup> Churchill's rhetoric was echoed by Lord Crewe, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, who at a speech in Glasgow the following month declared that:

the South African Union has been brought about with the most amazing rapidity owing to the great quality of the statesmen of both races in South Africa, and to the happy fusion for the purpose of those two races, as they hoped to attain a new era in the country.<sup>11</sup>

The language invoked by Churchill and Crewe hailed back to earlier Liberal narratives: the South African question invoked by the speakers remained that of Anglo-Boer relations and the legacy of the war, a problem which the Liberals' trust in the two settler populations' character and capacity for self-government had resolved, vindicating the Liberal basis on which the Empire was to be governed. An imperial question which had from the beginning been debated in the rhetoric of an idealised Liberal Empire was now declared to have been resolved by the very same Liberal ideals.

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<sup>9</sup> HC Deb, 19 Aug. 1909, fifth series, Vol.9 c.1657.

<sup>10</sup> Winston Churchill, speech at Branksome, 31 Jul. 1909, reported in *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 2 Aug. 1909.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Crewe, speech at Glasgow, 20 Aug. 1909, reported in *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 21 Aug. 1909.

How then is the Liberal Party's rhetoric on the South African question to be understood? Clearly, there did not exist a singular definitive vision of Empire for Liberal speakers, let alone a technical blueprint for imperial rule. Liberal rhetoric was instead framed on a series of collective assumptions about the ideals of British imperial rule, which were presumed to exist throughout the Empire of white settlement. Fundamentally, it was these assumptions which determined how Liberals characterised the problem of South Africa, framing each of the four episodes examined here as difficulties arising out of, and threatening to further exacerbate, race disharmony and misgovernment. Fuelled by failings of character and the corrupting influence of sectional interests, Liberals presented such problems as threats not just Britain's long-term position in the region but also to the character of the Empire as a whole. These same assumptions also shaped Liberal remedies for the problems of South Africa, fuelling the conviction that localised self-government would bring about a union of the settler populations and ensure good governance or was at least a precondition for such developments.

Yet, if it was the ideals of Liberal Empire which framed Liberal responses to the South African question, it was nonetheless a set of ideals which inevitably fractured when applied to the reality both of the situation in South Africa and of the political contexts in Britain, the fundamental tensions between self-government and good governance providing time after time a basis for division within the Liberal ranks. Indeed, Liberal responses were further complicated by the intrusion of what might be termed the ideals of the dependent Empire into a sphere which Liberal speakers consistently sought to frame in the ideals of the settler Empire. The impossibility of translating an idealised vision of British imperial rule into a practical imperial policy for South Africa nonetheless goes some way towards explaining why, when Liberal rhetoric embodied an essentially common approach to Empire, the issue nonetheless proved such fertile ground for Liberal divisions.

It is also worthwhile reflecting on why such language constituted a specifically Liberal rhetoric of Empire, as opposed to a body of rhetoric which Liberal speakers simply happened to use. Although it would be wrong to imply that the core elements of this rhetoric were somehow exclusively Liberal, existing in isolation from the wider political culture in which it was found, this rhetoric might

nonetheless be described as fundamentally Liberal because Liberal speakers themselves sought to claim it as such. From Sir Edward Grey's boast that Britain possessed a truly 'Liberal' Empire to John Morley's characterisation of his opposition to Unionist policy as essentially Gladstonian in nature, and most significantly of all in the Roseberyite campaign for Liberal Imperialism, Liberal speakers consistently sought to present their position on South African and imperial questions as explicitly Liberal in nature. The fractious divisions within the party during the South African War served to create a political climate in which speakers needed to defend their claims to speak for Liberal opinion in responding to events in South Africa, a position which necessitated a form of imperial rhetoric which could be claimed to be distinctly Liberal. Furthermore, this rhetoric was essentially Liberal in relation to why it existed as a phenomenon at all. For all the diverse purposes to which it was put, Liberal rhetoric on the South African question fundamentally served to justify a version of imperial rule differentiated both from that of the party's political opponents and from the traditional Caesarist notions of imperialism which remained a part of the political discourse. In this sense, this was a Liberal rhetoric not simply because it was used by Liberal speakers, but ultimately because of the political contexts in which it was articulated and the political purposes it served.

The focus of this thesis has been on the specific phenomenon of British Liberal politics, rather than on the presence in imperial debates of liberalism more widely. Yet while Liberal politics cannot be seen simply as the manifestation of liberalism within the British parliamentary system, it is nonetheless worth considering the extent to which this also represented a liberal rhetoric of Empire. Certainly, a suspicion of government power and military power in particular, as seen both in Liberal Imperialist characterisations of the Kruger government at the time of the war's outbreak and in Campbell-Bannerman's denunciations of martial law in the Cape Colony, can be seen as suggestive of the wider influence of liberalism (however it might be defined) upon the Liberal Party's imperial outlook. Indeed, these debates can be said to demonstrate Miles Taylor's assessment that the debates over Empire in the period after 1895 reflected mid-century concerns over imperialism as representing conquest-driven despotism: the characterisation of Chartered Company, Boer and British administrations in South Africa as examples of autocratic misrule served as

both as a criticism of despotic imperialism and a defence of the supposedly liberal values of traditional British rule.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, the emphasis placed upon the rule of law, whether applied at the regional level or within the republics and colonies, and particularly the Liberal focus on governing structures can be seen as reflecting the emphasis on constitutionalism identified by Mira Matikkala, forming part of a wider liberal conceptualisation of the issues surrounding Empire as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Liberal Party's rhetoric on the South African question broadly supports Uday Singh Mehta's assessments of the paternalistic impulses of liberalism in the imperial sphere: as demonstrated in the debates over the Boer treatment of the Black African population, the positions taken by Liberals often illustrated tensions between a liberal optimism in the potential of the civilising mission and a liberal pessimism necessitating less idealistic modes of imperial rule in the name of good government.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, in spite of all this, the most striking element that emerges from this study of Liberal rhetoric is the extent to which it represented not so much a liberal politics of Empire as it did a conservative one. Liberal speakers consistently spoke of the idealised Empire as pre-existing, the tensions in South Africa the result of deviations, whether British or Boer, from the traditional practices of British imperial rule, and active intervention in South Africa was justified as either pre-empting further decay or restoring a previous state of affairs. Even the more obviously innovative imperial visions that emerged in Liberal politics in this period, from Lord Rosebery's Liberal Imperialism to the emergence of Radical ideas on trusteeship, were generally framed within the narratives of the British imperial tradition and the organic development of Empire.

Considering questions of British political culture more generally, rhetoric played a critical role in shaping the meaning of imperial questions within British politics, serving to situate such issues within the wider dynamics of party political contest and national debate. More than simply imbuing imperial questions with

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<sup>12</sup> Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19:1 (1991).

<sup>13</sup> Mira Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late Victorian Britain* (London: 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: 1999).

their political meaning, it was through the public medium of rhetoric which the very ideals of Empire were contested within British political culture. The rhetorical dimensions of the South African question enabled Liberal speakers of all persuasions to elevate specific aspects of imperial policy into matters of principle, contesting both Unionist accounts of the nature of the South African question and those of their rivals within the Liberal Party. Indeed, the very flexibility of this imperial rhetoric allowed the South African question to become both a key driver of the split within the Liberal Party and its most visible reflection. Yet while this rhetoric of Empire was indeed sufficiently flexible to allow for Liberal speakers to advance their own positions on South Africa, it was not infinitely malleable or exclusively a means of opening up rhetorical space for speakers. In shaping understandings of Empire and ascribing political meaning to events in South Africa, speakers did not simply open up new rhetorical spaces for themselves, but also closed off or otherwise adjusted the scope of political action for subsequent speakers.<sup>15</sup>

This was true not just in relation to the Liberal Party's internal divisions, but across British politics as a whole. For example, during the crisis of 1899 even Liberals strongly opposed to a confrontationist policy nonetheless had to frame their responses with reference to the Unionist characterisation of the Uitlanders as British subjects and the idea of British paramountcy. Likewise, Liberal rhetoric in Opposition on the importance of Boer self-government following the cessation of hostilities restricted the incoming Liberal government's scope for action after 1905: having characterised the continuing problems of reconstruction-era South Africa as caused by the failure to implement true self-government, Campbell-Bannerman's ministry could not have easily adopted an alternative course in office.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In this sense, this Liberal rhetoric of Empire can be understood as conforming to the framework advanced by Richard Toye in relation to post-war British political rhetoric on the Commonwealth, in which 'each player in turn shifted the ground on which those who followed were forced to debate'. See Richard Toye, 'Words of Change: the Rhetoric of Commonwealth, Common Market and Cold War, 1961–3', in Larry Butler and Sarah Stockwell (eds), *The Wind of Change: Howard Macmillan and British Decolonization* (Basingstoke: 2013), p.154.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the flak that the Campbell-Bannerman government received from Unionist opponents and from its own radical supporters over the failure to secure the immediate removal of Chinese labour from the Rand demonstrates

Considerations over the role rhetoric played in shaping the wider direction of British politics also invite us to ask further questions about the role of newspapers in facilitating these developments, particularly the function of the detailed speech report. Although this thesis has concentrated in the main on the rhetoric of Liberal politicians, and indeed primarily on the rhetoric deployed in extra-parliamentary speeches, the role of the Press has been central to the rhetoric examined in this study. Not only is it newspaper reports which serve to provide the present-day historian with a mediated record of the rhetoric deployed by Liberal speakers, but it was also newspaper reports of speeches, including parliamentary speeches, which served as the primary medium by which contemporary audiences consumed the rhetoric of leading political figures. Yet the Press did not simply act as a means of political communication, but also directly participated in the processes of shaping rhetoric, contesting political meaning and, significantly, framing ideas as to what represented public or party opinion. Indeed, one might make the point that it was this very function of the Press with its practices of printing detailed reports of political speeches which enabled both the contest over what it meant to be a Liberal on questions of Empire, and indeed the wider contest for who could claim to speak for British Liberal opinion, to take place in the country at large at all.

Additionally, the rhetoric examined in this thesis also offers insights into wider imperial attitudes within fin-de-siècle British politics. At the heart of both imperialist and anti-imperialist narratives lay an insistence of British exceptionalism, the conviction that the Empire was both morally and materially superior to the empires of other nations, or at very least that the Empire was supposed to be superior. Rosebery's boast that Britain was the only Empire which would happily fix all borders, Campbell-Bannerman's allusions to Spanish imperial practices in condemning British war tactics, and the anti-slavery legacies invoked in the Chinese labour controversy all reflected this exceptionalist tendency. Critically, this exceptionalism does not appear to have simply been an expression of confidence in British imperial methods, but fundamentally constituted a belief in the exceptionalism of the British character: P.J. Cain's emphasis upon the role of character as key to late-Victorian

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the degree to which a previously useful line of rhetoric could subsequently create political liabilities further down the line.

justifications of imperial rule would certainly appear to be borne out by this study.<sup>17</sup>

Yet the rhetoric of the South African question also suggests an anxiety at the heart of the metropole's imperial outlook. Surveying the spectre of imperial decline in twentieth-century politics, John Darwin has argued that, despite the 'fear of falling', explicitly imperial declinist movements made relatively little headway in British politics, with party elites from across the political spectrum cooperating in the downplaying of imperial questions and the cushioning of the British public from imperial decay.<sup>18</sup> However applicable Darwin's analysis may or may not be for the bulk of the period he examines, what is striking is the degree to which the 'fear of falling' he describes can be seen as reflected throughout the politics of the South African question, with the Empire consistently framed as at risk from not just military but existential threats. Indeed, this existential fragility of Empire can be seen as sufficiently pervasive that Liberal speakers characterised their ideals of Empire as not simply moral and effective modes of imperial governance, but critically the only methods by which imperial degradation could be staved off. Articulated in an environment in which Unionists too were warning of the threats to Empire, not least the threat posed by a Liberal government, the rhetoric of Empire within British politics at the end of the Victorian era was, fundamentally, a rhetoric of insecurity.

The rhetoric of Empire explored in this thesis additionally serves to demonstrate the wider significance of imperial politics within late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain, posing challenges to the minimalist account of Britain's imperial past. Andrew Porter's characterisation of the South African question, as one shunned as far as possible by Liberals keen to return to domestic questions, fails to account for the ideals of imperial rule which lay at the heart of the Liberals' rhetorical responses, or indeed for the degree to which the debates over imperial policy represented a wider struggle over the future of Liberal politics.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> P.J. Cain, 'Character, 'Ordered Liberty', and the Mission to Civilise: British Moral Justification of Empire, 1870–1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40:4 (2012).

<sup>18</sup> John Darwin, 'The Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline Since 1900', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1986).

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Porter, 'The South African War and Imperial Britain: A Question of Significance?' in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh and Mary-Lynn Suttie

Neither does the complex and dynamic nature of Liberal imperial rhetoric explored in this thesis fit in easily with traditional interpretations of imperial politics as an elite proselytising exercise inflicted upon an uninterested population. While undoubtedly an element of propaganda existed in these debates, Liberal speakers from across the spectrum of opinion in the party did not broadcast their ideas in a vacuum: it was an awareness of the need to win over sections of Liberal and public opinion to their own positions on South Africa that compelled Liberal speakers to adopt and adapt the language of Empire. Imperial rhetoric served as the means of political communication, rather than just the product of it.

Finally, this thesis challenges the idea that the period of the South African War represented a brief imperial aberration in a British political culture otherwise untroubled by Empire. The persistent minimalist portrayal of the South African War as a short-lived 'climax' of the new imperialism followed by a swift return to apathy and scepticism, a characterisation notably advanced in Bernard Porter's most recent work on the British Empire, ultimately presents only a part of the wider political picture.<sup>20</sup> While the war represented a specific period of high salience, it did not call into being a hastily constructed and temporary rhetoric of Empire. Instead, as this thesis has demonstrated the rhetorical framework in which imperial questions were debated was already evident in the political responses to the Jameson Raid and would remain dominant throughout the subsequent politics of South African reconstruction. This rhetoric in turn did not exist in isolation, as much as it was a product of political and imperial turmoil of the fin de siècle: rather, Liberals had continuously framed and reframed this rhetoric in relation to other imperial debates. The South African question was not therefore a superficial issue or an imperial 'moment of madness' at the dawn of the twentieth century, but instead must be understood as the product of a political culture in which, fundamentally, imperial questions mattered.

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard Porter, *British Imperial: What the Empire Wasn't* (London: 2016), pp.101-03.



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