UNSETTLING NEWS: SETTLER
COLONIALISM, WAR AND EMPIRE IN
THE AUSTRALIAN AND BRITISH PRESS
(1863-1902)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses Australian and British newspaper commentary on Australian participation in three conflicts on the fringes of the British Empire during the latter part of the nineteenth century. These conflicts, the Waikato War (1863-64), the Sudan crisis (1885) and the South African War (1899-1902), offer insights into the narratives of British imperialism and Australian settler colonialism at these times. More specifically, the newspaper coverage of each conflict provides a window into the discourses that supported settler colonial and imperial processes, and of the anxieties that unsettled them.

Previous scholarship has rarely examined these conflicts in combination or paid close attention to the language in which they were reported in the press. For this thesis the turn toward a discursive critique of colonial print culture has been influential. More recently, the emphasis on the dynamics governing the global circulation of newspaper commentary has proven a fruitful complement to textual analysis. To add to this growing body of knowledge, this study also draws upon recent theoretical consideration of settler colonialism as a discrete modality of the imperial project. Finally, concentrating on the rhetoric of press debates has led to a focus on its affective character, or how sentimental language worked to address readers through a continual process of identifying with British imperial and settler Australian communities and narratives.

The chapters are, moreover, structured as a dialogue between Australian and British press accounts. It is my suggestion that Australian discussion of these events was largely undertaken, explicitly or implicitly, with reference to both real and imagined British observers. In turn, in much of the British response, the white colonies came to occupy an increasingly prominent position in the imperial imagination. Exactly how this relationship was manifested in print, however, was rarely stable and was persistently debated. It is the movement and continuity of these connections over time that forms the focus of this doctoral thesis.

The first, introductory, chapter outlines the approach and conceptual precepts used in this study. In particular, it discusses the function of the newspaper as a site of textual contest in the nineteenth century. Chapter Two addresses the historical context of the three conflicts and how they were reported and debated in Australia and Britain. This chapter proposes links between social, historical and racial apprehensions inherent in the colonial enterprise, and in particular its settler
colonial variant. Each of the remaining chapters undertakes to substantiate these claims, drawing on the archive of late-nineteenth-century newspapers. Chapters Three, Four and Five give the Australian view, with Chapter Six offering the British “reply.” Thus, Chapter Three examines the fretful debates over settler colonialism during the Waikato War. Chapter Four focuses on the tensions in claiming national and imperial unity in response to the Sudan crisis of 1885. Chapter Five demonstrates the gendered, racial and historical contradictions of Australian accounts of their contribution to the South African War. Chapter Six traces, in turn, the British response to Australian participation in each preceding episode and the changing imperial role the white colonies assumed in these accounts throughout the century. Finally, I conclude by pointing to some contemporary implications of this study and offer suggestions for further research.
DECLARATION

This thesis contains only sole-authored work, some of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship. The bibliographical details of the work and where it appears in the thesis are outlined below.

Parts of Chapter Three have been published in:


Student Signature ............................................................................................................
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“What a happy country this might be without newspapers!”


This study considers newspaper commentary on Australian participation in three overseas conflicts prior to the Great War, namely, the Waikato War (1863-64), the Sudan crisis (1885) and the South African War (1899-1902). These conflicts are not new to historians. However, reading them together in the imperial and colonial newspaper press, and in light of recent theoretical developments, has led the discussion into a number of attendant debates that act as themes or motifs that allow these histories to take on certain new inflexions. First, there is the tracing of the shifting late-nineteenth-century circumstances that shaped the mood of coverage of each episode. Second, there is the stress placed on the circulation between the Australian colonies and Britain of dialogue over these engagements in the press. This has required the discussion to move between history and theories of mediation. A methodological challenge of this work has, indeed, been the synthesis of these two modes of enquiry. Finally, I have used as a key basis for discursive comparison, the distinctive way in which identity is called into being in the language of newspaper articles, letters and editorials. What emerges there is a complex and fascinating modulation between, broadly, imperial British and settler Australian identifications.¹

Nineteenth-century British and Australian newspapers, I suggest, responded to these military crises with a vigorous debate over the nature of the settler colonial project, using each occasion to rally rationales and to rework the settler and imperial narratives that underpinned identity in the colonies and Britain.² As such, the ensuing discussions go to the heart of the process of identification itself as the

¹ As will become clear, the discursive division between Australia and Britain is problematic. For a critique of the colony-metropole binary see David Lambert and Alan Lester, "Introduction: Imperial Spaces, Imperial Subjects," in *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. David Lambert and Alan Lester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 255; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 52-55.

fluid manner in which peoples perceive themselves. In other words, I understand identification as an ongoing process in which subjects continually attempt to secure a stable identity. This situation is borne out both in the workings of the imperial press system and the uncertainty inherent in the predicament of Australian settler colonists, caught between professed pride in the achievements of social evolution and economic wealth, and a reluctance to countenance the foundations of these in convictism and, more fundamentally, violent territorial occupation.

I am indebted to the interrelated schools of imperial studies emergent over the last two decades, variously cast as the study of the “British World,” new imperial histories, and settler colonialism. Though it has been a target for recent criticism, I have borrowed from British World literature the re-emphasis on the wide-ranging, emotive, and tenaciously linked nature of the white societies formed by British colonial expansion. From the new imperial histories I have drawn on models of the mutual formation and transnational circulation of colonial and imperial knowledge and identities. Informed by the postcolonial and linguistic “turns,” the best of this scholarship does not aim for a wholesale replacement of an economic and political focus for imperial history. Rather, it shifts its emphasis to matters of language, race, gender and culture, and toward dismantling the conceptual separation of “colony” and “metropole,” or nation and empire, to recognise the ways in which they shaped one another.

The recent move toward analysis of settler colonialism as operating according to a distinct logic provides a further organising principle. Patrick Wolfe’s influential

formulation captures the essence of this critique. As opposed to other colonial regimes, Wolfe argues, for settler colonialism: “The colonizers come to stay – invasion is a structure not an event.”7 The implication being, given the settler’s primary desire for land over the exploitation of “native” labour, that “[s]ettler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies.”8 As Wolfe’s phrasing suggests, this social structure is ongoing and hence the category “settlers” designates the constituents of an enduring historical process.9 The process, in this case, being the establishment on existing Indigenous territory of the nominally “white” colonies of the British Empire.

This study is therefore situated in a historiographical moment that has evolved out of several decades of more overtly parochial nationalist histories, histories that were in turn reacting against preceding accounts that sympathetically stressed the subservience of colonial Australian history to British traditions and narratives. The recent return to an emphasis on reading the Australian past in its imperial context has been undertaken with a more critical eye and with the renewed self-awareness that postcolonial theorising has afforded. Most recently in critical settler histories, and not only those of Australia, the focus has been on moving traditionally marginalised voices to centre-stage, and accentuating the role of Australians as colonizers as much as colonists.10 Being “of” the Empire, then, could mean many things, and by no means did it designate membership of an inexorable or undivided

ensemble. Indeed the spectacle of settler societies fighting overseas to “defend,” consolidate or swell portions of Britain’s Empire(s) was notable not least for the ways in which different modalities of empire paralleled and opposed one another. The British Empire was no monolith.

Finally, I bring the above models together with a theorisation of the newspaper as a textual form and through close attention to the rhetoric that filled its pages. It is in this rhetoric, I argue, that certain emotional investments and anxieties can be noticed (if not always by its authors), and some of their patterns observed. Though extant literature has on occasion addressed one or more of these elements, the following chapters tie these threads together in, I believe, original ways so as to offer an alternative vantage point from which to both respond to old questions, and hopefully, generate new ones.

**War and Print**

From 1863 to the turn of the century troops and volunteers from the Australian colonies fought in a succession of foreign conflicts that the press reported at length. Martial enthusiasm had long animated the imaginations of Britons at “home” and in the colonies and, as recent scholarship has shown, participation in war was crucial to forging collective community identities. It is in the opportunity

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11 I am informed by Nicholas Thomas’ conception of the colonial enterprise as “an array of religious, commercial, administrative and exploratory projects that sometimes proceeded in relative harmony but were at other times in tension or outright contradiction.” Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 97.


14 I differentiate colonial conflicts from imperial conflicts, the latter being those fought primarily between major imperial powers.

to examine discrete historical episodes for what they might suggest of broader “imperial social formations,” in Mrinalini Sinha’s words, that I have found the study of news media representations of late-nineteenth-century conflicts so valuable.  

The Waikato, Sudan and South African conflicts were all inseparable from global imperial and colonial processes that linked the disparate parts of the British Empire. This study, then, views Australian involvement in each conflict not as isolated military histories per se, but as particularly lucid windows into patterns of settler and imperial press rhetoric at crucial junctures in British imperial history.

Each of these three conflicts clearly had its particularities. During the Waikato War in Aotearoa/New Zealand (henceforth New Zealand), British soldiers and colonists fought local Māori in a classic settler colonial conflict over land and sovereignty. The Sudan crisis, by contrast, was an early phase of the notorious “scramble for Africa” and was more obviously embroiled in late-Victorian imperial geo-strategic concerns. The South African War was a curious mixture of the two. Undertaken chiefly with the geopolitical impetus of African partition in mind and thus connected to the Sudan crisis, the South African War also saw the singular circumstance of British imperial and colonial troops fighting other non-British white settlers in a land comprised of an overwhelming black African majority. As much as each instance was unique, however, it is the rhetorical recurrences in their representations that stand out just as prominently. In the late-nineteenth century, the key medium for these representations was unquestionably the newspaper press.

It is difficult to appreciate the central place the newspaper held in nineteenth century British society. The Victorian press, write Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff, was “the context within which people lived and worked and thought, and from which they derived their (in most cases quite new) sense of the outside world.” Indeed, Wolff has elsewhere argued: “One might almost claim that an attitude, an opinion, an idea did not exist until it had registered itself in the press.” In colonial Australian society, too, newspapers were a “necessity of life,”


though they have received less historical attention. Australia, remarked Richard Twopenny two years prior to the 1885 Sudan crisis, was the “land of newspapers.” From mid-century, world-leading ninety per-cent adult literacy rates and a self-conscious desire for “improvement” and political awareness buoyed the significance of colonial print culture. Yet even the British-derived form of the Australian newspaper seemed to reflect the ambiguities underpinning the supposed relentless march of colonial progress. Alan Atkinson has noted the irony that “much of the certainty of life seemed to be vested not in habits of conversation but in printed publications, in sheets of paper that, having asserted at breakfast that Victoria was a people and a place, might be burned by dark.”

Newspapers also played their part in fostering links between communities broader than the colony or even the nation. Simon Potter’s work has underscored the commercial importance of the press in drawing together the different levels of local, national and imperial groups, but the affective capital generated by the press was equally significant. The nature of Australian press reportage of the British Empire, at least for much of the century, seldom raised serious questions over the fundamental emotional ties between the colonies and Britain. Indeed for Julie

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25 H. M. Green has suggested that of all print forms the daily newspaper was the least explicitly Australianist. Rather, “its outlook was what may be called British-Australian,” Henry Mackenzie
Codell, the international press system was “the most popular and powerful determinant for bridging ‘home’ or ‘mother’ country and its colonial peripheries.” Alan Atkinson has thus written of the transactional nature of this system: “colonial and other English-speaking presses throughout the world now worked as mirrors on mirrors, shifting words backwards and forwards, for sale and resale, across the seas.” That colonial Australian readers could now see their “reflection, or something like it, on paper” led to a “self-overhearing” that shaped ideas of themselves and others. To intercede in this circulation requires reading both Australian and British newspapers.

Here, again, I take inspiration from recent scholarship attentive to trans-imperial relationships of communication. As Kirsten McKenzie has demonstrated, it was the process of circulation and intertextual borrowing that gave colonial news its “global aspect.” Moreover, the passions stirred by colonial conflicts can be attributed in large part to the greater efficiency of war reportage gained through newly available telegraph technology, itself facilitating the “paper empire” of knowledge. In other words, the emotional unity of the British Empire was entwined with the communicative one. This connection is explicit in the sway Reuters held, according to Alex Nalbach, in both “coloring the news” and in the “selection of information” to promote imperial feeling in the colonies.


28 Atkinson, Europeans, 248.

29 Ibid., xv.


Accepting newspapers as a key site of mediation, I understand them as nodal points in a discursive network that bound the colonies both to each other and to Britain while also allowing for these ties to be contested. As the following chapters show, this process also meant that the Australian colonies and Britain could define ideas of themselves in contradistinction to one another. Each of the following chapters deals in some way with the always lopsided debates that characterised the public sphere of news media, debates that were rarely more spirited than in times of war.

Yet the very reason for studying these particular moments might equally be cause for caution. Precisely because of the excitement sparked by these conflicts, might any accompanying rhetoric represent only an aberration of feeling? Despite such reservations, these moments retain analytic value by freeze-framing, in the relative spontaneity of daily newspapers, manifest emotions that were likely latent at other times. This is more so when we consider that the Victorian-era press, a product of the rise of nineteenth-century commodity culture, operated according to the twin determinations of immediacy and, to varying degrees, populism. Glenn Wilkinson hints at the economic constraints that compel newspapers to “speak to a constituency immediately, and either react to their changing perspectives or, at least, relate news in ways which do not offend or contradict preconceived world views.” Such assessments are not new. John Stuart Mill recognised early in the nineteenth century that “[p]eriodical literature depends upon immediate success,” and that it “must, therefore, patronise the opinions which are now in vogue, the opinions of those who are now in power.” It pays to remember, then, that though newspapers did not necessarily represent public sentiment, they were obligated to attempt to appeal to those they considered their readership.

Such appeals rested on shared, if often tacit, cultural understandings. Here we can restate Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose’s claim that the “extraordinary is present within the everyday, but it is only at particular moments – instances of disruption

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or some intense experience – that it provokes conscious awareness and the possibility of critique.” After all, what is more everyday than the daily newspaper? What experiences more intense than those of war? The connection was not lost on British newspaper owners and editors themselves who were well aware of the selling power of battle reports and tales of Empire. The reflexivity of the press was noticeable in regular references to their war-time function whereby reporters promulgated not only the importance of the event but the significance of the medium through which it reached readers. Yet there was no unanimity of feeling expressed in British or Australian newspapers and periodicals. Simply because emotions were heightened did not always mean that they were flattened.

It therefore remains something of a paradox that so visceral an activity as colonial warfare entered most people’s everyday lives primarily through the perfunctory medium of mechanically produced script stamped on cheap paper. This is not to cast these events as mere representation. Even so, despite the fissure that remains between the actualities of conflict and their symbolisation, we cannot always neatly separate the two. Newspapers did not so much distort reality as shape the symbolic realm within which conceptions of reality could be organised and narrativised. This was evident in the newspaper’s serial form with each edition solidifying the boundaries of what constituted cultural experience, the terms in which to understand society and the elements of it that were open for debate. Though each of the three conflicts I examine was palpably “real” and occurred irrespective of their symbolisation, it was the struggle over competing interpretations at the level of discourse that primarily determined what these conflicts meant. The newspaper press thus offers an ideal “methodological meeting place between historicity and textual analysis.” It is to this methodology that we can now briefly turn.

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41 Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, "Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire,” in At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.
46 Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, Gender and the Victorian Periodical (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 198.
Reading the Victorian Press

All studies of the Victorian press must reckon with its plenitude. Indeed, any initial exhilaration felt in being immersed into the vast pool of available texts soon gives way to dismay with the realisation of, to borrow Ann Laura Stoler’s characterisation, their “fixed formats, empty phrases, and racial clichés.” Even in a delimited study of particular aspects of press responses to three conflicts undertaken in relatively short time frames, the methodological problem was not detecting these responses, but curbing them. In 1892, for instance, there were 605 newspapers in all six Australian colonies catering to a population of just over three million people. Accordingly, rather than pursuing traces lost to the colonial archive, this study corrals self-conscious declarations of identity within a medium saturated with them. Given both the repetition and variety characterising the newspaper’s rhetorical form, the question remained: upon collating these declarations and distinguishing each publication’s “editorial line,” what else was there to say about them? The following chapters offer my own answers to that question.

This task necessitated a theoretically informed reading accounting for the formal instability of newspapers and the circularity with which context and text fed into one another. In one sense, the practice of interpreting a newspaper article, beyond accusations of being redundant, might be viewed as a failure of the text itself, given that the newspaper is supposed to be a model of clarity and transparency. Yet critical scholarship still often overlooks the complexities of the newspaper in favour of seeing it as a mine from which to excavate supporting historical facts.

Any study of the press must then begin with the fraught task of defining its object. In other words, if we are going to pursue newspapers through the method of textual studies, what is the text? Lyn Pykett complicates any simplified idea of an isolated text and calls into question such obvious candidates as the single article, an

individual issue or a run under a particular editorship. Margaret Beetham concedes that it is "impossible to decide what constitutes a single text when one is dealing with a serial which came out weekly for years."\(^{51}\) We can add other issues to these. In the Australian case, for instance, how to decide whether to investigate the newspapers of one colony, several colonies or all of them? These complications are compounded when the archive includes British publications.

Additionally, questions as to the "author" of newspapers are notoriously complex.\(^{52}\) Most immediately we are confronted with the standard practice of journalistic anonymity, an issue redoubled when we consider that journalists often worked in different capacities for multiple publications of diverse persuasions.\(^{53}\) Further, whereas the predilections of individual journalists could be overridden by editors and proprietors, the conception of an omnipotent editor-author equally discounts the reality that, as Stephen Vella writes: "Behind a newspaper lies a vast, complex machinery of literary production and layered social networks, for which no single individual is wholly responsible, even at the level of a news article."\(^{54}\) For these reasons, Ann Parry has concluded that a periodical "is manifestly a process without an individual subject."\(^{55}\)

The extent of mutual influence between newspapers, their editors and their close political and elite acquaintances is also difficult to ascertain, though one need only consider the clout of Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) or W.T. Stead to be sure that it was far from negligible.\(^{56}\) While the study of the political power of


newspaper editors and owners has an important historiographical place, my focus remains on the larger structures of feeling within which they operated.\(^{57}\) That is, concentrating on individual editors risks deemphasising the discursive field out of which they spoke, and which they helped to sustain. Discussing the motivations of a Harmsworth or a Stead, or indeed a David Syme or an Andrew Garran, is therefore emphasised less than an understanding of how and why newspaper texts came to characterise a particular manner of speech at these times.\(^{58}\)

Speaking at the (admittedly artificial) level of a publication title can here be advantageous. To select an obvious example, the *Times* can be viewed as far exceeding the sum of its individual writers, editors or editions. Text appearing under the *Times* banner bears an institutional weight that lends the authority of tradition to its content, allowing it to withstand or incorporate critique (though for disreputable titles the effect could well be the opposite). Consequently, when discussing editorial comment I have preferred to personify paper titles. Where the individual writer warrants specific attention I have made this clear. Solutions to the problems of scope, however, are never absolute and remain contingent on objectives. To address the problems raised, I have selected newspapers based on their diversity of influence, political persuasion, popularity and geographical range. Major metropolitan papers, and some influential weeklies, have generally been prioritised for their social sway and for their agenda-setting role over rural publications.\(^{59}\) Leading publications in each Australian colony have been read with a view both to tease out where they align with their counterparts, and where they differ.

There are exceptions to this. The *Bulletin*, for all the attention scholars have given it, cannot be overlooked as both a counterpoint to the more venerated dailies, and for its own quirks. Other publications catering to workers such as the *Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners' Advocate*, have been selected to test dominant views against papers aimed at an alternative readership. The inclusion of Louisa Lawson’s *Dawn* is also an attempt to capture what feminist voices had to say on these matters. Similarly, *Freeman’s Journal* offers insights into a Irish Catholic perspective, a sector of society ever likely to rub up against British-derived opinion.


\(^{59}\) Morrison, "Fourth Estate," 36. The same was generally true of British newspapers, the *Times* being the most copied. Koss, *Rise and Fall*, 22-23.
For the British press I have cast my net more widely. I felt that the comparatively lesser amount of coverage given to Australian troops in the British press warranted a broader sample of texts so as to adequately discuss the range of reporting that occurred. Moreover, the time frame covered required a flexible approach to source material to draw upon publications that were prominent (or only appeared) in later periods. For example, though the Times was a hugely influential daily throughout the period of my study, by the time of the Boer War its influence was being challenged by populist papers such as the Daily Mail, which embodied a format, style and tone that simply did not exist during the time of the Waikato War.

To capture the differences and similarities in British press language I have included papers representing varied ideologies and geographies. While, say, the Standard and the Manchester Guardian are obvious choices to provide some political balance to, for example, the Times, I felt a need to include more radical papers such as Reynolds in an effort to feel for the boundaries of acceptable public opinion. Likewise, just as major English metropolitan dailies had to be included in a study such as this, I considered it necessary to include titles outside of London. Similarly, I have included papers from Scotland, Wales and Ireland to properly account for British press rhetoric, rather than English alone. Indeed, some of the more interesting revelations come from a comparison between what these other British publications were saying about opinions emanating from the centre of its Empire, and the variance in allegiances evident between colonial and British papers.

With the parameters of study defined it pays to further interrogate how the formal qualities of the newspaper impacted upon contemporary culture. According to Mark Turner the press stressed “the rhythm of modernity . . . establishing the patterns of everyday life.” That is, newspapers are structurally reliant on modern notions of linear time with each issue dependent on what preceded it while anticipating its next edition. For Benedict Anderson it was this sense of temporality, the scheduled and steady progression of daily editions, rather than the necessary continuance of specific content, that assisted readers in imagining themselves as members of a broad community. Or, in his words: “Reading a newspaper is like reading a novel whose author has abandoned any thought of a coherent plot.”

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Yet if newspapers were, as John Sommerville argues, “the first product with planned obsolescence,” designed only to stimulate its consumer to dispose of its prior edition and purchase the following one, the effect is to engender a false equivalence of the worth of each day’s news.\footnote{C. John Sommerville, \textit{The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20–21.} Simply put, news becomes a commercial product to be sold irrespective of the weight of events occurring on any given day.\footnote{Ibid., 7–8.} The task then becomes to critically evaluate the claims of significance a paper affords a particular story. In other words, if “news decontextualizes everything it reports,” then critical analysis must recontextualise it.\footnote{Ibid., 7–8.}

The historical study of newspapers, then, presents a methodological irony. As documents of the past, newspapers are archived for posterity. Yet for ordinary readers, they are defined by their ephemerality, deliberately fleeting in a way that many other public texts are not. Unlike the novel, newspapers are not usually intended for sustained and repeated contemplation, but rather for “extractive reading.”\footnote{Tony Ballantyne, "Reading the Newspaper in Colonial Otago," \textit{Journal of New Zealand Studies}, no. 12 (2011): 58. It should be recognised that many literary novels were first serialised within periodicals, Conrad’s \textit{Heart of Darkness} being a pertinent example.} Equally distinctive is the newspaper’s narrative style where, also unlike a novel, there is no grand denouement but rather a ceaseless succession of sub-plots and micro-resolutions. Whereas the novelistic plot typically concludes by revealing an internal logic after a careful pacing of events, newspaper reports generally aim not to prolong mystery but to eliminate it in an instant revelatory moment. They take incidental and disparate happenings and organise them into a form that it is deemed newsworthy (marketable), coheres as a narrative, and employs accessible and mutually reinforcing codes and conventions. Newspapers in this sense remain both the most original and the most derivative of media. By definition, readers must consider their content new. Yet they must also act as “structuring institutions” for readers requiring an existing and accessible patchwork of references close to hand.\footnote{Aled Jones and Bill Jones, "The Welsh World and the British Empire, C. 1851-1939: An Exploration," in \textit{The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity}, ed. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 67.} Newspapers therefore constitute a “methodological field” where a single


\textit{Imagined Communities}, 33n54.

\textit{Imagined Communities}, 33n54.
text is a part of a larger relationship between other texts that provides no set interpretive meaning, and cannot be isolated from its signifying system.\[^{68}\]

Given the contradiction of the newspaper’s presentation as both a self-contained document and a contingent and poly-vocal assemblage, there is an analogy with the notion of community as discussed in the chapters below. The newspaper has, according to Laurel Brake and Julie Codell, only a “false unity.”\[^{69}\] And by gathering unrelated fragments and presenting them as unified, it parallels the fictive cohesion of, say, nation or Empire. Both offer the illusion of solidarity. So too is the identity of an individual publication a prerequisite for allowing for its internal miscellaneity to be assimilated. The referent here is to how, as I will argue, collective feelings of Britishness permitted a distinctive “Australianess” to exist within it.

As epitomised particularly in leading columns and letters, newspaper consumers partook of a peculiar dynamic of reading a (usually anonymous) piece written on behalf of a public that itself was shaped through the hailing of these same (often solitary) readers.\[^{70}\] In other words, though a newspaper economically targets groups, it interpellates individuals as those who should be reading that text.\[^{71}\] Newspapers are likely to successfully interpellate individuals, however, only by catering to their identification with a particular group. In Peter Sinnema’s phrasing, “the reading ‘I’ is drawn into an imagined reading ‘we,’ identifiable primarily by its difference from the externalized and objectified subject(s) of representation.”\[^{72}\] Readers are joined in the act of both knowing their group and, through information about other groups, of knowing where their distinction lies. This intimate knowledge imparts a cultural currency demonstrating a reader’s community credentials. As Simmena argues, the “‘thing’ that is ‘sold’ is not simply the picture or its accompanying word, but the ideology (class attitude, national pride).”\[^{73}\]

In the structural constraints of newspapers we can also discern its slippages and inconsistencies.\[^{74}\] John Hartley rightly claims that “news discourse is hostile to

\[^{70}\] This thought owes much to Anderson, Imagined Communities.
\[^{73}\] Ibid., 150.
ambiguities.”\textsuperscript{75} This hostility, however, certainly does not prevent such ambiguity from appearing. Any attempt to present a semblance of unity of, say, the British Empire was already ideologically compromised and required persistent rhetorical management. Martin Conboy, in a study of how press rhetoric constructs and appeals to various ideological conceptions of “the people,” thus suggests that popular newspapers must “close down a potentially infinite heteroglossia into a unified editorial voice but one which still may appear to draw on the energies of a multiplicity of voices and attitudes.”\textsuperscript{76} Yet, Conboy observes, driven by the profit motive, “newspapers’ style and content remain determined ultimately by the voice of the political economy.”\textsuperscript{77} As useful as it is, Conboy’s conception of a dialogic relationship between publications and their readers should be supplemented by attending to more subtle contradictions that typically, and most effectively, occur unconsciously, even within a single writer’s text.

Reading press discourses through the concept of ideological fantasy (discussed below) offers a more refined approach to the task of comprehending textual contradictions. I here follow Graham Dawson in reading narratives of Empire as “being at once psychic fantasy and a cultural commodity, the product of the unconscious as well as of culture industries.”\textsuperscript{78} The key move is to ascertain how newspaper language functioned to manage the anxieties of Empire. That the press at these times attempted to give harmony to, as Laurel Brake puts it, “a cacophony of discourses,” can be seen as a necessary illusion precisely because newspaper language was routinely contradictory.\textsuperscript{79}

As such, the main question pertains less to uncovering the “truths” of individual texts than to understanding how they masked inconsistencies, and why this exercise was fraught. That is, to understand why particular historical narratives fail.\textsuperscript{80} Read in this way, we can view the press as neither fully shaping nor mirroring society, in the terms of the timeworn debate. Rather, we should read newspaper rhetoric as attempting to provide apparent resolutions to societal conflicts. The Victorian-era

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
  \bibitem{76} Martin Conboy, \textit{The Language of Newspapers: Socio-Historical Perspectives} (London: Continuum, 2010), 6 (emphasis added).
  \bibitem{77} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
press did not shape society as such—though they were a key cultural artefact in systematising and reproducing its discourses.\textsuperscript{81} Nor did they mirror it, as this ostensible mirroring, if successful, offered only an idealised misrecognition of a divided social body.

\textbf{The Social Fantasy}

The reader will have noticed several allusions to psychoanalytic ideas. I have found this conceptual language helpful in understanding the concerns set out above. In this I follow influential postcolonial scholarship of recent decades and the influence of this on historiography, sociology and political science as these disciplines try to grasp more clearly the operation of social thought and action.\textsuperscript{82} Indeed the ambiguities of Empire have prompted scholars to question the possibility of comprehending colonialism without considering such notions as fantasy, desire, and displacement.\textsuperscript{83} But such theories have less often addressed the specificities of settler colonialism.\textsuperscript{84} The positivist aversion to this approach may stem in part from its uneasy relationship to empirical evidence. What is unconscious, after all, cannot be seen. These objections would appear amplified at the level of social and historical forces. Employing some of these concepts to supplement a materialist approach does, however, allow a different slant on questions of social motivation. For instance, what we notice as rhetorical discrepancies and omissions might not

\textsuperscript{81} Hartley, \textit{Understanding} 62.
just be contingent differences of opinion but the necessary appearance, at the level of public speech, of attempts to pave over inherent tensions.

If Ernesto Laclau is correct in asserting that all societies have the “fullness of the community” as their “impossible object,” then it is only through misrecognition that a society can avoid the trauma of its dislocations by appearing even potentially whole.\(^8^5\) The perpetuation of this misrecognition is, in the technical parlance, the role of fantasy. Recent theorising thus gives fantasy an active, causative role, as the frame through which subjects perceive and tolerate reality.\(^8^6\) Fantasy, for example, assists in accounting for the perplexing array of statements the modern reader confronts in late-nineteenth-century Australian newspapers by viewing textual anomalies as one way of avoiding the paradoxes of settler narratives. Fantasy, then, is no mere scholarly indulgence. As Jacqueline Rose has argued, “fantasy—far from being the antagonist of the public, social being—plays a central, constitutive role in the modern world of states and nations,” and is essential to understanding political identities.\(^8^7\) Besides its more gratifying connotations, fantasy, Rose argues, “can just as well surface as fierce blockading protectiveness, walls up all around our inner and outer, psychic and historical, selves.”\(^8^8\)

Nor is identification, and its more common variant “identity,” easily separable from the material matters of Empire. Can it really be supposed that citizens of the self-governing Australian colonies would have been so enthusiastically willing to sacrifice their lives and treasure to the imperial cause had they acted only out of rational self-interest rather than seeing themselves as emotionally fused to the Empire? As Barbara Penny, in her study of Australian reactions to the South African War contends: “Imperialism is a belief as well as a political phenomenon,” and “one can often come closer to understanding it by exploring the emotions underlying significant events than by describing the events themselves.”\(^8^9\) A fundamental lesson the North American colonies had demonstrated at the end of the 18th century, a lesson only too well known to London’s elites, was that trade and consanguinity alone were insufficient to prevent a severing of the imperial cord. The historical irony was that this same severance and the consequent cessation of

\[^8^6\] This is in opposition to the conventional understanding of fantasy as an illusion or as the antithesis of reality. For an exploration of this approach see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), Ch. 1.
\[^8^8\] Ibid.
the American colonies as a terminus for British convicts hastened the need for a new penal colony in New South Wales—a further reminder of Empire’s global appetite.

The conception I have outlined clearly seeks a rapprochement of historicism and psychoanalytic theory, a body of thought frequently charged with being transtheoretical. “Yet,” Fredric Jameson reminds us, “psychoanalysis always involves a tricky and unstable balance between the theorisation of an eternal human psyche and the historical singularity of culture and mores,” that is, of a never satisfied desire on one hand and periodisation on the other.90 Accordingly, Sally Alexander grants that although concepts such as the unconscious and fantasy may seem to be universal, their experience is profoundly subject to social relations and historical context.91 Identification, in other words, shifts and fluctuates according to circumstance.92

Scholars have also rehearsed the risks (or worse) of applying this thought to social groups as opposed to individuals or works of art. Anthony Moran counsels: “One must proceed cautiously when negotiating the shifts in analysis between individual psychological process and collective social processes,” but insists that (paraphrasing Freud), “one must recognize that individual psychology is always at the same time social psychology.”93 Indeed Slavoj Žižek has persuasively argued that, despite the common relegation of affect in modernist accounts of nationalism, the affective element alone instils any group identification with substance.94

Sara Ahmed has accordingly forwarded a theory of “affective economies” in which emotions “align individuals with communities,” and “mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social.”95 Affect is here “produced only as an effect of

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92 Slavoj Žižek says the same of the Lacanian Real which “in a way, is historical, in the sense that each historical epoch, if you will, has its own Real.” Christopher Hanlon and Slavoj Žižek, ”Psychoanalysis and the Post-Political: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek,” New Literary History 32, no. 1 (2001): 16.
94 Slavoj Žižek, Terrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 201-03.
its circulation.”\textsuperscript{96} Likewise, Derek Hook’s interpretation of a “trans-individual societal unconscious freed of biological essentialism,” aims to avoid the twin pitfalls of volunteerism and determinism.\textsuperscript{97} Hook suggests that colonial, and we can add settler, pathologies constitute “an ongoing series of fantasmatic transactions between subjects and the . . . structural-symbolic system that make up the colonial sphere itself.”\textsuperscript{98} For Hook, it is through this dynamic that we can view “the trans-subjective social network – the ‘big Other’ of colonialism . . . as inclusive of social structure, of longstanding historical and socio-economic power-relations.”\textsuperscript{99} The (mis)identification of wholeness and fixed meaning is thus the result of being enmeshed within a pre-existing system of social relations.\textsuperscript{100}

If affect is not solely the attribute of an extra-social individual but is “conditioned by a . . . backdrop of historical values, meanings, roles and similar symbolic designations,” as Hook contends, the task when discussing collectivities is to determine the interface between the individual, the social and the historical.\textsuperscript{101} This should not imply that social structure unyieldingly determined discourse. Rather, argues John Cash, it highlights “the range of common-sense understandings, the predominant reality principles, that are recursively drawn upon by subjects to construe how to be and how to act.”\textsuperscript{102} This is a process that was both productive, dynamic and, in the pages of the press, performative.

Nor does their contingency mean that identities cannot be momentarily stabilised. Indeed, if ideologically successful, this stabilisation appears both timeless and natural. I understand colonial Australian society, that is, its habits of language, custom, law, and shared history, as having fashioned the way its citizens imagined and identified with one another, their various “others,” and the different collectivities of colony, nation and Empire. In one such particularly blunt formulation, Damien W. Riggs and Martha Augoustinos have suggested that “the originary violence of the Australian nation continues to shape the ways in which

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{97} Derek Hook, \textit{A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid} (East Sussex: Routledge, 2012), 117 (original emphasis).
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 67.
those invested in the nation relate to one another." In all of this, the role of fantasy is to smooth over and fill out these connections to give them an apparent harmony. The following chapters, then, examine narrative attempts to come to terms with history by locating within Australian and British newspapers certain rhetorical recurrences that were sustained, altered or discontinued throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century.

**Overview**

Though I trace the repetition of tropes in British and Australian press rhetoric, I do not wish to imply that these represented the feelings or attitudes of each individual. Nor do I intend a mass denunciation of these societies. There certainly existed, as Henry Reynolds has documented, settlers stirred by “whisperings in their hearts.” Yet one need not participate in violent dispossession to benefit from the forces that elicited it. Even grudging or unwitting successors of settler colonial processes perpetuated its social structure. It is my understanding that the consequent rationalisations or contestations of this structure can be glimpsed in the divergent patterns of speech that accumulated during certain impassioned moments.

As with each newspaper, therefore, it would be mistaken to view individuals in isolation, entangled as they were in their social and cultural orders. At the cost of reducing profoundly diverse entities, however (Australia, let alone Britain, was composed of distinct colonies, a varied demography, different classes and religions, urban and rural centres etc.), there is value in reading British and Australian newspaper discourse on these matters together, at the social level, as mutually, if unequally, constitutive. We can then be attuned not only to textual absences, but also to the relationship between the affective states perceptible at the rhetorical

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level and how social and historical circumstances prompted these responses. Equally, I acknowledge my references to Indigenous peoples risks homogenising many divergent groups and kinships. I make no claim to speak for their experience. My concern is how they were occasionally spoken of and alluded to within the newspaper press, and how we can apprehend their presence, often on the margins of these texts. This is a study of imperial and settler, not Indigenous, language.

A basic conceit of the following chapters is the dialogic exchange between the newspapers of Australia and Britain. After the following short contextual chapter, the next three chapters offer the Australian press response to the Waikato, Sudan and South African conflicts respectively. The Sixth chapter offers the British “reply.” It perhaps goes without saying that this dialogue was to a large extent simultaneous, reciprocal and, insofar as the cut-and-paste practice of the era prevailed, often indistinguishable.

Chapter Two discusses the historical situation shaping the reporting of the conflicts examined. I here attend broadly to issues of race, community identification and the apprehensions of nineteenth-century Australian and British society. The remaining chapters support the claims made thus far by zooming in on each specific moment. Chapter Three, on the 1863-64 Waikato War, primarily addresses the rationalisations and anxieties that often accompanied settler speech. Specifically, I read Australian press accounts of events in New Zealand as sites at which competing conceptions of the British settler project were negotiated in relation to perceived challenges to it. These discussions turned largely on the cost-benefit calculation of the colonies. Australian newspapers defended themselves and their fellow settlers in New Zealand against accusations of their mistreatment of Indigenous populations, while prominent British editorials urged withdrawal of imperial war funding. It was, I suggest, the displacement of unease over Australia’s own foundations onto a parallel case in New Zealand that highlighted the operation of a trans-settler sensitivity to critique. This affective state can, I claim, be described as a defence of the fantasy sustaining settler reality.

Chapter Four, set during the 1885 Sudan crisis, focuses on the apparent irony of an emergent nationalism at a time of intense imperial patriotism. I examine how the contingent of troops offered by New South Wales to assist Britain in Africa prompted ubiquitous claims of imperial “unity.” The differing and incongruous rhetorical uses made of the NSW contingent, however, spoke to the impossibility of this same unity. After placing the episode in its historical setting I detail the ways in
which these loud (and proud) proclamations of unity were troubled by, firstly, the
difficulties in demarcating a distinct colonial identity within white Britishness.
Secondly, the desire to be noticed by Britain exposed the pressures of a society
seeking to have its importance externally approved. Finally, the public sphere of the
press itself saw challenges to mainstream narratives undermine the linguistic terms
of imperial loyalty. These were, however, challenges that could not break from their
own inner tensions.

Chapter Five, on the 1899-1902 South African War, looks at settler rationales used
in discussions of Australian involvement in the war. This language was marked by
moves into racial comparisons between and against white Australians and their
Chinese, Boer and “native” “others.” These comparisons exemplified the ever-
shifting nature of race as a signifier that could sustain or weaken particular
historical plots. This language, moreover, was also explicitly gendered, with
apprehensions of industrial society finding expression in the masculine “Bushman”
solider and attention turning to the maternal bearers of white Britishness. This was,
again, a manner of discourse shaped by the dependence upon its reception by the
mother country.

An extended sixth chapter takes a view from the British press to sample the
commentary on Australian troops and their societies available to British and
colonial readers alike. The first section demonstrates the kinds of confronting
British editorials that settlers might have read, eliciting the defences described in
chapter three. It also, however, discusses the ways in which British allies could be
found. In each case Australian and British newspapers could be seen to borrow
from one another as their positions demanded. The second section outlines the
ways in which the NSW contingent to the Sudan affirmed the story of the white
colonies as flag bearers for the future of the Empire and a reminder to potential
challengers of the Empire’s strength. The third and final section shows how far the
narrative role played by the colonies had come. From an imperial inconvenience in
the 1860s to their revival in the 1880s, by the 1890s the settler colonies were less
imperial dependents than proven partners. Yet the same transnational press system
that circulated these joyous claims equally allowed for dissenting ideas to be
distributed and read by British and colonial observers. Chapter’s Three to Six each
offer extensive consideration of their subject, though I hope to have spared the
reader’s patience with regular sub-sections in each. I conclude with a reflection on
the potential implications of studies such as my own and on promising directions for future research.

This outline is not meant to suggest that there is no overlap between themes. Reiteration of certain ideas is, in an important sense, precisely the point. In each historical moment I examine, the responses to recurrent tensions share some consistency. But I do not simply force divergent readings on identical patterns. Rather, though sharing a basic impetus, within each historical excavation lay an impression that was more marked at some times than others. How these patterns merge in to one another and drift apart attests to the wealth of the newspaper archive.

Considering the topic and period at hand it might reasonably be expected that the following chapters discuss the highly influential trinity of “Greater Britain” texts, namely; Charles Dilke’s *Greater Britain* (1868), John Seeley’s *The Expansion of England* (1883), and James Froude’s *Oceana, or, England and Her Colonies* (1886), all of which to some degree intuited (or promoted) the emotive connections between the so-called British World. So, too, from an Australian perspective, one might anticipate ample attention paid to “Banjo” Paterson. It is indeed fascinating to trace Paterson’s shift from the anonymous dissident-poet of the radical *Bulletin* during the Sudan crisis to his compliance with the mythology of the Australian soldier as war correspondent for the mainstream *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Argus* during the South African War, before turning against that war in turn.

Though these figures might occasionally surface in the following pages, the emphasis remains on more quotidian and less distinguished newspaper samplings.

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The structure of this thesis might also appear to suggest a debt to a Whiggish historical teleology leading from the mid-century boom to the 25th April 1915, from gold to Gallipoli as it were.\textsuperscript{111} Though not intended as such, it remains impossible to divorce perhaps the defining chapter of white Australian mythology from its seeming precedents. Without masking the complexities of each historical moment, I prefer to view the elements that would subsequently constitute the Anzac legend as being largely in place on these earlier occasions and awaiting only a fitting occasion for their expression.\textsuperscript{112} I therefore view each instance as encircling recurring problems rather than as stepping stones to the Dardanelles.

Finally, in the spirit of a study dealing with identification and history, I wish to note that the motivation for my research was a belated coming-to-terms with my own position as a beneficiary of settler colonialism. As a dual citizen of New Zealand and Australia, half-Tasmanian and of Scottish and Irish extraction, the “settleness” imbedded in my own heritage was not something I had thought to inquire into until far too recently.\textsuperscript{113} Accordingly, I cannot fully disassociate the inspiration for this study from the feelings I hold toward the enterprise that forged both of my homes. This text too is shaped by its historical moment.


\textsuperscript{112} Though the ongoing and vitriolic debates over the meaning of Anzac would seem to further attest to the impossibility of social cohesion. See Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, eds., What’s Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO: SYMPTOMS OF EMPIRE

In The Colonies

To better understand the press discussions of Australian troops we must first situate events in New Zealand, Sudan and South Africa in their historical settings. By the 1860s Australian social consciousness encompassed local community belonging, colonial and imperial loyalty, and an embryonic national awareness. These were subsumed, above all and without dissonance, by a pervasive ideology of British racial progress. As the following chapters argue, however, attachments grounded in a shared Britishness, could have a tense relationship with transnational settler solidarities. Although uneven in their import, these group affinities were interwoven rather than independent categories and must be viewed together.

Andrew Hassam warns that overemphasising the differences between Austrolianness and Britishness is to mistakenly assume “that there is a natural, coherent, and timeless notion of Britishness, and that being British and being Australian were mutually exclusive categories.” Indeed the point of a transnational British identification, for Robert Young, was that those on the margins of the white British Empire often felt it most acutely. This entailed a relationship that “simultaneously asserted a grounding in the past and continuity with the centre, and the distance of rupture, displacement, migration, colonization.” Post-1788 Australia, then, for all its internal and structural heterogeneity, operated within an unequal but mutual relationship with Britain. Yet for reasons of clarity I discuss the

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5 Ibid., 6-7.
Australian colonies and Britain (inclusive of England, Scotland, Wales, and, most problematically, Ireland) as discrete entities.\(^6\)

Though being at once British and Australian necessitated no competition between loyalties we must distinguish colonial loyalty to the British Government from an attachment to Britishness *per se.*\(^7\) This was, moreover, not a relationship of mere complementarity. Rather, as Russell McGregor has argued, Britishness provided the necessary foundation in which a sense of Australianness could be cultivated.\(^8\) Given the now customary proviso to view imperial power alongside its tenuous hold on those it colonised, we should recognise that, Indigenous resistance and radical dissent aside, for British settlers in Australia the *idea* of Empire, as opposed to specific imperial actions or representatives, was a resilient one. Even instances of dispute often came from a position of loyalty to the broader British community and which could enhance a sense of participatory belonging to it. Here we can read of colonists “who, paradoxically, may have chosen to affirm their Britishness even in the act of resisting British imperialism.”\(^9\) It thus pays to be as attentive to the subject positions assigned by press rhetoric as much as its specific content.

A textual reflection of this relationship exists in reports and editorials where, depending on the context, Australia was variously referred to by its individual colonies; as a nation; in tandem with New Zealand as “Australasia”; and collectively with all the white British settler colonies, or even with non-white possessions such as India. By contrast to other colonial modes, talk of British settler colonists defining themselves against Empire is often misleading. Australian expressions of identity through their participation in colonial conflicts are only comprehensible when understood as contributions to the British Empire’s global project. For these

\(^6\) Ireland legally belonged to the imperial parliament while essentially remaining a colony. Christine Kinealy, “At Home with the Empire: The Example of Ireland,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77.


reasons, any either/or study of Australian national or imperial identification tends to offer a somewhat static analysis.  

Any presumption that the expansion of the British Empire necessarily gave free rein to its settler colonial variant, however, was subject to frequent opposition in the nineteenth-century British press. Tensions between the white colonies and London were frequent and were evident in debates over imperial military funding, interference into Australian immigration restriction, and the Australian "sub-imperialism" in the South Pacific that peaked in the 1880s. Such tensions would frame debates during the Waikato, Sudan and South African conflicts. Throughout the latter part of the century the Imperial Government had to weigh often bothersome colonial demands against broader strategic imperatives (New Zealand Governor George Grey’s manipulation of an unenthusiastic Imperial Government to procure sufficient numbers of troops to invade the Waikato was a case in point.  

At all times these moves were discussed, challenged and negotiated in news print. Concentrating only on the interrelations between various geographic groupings, however, is insufficient. In considering how different levels of community intersected we need also to locate the “nodal point” of race through which the subject positions of colonial, national, and imperial citizen were threaded. To pose this as a question we might ask: if one can accept a particular nineteenth-century subject identifying as New South Welsh, Australian and British simultaneously, would it have been be possible to accept the same person as any of these if they did not first possess the requisite whiteness? I maintain that each of the above communities were conditioned, if often indirectly, by racial categories. In other words, whiteness marked (and still marks) a “privileged entitlement” in Australian society even if this operated without conscious intent.

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10 This seems to be the tone of John Griffiths’ recent study disputing the impact of imperial culture in Australian and New Zealand cities. John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).


12 Definitions of race shifted throughout the nineteenth century and encompassed modern ideas of ethnicity, culture and scientific racial doctrine. For clarity I have generally avoided the term ethnicity and have, advisedly, used “race” throughout. Young, *English Ethnicity*, 43. The conception of the “nodal point” is taken from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001 [1985]), xi.

As the nineteenth century progressed, furthermore, this racial coding took on new emphasis. Contrary to ideas of its silent presence, British settlers, according to the editors of a recent collection, bombastically pronounced their whiteness, if only “in response to the exigencies of settler-colonial expropriation and its concomitant anxieties.” Indeed, for Bill Schwarz, this idea of whiteness was first produced in the colonies and only later trafficked to the metropole. Whiteness was no ahistorical essence but was conceptualised, sustained, and tested as the needs of the moment demanded. And these needs differed depending on location. Whiteness could take on very different inflexions when discussed with reference to Australians in different parts of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa or Sudan. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds therefore suggest that settlers were passionately attached to, and defensive of, the whiteness that, “at once global in its power and personal in its meaning,” bequeathed to them their privilege.

On a more material level, the affiliations and tensions within the Australian relationship to Britain gained greater significance with the rapid increase in wealth and population following the mid-century gold rush that provided apparent proof of the intrinsic worth of the settler colonial project. The global diaspora of British emigrants, many of whom landed on Australian shores in great waves between 1850 and 1890, was such that by the turn of the century Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide had quadrupled their populations from the 1860s. This demography ensured the emotive links between “home” and colony.

Further solidifying these links, the telegraph had internally connected most of Australia by 1861, and by 1872 the Australian colonies were officially wired to England, meaning information could travel from London to the colonies in a matter

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17 A “stagnant” Tasmania was a notable exception to this economic boom. Adelaide also “slumped” in the 1880s. See Geoffrey Blainey, A Land Half Won (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1980), 295, 280. For an economically-minded comparative study of late-nineteenth-century settler societies see Donald Denoon, Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983).
of days or hours rather than weeks or months. Other investments in colonial identities were explicit in the opposing economic ideologies of protectionist Victoria and free market New South Wales, reflecting an intense rivalry amounting to distinct visions for the continent’s future. This rivalry was largely conducted in the pages of the press with “King” David Syme’s brazenly proselytising Age the most ardent platform for his protectionist convictions.

As if to underscore these tensions, the years 1851 and 1859 brought Victoria and Queensland respectively political separation from NSW. At the same time, colonial matters could be surpassed by those of more national concern. That newspapers could echo intra as well as inter-colonial rivalry, exemplified in the bitter feuds between the Age and Argus in Victoria, or South Australia’s Advertiser and Register, further complicated the situation. Accordingly, Meg Tasker’s comparative analysis of nationalism in two colonial Australian periodicals draws attention to “the way in which each would define itself against other publications, and in doing so create a distinctive sense of identity or presence in the contemporary print culture as well as in history.” Newspapers of likeminded politics could here display more in common than rival papers of the same colony. These alliances were evident in the cable news cartels with, during 1885 Sudan crisis, the SMH, Argus, and Adelaide Register aligning with Reuters, and the Age, the Daily Telegraph and the Adelaide Advertiser forming a rival grouping. By the

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19 In both cases Western Australia was the exception. Alan Atkinson, The Europeans in Australia: A History. Volume Two: Democracy. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004), 321; Graeme Osborne and Glen Lewis, Communication Traditions in Australia: Packaging the People (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.


time of the South African War these competing factions had merged their operations.\textsuperscript{25}

Partly for the above reasons Australian newspaper editorials and letters exuded ambiguity as much as confidence. Yet this had deeper roots. During my period of study (1863-1902) settler Australians felt profoundly their geographical isolation at a moment when non-British imperial powers were showing increasing intent in the South Pacific region. The Australian continent’s proximity to Asia, as David Walker has shown, has been an ongoing source of anxiety for Australian colonists, shaping their culture and official policy alike.\textsuperscript{26} Moreover, the colonies were marked by the historical animosity between its Protestant English and the Catholic Irish immigrants, riven by growing class, gender and social divisions, and unable to shake the remaining ignominy of the convict stain. Theirs was also an existence predicated on the ongoing and violent dispossession of the continent’s original population to make way for its new one.

These were not unconnected elements. Large scale white British immigration, cheap convict (and later Chinese and coerced Pacific Islander) labour, and the usurpation of land to produce for Britain the wool, dairy and mutton exports on which the Australian economy depended, were constituent parts of a broader imperial initiative.\textsuperscript{27} As might be expected, the stories settlers told (and tell) themselves tended to both justify their territorial presence and absolve them of any negative consequences of it. If the fundamental dynamic of settler colonial societies is the forcible taking of Indigenous territory to establish new modes of production followed by the renunciation of the costs of these same acts, then both the physical and epistemological violence inherent in this operation were (are) easily detectable in Australia.\textsuperscript{28}

Viewed from the British press, representations of Australia followed a certain pattern throughout much of the century. Often this was as a caricature of a place of


\textsuperscript{26} David Walker, \textit{Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939} (St. Lucia: UQ Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{27} The practice of procuring “Kanaka” labour coincided to a marked degree with the period of this study, from 1863 until the turn of the century. See Tracey Banivanua-Mar, \textit{Violence and Colonial Dialogue: The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007).

\textsuperscript{28} Lorenzo Veracini, \textit{Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview} (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 75.
outcasts and gold, a location for emigration and social depredation. Though colonists were, in these accounts, reassuringly white and British, these qualities remained compromised. Read back in the colonies, the pseudo-scientific racial thought gaining prominence from mid-century created a distressing bind. As Tom Griffiths has written, the “same Darwinism that comforted colonists about the destruction of the Aborigines created dark suggestions in their minds about the consequences of their own convict beginnings.” The resultant sensitivity that British Australia was yet to be validated was no trivial matter. Without a secure identity to embrace, colonial foundations resisted a narrative of historical progress. The urgency of attaining this narrative is suggested by Kate Foord’s reminder that the “fundamental fantasy at the foundation of all other fantasies is always one that involves origin . . . no less for a group (such as a nation) than for an individual subject.” Though its actors need not consciously register this process, it certainly marked the discursive manoeuvres of newspaper opinion.

With similar problems in mind, Cherie Lacey has suggested that settler trauma is based on an “impossible origin” of being “unwilling to maintain (the) genealogical link” of the original colonisers. Although Lacey in my view correctly claims that the original act of colonisation must be occluded and that this repression will inevitably result in its symbolic return and repetition, the identifications Australian settlers made in the nineteenth century also required the reincorporation of settler origins into the safety of a larger British story. This was a paradox of Australian settler history. By necessitating the veiling of settler origins, history was a source of anxiety. Yet by allowing a recalibration of these origins into the teleology of Empire, historical narrative could ease this anxiety. I suggest that we can better understand much of the newspaper reporting of the three conflicts examined below as attempts to resolve this situation.

It is the fraught coming-to-terms with origins, the pre-occupation with defining a consolatory relationship to their society’s past that is often apparent in settler discourse. Historians have long understood these concerns. In 1973, Charles Rowley, on the back of a trilogy of pioneering books on settler-Indigenous relations, could claim that colonists, as “usurpers . . . cannot rest easy while the original occupier survives and refuses to concede and recognize his superior claim.”

Indeed Rowley suggests that this “consciousness of usurpation by both parties has far more lasting effects . . . than even the most extreme violence.” The resultant interplay between a determined amnesia and an incessant nostalgia ensnared settler societies in a process best described as disavowal. That is, the manner in which traumatic acts are simultaneously acknowledged and dismissed.

Settler-Indigenous violence, then, was hardly unknown in nineteenth-century Australia. Press reports often documented, however euphemistically, the occurrence of frontier conflict. The issue was not necessarily whether or not hostilities had occurred, but the problematic place they occupied in settler narratives as that which could be neither fully denied nor adequately incorporated without calling into question the validity of settler societies. How, in other words, was one to assimilate the observable brute facts of colonisation with the need to legitimate settler presence? The difficultly in resolving this bind helps to explain the various claims made about Indigenous populations within settler colonies; their inefficient land use, their mandatory redemption by Europeans, and predictions of their impending demise. This latter rationale was particularly insidious. Throughout the century the only substantial differences within the common settler belief that Indigenous peoples were destined, or doomed, to extinction were whether this was a direct result of colonisation, or whether it stemmed from something more mysterious. That this was a global view mitigated feelings of local responsibility. The position taken on the subject would decide whether Indigenous disappearance was to be regretted, celebrated, or quietly accepted. Often the

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34 Charles Dunford Rowley, "From Humbug to Politics: Aboriginal Affairs and the Academy Project," *Oceania* 43, no. 3 (1973): 186.
35 Ibid.
equation boiled down to whether it should justify halting settler colonisation altogether.\textsuperscript{38} Unsurprisingly, the answer was usually that it did not.

The point was therefore not to flatly deny traumatic histories but to comprehend them from a secure position. In the settler colonial context everyday life entailed a “perceptual editing” that tolerated Indigenous presence and dispossession in a way that normalised settler society.\textsuperscript{39} Individual consciousness and the social order were here interdependent. Appeals to collective civic morality and values sanctioned individual rationalisations. These appeals, furthermore, increasingly crossed geographical boundaries.

Settler-Indigenous relations played an important part in identifications made throughout the settler world. “As far as most colonial Britons were concerned,” writes Alan Lester, the “mutual consideration of the empire’s subordinated peoples in itself helped generate a collective consciousness of being part of a British diaspora.”\textsuperscript{40} The irony was that just as the purported lack of Indigenous rootedness justified settler usurpation of their land, white settlers were itinerant on a global scale, a pattern of movement that assisted the formation of a transnational British identity.\textsuperscript{41} Lester’s “collective consciousness,” hints at the affective investments made by settlers into the transgressions of their societies which repeatedly hailed its members as \textit{in it together}.\textsuperscript{42} Just as communities forge identifications through pride in stories of the past, they might also be bound by collective disavowal.\textsuperscript{43} As might be intuited, communities were likely to feel intensely the bonds rooted in this process. It is for such reasons that we cannot dismiss the language of affect as mere rhetorical embellishment. Sentiment mattered.\textsuperscript{44}

In light of their global identifications, it is little wonder that, as Kirsten McKenzie had written of New South Wales earlier in the century: “Concern about the colony’s


\textsuperscript{39} Mark Rifkin, "Settler Common Sense," \textit{Settler Colonial Studies} 3, no. 3-4 (2013): 332, 39n.

\textsuperscript{40} Alan Lester, \textit{Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain} (London: Routledge, 2001), 189.


\textsuperscript{43} Tony Birch, ""History Is Never Bloodless": Getting It Wrong after One Hundred Years of Federation," \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 33, no. 118 (2002): 45.

image amounted almost to an obsession.”45 The gaze of the mother country was indeed necessary for colonial self-recognition. When directed at colonial misdemeanours, however, the effect was wholly uncomfortable. Intensified metropolitan scrutiny of colonial life had to be refocused on features less detrimental to settler reputations. Here the performative role of newspapers was crucial.

Australian press rhetoric was, I claim, motivated not only by how colonial Australians imagined themselves, but by how they perceived themselves from Britain’s point of view.46 I am sympathetic to Anna Johnston’s assertion that because settlers were trapped between opposing claims to an Indigenous authenticity and an imperial authority, “settler identity must continually assess its own worth.”47 I merely add that only through external endorsement could this worth be registered. Accordingly, we can see each of the examined military involvements not only as axes around which meaning coalesced, but as moments when the position of the Australian colonies vis-à-vis Britain could be more clearly ascertained. It is this dynamic that accounts for the insistent questions Australian newspapers seemed to be asking, even if obliquely, in their commentaries: what exactly was Australia to England? What was it that England wanted from them? To these questions we can add another, retrospective, one: what narrative did these questions support?48 The answers to each of these had significant implications for how Australian newspapers reacted to British commentary on colonial affairs.

The often rapturous public reception of overseas nineteenth-century military campaigns patently contrasted with the muted response afforded to contemporaneous Aboriginal Australian resistance to settler invasion.49 Yet awareness of actions on the so-called frontier also announced problems of legitimacy within Britain itself. The 1850s saw Britain granting self-government of internal matters, including Aboriginal affairs, to Australia’s eastern colonies despite

49 The number of people (mostly Aboriginal) who died in Australia’s so-called frontier wars vastly exceeded the number of Australian deaths in the Sudan, Boer and Boxer conflicts combined. Kingston, Oxford History, 304.
knowledge of frontier violence being publicised in local and metropolitan reports.\textsuperscript{50} As Henry Reynolds points out, with this decision “the Colonial Office prepared to surrender responsibility for the Aborigines to the very colonists whom they had frequently accused of trying to exterminate the tribes they encountered.”\textsuperscript{51} Partly owing to the new lack of British restrictions on settlers, the frontier in parts of the country was arguably more violent in the second half of the nineteenth century than the first, though differing legal and political frameworks would influence the extent of this in each colony.\textsuperscript{52}

With the ensuing “philanthropist” response and often disingenuous metropolitan finger-wagging, the Australian colonies appeared as more than simply a blot on imperial attempts to spread civilisation. Zoe Laidlaw notes that metropolitan elites had an interest in isolating themselves and the imperial state from the behaviour of colonists, even whilst implicitly endorsing their actions.\textsuperscript{53} According to Patrick Wolfe, however, “So long as it persists with its claim to colonial territory . . . the metropolitan power cannot distance itself from the ostensibly unauthorized activities of frontier land grabbers.”\textsuperscript{54} Given that most honest policy makers in London could well predict the hostility that colonial expansion provoked, we can view Australian settler-Indigenous violence as a symptom of Empire.\textsuperscript{55} In other words, frontier conflict was not simply a regrettable deviation but rather was indicative of the violence of the colonial project as a whole. It follows that many humanitarian critics who argued for more humane modes of settlement often missed the point that the colonisation from which many of them benefited relied

\textsuperscript{50} Western Australia would have to wait until 1890. Reynolds, \textit{Forgotten War}, 146-47.

\textsuperscript{51} An \textit{Indelible Stain}?, 99.


upon the methods they decried. As they appeared in the press, such oversights enacted the basic ideological habit of news reportage: the discounting of systemic social features in favour of particular anomalies, that is, the singular over the structural.

**In Britain**

The irony of Australia seeking a secure narrative place within the Empire was that, at least according to imperial historian John Darwin, “the British Empire in its heyday was largely a sham.” A worldwide system without precedent, the conditions for the Empire’s expansion lay in a precarious geopolitical balancing act with considerations of prestige rivalling those of economics. Of prime concern was India, described by Ronald Hyam as “the one piece of genuine imperial real-estate possessed by the British . . . validat(ing) her claims to be a world power.” And although France and Russia persisted as Britain’s chief rivals, other mid-century geopolitical factors stood in Britain’s favour. Chinese disorder and Ottoman weakness, though of concern to imperial strategists, had sidelined two potential contenders for global supremacy. An expansionist post-Civil War U.S., though ever-threatening in the minds of British elites, was, like Japan, not considered an overt rival to British power until the end of the century.

It was the state of Europe, however, with its existing imperial powers locked in diplomatic stalemates or preoccupied with internal matters, which had created the conditions for Britain to take advantage of its massive industrial and naval power, and its financial, communications and migration networks from the early nineteenth century until its third quarter. This situation was already changing by

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58 Darwin, *Empire Project*, xi.
59 Ibid., 18-20, 305-07.
60 Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 32. Thus it has been claimed that “British Africa was a gigantic footnote to the Indian Empire.”
61 Ibid., 26-36.
62 Ibid., 18.
63 Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century*, 73.
64 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 155. See also Bernard Porter,
the time of the Waikato War in 1863. The realignment of European power relations would accelerate following Prussian victory over France in 1870 so that Britain could add Italy and, much more significantly, Germany (both unified at the beginning of the 1870s), to its list of imperial adversaries. By the 1890s, Britain’s relative dominance was steeply declining. The mid-Victorian period has thus generally been considered the high point of British imperial (relative) self-confidence, if not reaching the militaristic fervour of the century’s end.

Yet we should not exaggerate the gulf between the mid-Victorian period of the Waikato War and the late-Victorian period of the Sudan and South African conflicts. Severe crises of confidence certainly occurred in the former period, most notably the devastating Indian “Mutiny” that erupted in 1857. And just as there were many who maintained a sense of assurance in the Empire throughout the latter period, territorial expansion clearly was not confined to the high imperial moment, as the official annexation in 1840 of New Zealand itself indicates. Rather, the geopolitical situation that had allowed for the preferred system of “informal empire” had, through increased imperial competition, hastened measures to secure and consolidate existing territory that in turn led to the fitful and defensive taking of new territories. It was this phase, the acceleration of an existent pattern, that was famously accompanied by a more vocally aggressive aspect, itself often bravado masking deeper unease. I read Australia’s narrative role in all three military episodes within this context.

British anxieties throughout the second half of the nineteenth century thus frequently found expression in discussions over their role in the world. The British Empire was never a coherent, totalising “juggernaut,” but rather an umbrella term (one which I continue to use advisedly) that attempted to give solidity to a shifting arrangement of divergent enterprises, relationships and processes that could be

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66 Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century*, 198.


both dominant and brittle.\textsuperscript{69} Attitudes toward its direction and meaning were, moreover, diverse and keenly debated. There was only consensus around the ostensibly natural fact of its existence and a vague, if steady, faith in Victorian progress. Not that disagreement over the Empire would have been always apparent to those who suffered under and resisted, or accommodated and shared in its various manifestations. While the agency and opposition of the Empire’s variegated “subjects” was never absent, and while their experience was certainly not reducible to their relationship with Empire, or always detrimental, the asymmetry of power relations was, with important exceptions, undeniable. Understandably, nothing could better draw attention to debates over the Empire than challenges to it, perceived or real, and these challenges were of increasing concern as the century proceeded.

Imperial concerns were not the sole preserve of a bureaucratic elite. The British public had come to increasingly identify imperial health with national health.\textsuperscript{70} The newspaper press was the routine source of information with which to make these identifications. Yet if the British half of the press conversation was avidly received by readers in Australia, within Britain itself colonial news often amounted to intermittent background noise relevant mostly for practical and commercial matters or for news about migrated family members.\textsuperscript{71} Though it was the more Arcadian aspects of the colonies that scholars have often noted as having consequence for Britain, the extent of this, too, was largely geopolitical.\textsuperscript{72}


\textsuperscript{70} See Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., \textit{At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{71} This point is emphasised by Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, \textit{Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, C. 1850-1914} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 186. Magee and Thompson do, however, note the spikes in coverage of the colonies especially during the South African War. In terms of migration, furthermore, in the period of this study alone the Australian colonies received some 1.2 million British immigrants. See Janet McCalman and Rebecca Kippen, “Population and Health,” in \textit{The Cambridge History of Australia, Volume 1: Indigenous and Colonial History}, ed. Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 299.

Altered global circumstances over the century had overseen a noticeable shift in how Britain understood the white colonies. Despite increasing awareness of the benefits they offered, and notwithstanding the promotional literature aimed at potential emigrants, prominent mid-century British commentators had commonly deplored British settlers for their costly demands and their treatment of Indigenous peoples. By the 1880s, they had largely undergone a discursive recovery in British public discourse attended by a developing constellation of metaphors. From seeing the colonies as somewhat embarrassing and expensive children who were undermining claims to British liberality in their conduct toward "natives," by the end of the century Britons could increasingly read of maturing sons and daughters, and later of sisters and brothers sharing a more equitable family relationship. Colonists, in turn, claimed that they were improved Britons and that the territories they were “settling” were the answer to emasculating metropolitan industrialism. The period from the 1860s to the late-Victorian era thus saw the Australian colonies become a crucial element in imagining white British supremacy. This was a shift that gained momentum as perceived threats to racial purity rose.

The discrepancy between coverage of Australians in the Australian press compared with the British press is the most obvious difference between the two. Until the end of the century, the colonies largely existed in British newspapers as in imperial geography: peripherally. And while we do need to account for patterns at this level, this kind of quantifying can miss the point. I measure the importance of British press coverage of the colonies not solely in column inches but by the imaginative investment made in them at particular times of need.

The Waikato War occurred during a moment of relative imperial optimism, the “Irish question” aside. The concurrent American Civil War claimed page space from events in New Zealand and, even when Australia was given attention, this usually concerned other affairs, most notably the transportation of convicts to Western

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75 John Darwin dates the slow re-evaluation of the settler colonies from being a “drain” on imperial resources to “a more positive estimate” of them from the 1850’s. Darwin, *Empire Project*, 145-46.
77 I have been influenced here by the perceptive recent work of Bill Schwarz. Schwarz, *Memories of Empire*. See also Darwin, *Empire Project*, 101-02.
The Australian colonies were therefore less required, in a narrative sense, to bolster British confidence than they would increasingly become later in the century. Though Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson suggest that little news from the colonies would have been “deemed worthy of telegraphic transmission,” I feel it is more precise to say that this news was muted until such moments when the colonies became discursively “worthy.” At these times the colonies allowed British newspapers not only to avert their gaze from internal troubles or external threats, but also to discuss the function of settler societies, a discussion eagerly overheard as British reports flowed back to the colonies.

As it happens, the historical timeframe of this study also marks for Britain what Aled Jones has described as the "transformation of the popular newspaper from a fugitive literature which prowled the margins of social consciousness, to a professional and pervasive form of communication." Moreover, through their dispersal in reading rooms, cafes, libraries and public houses newspapers were more democratic than so-called higher forms of literature. The development of the press over this period followed the extension of education, reduced outlays resulting from the removal of newspaper taxes and the decreasing costs in newsprint. More disconcertingly for middle and upper class contemporaries, it also entailed the growing enfranchisement of hitherto marginalised classes, buoyed by the growing accessibility of sensationalist, radical and feminist publications.

This dilation of the public sphere meant economics was more important than ever, with papers such as the Daily Mail aiming for a more popular readership boosted by the jingoistic atmosphere of the South African War. Yet as Paula Krebs pointedly contends, “the notion of a single public that supported the imperial project was false.” It was, moreover, a shift in the civil function of newspaper journalism itself.

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78 A system which would only end in Western Australia in 1868. See for example, Times, 16 February, 1863, 8.
79 The history of the shift in attitude toward the colonies in the writings of prominent British commentators is thoroughly documented in Bell, Idea of Greater Britain.
80 Magee and Thompson, Empire and Globalisation, 190. The most (in)famous argument of the limitations of popular imperial influence within Britain is Bernard Porter, The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
84 Paula M. Krebs, Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 177.
that helped shatter any idea of a unified readership. Thus the timeframe of this study broadly coincides with changing conceptions of the nominal ideological role of the press from educating the public to speaking on behalf of it.\textsuperscript{85} Without suggesting a causal link between this shift and the signification of the events themselves, it is nonetheless interesting to think through each moment alongside the ideals guiding their textual expression. Following Mark Hampton, I see each episode as occurring within a period of broad change in the British press. Firstly, the tentative democratic ideal of the “free exchange of ideas” in the 1860s; secondly, the transitional period in the 1880s of increasingly concentrated ownership and dependence on advertising revenue and a mass, though diversified, readership; lastly, the populist content and form of full-blown “New Journalism” by century’s end, itself both influencing and influenced by the social upheavals of late-nineteenth-century Britain.\textsuperscript{86}

Consequently, the idea that, say, the \textit{Times}, the \textit{Daily News}, and \textit{Reynolds’s Weekly Newspaper} all spoke to, much less represented, a homogenous public is clearly erroneous. Different papers appealed to different sections of society not only in political sympathies (very broadly: “Conservative,” e.g. London \textit{Daily Telegraph} & Melbourne \textit{Argus}; “Liberal,” e.g. \textit{Manchester Guardian} & Melbourne \textit{Age}; and “Labour/Radical,” e.g. \textit{Reynolds’s Weekly} & the \textit{Bulletin}), but increasingly in popular formats and prices. Coverage of the British Empire within these papers was predictably diverse in quantity (generally increasing from the 1880s), subject matter, and tone.

Yet we should be cautious in celebrating reader agency in colonial and imperial newspapers. Despite the avenues open for contestation, especially in letters sections, the press largely consisted of elite institutions rather than neutral mediums of exchange.\textsuperscript{87} In the British and colonial press systems the numbers of middle and upper class males were vastly disproportionate to working classes, women, and, perhaps most of all, Indigenous groups.\textsuperscript{88} The following pages are

thus necessarily, if unfashionably, overrepresented by the voices of (to indulge in binaries) elites over radicals, men over women, whites over blacks, colonisers over colonised.
CHAPTER THREE

“The common interest of the Southern world”: The Waikato War, 1863-64

Between 1863-64 approximately 2400 volunteers left the Australian colonies for New Zealand to assist the war effort in, and the colonisation of, New Zealand’s North Island. This, the Waikato War, was “the largest and most important of the New Zealand Wars” that raged from the 1840s to the 1870s between British soldiers and settlers, and Māori.89 Retrospectively, the Waikato War has particular local importance in marking the decisive shift in the demographic and territorial balance of power toward settler society over Māori.90 The Australian volunteers to the Waikato were an official military force recruited and despatched by the New Zealand Government, and, according to their historians, were variously tempted by compensatory offers of land, the promise of imperial adventure, fraternal loyalty, and concerns over the consequences of British settler defeat in a neighbouring colony.91 It is the last two of these reasons that I feel warrant further discussion.

These did not go unnoticed in the local press at the time. For the *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, the contribution of troops from the Australian colonies made it “the first time in our history when the common interest of the Southern world has made Australians brethren in arms.”92 Likewise, for the *Argus*, the “war in New Zealand brings home to us very forcibly the vitality of that common bond of interest and of race which connects the Australian system.”93 The pride of their colonies, Jeff Hopkins-Weise has even recently argued, tenuously in my view, that the Australian volunteers provided a precedent for the future Anzac relationship between Australia and New Zealand.94 The historical attention that has been given to Australian involvement in the New Zealand Wars has generally been of a military or

89 James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1986), 119. It should be noted from the outset that some Māori aided the British side thus becoming known as *kupapa* (friendly), or Queenites (as in Queen Victoria) as opposed to Kingites (as in the Māori King Movement).
92 SMH, 15 August, 1863, 6.
93 Argus, 20 August, 1863, 5.
nationalist persuasion. Yet it is useful to read the Waikato War in its British settler colonial context to understand the debates that attended it.

While newspaper accounts seldom questioned the British Empire *per se*, the rationale and methods of settler colonists were frequently discussed. For instance, although Australian editorials occasionally conceded Māori claims of possession of their ancestral land, their allegedly unproductive use of it and their “barbarism” necessitated their making way for British sovereignty. Moreover, Australian press commentary on the Waikato War bears evidence of the displacement of anxieties pertaining to the Australian colonies onto New Zealand, or at least allowing implicit comparisons to be drawn. This in turn permitted mutual settler identifications based on historical commonalities, reading threats to one as potential threats to another.

If the Waikato War presented an opportunity to negotiate imperial and settler identifications, it also evidenced the impossibility of constructing an absolute identity. This being the case, the critical task is to locate and disentangle these identifications before suggesting explanations for the emotional investment in them.

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98 Lydia Wevers has argued that Australian novelists of the late-nineteenth century displaced concerns about the legitimacy of their nation onto that of the New Zealand settlers where possession of the land was legitimised through war with a strong adversary. I feel Wevers both overstates the sense of legitimacy likely felt by New Zealand’s settlers and rather understates the extent of Aboriginal Australian resistance. Lydia Wevers, "Becoming Native: Australian Novelists and the New Zealand Wars," *Australian Literary Studies* 22, no. 3 (2006): 326. See also Robert Dixon, "Rolf Boldrewood’s War to the Knife: Narrative Form and Ideology in the Historical Novel," ibid.12 (1986).
as they appeared in text. In this chapter I argue, firstly, that the Waikato War presented Australian newspapers with a textual field in which to assert the purpose and legitimacy of the settler project. Secondly, I claim that the circulation of transnational press complicated colonial relations with Britain. In particular, the Waikato War offered an occasion for Australian newspapers to petition against humanitarian meddling in colonial affairs while urging British military defence of the Tasman region. This exchange resulted in a set of press alliances and clashes. Finally, I argue that the rhetoric of the Australian press toward the Waikato War was grounded in a structure of affect that can be explicated using the theoretical concept of ideological fantasy.

What, then, were the immediate causes of General Duncan Cameron’s invasion of the Waikato on 12th July 1863? In a recent historical overview of the British Empire, John Darwin argued: “Few issues aroused more passionate feeling in settler societies than access to land, not least because its speculative purchase and re-sale were usually the main source of wealth for the settler elite.”99 As such, these settlers “were sure to resent any attempt to control their territorial advance . . . Left unchecked, its certain result was constant war on the frontier as indigenous peoples resisted the loss of their land.”100 The Waikato, with its verdant pastures and proximity to the growing Auckland settlement, was indeed a valuable prize for settlers.101 Yet its Māori owners did not cede such land easily. The consequent pressure to purchase Māori land and the growing immigration of settlers into the North Island eventually led in the 1850s to the unprecedented formation of a proto-national anti-land selling league, the Māori King Movement (Kingitanga).102

The King Movement arose out of a new sense of pan-tribal “Maoriness” contrasted to the European presence.103 It was inspired by the ambition for a unified, authoritative Māori voice under a European-style single monarch.104 To this end, the Waikato chief Te Wherowhero was appointed the first Māori King in 1856. From the settler point of view, this new movement threatened to destabilise the

100 Ibid., 233-34.
103 Belich, Making Peoples, 234.
104 King, History of New Zealand, 211.
region, making vulnerable the British immigration and external trade upon which their nascent societies depended. This was precisely the result of the prolonged Taranaki War of 1860-61, the unresolved nature of which precipitated its reprisal in the Waikato two years later. In simple terms, then, according to Keith Sinclair, it was “the desire of the Maoris to hold their best land and the desire of the settlers to acquire it,” that caused the wars of the 1860s. In this sense, the Waikato War was a violent extension of the disputes over land ownership and governance so problematically stipulated in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, and the various contradictions, misunderstandings and duplicities associated with it.

Yet it was equally the King Movement’s perceived challenge to British sovereignty that most incensed Governor George Grey, the man selected by the Imperial Government to resolve the New Zealand issue. Grey’s tenure followed the sacking of his predecessor Gore Browne by a London frustrated at the expense and reckless incitement of the Taranaki War. The singular Grey, two-time Governor of New Zealand (1845-53, 1861-68), and previously the Governor of both South Australia (1841-45) and Cape Colony (1854-61), personified the contradictions of Victorian imperialism. And it was the King Movement’s refusal to “bow to his prestige” that Grey was determined to subdue. Grey had long seen the Waikato as the key to forcing Māori submission and he had planned for the invasion since the beginning of 1862. In early July 1863 Grey delivered a proclamation calling on local Māori to swear allegiance to the British Crown. Subsequent insinuations of impending Māori attacks on Auckland convinced the Imperial Government to supply ships and troops for Grey’s invasion and provided the pretext for his authorisation of initial and ostensibly pre-emptive British incursions.

In his seminal study of the New Zealand Wars James Belich contends that the causes of the Waikato War were not simply that of settler land acquisition, crucial though this was. Rather, the wars were “a series of British attempts to impose

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105 Belich, New Zealand Wars, 80, 114.
107 Ibid., 72-75.
108 Grey was also later a Premier of New Zealand (1877-79). According to James Gump, “If Grey is unique as a colonial governor, it is due to his discursive virtuosity in finessing these [Victorian imperial] contradictions and in rationalizing their consequences.” James O. Gump, “The Imperialism of Cultural Assimilation: Sir George Grey’s Encounter with the Maori and the Xhosa, 1845-1868,” Journal of World History 9, no. 1 (1998): 91.
111 Belich, Making Peoples, 231.
substantive, as against nominal, sovereignty on the Maoris." For Belich, it was the ideological affront to British authority manifested in the King Movement’s power to withhold land rather than simply the desire for land itself that was most unbearable. The King Movement hardened pre-existing declarations of Māori independence and “raise[d] its profile to a point the myths of empire could not tolerate.” In other words, the unquestioned assumption of the right of the British to subjugate Māori was the key explanation encompassing all others. According to Belich, prior accounts resting on “the persistent stereotype of the fat and greedy settler has always been a scapegoat for less tangible factors.” Rather, “British expectations arose, less from individual greed, than from the racial and national attitudes that were part of the Victorian ethos.”

As Belich has it, British belief in the inevitability of their conquest often distorted understandings of events on the ground. When events contradicted this interpretation, they were explained away in a manner tolerable to British or settler consciousness. This willing failure to recognise Māori military achievements resulted in “a traumatic shock” when their occurrence meant that British inferiority could not be ignored. It was, for Belich, this “tension between expectation and reality [that] was, perhaps, the most fundamental cause of the New Zealand Wars.” Such a conception is appealing and presents a persuasive illustration of the ideological context of the wars. Yet the Waikato War must also be understood in its broader setting and here it is useful to read how it was represented in the Australian (and later the British) press to see the interconnections of race, settler and imperial ideologies, and land acquisition, and how these worked through and buttressed one another. As we shall see, in its challenge to trans-settler legitimacy, such a perspective throws the land question, and the part it played in Australian settler consciousness, sharply into relief.

113 Belich, Making Peoples, 234.
114 New Zealand Wars, 304.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., 312-213.
117 Ibid., 304.
“The question at issue is one of more than local interest”

It is the lack of melodrama over Australian troop deployment to New Zealand in 1863 that, as we will see, contrasts most pointedly with later episodes in the Sudan and South Africa. Though the SMH estimated that Sydney’s Patent Slip Wharf overflowed with some 5000 spectators waiting to see off volunteers to Auckland, this was a far cry from the reported 200,000-odd that would assemble twenty-two years later for the NSW contingent to the Sudan. A cursory reading of the Australian press at these different times accordingly reveals a contrast in the import placed on colonial involvement in these expeditions. Prominent Victorian and Tasmanian newspapers, for example, after their initial enthusiasm, had by 1864 begun to oppose further troop deployment for fears that the relocation of men to New Zealand would be to the detriment of their colonies. Yet if the embarkation of troops was relatively unaccompanied by emotive rhetoric, the same could not be said of the Waikato War’s settler colonial rationale. In the 1860s, events in New Zealand thus prompted Australian newspapers to displace a series of historical tensions onto happenings across the Tasman.

It has become something of a commonplace to recognise that settlers faced discursive, and indeed legal, opposition from certain humanitarian and elite quarters of Britain, especially on the subject of land sovereignty and relations with Indigenous peoples. Britain’s daily newspapers regularly accommodated and contested this opposition. What is now receiving growing examination is the response of the settler press in writing back to these charges and thereby formulating and ratifying certain collective identities.

It does not take long for grievances aired by Australian newspapers to encounter inconsistencies, particularly in the uncertain self-identifications made by colonists. As Adele Perry contends, settler societies were intrinsically contradictory: “settlers

118 SMH, 28 August, 1863, 5.
119 Glen, For Glory and a Farm, 19-20, 32-34; Hopkins-Weise, Blood Brothers, 190-91.
had to be white, but could not really be so. Its native people supposedly did not exist, but obviously did. The settler population was supposed to reproduce itself, but often created hybrid, local populations instead.”\(^{122}\) Simply put, a question mark lingered over what being a white British settler meant. The attempt to resolve this uncertainty regularly came in the form of a justificatory rhetoric of settler industry and production. Australian newspapers refuted denunciations from London by emphasising that Australian colonists were, almost by definition, invaluable contributors to the expansion, production and profitability of the British Empire.

Alan Lester makes this point in relation to the Cape Colony, New Zealand and New South Wales during the 1840s. He notes: “Despite the different inflections that each community of settlers’ situation gave to their constructions of Britishness, they all stressed their value as capitalists, contributing to the wealth and prestige of the British Empire as well as the comfort and security of their own families.”\(^{123}\) When the chance arose for Australians to (at least ostensibly) defend their fellow settlers and members of the Empire in New Zealand, Australian newspapers used this opportunity to note their frustration at settler needs being secondary to those of London.

A Brisbane *Courier* article, reproduced from the *Australian and New Zealand Gazette*, itself a metropolitan paper summarising colonial news, exemplified this critique of imperial government policy, excoriating what it saw as undermining racial loyalty. The global structure of capitalist expansion here merged with racial prerogatives as the twin drivers of British settler colonisation. New Zealand’s settlers were congratulated on the basis that they had “opened up new markets for British manufactures, and they [had] developed new sources of supply of the raw material for one or more branches of industry in the old country.” Yet in spite of this invaluable service to the Empire:

> the British government, finding it expensive and somewhat difficult to repair the blunders of the Colonial Office, coolly [sic] propose to withdraw their forces, and leave the protestation of the lives and property against infuriated savages entirely to the small handful of Englishmen, who relying on the performance of its duties by the home government, have embarked their fortunes in this colony. We can conceive of nothing more unjust, and, we had almost said, cruel and unprincipled, than this mode of treating British subjects.\(^{124}\)


\(^{123}\) Lester, “Colonial Settlers,” 44.

\(^{124}\) “Withdrawal of the British Troops from New Zealand,” *Courier*, 5 March, 1863, 2.
The settler was thus located between the dual threat of the “native” and the betrayal of the Imperial Government. From this perspective we can appreciate the need to both conflate New Zealand settlers with the culture of “Englishmen,” and position them against the abstractly defined “government” and “savages.” Yet this was less an argument for settler autonomy from London than it was a promotion of the extension of imperial intervention in New Zealand.

Elsewhere, a *South Australian Register* article compared the New Zealand situation with Australia and considered the mere thought of Indigenous land title enough to invite ridicule. “It would be absurd,” asserted the *Register*, “to say that the founders of South Australia had no right to take possession of the millions of acres of land forming the colony without permission being first obtained from the handful of aboriginal inhabitants scattered over some portions of it.” As an affective statement of what Mark Rifkin has labelled “settler common sense,” this passage is characteristic. To put the *Register’s* position another way, the inherent potential of settlers to acquire land without “aboriginal” consent was of such mundane normality that any attempt to question it is rendered ridiculous. Indeed, for the settler’s sense of reality to remain coherent such questions must be ridiculous. The very idea that this presupposition might not be absurd was enough to trigger a vigorous defence of the assumptions of colonial life. That is, even the act of questioning this basis was enough to provoke anxiety. And yet it was in the very easiness of such dismissals that anxieties could be located.

An 1863 *Argus* editorial captured the tensions embedded within Australian press critique and merits extended quotation:

> As to the sentimental side of the question, involving the abstract question of whether one nation has a right to invade another and to settle on its lands, it is useless and absurd to raise it at this stage of the struggle between the Maori and the Englishmen. The right of a civilized race to colonize a barbarous country, is not worth disputing about. If necessary, it might be justified upon the very highest grounds. The earth was given to man at large, to use and to cultivate. It was not portioned out among various tribes or races, in separate lots and for eternal possession. Our right to New Zealand is precisely what our right was to New Holland, or to the continent of North America.

Of the many points one could raise here most obvious is the over-protestation of the (again) “absurdity” of arguing for the rights of colonial settlement. For a question so

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125 “The Maories,” *South Australian Register*, 4 August, 1864, 2.
127 For the same rhetoric of “absurdity,” see also *Argus*, 15 July, 1864, 5.
128 *Argus*, 4 September, 1863, 4.
self-evidently redundant there appeared a restless need to itemise why this was so. As a result the editorial ascribed a proliferation of meaning to this event even as it asserted its foreclosure, reasoning that with fighting underway dissent had to be avoided and minds concentrated on the task at hand. Yet rather than this being the wrong “stage” to raise the issue, the moment of Indigenous resistance to invasion would seem precisely the time to do so. Even discussing “rights” in this way presupposed the existence of a universal agreement of what such rights were. The question remained: Who determined who had what rights? Clearly not Māori, whose voices were conspicuously absent. Rather, it was “our right.” Coming from a Melbourne publication, this “our” was evidently a collective defined not by colonial borders or incipient ideas of nationhood, but instead a shared British settlerness. The very existence of Māori resistance, however, enacted the response to their silencing. If colonial accounts had so far propagated only one side of the “issue,” Māori resistance itself can be understood as forming a dialogic exchange.129

The uncertainty of the Argus is in any case evident when immediately after refuting the need to defend colonisation it offered its own justifications based on doctrines of racial hierarchy. Here the binary distinction of “English settler” and “Maories” collapsed specific Australasian colonial histories into a generic narrative of rightful land annexation from undeserving occupants. The Argus continued:

Who can produce a better title than ours? By what right do the Maories themselves occupy the Northern Island of New Zealand? They are only colonists like ourselves, although of older date. Their title does not go further back than some two hundred and fifty or three hundred years, by their own admission. And it is absurd to pretend that is a sort of title which gives them the right of excluding for ever all other races. They cannot pretend that the lands which they own they are able to occupy or make any use of. That land was of no appreciable value to them before the English colonization, and it has only been considered worth quarrelling about since the English settlers arrived. It is we, in fact, who have given a value to the lands of the Maori, by our presence in the island, by the introduction of the arts of civilization, by the institution of British law and order, and the establishment of the British sovereignty. It is only that sort of wild philanthropy which excused the Sepoys and befriended the Dyaks, which would counsel us to give up, at this crisis, all that we have done for New Zealand—to withdraw our settlements, and to abandon the land once more to its old barbarism.130

Seemingly still unpersuaded by its own argument, the Argus trivialised Māori land rights on the basis that Māori themselves “are only colonists like ourselves” with their “title” only going back several hundred years. Though attempting to destabilise Māori claims to authority in New Zealand, the Argus inadvertently

129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
challenged parallel claims in Australia—even more so given its explicit comparison of settler rights between the two. The implication that Māori title should be denied on the basis that they were neither the original owners of the land, nor had carried out some requisite term of occupation suggests that by the same rationale Aboriginal Australians would qualify on both counts. Arguing for the primacy of origins to justify the settler legal order was clearly problematic. The temporal recentness of settler occupation prompted settler narratives, in Gaia Giuliani’s words, to “delegitimize the meaning of prior-ness.” Prior Indigenous presence was simply re-narrated as preparing the way for the imminent arrival of the European.

The precondition of settler society, the transplanting of a foreign population onto land taken from its original one, meant that the editorial must skirt around the subject while asserting its legitimacy. For the Argus, it was not only Australia, New Zealand or North America that was the rightful property of “Englishmen,” but, within a Lockean rationale, any part of the earth not being “used and cultivated.” It was the effort to normalise these claims of possession that drew Māori into the dual position of colonisers and yet the wrong kind of colonisers. The Argus advanced its argument in two steps. It first drew equivalence between an abstracted and de-historicised morality of colonisation. Secondly, by signalling British settler distinction, it affirmed the natural supersession of an original model of colonisation with a more efficient one.

As this reasoning suggests, in reading colonial newspaper editorials it is equally important to zoom out as well as in. Though the local analogy with Australia is central to understanding Australian press accounts of the Waikato War, the mentality was a decidedly global one, as the reference to the “Sepoys” of the so-called Indian Mutiny implies. The Waikato War was but one of a series of wars that threatened the viability of settler society and it demanded attempts to discursively manage the inevitable resistance this process incited. The same globalised vision elicited in its defence, however, equally evoked a traumatic history that haunted press discussions of events in New Zealand.

Editorial justifications of New Zealand’s colonisation frequently drew upon the multiple determinations of capital production, culture, law and politics, all of which


\[132\] A direct comparison between events in the Waikato and the Indian “Mutiny” is made in *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, November 27, 1863, 4. See also “New Zealand,” *Morning Post*, 16 October, 1863, 3.
were now threatened by both “wild philanthropists” and “barbarism.” Moreover, the same “use” and “value” with which the settlers had endowed New Zealand also made it worthy of conflict. The outcome of this equation was that Māori as a people become subsidiary to New Zealand as a productive territorial entity where any impediment to progress was framed as a reversion to barbarism and therefore grounds for expulsion. The historical analogy with Australia need not be spelled out. To adapt to the Waikato War Patrick Wolfe’s elegant formulation apropos the Cherokee Trail of Tears of 1838-39: “for all its stark containedness, as a monolithic occurrence, we should see it as a symptom, a synecdochic moment that condensed key features of a historical relationship of inequality.”¹³³

Importantly, the above Argus editorial was itself a response to a critical letter of a “Victorian Colonist,” which offered a powerful moral critique of the Argus’s position. This letter reasoned that the Waikato War could well be described as both “unjust” and “tyrannical.” Further, a peculiar parallel hinted at a more localised anxiety. Considering the moral justification “in taking possession of a savage land and enforcing our laws,” “Victorian Colonist” asks: “how would we meet an attempt by the Chinese to come here in force—where we have comparatively a weak title—and, as a people considering us outer barbarians, to improve us off the face of the earth?”¹³⁴ As we will see, concerns over the weakness of this title surfaced at other moments in the century.

The Argus saw this sort of talk as an example of the “spirit of perverse and morbid philanthropy,” typical of an “enemy of the nation.”¹³⁵ This editorial response prompted an impassioned second letter from “Victorian Colonist” which closely evaluated the terms of Māori “sovereignty” and agency, albeit in racially patronising terms. Sharply countering the Argus’s assertion that Māori happily gave up their land rights, “Victorian Colonist” observed that the “best proof that the Maori never understood what he parted with, or rather assented to, is that upon practical experience he rejects it, whether rightly or not.”¹³⁶ In other words, the obvious fact of Māori resistance was making nonsense of the Argus’s suggestion that Māori accepted the terms of colonial law and sovereignty. Moving on to still graver implications of this line of thought (later reprised as “fatal impact”), “Victorian Colonist” reminds the Argus that the responsibility for the “passing” of the

¹³⁴ “The New Zealand War,” Argus, 4 September, 1863, 5.
¹³⁵ Argus, 4 September, 1863, 4.
¹³⁶ “The New Zealand War,” Argus, 8 September, 1863, 7.
Indigene lay solely with British colonists: “we can only lament that wherever the white man plants himself, those of a duskier colour pass away, forgetting that the white man is the cause, and therefore responsible for that passing away.”

To understand the above Argus editorial, we must read it as operating according to a late-nineteenth-century assumption. “Natives,” according to the Argus, did not require a motive for violence. Their “savagery” was intrinsic to them. The settler, by contrast, was merely dutifully defending his contribution to the Empire. What letters such as those of “Victorian Colonist” did was to reverse this narrative by supplying “natives” with a rational motive for their actions, while identifying settlers as violent and rapacious. Underwriting this exchange was a tension between inherited Victorian ideals of liberalism, encapsulated in the idea of the press as a public sphere, and the space this opened up for provocative retorts to the views of papers such as the Argus, and which in turn had to be managed. Newspaper letters, being the largest space for oppositional speech, were clearly a potential hazard to the editorial coherence of the publication, throwing into relief the boundaries of official discourse. As we will see later in this chapter, the “philanthropist” critique would repeatedly set the scene for anxious defences of the settler way of life.

Australian commentators, then, did not unanimously see the Waikato War as akin to the situation in Australia. Though they might cite Māori distinction and the singularity of the Treaty of Waitangi, they could equally empty the war of its specificity to make points that could neither be contained within its Waikato setting, nor viewed as the result of circumstances unique to New Zealand. We can thus read a passage from the SMH that initially emphasised the localised nature of the conflict only to highlight the interconnectedness of the Empire and the newspapers that carried this sentiment: “If the people of England may cry out because they have no interest in these wars,” queried the SMH:


We may ask what interest has Lyttelton? What concern has Dunedin? What has Otago to do with this contest? What that large section, passing under the name of New Zealand, which forms a separate island, and where there is scarcely a Maori tribe to be found? What have New South Wales and Victoria to do more than any other part of the British Empire with the fate of New Zealand?\textsuperscript{139}

The \textit{SMH} then acknowledged the importance of the press as the theatre in which to perform settler identifications \textit{vis-à-vis} the Empire:

All that can be said is that in this colony in particular the requests of the representative of the Crown were promptly complied with—that when volunteers were called for, the Press, and particularly this journal, appealed to the English feeling and fraternal sympathy of the population, and thus drew together a considerable number of men trained to bush life, who rushed to the assistance of their countrymen.\textsuperscript{140}

This interplay between the global and the parochial worked to re-contextualise historical moments.\textsuperscript{141} Just as imperial participants could be viewed in isolation, so too, in the name of racial affiliation could they be recovered back into the fold of an affective community greater than the sum of its parts.

There is a problematic bind in these passages. The material benefits of the colonies to the Empire necessitated, so Australian editors claimed, imperial defence. The seizure of territory that formed the basis for this material production, however, ignited the resistance from which settlers had to be protected. In other words, settler discourse displaced the reasons for necessitating imperial protection (invasive territorial expansion) onto the process by which it justified its protection (capitalist wealth production). That British settlers should make the land productive was essentially tautological. If settlers could not prove their industry and the sacrifice that came with it they risked forfeiting their rights to the land and hence their status as bona fide settlers.\textsuperscript{142} It was so that they could continue in this role that they required imperial assistance. Settler aims consequently conformed to an understanding of the harmony between the components parts of Empire. The metropolitan need for productive territory driven by global finance and the settler desire for vacant land to inhabit, cultivate and transform were two sides of the same coin.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{SMH}, 20 August, 1864, 4.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} This was process that could work both ways. In 1863, for example, the Māori newspaper \textit{Te Hokioi} evoked the successful Haitian resistance against the French. See Sinclair, \textit{Origins}, 77-78.
In a parallel rhetorical gesture, the Hobart Mercury ardently rejected the need to comply with Māori assertions of sovereignty. Framing the problem as an ultimatum, the Mercury warned that if British authority was not affirmed:

the work of colonisation in New Zealand must be undone; the field must be evacuated; the British flag lowered; and as fine a piece of territory as GOD has created be once more given over to barbarism, after having been planted with seeds that promised the richest fruits of civilisation and christianity. A fatal slur would thus be cast upon what we have deemed our special glory as a people exulting in the strength of peace—our aptitude for reclaiming and settling the waste places of the earth.144

It is again difficult not to read in this a displaced conversation about the Australian colonies, and one aimed as much at a British reader as an Australian one. The teleology of this narrative entailed that the justification for invasion would continue to be the justification for permanent settlement. As James Boyce has observed of this logic in the context of 1830s New South Wales, the colonisation process “could not be stopped because it should not be.”145 The Mercury’s use of the future tense is here doubly revealing. The reader with one eye on the future could envision not only the imperial potential of the colonies, but the dystopian consequences of not dealing with “barbarism.”

Though the Mercury acknowledged the more magnanimous settler treatment of Māori compared with Aboriginal Australians, they had apparently squandered this generosity. The corollary was that if even racially superior New Zealand “natives” in the best of circumstances had failed themselves there could surely be no remorse for seizing unused Aboriginal Australian land.146 Yet the concern underwriting this assertion was implicit in the Mercury’s declaration that the “question at issue is one of more than local interest.” “It would be a humiliation,” it continued, “to the whole of the colonies if, in the great north island of New Zealand, the enterprize [sic] of colonisation itself were defeated.”147 The Mercury’s statement of the utilitarian value of the Australian colonies was significant. Where British newspapers focussed on negative colonial attributes, especially their ill-treatment of Indigenous populations, Australian newspapers saw the need to demonstrate the positive worth

144 Mercury, 29 May, 1863, 2.
145 Boyce, 1835, 130 (original emphasis).
147 Mercury, 29 May, 1863, 2.

The role of the press in this was critical. It was insufficient for colonial achievements to merely occur. To fulfil their symbolic function they had to be recognised from outside. This led to the uneasy operation of colonists presuming what it was that London wanted from them. To the extent that these presumptions continued unanswered we can read Australian press rhetoric as hysterical.\footnote{"The hysteric is never clear what the Other wants and is therefore always plagued by a kind of self-doubt, manifest in a recurrent questioning." Tony Myers, Slavoj Žižek (London: Routledge, 2003), 95.} What is more, the colonial objective to be seen by Britain as integral to the growth of the Empire also meant that the capitalist use-value of the colonies threatened an emotional distancing from the mother country. Australian readers could view the image of themselves from the perspective of certain British newspapers chiefly as a utilitarian site of production and, consequently, a material relationship eclipsed the maternal one suggested by recurrent filial metaphors.

Colonial collaboration in the expansion of British capital thus both seemingly sustained the image of unity between the colonies and Britain, while at the same time alienating one from the other by making the relationship dependent on material gain rather than on an imagined relationship of unconditional and spontaneous affection. As we will see, this differed markedly from rhetoric heard during the Sudan crisis and the South African War where attempts to fill this narrative gap helps to explain the public fervour for campaigns in which Australia could prove its fundamental British kinship. In the 1860s, however, humanitarian and metropolitan critiques of the settler colonies disrupted any such conception. It is to the sensitivities resulting from these critiques that we can now turn.

"Their delicate philanthropic sensibilities"

The Waikato War occurred during a moment of ideological transition, as the meaning of “race” shifted from a synonym of national and cultural descent, with subjects capable of progressive change, to a more rigid, biological conception of...
innate bodily and behavioural characteristics.\textsuperscript{150} Recent scholarship has attributed this change to frustrations with the evident “savagery” discerned in a confluence of imperial crises including the New Zealand Wars and the Indian “Mutiny.”\textsuperscript{151} As Penny Russell argues, however, “to understand the debate in such polarised terms risks underestimating the level of uncertainty, anxiety and tension that accompanied the ‘civilising project’ of the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{152} Indeed the slippage between differing conceptions of race characterised much Victorian writing.\textsuperscript{153} This had implications for settler language. Alan Lester contends that we should not regard changes in racial thought as marking radically different attitudes toward colonialism \textit{per se}, “since both sides of the political debate . . . agreed on the legitimacy of further British colonialism.”\textsuperscript{154} However, ideas of inborn racial essences did act to validate the process of \textit{settler} colonialism and provided settlers with an affective dimension to their aggrieved response to humanitarian interventions into their relations with Indigenous populations.\textsuperscript{155}

Lester has traced the rise to prominence of the humanitarian movement to a network of trans-imperial connections that contributed (in part) to dismantling the slave trade. These humanitarians, Lester writes, “concerned about the continuance of slavery itself, but also about the plight of indigenous peoples on the frontiers of empire, subsequently redeployed and extended this network.”\textsuperscript{156} This extension in turn was part of an expansive project of disseminating the civilising properties of Britishness, one consequence of which was supposedly to ameliorate the more nefarious tendencies of Australian settlers.\textsuperscript{157} The perceived humanitarian interference in settler societies was the cause of much opprobrium in the 1840s, sharpened by apparent proof of the humanitarian failure to redeem Māori.\textsuperscript{158}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Ibid., 141.
\item "British Settler Discourse," 26.
\item Ibid., 26-27.
\item "Colonial Settlers," 46.
\end{thebibliography}
well-publicised failings formed the basis of a settler press campaign to equate “resistance to the British civilising mission with resistance to civilisation per se.”\textsuperscript{159}

A similar dynamic occurs during the Waikato War where Australian press commentators perceived elite humanitarians or “philanthropists” as intruding into settler affairs. The timing of the war is important. Though Lester sees the 1860s as the era that marked a less aggressive mode of humanitarian rhetoric toward settlers, the 1860s saw neither scarcity of humanitarian critique, nor of colonial response to it.\textsuperscript{160} That Australian newspapers felt compelled to answer critiques of New Zealand’s settlers speaks to the global affinities felt by colonists who perceived themselves to be under siege.\textsuperscript{161} The “native” presence in the white colonies disrupted the physical, social and psychic atmosphere of immigrants attempting a radical transformation of newly acquired lands. The need to confront this presence often clashed with humanitarian protestations and led to frequent ripostes in the local press, often informed by racial animosities. The \textit{Empire} (erstwhile soapbox of Henry Parkes), in one breathless polemic among many, exclaimed of events across the Tasman: “It is high time that the romantic halo thrown by pious missionaries and enthusiastic philanthropists around these bloodthirsty irreclaimable savages was dispelled, and the last rag which covers the hideous nakedness of the Maori character stripped off.”\textsuperscript{162}

More commonly, however, the to-and-fro between the newspapers of the colonies and Britain was more subtle and involved often shrewd rhetorical manoeuvres. In countering humanitarian critiques, the \textit{South Australian Register} discredited those distant critics who misunderstood the nature of the conflict:

\begin{quote}
It is easy enough for gentlemen ‘who live at home at ease’ to lay down the law which ought to govern the conduct of the colonists towards the aborigines, and to denounce their fellow-countrymen for their alleged injustice and cruelty towards a helpless race. But perhaps a closer contact with the Maories might alter their views.\textsuperscript{163}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain} (London: Routledge, 2001), 190.


\textsuperscript{161} Lester, "Colonial Settlers,” 44-46.

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Empire}, 12 January, 1864, 4.

\textsuperscript{163} “The Maories,” \textit{South Australian Register}, 4 August, 1864, 2.
The Brisbane Courier, by contrast, belittled the humanitarian narrative as merely one of several possible, though ultimately rejected, alternatives. Upon noting how the “New Zealand war has become a stock subject with journalists,” the Courier summarised the numerous accounts available to newspaper readers. The information on New Zealand, it explained:

May be dished up in a variety of ways if you care to depart from the simple but prolix narrative of the peripatetic reporters at ‘the front;’ but this we shall not attempt to do. As a publicist, we might discourse at length upon the rights of the races that contest for national supremacy in the treble-island colony; as the ‘friend of humanity,’ we might wax severely sympathetic with what appears a hardship to either of them; as a filibuster, we might go in for nothing short of exterminating the dark-skins; as a true disciple of Exeter Hall, and a believer in Bishop Selwyn, we might elevate the Maoris as possessors of a higher intelligence and more Christian meekness than the Anglo-Saxon colonists; or, we might do that which is most common, criticise General Cameron’s tactics. Well, at present, we shall do none of these.

The Courier concluded by affirming: “Once and for all, they [Māori] must be conquered and be made to feel their inferior position.”¹⁶⁴ That is, the proper colonial and racial order of things, having been jolted out of place, should be firmly re-established.

The Courier’s attention to a series of potential narratives appears to have offered the reader some distance between a subjective awareness of the construction of news stories and an objective reality. Yet the self-awareness of the Courier also strengthened its own discursive position by implying that it was free of bias.¹⁶⁵ By proving, albeit disparagingly, their alertness to the different plots available to them they shielded their own standpoint. Having judged other possibilities, the Courier could now credibly claim their “plot” as authoritative. Similarly, the Mercury, leading up to Waikato War described that:

We have before us the files of the leading journals of the colonies which may be supposed to be the most nearly and deeply interested in this war. They give the chronicle of events. They make their comments upon them. And they are unanimous in affirming the principle that no discussion of the merits of the quarrel between the aboriginals and the colonists of New Zealand is now pertinent. The whole question resolves itself into one of supremacy. It is a war of races.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Brisbane Courier, 5 April, 1864, 2.
¹⁶⁶ Mercury, 29 May, 1863, 2.
The *Mercury* endowed itself with impartiality by citing the unanimity of “leading journals” of other colonies to assert British supremacy and the imminence of racial violence. Second-hand reportage of what was elsewhere taken as axiomatic here offered a semblance of neutrality.

In its turn, the *Argus*, in a clear show of settler solidarity, described how a “perfect storm of abuse is showered on the unfortunate colonists, both in the Press and in the Parliament.”

Listing the alleged crimes attributed to the New Zealand colonists, the *Argus* takes sharp aim at a recent *Times* attack on the “poor colony.”

In rebuttal the *Argus* deconstructed a reproduced *Times* editorial, accusing the *Times* of advancing incompatible reasons for advocating New Zealand’s independence. The *Times*, it was implied, cynically exploited the rhetoric of both humanitarianism and economic dependency with the aim of curtailing imperial involvement in New Zealand to cut British expenditure. “It is difficult to know what it is that *The Times* wants,” complained the *Argus*. “Between its feeling for the ‘noble savage,’ and its regard for the pockets of the British public, it is unable to give us any coherent idea of what our policy should be.”

It then reformulated the *Times*’ position as contradictory before re-presenting it as an ultimatum, soliciting the reader’s participation in taking the last logical step. “Let us know,” the *Argus* implored, “precisely what it is that *The Times* desires—whether economy or philanthropy. The two luxuries cannot be enjoyed together by the British people.” It then cautioned: “If they will not pay for having the war conducted regularly and humanely, they must be prepared to see the colonists taking it in hand in a manner which will somewhat startle their delicate philanthropic sensibilities.”

Lorenzo Veracini has argued that in terms of identity formation, it was essential that “settlers insist on their capacity to autonomously control indigenous policy as a crucial marker of their substantive sovereignty.” Here, however, the *Argus*’s preference was toward greater imperial defence of New Zealand’s settlers. The *Argus* predicated its threat-by-proxy on the stated need to avoid the ominous consequences of unregulated settler treatment of Indigenous populations through the imperial payment for the war that their humanitarian detractors were impeding.

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167 *Argus*, 30 September, 1864, 4.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
The *Argus* needed to tread carefully. It distanced itself from the *Times* while allying itself with New Zealand on the grounds of its more intimate knowledge of its neighbour's circumstances. Yet it quickly qualified any construed deviation from British loyalty by relocating settler interests as a collective racial concern. The *Times*’ “allegations,” the *Argus* continued, “from first to last, are a libel not only upon the colony of New Zealand, but upon our common Anglo-Saxon race.” It went on to defend the settlers’ actions against the “odious accusation” of settler greed by claiming that the hostilities were begun by Māori, that their only alternative to fighting was to relinquish sovereignty and possession of New Zealand, and that, in any case, the Imperial Government had themselves selected Governor Grey to quell hostilities. All talk of settler “selfishness” was annulled by settler’s being mere participants in broader imperial designs and their actions protecting their own interests and the Empire’s. “Is it ‘selfishness’,” the *Argus* asked, “for a colony to ask for defence against a foreign enemy, which disputes its very existence?” In the last instance, “the quarrel is one which the colony owes to the fact of its being a portion of the empire.” The negotiation between subject positions here is impressive, shifting between incorporation within an imperial collective, yet existing apart by virtue of an empathetic defense of a fellow settler society.

Further illustrating the logic driving the refutation of “humanitarianism,” the *Argus* had some nine months earlier admitted that the “notion of punishing a rebellion among savages by the forcible confiscation of their lands, is not altogether reconcilable with the principles of abstract justice.” Yet, it continued, “no one pretends that abstract justice ever is, or ever can be, the rule of public life . . . We live in a world in which we are compelled to do evil that good may come.” The *Argus*, on behalf of the greater good of the settler project, thus conjured its own moral code that superseded ordinary principles. For such reasons, the *Argus* declared: “We . . . deprecate the intervention of the sentimentalists at this particularly critical juncture.” The targets here included the influential Bishop of New Zealand George Augustus Selwyn who had long maintained that it went against Christian principles to elect for war (but whose later view of the war was more ambiguous). The *Argus* chose to challenge the humanitarian position on its

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171 *Argus*, 30 September, 1864, 4.  
172 Ibid. See also *Argus*, 23 May, 1863, 4.  
173 *Argus*, 22 December, 1863, 4.  
174 Ibid.  
175 Ibid.  
own terms. It wrote: “On the abstract ground of humanity, to pause in the career of conquest, to stop short of utter and complete subjection, would be inhuman,” both “to the native, whose hopes it would excite to a fresh struggle, to be followed by another defeat; and to the settler, who has suffered so much that it would be cruelty to ask him to suffer more.”

Clearly the “humanity” the Argus displayed toward Māori rested, as Belich has proposed, on the presumed historical certainty of Māori defeat and the need to deny them any naïve illusions of an alternative to this defeat. The Argus presented the following prognosis: “How far we can arrest them in their progress to self-extinction, and regenerate them in character as well as in numbers, will depend upon the solution of the present crisis.” The best hope of averting this predestined Māori “vanishing,” according to this reasoning, was their immediate subjugation. This much was clear. Indeed, for the Argus, the Māori had only “been chastened for his own benefit, and he has been subjected to the chances of partial annihilation that he might be rescued from total annihilation.”

The inconsistencies of the editorial are apparently resolved through the imminence of Māori defeat assigned to them in the same passage. The humanitarian critique was framed as well intentioned but ultimately ruinous, as the deficiencies in Māori culture and civilisation required sterner correction. The editorial concluded with one last “consideration.” The Argus knew that the war’s termination would only result in net gains for New Zealand and observed that the “war will be to her only a rougher mode of colonization. The lands she has conquered, the telegram tells us, have all the requisites for settlement.” The Argus was quick to remind its readers that New Zealand remained indebted to those Victorian volunteers who had assisted her and who aimed to collect their compensatory plot of land.

Through the rhetoric of humanitarianism and “abstract justice,” the editorial returned to land possession as the core aim for both New Zealand and Australian colonists. In embracing the language and lessons of the humanitarian to achieve antithetical ends the Argus co-opted rather than negated oppositional discourse. This was a manoeuvre likely undertaken in part, as Kenton Storey perceives, to

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177 Argus, 22 December, 1863, 4.
178 Ibid (emphasis added).
179 Ibid.
181 Argus, 22 December, 1863, 4.
alay “anxieties related to metropolitan surveillance and the understanding that
colonial executives operated with an implicit humanitarian mandate.” Rather
than simply denying the value of “humanity,” it imbued it with near mystical
authority that overrode the myopic “humanity” of the philanthropist. In this way,
the principles of “humanitarianism” were not rejected, rather their meaning was
reorganised according to an alternative rationale. Those readers wishing to identify
themselves as humanitarians, as many likely did, had now to contend with (or
perhaps be comforted by) an opposing idea of what this meant. To not conquer and
subjugate Māori was to be lacking in humanity.

As we saw above, the emotion of the press debate even saw editorials framing
threats posed by humanitarian interference in settler affairs as an existential crisis.
In another editorial almost exclusively devoted to defending New Zealand settlers,
the *Argus* warned:

> The speeches of Mr. Mills, Mr. Buxton, and Mr. Selwyn . . . on the war policy
       of the New Zealand Government, are a capital illustration of the kind of
       obstacles which beset colonists at a distance from the mother country in
       simply solving the problem of their existence.\(^{183}\)

The *Argus* again petitioned against external moral prohibitions while
simultaneously disavowing responsibility for settler actions by laying the blame
squarely at the feet of the imperial, rather than the colonial, government. In defence
of the colonist’s “existence,” the *Argus* noted that New Zealand was only the pre-
meditated acquisition of the Imperial Government that both “founded the colony,
and invited settlers,” and which had “occupied the islands, purely for Imperial
purposes.” Thus the “colonists of New Zealand may fairly complain both of their
assailants and their defender.”\(^{184}\) Whereas, “to the theory that this is a war got up
merely out of lust of territory, or from vindictiveness, it can only exist in the minds
of that morbid race of philanthropists in whose eyes the white man is always wrong
and the dark man is always right.”\(^{185}\) Such passages exemplify the double
movement of firstly legitimating colonial violence by demonstrating its compliance
with imperial imperatives, then, secondly, subordinating this violence to the grand
narrative of British imperial history.

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\(^{182}\) Storey, "Colonial Humanitarian? Thomas Gore Browne and the Taranaki War, 1860–61,” 115. Storey differentiates between a cynical “rhetorical humanitarianism” of the type the *Argus*
practised here, and a seemingly more legitimate “evangelical humanitarianism.” I would simply
point out here that *any* attempt to define what constituted a humanitarian disposition was
necessarily rhetorical. Though one may well have been better intentioned than the other, care
should be taken not to sideline the discursive and ideological aspects of each.

\(^{183}\) *Argus*, 15 July, 1864, 5.

\(^{184}\) Ibid.

\(^{185}\) Ibid.
Yet this worked both ways. Just as settlers shifted the blame from the frontier to London, so too did London (as we will see in chapter six), however disingenuously, see settlers as acting against official sanction to instigate the decimation of Indigenous populations. In each case there seemed to be an unspoken, perhaps unconscious agreement, that though distasteful, even abhorrent, these acts offered the only alternative to abandoning the British settler enterprise. What each of these blends of self-righteousness and victimhood concealed was the mutual implication of the settler colonies and the British metropole in a shared imperial project.186

“Our English readers”

Editorials and letters of colony and metropole were, as we have seen, often framed in relation to other newspapers. A double-page spread of an Australian paper might offer contributions from its own writers and correspondents amid a cocktail of reports from other Australian and New Zealand newspapers, side-by-side with commentary from the British press and responding letters. Australian newspaper articles were in turn reproduced by British papers that would reprint these and similar reports. These could then filter back through the colonies.187 Simon Potter has noted the complexity of these communication channels whereby “[o]ne newspaper would pirate an item from an overseas journal, and others would then reprint the reprint. In the process, details such as the nature of the original source would be lost.”188 This network or “web” of knowledge throughout the British World aided in shaping the various (though still curtailed) imaginings that surfaced in different locations of Empire.189

The dialogism of the press was evident when Australian newspapers attempted to moderate impressions of the colonies for British readers. The Hobart Mercury, for instance, before offering evidence of its unquestioning imperial loyalty through the offer of Tasmanian troops to New Zealand, admitted to being “still desirous of not being set down at less than our true value.” It continued:

We do not like to have England thinking of us, in common with the Australian
group of colonies, as we saw it stated in an influential journal the other day, as
consisting chiefly of convicts, when running the race of social progress and
when showing a larger amount of jealousy for the country's honor in this
hemisphere that she appears to do.\textsuperscript{190}

The process of policing British perceptions could be more elaborate than this. In
April 1863 a letter to the \textit{SMH} sparked a scuffle between the Sydney paper and the
London \textit{Times}. Curiously, the letter itself was responding to an article the \textit{SMH} had
reprinted from the \textit{Times}. In an effort to correct the “calumnious diatribe” from the
original \textit{Times} article, the correspondent included within his letter a further
editorial from the London-based \textit{Australian and New Zealand Gazette}. A major
colonial Australian newspaper thus provided a platform for presenting differing
views on events in another colony. The inclusion of this third-party editorial,
claimed the writer, “must be some encouragement to the maligned yet staunch men
of Taranaki to find so lucid and accurate a vindication of them and their fellow New
Zealand settlers against the audacious and heartless attack of the \textit{Times}.”\textsuperscript{191} The
letter proceeded to accuse the \textit{Times} of ignorance or even wilful misinformation
before positioning the \textit{Australian and New Zealand Gazette} editorial as the
paragon of truth. Noting the frequent mistakes made by the British press when
reporting on the colonies, the correspondent duly offered a corrective to the alleged
distortions of the \textit{Times}.

Yet the more disconcerting corollary of this operation was the potential
broadcasting of British caricatures of the colonies. As the \textit{SMH} warned:

\begin{quote}
The colonists would smile at the extraordinary books which come from the
English press purporting to give an account of Australia, if mirth were not
corrected by the reflection that the public which purchases these rapidly
succeeding volumes knows very little of the old countries whose destiny is so
largely under their control.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

Accordingly, the press could also remedy awkward British misperceptions. The
point about rectifying Australia in British eyes was that local newspapers needed to
maintain control over what Australia \textit{meant} and, through the feedback circulating
back to the colonies, what Australians in turn read of British knowledge of them.
That this control could never be absolute was surely a source of intense frustration.
Colonial conflicts were ideal opportunities to negotiate these meanings in moments
when the mother country was looking on. That British newspapers reprinted

\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Mercury}, 10 October, 1863, 2.
\textsuperscript{191} “The 'Times' On New Zealand Answered,” \textit{SMH}, 15 April, 1863, 3.
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{SMH}, 22 September, 1863, 4.
Australian correctives speaks to a larger point. Papers such as the *SMH* had a trans-imperial as well as a national audience.\footnote{See for example, “Australian Items,” *Bradford Observer*, 28 July, 1864, 7. Kenton Storey briefly mentions the importance of the Australian press for British press narratives during the earlier Taranaki War and the anxiety felt in Australia about imperial support at this time. The present chapter, and the first section of chapter six, largely substantiates this view in the Waikato context. See Kenton Storey, “‘What Will They Say in England?’ Violence, Anxiety, and the Persistence of Humanitarianism in Vancouver Island and New Zealand, 1853-1862.” (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 2011), 247-48.}

Though how might British readers receive these representations? As will be examined further in chapter six, the mediation of ideas was rarely straightforward. The *Glasgow Herald*, for instance, regaled its readers with stories of intercolonial cooperation and of New Zealand’s appreciation of the “cheerful and ungrudging spirit with which the colonies of Australia have responded to their wants.”\footnote{“The War in New Zealand,” *Glasgow Herald*, 18 November, 1863, 3.} Yet even this sentiment was only a reproduction of a self-congratulatory *SMH* article. Though the result was (it was hoped), the Scottish reader’s perception of Antipodean colonial spirit, the information shared between Britain and her colonies belied any strict demarcation of their respective press systems. Indeed the reproduction of this article shows just how political information flows, and the editorial decisions that permitted them, could be. The *SMH* correspondent in the *Glasgow Herald* had the aim of convincing the British reader that though London may “grumble” at the cost of aiding the colonists, they would surely “grumble” more if they lost the colony.\footnote{Ibid.}

The writings of one of the more conspicuous irritants to the Australian press, British liberal historian and polemicist Goldwin Smith, can illustrate the complications of this process. Smith was, according to Duncan Bell, “considered by his peers to be one of the main adversaries of the empire, a man renowned and reviled in equal measure for his clarion call to ‘emancipate’ the colonies.”\footnote{Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, 179.} For this reason Smith was described, imprecisely, as a “Little Englander of the Little Englanders,” a position that led him to openly clash with the editors of the *Times*.\footnote{Elisabeth Wallace, *Goldwin Smith: Victorian Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 183.} In fact, Smith was anxious about the fate of Britain and its potential to relinquish its global dominance. While he saw the loss of the colonies as “happily impossible,” he grew frustrated with their political and economic dependence on Britain.\footnote{Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, 183-84.} Smith saw a formalised imperial system as an unnecessary burden when informal sentiment and “Anglo-Saxon” racial ties were sufficient to keep the relationship
between the colonies and the Empire secure (“colonies”, for Smith at least, meaning the white settler colonies rather than franchise colonies such as India).  

Fame came to Smith through the publication of a series of provocative letters on the British Empire to the *Daily News* between 1862 and 1863, later published as a book. In these letters Smith found occasion to ruminate upon the situation in New Zealand and to voice his criticisms of official policy there. He argued for colonial independence for the good of both the colonies and Britain. Although published in British newspapers, these letters predictably generated lively discussion in Australia.

In early November 1863 the *Mercury* published a lengthy editorial response to a letter Smith had written on the New Zealand Wars, a letter which itself was a reply to an article in the *Quarterly Review*, a British publication that the *Mercury* had sided with against Smith. In his letter, Smith backed himself with several telling examples, yet his claims rested on two different newspaper sources; New Zealand’s *Canterbury Press*, and, more indirectly, the *Times*. Smith’s reliance on the *Canterbury Press* exemplified the mutual influence of the newspapers around the Empire. Through a carefully selective reading, Smith endorsed the opinion of the *Canterbury Press* and drew on it to critique British imperial policy. Toward the end of the article, he took the *Times* to task for urging the military participation of those “loose adventurers in Australia.” Beside the polemical punches landed by Smith, the key point was his dependence on, and the oscillation between, New Zealand and British newspapers as his twin points of reference.

The sections of Smith’s letter that the *Mercury* subsequently chose to reproduce argued for ending British involvement in New Zealand due both to the cost to the English taxpayer and because “New Zealanders” would be better off independent. The *Mercury* rebuked Smith’s argument based on his distance from, and hence ignorance of, events and people in New Zealand. In ostensibly adjudicating between the *Quarterly Review* and Smith’s contribution to the *Daily News*, the *Mercury* seized a privileged moment to petition, as a representative of settler interests, for sustained imperial “assistance and support” and against British voices

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203 This was a prevalent theme. South Australia’s *Advertiser* thus contended of the English press that the “further away from the scene of action the more positive and dogmatical was the editorial mind.” *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 February, 1863, 2.
arguing for colonial independence. In a now familiar gesture, the *Mercury* framed its argument squarely in terms of colonial utility to the Empire: “For what would England have been,” it asked:

> without colonies on which she could have poured forth from time to time her surplus population? What would Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, and other places, be now, if we did not furnish some of them with the raw materials for trade, and take from others their soft goods or hardware?  

The *Argus* also took aim at Smith’s letters. In one hostile editorial, the *Argus* claimed authority through its authenticity and its pragmatism. “It is not very easy,” grumbled the *Argus*, “to grapple with a gentleman who writes out of a sentiment so purely abstract, and so little connected with matter [sic] of fact, as Professor Goldwin Smith, the advocate at once of the British tax-payer and the ‘noble savage’.” Yet the true insult to the *Argus* was the apparent undermining of settler validity as a whole:

> The great object with Mr. Goldwin Smith seems to be, to prove that the founding of colonies is in itself both a crime and a blunder in an old country; that the distribution of the British name and the British race over the world is detrimental both to the countries colonized and to the parent nation—that the colonial system is equally injurious to the mother country, the colonists, and the aboriginals, who are displaced to make room for the settlers.

The *Argus* clearly exaggerates for effect. As Ronald Hyam has noted, though the “British frequently disliked colonists . . . they had in principle no animus against colonies,” and it would be difficult to find any public figure, Smith included, that genuinely wished to be wholly rid of the colonies, as opposed to disavowing, or at least modifying, colonial methods. Crucially, the defensiveness of the *Argus*’ rhetoric was not based exclusively on events in New Zealand, but rather the threat that such ideas presented to settler colonial legitimacy. The *Argus* accused Smith of exploiting the “ignorance and prejudices” of “the British tax-payer . . . who is also an attendant at the Exeter-hall meetings, and a member of the Aborigines’ Protection Society,” and “is perhaps about the worst possible referee on any question connected with the British Imperial management of the colonies.”

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205 *Argus*, 23 February, 1864, 4.
206 Ibid.
208 *Argus*, 23 February, 1864, 4.
these people, it wrote, “every native is a dark man, and every dark man is a slave, who ought to be a brother.”

However, the positions of Smith and the “missionaries” were hardly aligned. Indeed the Argus even contrasted the views of Smith and the “missionaries... who from the first have shown themselves to be as zealous opponents of British colonization in New Zealand as Mr Goldwin Smith himself.” Whereas Smith saw imperial troops as instigating hostilities between colonists and Māori, and considered that race relations would be improved if settlers were left to deal with Māori on their own terms, the Argus, by contrast, countered that the imperial presence acted as the sole check on settler abuses: “So far from tempting the settlers to thoughts of greed and oppression, it has ever restrained them from pushing their advantages too far over their Maori brethren.” Indeed this presence “has been a common shield, both to the Maori and the Englishman—admitting the one to the full rights of British citizenship, and forcing the other to recognize those rights.” In other words, though it accused both Smith and the “missionaries” of ignorant and wrong-headed meddling into settler-Indigenous affairs, the Argus agreed with the “missionaries,” contra Smith, that the Crown and its troops had protected the “natives” from the colonists.

The Argus may well have wanted to distance itself from the reputation of those on the frontier, yet it also realised the necessity of imperial defence for the Antipodean colonies. Since the Argus considered any notion of calling-off the British settler project as self-evidently “absurd,” this project had to be undertaken in a manner that was secure, efficient and less scandalous. Thus continued the conflicted movement whereby colonial commentators could at once champion settler interests, pay lip service to humanitarian rhetoric, and denigrate perceived detractors such as Smith. The crucial point was that, despite having ostensibly different aims, both “missionaries” and figures such as Smith represented for settlers a threat to the colonial project as the Argus envisaged it. Each position threatened to confiscate something from the settler. And it was this implied theft, I argue, that goes some way to explaining the often irrational tone of much Australian press rhetoric at this time. To clarify this point we can step back and revisit the work of Alan Lester via recent theories of affect.

209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
The Settler Thing

In his examination of transnational settler press discourse in the 1830s and 1840s, Alan Lester observes that humanitarian critiques of settler practices raised questions “over the imagined characteristics of Britishness.” Lester argues that by threatening “the discursive marginalization or exclusion of settlers,” humanitarian also threatened “colonial settlers’ political and military dependence on metropolitan support.” For this reason, Lester suggests, “settlers’ struggle[d] to avoid such marginalization by establishing and promoting their own ideas of legitimate British colonial intervention.” I wish to push Lester’s claims further. Humanitarians and other settler critics, in my view, threatened more than merely the discursive positioning of settlers. Rather, these critiques elicited an affective response to the potential dissolution of the ideological fantasy that sustained settler society.

Lester hints at the affective bonds roused by humanitarian accusations. He observes that “the sense of outrage occasioned by such humanitarian accusations was perhaps one of the most emotive and powerful of reactions binding settlers at a number of sites within a common system of representation.” He details how settlers attempted to rectify their “Britishness” under the metropolitan gaze by invoking the perceived failures of the humanitarian movement in the West Indies and the subsequent hardening of scientific racial attitudes. Yet it seems probable that this was more than simply a “‘war of representation’.” Indigenous resistance to colonial invasion disturbed settler narratives and necessitated that settler societies be simultaneously, and repeatedly, defended and justified. As such, I suggest that a more fundamental motivation underscored the umbrage taken by settlers toward external critique.

Recent theories of nationalism have employed theories of affect to account for the tone of political and nationalist discourse. This scholarship posits that nationalist

213 Lester, “British Settler Discourse,” 27.
214 Ibid., 30.
215 Ibid.
216 Yannis Stavrakakis emphasises: “Our societies are never harmonious ensembles. This is only the fantasy through which they attempt to constitute and reconstitute themselves.” Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), 74.
218 Ibid., 42.
fantasies of social harmony rely on an imputation that an “other” has stolen “our”
national “Thing.” This “Thing,” as Slavoj Žižek has it, is the incarnation of
community “enjoyment” discernible in the elements that constitute what is
perceived in the national imaginary as “‘our way of life,’” and that supply it with
“plenitude and vivacity.” It represents, in other words, those qualities that are
unique to a particular group and which are considered under threat. Such is the
power of this element that Žižek argues: “A nation exists only as long as its specific
mode of enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and
transmitted through national myths that structure these practices.” It is,
according to this thought, the common identification with this national “Thing” that
constitutes the affective bonds of nationhood.

If this proposition can also be held as true for settler subjectivities, as I am
suggesting, it follows that the objections of Australian commentators might be
targeted against those who through ignorance, neglect or naivety, rendered
vulnerable settler’s conceptions of what made their societies both unique and
legitimate. As Anthony Moran has suggested, if group formations act as a
defensive mechanism whereby its constituents can allay or displace their anxieties,
then any perceived threat to this is “likely to unleash anger, fear, and despair as the
particular fusing of individual and social form breaks down.” I maintain that
many of the idiosyncrasies characterising settler discourse were a product of an
ambivalent filial relationship to a mother country that was perceived to encourage
settler endeavours while simultaneously condemning how these were undertaken,
and then equivocated over protecting settlers from the “native” resistance that their
actions provoked.

Editorials warning of threats to colonial “existence” might well have perceived
economic or physical hazards to settler survival, hence their dependency on and

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220 Žižek, Tarrying, 201.
221 Ibid., 202 (original emphasis).
223 I give a fuller account of this process in Sam Hutchinson, "Humanitarian Critique and the
Settler Fantasy: The Australian Press and Settler Colonial Consciousness During the Waikato
224 Anthony Moran, "The Psychodynamics of Australian Settler-Nationalism: Assimilating or
225 On the triangular dynamic of settler colonialism see Lorenzo Veracini, Settler Colonialism: A
Theoretical Overview (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Ch. 1.
appeal to British protection. Indeed the responses to the situation in New Zealand came only a few years after a sequence of high-profile station massacres in Queensland, where attacks on whites by local Aboriginal parties sparked vicious reprisals and triggered rancorous responses in the press. These events were publicised elsewhere in the continent by the SMH editorials of John West. Such incidents inflamed feelings amongst the white population. The perception that similar threats faced by settlers elsewhere were shown little sympathy in leading British newspapers likely contributed to the acrimony of Australian press reactions.

In this sense, both Australian and New Zealand colonists were evidently frustrated at accusations of their wrong-doing while defending what they saw as their imperial duty.

I would argue, however, that discursive critique also endangered the ideological fantasy that structured settler reality. Dirk Moses has observed that the “deep structure of settler colonialism becomes incarnated in settler consciousness when security fears are triggered by the inevitable indigenous resistance.” These fears were undoubtedly often warranted, but they were unlikely to be restricted to somatic risk. If critics challenged both the moral basis of settler livelihoods and feelings of their innate superiority, then their affective identifications as a group, that is, their collective subjectivities, could be felt as jeopardised. Rather than representation being the endpoint of settler aims, these representations were but the textual inscription of deeper threats, and herein lay the force of settler feeling.

While settlers could disdain moral or overly restrictive external interference, they could also keenly lobby for British Government martial aid to assist them in colonial conflicts (“protecting them from savages”) in order, so they claimed, for the colonial process to continue efficiently and, less convincingly, humanely. This was true of both New Zealand and Australia. Settlers could defend their participation in these conflicts by claiming they were only implementing a London-directed colonisation process. Yet the colonial request for British aid came with the condition that broader settler aims were achievable without external obstruction.

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227 For a summary of these events see Henry Reynolds, An Indelible Stain?: The Question of Genocide in Australia’s History (Ringwood: Penguin, 2001), 121-30.


230 Moses, "Genocide and Settler Society," 34.
This ideal balance of intervention and autonomy can be seen as a large-scale instance of the common colonial desire for “the freedom to succeed and protection from failure.”²³¹ The antagonist to colonial society existed in the form of those who, like the *Times* or Goldwin Smith, might block settler aims through either economic or “humanitarian” agendas. In their turn, settler newspapers could use these same reasons to suit themselves. Where critics claimed the colonies to be overly expensive, counter-arguments demonstrated that they were in fact the productive basis for global British prosperity. Where they were accused of harming “natives,” it was rebutted that immediate suppression of Māori was the *more* humane option. With circular logic, settler land claims were necessarily true *because* the validity of settler colonialism depended on their truth.²³² Once the naturalness of settler occupation of foreign land was taken for granted, it only remained to ensure that the settler project continue uninhibited.

The crucial point, however, is that the perceived threat of an “other” stealing the settler’s “Thing” was necessary to conceal, in Žižek’s words, “the traumatic fact that we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us.”²³³ In other words, though the subject knows that their fantasy cannot be realised, through the figure of the “other” he/she can disavow this knowledge so that their fantasy becomes one of mere unfilled promise rather than impossibility.²³⁴ My contention is that both “philanthropists” and an obstinate Imperial Government here served as the necessary means for settlers to avoid any realisation of the impossibility of an idealised settler polity. This entailed a necessary double-bind. The aims of settler colonisation were sought without undue reflection on the violence with which they were achieved, a reflection forced by humanitarian critics. Yet the humanitarian, or any impediment to settler aims, had to remain present to uphold the fantasy that it was only their obstruction that prevented the achievement of settler aims and thus the unrestricted access to the settler “way of life.” What needs emphasising, then, is the mutual dependence of the figures of the “humanitarian” and settler, an interdependence galvanised by the exchanges permitted by the global circulation of

²³³ *Tarrying*, 203.
commentary between the colonies and Britain. This was a trans-imperial discussion. As we will see in chapter six, leading British newspapers such as the Standard could take issue with the Times to create a space for press alliances between the settler colonies and sections of the metropolitan press, eroding the divide between them.

“Traversing the seas of newspapers”

In September 1863 the SMH reproduced an article entitled “Natal” from the Yeoman. Its concerns make a fitting coda to the above chapter:

No one can adequately understand how completely it is the fashion of the British colonies to reproduce the representative Briton, without having either travelled through a selection of the thirty or forty colonies which own Queen Victoria for mistress, or, a somewhat easier process, traversed the seas of newspapers which reflect our brethren and cousins in all their ways and phases, their businesses and pleasures, their joys and sorrows, their downlyings and uprisings, their goings in and comings out. Whatever the country and climate, the original John stands forth unaltered in full relief . . . The British colonist remains intact; and he who has taken up the leading journal of one colony and read through its pages may apply the larger portion of it, with scarcely a variety, to any other of them . . . and it is evident that the effervescent fooleries and sparrings of mimic wars are but the spray tossed up on the crest of the advancing billow. Slower or faster, but everywhere deep and strong, the wave of colonial life presses on. As the white man advances the savages receded, and a mimic London is born amid the stumps of the aboriginal wilderness.


The Waikato War was a significant moment in New Zealand’s history. But it was also an act in the ongoing global drama of the “expansion of England.” The movement of British settlers to new lands was a revolution in world affairs, one that not only transformed parts of the earth’s terrain, but also clashed with other ways

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235 The corollary to this would be the extent to which knowledge of settler violence toward Indigenous populations could be a constitutive element of much humanitarian self-identification as “native” saviours.

236 This was: “The ‘Yeoman’ section of the Australasian—the rural arm of the Argus, and arguably the most influential of Victoria’s half-dozen specialist rural newspapers.” Stephen Legg, “Passionate Advocates - Australian Forest History Society Inc” (paper presented at the Australia’s Ever-changing Forests VI: Proceedings of the Eighth National Conference on Australian Forest History, 2012), 2.

of life.\textsuperscript{238} The Waikato War was one symptom of this. Crucially, the recognition of this phenomenon was achieved largely through an imperial press system that was profoundly interconnected and reliant both on the materiality of a communications network and on the imagined relationship between the elements of the so-called British World existing in the pages of its newspapers.\textsuperscript{239} The newspaper form tidily captured Victorian imperial consciousness, and, as the foregoing discussion indicates, something of its unconscious. The daily paper drew spatial links between varied communities and territories. Time and place shaped its immediate concerns but its geographical scope was potentially unbounded and shifting. Moreover, connections were made not only between territories but also between events so that the actions of settlers in one part of the globe were related to similar actions elsewhere.\textsuperscript{240} Colonial identifications were thus formed not only in collusion or in contrast with the metropolitan homelands but also across and between colonies, a point well known to contemporaries if often overlooked in more recent scholarship.

The \textit{Yeoman} passage exemplifies this pattern. Here a New South Wales newspaper reproduces an article from a publication of its rival colony of Victoria comparing Australia with the British colony of Natal. Equally, it extolled the virtues of the unity of British imperial and settler identifications through their common project. In this the \textit{Yeoman}, as a paper designed to address a property owning agricultural readership, was a settler newspaper \textit{par excellence}. The settler narrative, as read in the periodical press, was a select one, though it was not impervious to contestation. The tone of the \textit{Yeoman} passage is evidently one of self-congratulation and yet the same globalised and increasingly accessible movement of information that purported to comfort also elicited anxiety. The same readers in Australia that could comprehend their rightful position as producers for the Empire might turn to the next page to read of the latest consequences of that same mode of production in a neighbouring colony. And if Britons “there” truly were no different to “here,” if the process of “advancement into the wilderness” was alike in each location, then might not the same resistance await them? Further, though passages like this one advertised the colonies and their worth to readers in Britain, such advertisements equally invited challenges from Britain to critique the very “Thing” that substantiated settler reality.

\textsuperscript{240} Anna Johnston, “‘Greater Britain’: Late Imperial Travel Writing and the Settler Colonies,” in \textit{Oceania and the Victorian Imagination}, ed. Richard D. Fulton and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 33.
Whilst the knowledge of fellow colonials throughout the British World was attained for most people by navigating the “seas of newspapers,” so too was this the theatre for negotiating the meaning of being a member of the Empire. This thought anticipated what would, a few years later, be known as “Greater Britain.”\textsuperscript{241} Though we might note the naivety of the conception that newspapers “reflect our brethren and cousins,” this very conviction provided a key function of the Victorian press, asserting as it did a comforting reality to its readers, even as it attempted to avoid more traumatic realisations. In other words, the imagined community of transnational Britons acted to console readers that though one portion of this community might occasionally be challenged, “the wave of colonial life presses on.”

\textsuperscript{241} Charles Dilke was to coin the phrase in his 1868 travelogue of the same name. Its conceptual evolution is charted in Bell, \textit{Idea of Greater Britain}. 78
CHAPTER FOUR

“Closer to our mother’s side as clearer in the eyes of the world”: The Sudan Crisis (1885)

The embarkation of some 750 colonial troops from New South Wales to the Sudan on March 3\textsuperscript{rd} 1885 is, as with the Waikato volunteers, seldom commemorated.\textsuperscript{1} This is unsurprising given the retroactive muting of Australian military history prior to 1915. Australian military history acknowledges the contingent’s achievement of being the first self-raised, funded and equipped infantry force sent overseas by an Australian colonial government in a British imperial war.\textsuperscript{2} But as historians also customarily remind us, the New South Wales contingent (henceforth NSW contingent) saw minimal “action” in the Sudan.\textsuperscript{3} What is more, though several Australian colonies offered troops, London accepted only the New South Wales offer, lending the story to more localised accounts. In other words, if mentioned at all, historians generally assign Australian involvement in the Sudan the status of a curious historical footnote.

Yet the NSW contingent holds more than trivial significance. When a reported 200,000-odd spectators united in Sydney to bid farewell to their troops, ebullient newspaper evocations of heaving crowds portrayed a society that had reproduced a thriving English community half a world away (putting the “New” in New South Wales).\textsuperscript{4} Descriptions of troop preparations, meanwhile, confirmed colonial administrative and technological advancements for both local and foreign readers. We might well conclude that such displays demonstrated, variously, a fondness for spectacle, governmental manipulation, or a carnivalesque release from Victorian formality.\textsuperscript{5} Yet newspaper rhetoric on the eve of the contingent’s embarkation reached such fever pitch that the temptation to hastily dismiss it should be resisted.

\textsuperscript{1} I use the modern spelling of Sudan but retain the original “Soudan” in primary source quotations.
\textsuperscript{2} See Malcolm Saunders, \textit{Britain, the Australian Colonies and the Sudan Campaigns of 1884-85} (Armidale: University of New England Publishing Unit, 1985), 32.
\textsuperscript{4} The 200,000 figure, from a Sydney population of approximately 300,000, has been cited by, among others, Ken Inglis, \textit{The Rehearsal: Australians at War in the Sudan 1885} (Adelaide: Rigby Publishers 1985), 53.
\textsuperscript{5} These include some of the motivations suggested in Beverley Kingston, \textit{The Oxford History of Australia Volume 3: 1860-1900: Glad, Confident Morning} (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 197-98.
Ann Laura Stoler has cautioned against disregarding the language of affect as mere “distractions from both the ‘real’ workings of colonial authority, its underlying agenda, and its true plot.” Rather, the language of sentiment in nineteenth-century archives can be read on its own terms to better comprehend colonial compulsions. It is therefore important to account both for the affective force of what was being written in the Australian press and for the sharp shift in register from the commentary attached to the Waikato War. One must, of course, remain cautious of extrapolating mass sentiment from the purple prose of late-Victorian press reports. The subjectivity of the reading experience precludes any final judgement of how individual readers engaged with their papers. Yet it can be safely assumed that the rhetorical zeal of Australian newspapers in the early months of 1885 at least partially characterised the general public mood if only because economic imperatives meant appealing to a sympathetic market. This commentary, moreover, shaped and consolidated the mainstream consensus as to the meaning of the NSW contingent.

Rather than simply arguing for a political-economic understanding of this press coverage I claim that it offered an opportunity to recast colonial identity from an encumbered past to a celebratory fulfillment of destiny. This necessarily entailed a degree of selectivity whereby the judicious retelling of history concealed as much as it revealed. As Stephen Turner has argued, “For the settler, the Western notion of history is perhaps the deepest form of forgetting, a self-constructing form of repression.” There is no inconsistency here. Two conceptions of history confronted settlers. The first was “History,” paraphrasing Fredric Jameson, as the traumatic knowledge of colonial violence that resisted incorporation within a progressive and congratulatory narrative. The second was precisely this triumphant account that attempted to work around the trauma of colonial origins and its repercussions. These two notions were mutually dependent. Although a sanitised historical narrative required circumventing disconcerting elements of the past, its perpetual failure to fully do so prompted subsequent retellings. In Australia’s case this meant

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8 “History is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form.” Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 35; Homer, “Narratives of History,” 77.
a recurrent refrain of proving the colonies worth as both an imperial partner and a separate entity.

I aim to draw out the ambiguities in ideas of community that manifested in the Australian press at a time when discussions of community bleed between its imperial, national, colonial and trans-settler incarnations. The mid-1880s are a particularly tantalising time in this regard. Whereas the Waikato War period saw clear antagonisms between some British commentary and the collectively conceived settler colonies, a new crisis in relations in the 1880s met with a different response. Three years prior to the centenary of the landing of the First Fleet and two years before Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, the Sudan crisis would anticipate emotions roused by both events. The flowering of so-called colonial nationalism within a period of “high imperialism” meant any community feeling was going to be a balancing act, not merely of co-existing identifications, but of inter-reliant ones. This dynamic was more subtle than “a clash of imperialism and nationalism.” By reading about the NSW contingent, Australians could reflect more broadly on the idea of the white colonies and their relationship to the Empire and its history.

This chapter surveys attempts by Australian newspapers to fashion an imperial “unity” before showing how this unity was, even on its own terms, unsustainable. The reasons for this lay not only in the fractured form of the newspaper itself, but also in attempts to resolve Australian society’s broader apprehensions. For both Australia and Britain, the idea of fulfilling a latent historical role underwrote imperial unity. Through the NSW contingent, colonial newspapers assembled a narrative that stressed Australia’s “coming of age” as a nation, whilst emphasising its embeddedness within the hierarchy of Empire. In other words, colonial progress toward national self-assertion resided in the maintenance, rather than the rejection, of traditional loyalties. The idea of “unity” was thus a conservative one, screening social divisions and opposition to the status quo. Based as it was on a system of differences, however, any idea of imperial unity held the seeds of its own dissolution. Accordingly, I suggest that the NSW contingent acted as a floating

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9 An ambiguity suggested by Henry Parkes’ 1887 proposal to rename New South Wales “Australia.”
10 John Griffiths devotes a few pages to this episode to question the levels of imperial “sentiment” felt in Australia and New Zealand. I feel that Griffiths’ approach limits a more nuanced and fluid analysis of British colonial and imperial identifications. See John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 33-37.
signifier of ideological coherence that contained a range of anxieties plaguing colonial self-confidence. This chapter thus offers substance to the theoretical assertion that “the central paradox of ideology is that it cannot affirm a notion of unity without simultaneously producing the idea of a threat to (it).”

The Australia press at this time was replete with rhetorical devices attempting to give ideas of community a distinctive colonial character. As Ernesto Laclau reminds us, however, despite representations of society as natural and consistent, our practical experience of society is “not as an objective, harmonic order, but as an ensemble of divergent forces which do not seem to obey any unified or unifying logic.” Any understanding of social unity is thus never free of ambiguity and press accounts proclaiming this unity are better read analytically as competing interpretations of society. “It is in this sense,” writes Laclau, that society as such “only exists in the pragmatic—and as a consequence always incomplete—movement of its affirmation.” For Laclau, the impossibility of attaining this unity compels its assertion. After placing the Sudan crisis within its historical setting, the remainder of this chapter will analyse how the manifold disruptions within these assertions surfaced on the pages of the colonial press. These disruptions were prompted both by racial and historical tensions within Australian society, and, perhaps for this reason, the impatient need for its external validation.

“The anxiousness which young communities are apt to feel about their position”

From the outset, the interplay of press rhetoric and community identifications is apparent in the coverage of General Charles George Gordon whose death prompted, at least superficially, the New South Wales offer of military troops. Even before his

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14 Ibid., 183.
assignment to the Sudan, Gordon was a Victorian cult figure thanks to his preceding role there as Governor-General in the 1870s, in which he famously endeavoured to suppress the Sudanese slave trade, and even more for his exploits in assisting the Chinese government’s subdual of the Taiping Rebellion in the early 1860s. Beyond his celebrity, however, Gordon, according to John Mackenzie, personified a heroic myth of Empire, carrying a “psychic power . . . through the collective consciousness of its citizens.” Denoting the peak of an idealised Britishness, Gordon was an emblem of muscular Christianity and his death, Ken Inglis writes, “was mourned more intensely than any other Englishman in the whole of the nineteenth century.” The pervasiveness of Gordon’s feats was assisted by their fit within media narratives creating “one-day best sellers.” In other words, narrative function was inseparable from market forces.

Figures such as Gordon offered ordinary readers the kind of imaginative investment in the idea of Empire that political-economic affairs simply could not supply. Positioned beside financial tables and agriculture reports was an adventure story seemingly recounted in real-time. Each incoming report “of that all engrossing topic,” brought with it both the exhilaration and apprehension of following an underdog warrior enlightening the “dark continent,” and his betrayal by ineffectual politicians. The activity of daily newspaper reading transformed Gordon’s death into a public mourning ritual shared between the colonies and Britain. An Australian correspondent for the Times typified this procedure:

‘It is impossible to give your readers even the slightest notion of the thrill of pain, and heart-felt sorrow with which the news of the death of the late"
General Gordon was received throughout the length and breadth of this island continent... it is no exaggeration to say that every morning for weeks before the final catastrophe the first thing looked for and with hourly increasing anxiety, was some telegraphic intelligence that Gordon at any rate was safe.22

Yet the events subsequently seen to have led to Gordon’s death were, in their genesis, complex. What at a local level appeared as religio-nationalist resistance against Ottoman-Egyptian control was, in its geopolitical context, ultimately (if never solely) about the protection of India and its routes. A secure India required permanent control of the Suez Canal and hence the defence of Egypt from competing powers. When Britain’s de facto authority in Egypt collapsed in 1882, William Gladstone’s Liberal Government made the somewhat reluctant and diplomatically delicate decision to effectively occupy Egypt to protect the Canal (and arguably to shield British investors).23 Meanwhile, the long-time subjugation of the Sudanese had led to a subsequent series of uprisings under the leadership of the mystical figure of Muhammad Ahmad, the notorious self-appointed “Mahdi.”24 The Mahdi’s growing influence, writes John Darwin, “threatened to destabilise Egypt’s politics still further and spread rebellion in its upper provinces.”25 Gladstone, wanting nothing to do with the unfolding chaos, argued against further intervention, contending that the Sudanese were “struggling rightly to be free,” and organised a plan to evacuate the territory.26

The Pall Mall Gazette’s famed editor W.T. Stead soon led a successful campaign to have his friend Gordon implement the evacuation.27 Characteristically exceeding his mandate, the ever-ambitious Gordon ill-advisedly tried to crush the rebellion.28 As the Mahdi’s forces gained momentum, newspapers presented readers around the Empire with increasingly dramatic reports of Gordon’s predicament. After ten

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22 “From Our Correspondent,” Times, 8 April, 1885, 7. For the same reasons, during the South African War the Daily News found it “difficult to say whether this annihilation of space and time tends to reduce or to increase the pressure of public anxiety.” “In some ways,” it concluded, “it increases the strain.” “The War and the Colonies,” Daily News, 9 December, 1899, 4.


24 Mahdi meaning “guided one.”


26 Ian St. John, Gladstone and the Logic of Victorian Politics (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 288. See also Saunders, Sudan Campaigns of 1884-85, 13; Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, Africa and the Victorians, 132-55.


months withstanding the Mahdi’s siege, British and Egyptian forces folded. The belated distribution of British reinforcements saw their arrival just days too late.\textsuperscript{29} On 26\textsuperscript{th} January 1885, when white Australians in Sydney could commemorate ninety-seven years of European settlement, Gordon, surrounded in Khartoum, was killed, decapitated and his body thrown into the Nile. Near unanimous Australian and British press portrayals of Gordon’s imperial martyrdom called for a scapegoat. One was found in Gladstone whose political stock plummeted and blame attributed to his dithering response.

In a bid to make amends, Gladstone ordered the commencement of military operations in the Sudan designed to end the Mahdi’s movement. As soon as this news reached Australia the acting premier of New South Wales William Dalley, in a stellar instance of media relations, suggested that his friend, the retired British army officer Edward Strickland (and 1860s New Zealand War veteran), float an offer of a military contingent to the editor of the \textit{SMH}, the London-born “unabashed imperialist,” Andrew Garran.\textsuperscript{30} As Ken Inglis tells it, “any scheme to preserve or extend the empire had a good chance of attracting Garran’s enthusiasm,” while at the same time gaining public support prior to the official offer.\textsuperscript{31} Garran “advised Strickland to write a letter, published it the next morning with no editorial comment, and waited for a response.”\textsuperscript{32} In this way, Strickland “had got his idea to perhaps one in five of the breakfast tables of New South Wales, including practically all of those occupied by the men who composed the colony’s political public.”\textsuperscript{33} The following day Garran printed an editorial approving of Strickland’s suggestion coinciding with Dalley’s offer.

Victoria, Queensland, and South Australia followed Dalley’s offer of troops, though only the New South Wales offer was accepted.\textsuperscript{34} Though outwardly celebrating the apparent proof of colonial loyalty, London had accepted the offer partly out of imperial etiquette, and the diplomatic (and awkward) decline of subsequent colonial offers spurred a brief surge in already prevalent intercolonial rivalry.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{29} For an evocative imagining of Gordon’s last days see Jan Morris, \textit{Heaven’s Command: An Imperial Progress} (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980 [1973]), Ch. 25.
\textsuperscript{31} Inglis, \textit{Rehearsal} 19.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} For speculation on why this was so see Chris Coulthard-Clark, "The Dispatch of the Contingent," in \textit{But Little Glory: The New South Wales Contingent to the Sudan, 1885}, ed. Peter Stanley (Canberra: Military Historical Society of Australia, 1985), 19-24.
Luke Trainor has thus argued that New South Wales saw the contingent as both distracting from class and political antagonisms, and as cementing its place as the preeminent Australian colony. Several months after its embarkation, after “much sweat but little glory,” the NSW contingent returned to a rainy Sydney and markedly less fanfare than had seen them off, while attention turned again to the threat of Russia on the Afghanistan frontier.\(^{36}\) As if to justify their original fervour newspapers around the continent sought in vain to imbue the episode with lasting meaning.\(^{37}\)

To grasp the significance of the media response to the Sudan crisis, however, we must view it alongside the events with which it shared page-space. As Daniel Bivona reminds us, with the agreements in Berlin which hastened the so-called scramble for Africa (not to mention Oceania), the year 1885 became “the date on which the assembled European powers first officially endorsed the attitude that imperial conquest is what Great Powers do with their power.”\(^{38}\) This confluence of events deeply embedded the NSW contingent within the high imperial moment.\(^{39}\)

A series of invasion panics had also recently amplified imperialist and nationalist feelings within the Australian colonies. Seemingly prevalent “Russian scares” kept in mind the so-called Great Game between Britain and Russia. Indeed it was popularly believed that Russia was to use British distraction in the Sudan to invade Afghanistan.\(^{40}\) These fears co-existed with Australian agitation for British control of nearby Pacific Islands. Following press reports that German annexation of north-eastern New Guinea was imminent, in 1883 Queensland, broadly supported by the other Australian colonies, unilaterally annexed south-eastern New Guinea. To the dismay of the colonies, this move was hastily overruled in London where New

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\(^{36}\) Stanley, *But Little Glory*.

\(^{37}\) For some immediate retrospectives of the contingent see *Brisbane Courier*, 24 June, 1885, 4; *SMH*, 23 June, 1885, 6; *Mercury*, 25 June, 1885, 2.

\(^{38}\) Daniel Bivona, *British Imperial Literature, 1870-1940: Writing and the Administration of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 16. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1887), 56-83. 1885 also happened to be the year that Rider Haggard’s immensely popular, and much hyped, *King Solomon’s Mines* was published, and the founding year of the Indian National Congress.

\(^{39}\) The three-month-long Berlin Conference, closing on the 26th February 1885, apportioned the African continent among the European powers. It has been claimed as “the zenith of Old Europe’s period of predominance in global affairs.” Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 194. The scramble for Africa should also be seen, as Luke Trainor notes, alongside and connected to, the “scramble for the Pacific,” Trainor, *British Imperialism*, 24.

Guinea was viewed as a key geopolitical “bargaining chip” to trade with Germany.\textsuperscript{41} In sum, there was an obvious tension between Australian ambitions and fears in the Pacific, and imperial strategy. The New Guinea predicament thus offered a sharp reminder of colonial subordination to British control over their foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{42}

A global view here illuminates the connection between affairs in Africa and the South Pacific. Roger Thompson notes that Gladstone’s intervention in Egypt forced him to weigh the embarrassment of withdrawal against risking war with Britain’s European rivals.\textsuperscript{43} It was these same strategic concerns that influenced British compliance with German designs on New Guinea.\textsuperscript{44} This did not prevent many in Australia seeing London’s acquiescence to Germany as British neglect of its responsibility for colonial security. Compounding these concerns, colonists in Victoria also harboured suspicions over French intentions in the New Hebrides and New Caledonia where it was understood that French criminals would be stationed too close to Australian shores and, one senses, even closer to Australian historical sensitivities.\textsuperscript{45}

Lastly, after 1872, the telegraphic link between Australia and Britain aided the swift circulation of sentiment between them. By contrast with news transmission between Australia and Britain during the Waikato War, by the mid-1880s Australian colonists found it “was possible to participate emotionally in British public life on a day-to-day basis and to be effectively committed to a British cause.”\textsuperscript{46} This effect was perceived to usher in new historical precedents. The Argus, for instance, recognised that the separation of the American Colonies from Britain was based in “the constant and often unconscious assumption that the native-born colonist was inferior in grade to the Englishman.”\textsuperscript{47} By contrast, the chief reason that the Australian colonies would not follow this revolutionary route was that “easy communication, rendering constant intercourse possible, has quite done away with jealousies and suspicions and assumption [sic] of superiority.”\textsuperscript{48} “Ignorance breeds misunderstandings,” wrote the Argus, “But the electric

\textsuperscript{43} Thompson, Australian Imperialism, 103,227.
\textsuperscript{44} Darwin, Empire Project, 77-78.
\textsuperscript{45} Thompson, Australian Imperialism, Ch’s. 4-6; Saunders, Sudan Campaigns of 1884-85, 51.
\textsuperscript{46} Walker, Newspaper Press, 204.
\textsuperscript{47} Argus, 8 June, 1885, 4.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
telegraph, the steamship, and the printing press have well-nigh abolished the disadvantages of distance, and men in all parts of the Empire now read the same news and discuss the same ideas at the same time.”

In such ways the “proof” of “colonial merit” witnessed in the publicity generated in Britain by the NSW contingent had “allay[ed] the anxiousness which young communities, as well as young people, are apt to feel about their position.” Yet as this last sentence implied, it was the uncertainty over their publicised “position” under the eyes of the mother country that engendered these anxieties in the first place.

“The unity of national feeling at both ends of the earth”

And if the World, with scoffing smile,
   Say, ‘Why they handful fighting here—
Is not thy home Australia’s Isle?’
   Then answer with defiant cheer,
‘We are the Empire’s children! – not
   Mere stepsons of the ‘Southern Cross’
And with our parent cast our lot,
   To manful share her gain or loss.
What though a world-wide ocean flood
   Divide us? – we in soul are one!
And warm as ever, British blood
   Beats in our veins, from sire to son!’

Of all the jingoistic calls read in Australian newspapers at this moment none were more pervasive than the incantations of national and imperial unity. General Gordon here symbolised a particular transnational identity. A typical memorial column in the Melbourne Age described Gordon’s death as a “national calamity,” while a letter two days later understood his demise as a chance to admire the joint belonging and grand scope of their cooperative Empire. “It is when we are as it were gathered round a grave like this,” wrote the Age, “and can in imagination gaze into the faces of so many different peoples, gathered from all climes, and from every quarter of the world, that we are able to realise the vastness of England’s possessions.” Not to be outdone, the Age’s conservative competitor in Melbourne,

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49 Ibid. See also Brisbane Courier, 27 February, 1885, 4; Brisbane Courier, 11 March, 1885, 4.
50 Argus, 8 June, 1885, 4.
52 “Lex,” Age, 14 February, 1885, 10.
53 Age, 12 February, 1885, 7.
the *Argus*, claimed Gordon on behalf of the Australian colonies as “the great hero of all English speaking people throughout the world.”

In New South Wales, the *SMH* painted Gordon as Christ-like in life and death, uniting the British imperial family through a shared religious heritage and reminding its readers that Australia identified itself as *for* Christian civilization and *against* the “Saracens.” Predictably, Dalley’s subsequent offer of troops, which bypassed the required parliamentary consent, saw a further outpouring of comment in newspapers throughout Australia. The *SMH* saw the offer as dissolving the geographical distance between Britain and the Australian colonies insomuch as “the unity of national feeling at both ends of the earth has been displayed in the most natural and unmistakable way.” While, for the *Evening News*, in grammar as strained as the sentiment, the response to the offer “prove[d] as nothing else could so well prove how deeply seated the love for England is seated in this far away Dominion of the Empire.” The effect of this love was to ensure that among “all Australians . . . petty differences are forgotten; and from the highest to the lowest one spirit of volunteering animates the whole community.” In the very next sentence the *Evening News* proclaims the loyalty of “the colony” toward “England.” Within the space of a single paragraph the community in question slid between the Empire, the nation, the colony and the mother country.

Similar rhetoric could be read in initially more equivocal coverage of the offer in other colonies. The *South Australian Advertiser*, for example, wrote: “In the mind of every Australian will be the recognition . . . of the practical share of these colonies in the duty and privilege of representing and contributing to the unity of the Empire, and of forwarding its enterprises.” Despite stating its “practical” application it was the suggestion that these ideas existed in the “mind of every Australian” that tactfully overlooked inter-colonial antipathy to present a national harmony for Australian and British readers alike. Such declarations in turn limited the range of responses to the contingent, rendering dissent unpatriotic.

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54 *Argus*, 12 February, 1885, 4; See also, “A Patriotic Fund,” *Evening News*, 16 February, 1885, 4.
55 “To The Editor of the Herald,” *SMH*, 12 February, 1885, 5. For similar references see *Age*, 12 February, 1885, 4.
57 *SMH*, 16 February, 1885, 6. See also *Mercury*, 17 February, 1885, 2.
58 *Evening News*, 16 February, 1885, 4.
59 Ibid.
60 *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 February, 1885, 4 (emphasis added).
Comparable statements proliferated as we will see and they need not be compiled here. Beyond platitudes of imperial union, however, it pays to recognise the performativity of declarations that fervently affirmed what was ostensibly “natural and unmistakable.” Rather than merely mirroring self-evident facts of imperial relations, editorials attempted to speak this naturalness into being. This was no side effect. The symbolism of the contingent was, in many respects, its core function. This helps to explain why comparatively little mention was made of the Sudanese people themselves who, if discussed at all, were typically embodied in the metonymic figure of the Mahdi or through their historical casting as “brave Saracens.” This neglect reinforced the feeling that the significance of the contingent lay less in events in the Sudan than in the opportunity for colonial newspapers to locate Australia’s relative position, and thus its desired identity, within the Empire. The Mahdi and Gordon were here two sides of the same coin. Just as the Mahdi stood in for what was not British civilisation, Gordon stood in for what was. Yet as we will now see, this binary distinction required further refinement.

Robert Dixon has argued that late-nineteenth-century Australian unease was grounded in the fear that “the loss of an originary Englishness would not be replaced by a fully-formed colonial identity,” thereby leaving the colonies “caught between a lost origin and an undefined future.” Articulations of differing settler subject positions became necessary. Having noted the ardent demonstrations of colonial loyalty to the mother country, the paradox remained that proving colonial Britishness could be attained only by emphasising a distinctive Australian-ness.

One means of achieving this was by situating Australia against other British settler colonies. This was, in other words, colonial loyalty as a competitive gesture. Edward Strickland’s famous letter claimed: “A grand opportunity is now offered to Australia of proving, by performing a graceful, a loyal, a generous act, that she yields not to Canada or to any portion of the British Empire in loyalty and affection towards our mother country.” This passage speaks to Lorenzo Veracini’s conception of settler

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62 “To The Editor of the Herald,” *SMH*, 12 February, 1885, 5.
63 James Froude, visiting Australia at the time of the Sudan crisis, witnessed this first-hand. He wrote: “The New South Wales colonists cared nothing about the Soudan. They were making a demonstration in favour of national identity,” James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, the Tempestuous Voyage of J.A. Froude, 1884 & 1885* (North Ryde: Methuen-Haynes, 1985 [1886]), 86.
65 “To The Editor of the Herald,” *SMH*, 12 February, 1885, 5.
colonialism as “a form of peer reviewing,” whereby “settler national projects are often self-defined in opposition to parallel exemplary settlerhood.” Yet the apparent confidence of Strickland’s language is betrayed by the concern that Australia could be upstaged at all—a concern that seems to be self-generated. After all, no-one was suggesting that the Australian colonies might “yield to Canada” but Strickland himself. Similarly, “An Australian Briton” suggested to the Argus a way of promoting Australia’s ambition to London. “As distance prevents us expressing ourselves in the practical manner of the Canadians,” he writes, “would not an enthusiastic public gathering prove that we desire to preserve our identity with the grand old Empire.” While the imperative here is to preserve the Australian colonies’ imperial identity, it would not seem worth mentioning were it not for fears that this very identity might be threatened.

Further marking the global vision of imperial relations, a letter to the Age professed:

There was a sense of bereavement throughout the British Empire as the fate of General Gordon was transmitted from one end to the other of her world wide possessions. The name of the hero who has passed away is not more dear to the heart of the millions who teem in the mother country than it is to the lonely dwellers in the far west of Canada, or the but yet sparsely populated plains of Australia. He was the ideal Englishman.

While reiterating the rhetoric of unity and its telegraphic condition of possibility, this letter delineated individual colonial components of the British World. The point, though, was that both Canada and Australia were premised on the project of territorial expansion and population growth. The writer, upon referring to the vast scale of the Empire, offers the pregnant disclaimer “yet” to the description of Australia’s “sparsely populated plains,” locating these regions in a teleology that stressed Australia’s active imperial role. This was of vital concern. In the light of the New Guinea crisis geopolitical realities had forced an awareness that the Australian colonies were only one of many interdependent parts of the Empire, and a less important part than they had hoped.

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67 This competition was based on a mistaken Times report that the Canadian Government had offered troops. It had done no such thing. Inglis, Rehearsal 16. See also Mercury, 4 May, 1885, 2; Mercury, 21 May, 1885, 2.
69 “To The Editor of the Age,” Age, 14 February, 1885, 10.
Thus the hierarchical distinctions inherent in the imperial relationship were, when viewed from Australia, determined by whom the colonies were placed beside. The intercolonial rivalry of the time can be gauged by the observation of a Melbourne correspondent in the *Brisbane Courier* who claimed: “Never more than during the past week have the people of Victoria been set seriously thinking of its relative position as one of the Australian colonies.” Colonial enmities, chiefly between New South Wales and Victoria, could elsewhere be looked upon by other Australia colonies, such South Australia, with “amusement.” And yet when set against Canada, this rhetoric could shift to that of Australia as a whole. Canada in this sense offered a mirror into which the divided Australian colonies could perceive themselves as a national whole. Later, as the date of the troop’s embarkation crept closer, this pattern continued. When a threat was presented against the British Empire the rhetoric was further shifted to an abstracted Britishness (or ‘Englishness” depending on the context) that transcended national borders.

In each case the Australian colonies could at least be reassured that the imperial network within which they recognised themselves was restricted to the white colonies rather than its racially inferior components. It is crucial, then, not to let inter—or intra—settler competition obscure the more fundamental distinction perceived to exist between whites and non-whites. Though differences between and within settler societies were notable, they were, through their affinities, surmountable in a way unavailable to their racial “others.” Race, as denoting the structural relationships of Empire, remained the ultimate psychic support upon which settler colonialism in particular depended. Yet even this racial divide could be blurred, and not least when colonial papers cast their gaze inward.

“Men fully equal to the Arabs”

The occurrence of the Sudan crisis in the “high imperial” age strengthened colonial Australian confidence that their very existence proved their important historical function. Yet this was a confidence beset with contradiction. Part of the historical assignment of Australian colonists was to sustain the purity of the British race in a new land even as they increasingly expressed a budding nationalism. To balance the

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71 “Victoria,” *Brisbane Courier*, 4 March, 1885, 3 (emphasis added). See also *Brisbane Courier*, 5 March, 1885, 4.
72 *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 February, 1885, 4. See also *South Australian Register*, 19 February, 1885, 4.
articulation of colonial difference within a homogenous Britishness required tropes that upended notions of colonial inferiority, remaking them into illustrations of settler advantage. In this light we can better understand the frequent descriptions of the physical fitness and manly appearance of colonial troops. Where Australian uniqueness had often been associated with the negative environmental effects on “Englishmen,” an inversion could now be forced. It is fitting that tropical Queensland’s Brisbane Courier, anticipating the South African War’s “bushman” soldier, emphasised that were the Australian colonial governments to “raise and discipline a corps of bushmen”:

they would, no doubt, succeed in producing a body of men who would be specially fitted for a campaign in such a country as the Soudan; men fully equal to the Arabs in power of endurance and withstanding the fervid heat of the country, and able to fight as coolly and as well as the best of the unacclimatised Englishmen, who fill the ranks of the British army.

Evincing the dialogism of the press, this editorial was answered by a letter which, through its description of the physical superiority of men from select Australian regions, transformed the issue of climate into one of potent racial feeling and competition:

How much better could they stand it than the South Staffordshire boys, who had never left England before! A Victorian, Tasmanian, or New Zealand contingent might not be so suitable, but the men of Western Queensland, Western New South Wales, and South Australian territory, are as sundried and hardy as any Soudan Arab can be, as inured to severe heat as any Sepoy or Sikh troops, while imbued with that white bulldog ‘devil’ that is ever lacking in black troops of any kind.

The point to take from this is the detailed and contradictory complex of racial distinction. Only certain Australians are here considered fit for military service, but in attempting to attain consistency the writer fashions a racially equivocal ideal. The soldiers are described as superior to their English counterparts. Yet this fusion sits uneasily with ideas of British racial supremacy and must be tempered by a return to the security of an exclusively “white” Britishness of the kind absent in “black troops.” The equation, evidently, was that black physique plus white temperament equaled a formidable new colonial combatant. As if this description

74 For an extended analysis of the differences between colonial and “home-bred” soldiers in relation to environment and prosperity see Brisbane Courier, 20 June, 1885, 4.
remained misleading, however, the correspondent amended his categories, concluding that General Gordon’s mistake was to “‘trust the niggers,’ as no Australian bushman would do; for all niggers from yellow to black, are treacherous once you get away from the white skins.”77 Rather than any statement of outright distinction from the British, then, claims of colonial difference verified their position within Empire and internal to whiteness, turning a source of anxiety into one of pride. The true dichotomy was only white and non-white.

Worries that Australian troops might be understood by Britons as something other than pure members of an uncontaminated racial family were repeated more explicitly on several occasions.78 In a particularly blunt statement of the racial sensitivity attending the contingent, a local paper informed its readers: “the English troops at Suakim [sic] were delighted to find that the New South Wales men were not ‘niggers,’ and they congratulated them on the colour of their skin, and the comparative civilisation of their manners.”79 One need only note the apparent relief of even this qualified praise (Was simply being not-black sufficient acclaim? How civilised were they exactly? Compared to whom?) to sense the depth of concern that things might have been otherwise. Similarly, a speaker at banquet reported by the SMH described the common British belief only 15 years ago, “that Australia was peopled entirely by blackfellows,” but, thanks to Dalley’s offer, the “people of England, in future would not require to look upon their chart to discover where Australia was, or to study a book to see what Australians really were.”80 Needless to add, what they were was “British to the backbone.”81 Discovery indeed. A wit in Sydney’s Catholic Freeman’s Journal likewise saw the offer of the contingent as quashing the “notion that we are a lot of gohanna-chewing [sic] blackfellows.” Rather, in an inimitable gesture of settler historicism, the writer claimed: “Australia has been discovered for the second time, so to speak.”82

The anxiety inflecting this sentiment could also be put to use in reaffirming intercolonial pride. One sardonic letter to South Australia’s Advertiser, reproduced in a local Victorian paper, expressed satisfaction (rather too great a satisfaction)

79 “News and Notes,” The Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser, 30 May 1885, 2.
80 “The Banquet,” SMH, 5 March 1885, 5.
81 Ibid.
that other Australian colonies had not succumbed to New South Wales’ unthinking donation of men. The letter-writer found pleasure in the thought that Britain had likely accepted the offer only by misunderstanding “[t]he Australian Troops’ to mean the aboriginal natives,” seeing as they did entertainment value in “the spectacular effect of 700 New South Wales blackfellows dressed up in their war paint.” The writer went on to illustrate the predicted British shock when Australian troops were found to be white after all. These thoughts were seldom expressed so brazenly. But that they were considered at all hints at the sense of strangeness and alienation colonists evidently saw in themselves when, even one hundred years after Arthur Phillip unloaded his unsightly cargo on Sydney’s shores, there remained little confidence in what outsiders made of them. Whether spoken out of fear or derision the idea that Australians would be misperceived by Britons, an idea which continued during the South African War, provoked a reevaluation of who Australians were and how they defined themselves in relation to others, just as our above banquet speaker had intimatet.

Colonial Australia, then, was seen to require a distinct identity while simultaneously needing a sanctifying “English” component to avoid its own degeneration. The evocation of the “bushman” would come to occupy just such a middle ground. The precariousness of this position is, however, clear. Colonial difference could neither abate, nor swing too far toward the pejorative connotations of being a mere colonial. The troubling equation was, according to Beverly Kingston: “The more assertive their Australianness, the more colonial they seemed.” More problematic still, the options to replace the “English” element were either a focus on convictism and Aboriginal dispossession, or the unhappy alternative of Australian identity being forever defined by an historical void. It was in ameliorating this problem that war offered a prime opportunity.

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84 See also the reproduced letter apparently received from an Australian in Sudan that read: “They are very glad to see us. Many of the British soldiers expected to see us all blackfellows, and were very much surprised to find us white.” “That Contingent,” Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate, 16 May, 1885, 8.
85 Dixon, Writing the Colonial Adventure, 11.
Yet pairing race and colonial warfare came with other complications which can be illustrated by briefly juxtaposing passages from the *Brisbane Courier*.88 Queensland was the site of the most rancorous Australian frontier engagements of this period, arguably peaking in the mid-1880s.89 It was not uncommon for Indigenous-settler conflicts there to be acknowledged in the local press even if their implications for settler legitimacy were down-played. As ever, the question was one of framing. The realities of frontier conflict could be made tolerable for settler readerships if they could be justified as the result of provocations by aberrant miscreants; as necessary (if unfortunate) measures of self-defense; or in accordance with the inevitabilities inscribed in racial doctrine. More problematic were comparisons between frontier conflict and overseas wars of Empire.

In an editorial two weeks prior to the NSW contingent’s embarkation reference was made to its historical lineage. The intention was to excise any niggling doubts over Australia’s racial heritage. The beginnings made by Australian involvement in New Zealand were invoked to give credence to current claims. Citing their participation in the “warfare between the whites and Maories,” Australians could now put paid to the charge that they were only “degenerate descendants of the grand old fighting races from which the colonists and the Britisher are alike descended.”90 The editorial goes on to link Australians with other white settlers from New Zealand and America who had also forcefully colonised their territories. Five days later the *Brisbane Courier* more forthrightly affirmed that, because of the NSW contingent, there “is no breach of race unity yet, no dimming of the sentiment which makes us regard England still as a country for which a man should leave home and children and go forth without a murmur to die.”91

However, readers could encounter a diversity of messages in their daily papers. In this case, the attempt to salvage colonists from charges of racial erosion by virtue of their martial pedigree might be read alongside a report printed some six weeks later comparing Aboriginal Australians with the Sudanese. It states: “Our native blacks

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88 A similar comparison with different aims can be found in Henry Reynolds, *Forgotten War* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2013), 194-227.
90 *Brisbane Courier*, 20 February, 1885, 4.
91 *Brisbane Courier*, 25 February, 1885, 4. Similarly, Sydney’s *Evening News* drew a straight line between colonial martial enthusiasm and British racial parentage to proclaim: “there is here existent plenty of the old love of excitement and danger, and consequently of the collision of bodies of men which characterised the British race for so many centuries . . . Plenty of it wherever the British race has a footing, and plenty of it in this young land of ours.” “Advance Australia!,” *Evening News*, 13 February, 1885, 5.
were just as difficult (in a small way) to deal with as the savage hordes on the
Soudan.” The writer drew the following conclusion: “War should be declared
against them until they were entirely subdued.” Leaving aside the vulgarity of the
statement, this casting of Aboriginal Australians is troublesome in the paternalistic
use of the possessive “ours” that inadvertently undermined the settler’s authentic
relationship to the land. That “our” blacks were also “native” belied frequent
allusions to settler nativity while also connecting Australia to the perceived
otherness of Africa.

The exterminatory rhetoric, moreover, underlined not just the contemporaneous
violence within Queensland. The “difficulties” caused by the “natives” also
suggested a resistance equivalent to that occurring in the Sudan, a resistance
credited elsewhere as entirely legitimate. As a correspondent for Sydney’s
Evening News reported around the same time, “the cost of the expedition is
considered too great by some, while others sympathise with the Arabs as an
oppressed race, and compare them with our own aboriginals.” The intimation of
“native wars” of resistance directly contradicted references found in other
publications, including in the British press, to a peaceful Australian history. At a
time when mutual exchanges of press reports between Britain and Australia was
already common, and when martial sacrifice was celebrated as denoting national
birth, the foundational warfare occurring concurrently on Australian soil offered a
more incompatible case.

The discrepancy between the celebratory reporting of Australians in foreign wars
and the commentary afforded to settler-Indigenous conflicts prompts consideration
of the relationship between territorial inheritance and martial sacrifice. The nexus
exists in the pervasive image of blood as a justification for Australian involvement
in the Sudan (note this chapter’s epigraph). In one excessive example among many,

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92 “The Daintree,” Brisbane Courier, 3 April, 1885, 6.
93 Ibid (emphasis added).
94 It is thus difficult to judge the level of semantic awareness of the Newcastle Morning Herald and
Miners’ Advocate (a publication very hostile to the idea of the contingent) in scorning those
troops that “imagine that they are going to meet a number of undisciplined aboriginals,” rather
than “a courageous race; men who have had the manliness and spirit to die in defence of their
country as readily as any British or Australian native would die for his.” “The Soudan
Expedition,” Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate, 26 February, 1885, 2 (emphasis
added).
96 James Service, premier of Victoria in 1885, famously claimed the NSW contingent had
“precipitated Australia, in one short week, from a geographical expression to a nation.” Cited in
Richard White, Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980 (Sydney: George Allen &
Unwin, 1981), 73.
97 See the Argus’ exhortation that to achieve greatness: “nations must be ready to face or pass
through a time of sacrifice, and perhaps heavy loss.” Argus, 3 March, 1885, 4.
an *Echo* supplement commemorating the embarkation warned that national maturity did not come through peace, but rather:

Principles are rained in blood; virtues are nourished by blood; and baptised in blood we do become regenerate, born anew to a consciousness of a duty in ourselves, and a recognition on the part of others of our willingness to perform that duty, which at once purifies and elevates, broadens and illuminates, makes us more to ourselves and for the first time much to all neighbours and beholders.\(^98\)

Deborah Bird Rose has suggested that such pronouncements were premised on a fundamental elision. Rose writes that the “concept of blood includes both kinship and sacrifice, and the linking of British blood with sacrifice in warfare could enlist a different notion of blood and still exclude the Aboriginal people whose blood was massively shed in the conquest of the continent.”\(^99\) Although the *Echo* credits the contingent with attaining “national distinction,” it is vigilant in stressing that Australia should be seen by outside observers to “suffer no severance from the patria” felt toward England. “Closer to our mother’s side,” it continued, “as clearer in the eyes of the world; closer in incorporation as prouder in distinctiveness.”\(^100\)

We can again see that attempts to articulate Australian distinction within an imperial family structure are burdened by historical contradictions.

Ongoing conflicts within the continent made any colonial claims to nationhood particularly suspect, as if simply asserting that the nation now existed somehow circumvented the violence required to constitute it.\(^101\) Though the *Echo* might claim that “[w]e had lived almost a century thus in one monotonous routine of peaceful prosperity,” it was this very “peace” that had hitherto thwarted claims to nationhood.\(^102\) In Australia’s case, the bloodletting upon which colonial society was founded provided an unacceptable story of origin. Yet this had resulted in a gap in the national narrative which the NSW contingent could now apparently fill. Notwithstanding the *Echo*’s baroque moralising, it was not the lack of bloodshed in colonial Australian history that begged for, in its words, “baptism” and “purification” “to all beholders,” it was the excess of it.\(^103\)

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\(^98\) *Echo*, 3 March, 1885, 1.


\(^100\) *Echo*, 3 March, 1885, 1.


\(^102\) *Echo*, 3 March, 1885, 1.

\(^103\) Ibid.
References to blood summoned not only feelings of kinship but, more subtly, the history underlying the geographical distribution of that kinship. The blood ties of settler discourse obliged the recognition of biological ancestry while disavowing that this new bloodline was predicated on the replacement of an original one. White Australia’s “collective claim to historical priority,” in Patrick Wolfe’s phrase, again clashed with the affirmation of bloodlines deriving from the British on the other side of the world.

Thus, argues Zoe Laidlaw, settlers “attempted simultaneously to naturalize (indigenize) their presence in the colony, to mythologize their relationship to the metropole, and to assert their control over the land and its (neutralized and erased) original inhabitants.” In the struggle to fashion a consistent narrative, Australian newspaper accounts were undermined by the implicit position in which they placed Indigenous peoples. That is, if blood spilt “defending” one’s community retroactively granted that community’s legitimacy, where did that leave Aboriginal Australians?

Attempts to circumvent this question extended to settler metaphors of “home” and “family.” In an increasingly familiar mode, an SMH editorial the morning after the contingent’s embarkation announced that New South Wales, “not yet a hundred years old, put forth its claims to be recognised as an integral portion of the British Empire, just as much as if it had been situated in the county of situated in the county of Middlesex, instead of being at the very opposite side of the globe.” The emotional plea to imaginatively relocate New South Wales to its rightful place as an eminently English portion of the Empire highlighted colonial geographical sensitivities. Both exile (and the historical reasons for it), and the awareness, however unheeded, of continued Aboriginal existence and claims to sovereignty resulted for settlers in the characteristically uncanny oscillation between “home” as a place of settlement and of un-settlement.

The recurrent problem was that disavowing colonial origins meant the deferral of any stable identity. What Britain-as-home appeared to have that Australia-as-home

did not was an acceptable lineage less reliant on historical introspection. A British historical narrative could bind its subjects together with a comforting sense of pride while its familial metaphors sourced colonial maturity to maternal descent. This choice was understandable. If imperial theorists and colonists alike were seeking a model of affect on which to base the Greater British relationship the obvious candidate was the constellation of Victorian family ideals centred around maturation and bequest. As Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose have perceived, familial images of Empire were clearly marked by gender roles reinforcing a naturalised and harmonious hierarchy where each member played their part. Still, locating the proper place for the colonies within this hierarchy depended on whether they were seen vertically as subordinate to England or, horizontally, as equal partners. The Argus thus claimed of the troop’s embarkation: “Without a great stretch of the imagination it might be said that today Australia comes of age,” before mixing filial ideas of Australia as partaking in “grown man’s work,” while still being referred to as “she.” In so doing the Argus slips between the vision of the masculine soldier as national representative and the familiar image of the young, feminine daughter of “Mother England.” That is, between the Australia that had proved itself, and the one that remained dependent.

The apparent contradictions of national masculinity and femininity have been discussed by Ghassan Hage who argues that they in fact represent complementary and necessary components. For Hage, the father figure of the nation ensures an ordered and secure environment through the threat of violent force, while the mother figure uses this promise of stability to provide the nourishment, love and hope necessary to satisfy its citizens. Consequently, the “art of ‘national fatherhood’”

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108 On the ambivalence of affective links toward home and family in the colonial Australian context see Russell, “Unhomely Moments.”


111 Argus, 3 March, 1885, 4. This was not a new sentiment. Anticipating the rhetoric accompanying the NSW contingent was the Freeman’s Journal announcement that Queensland, through its New Guinea annexation, had acted like “a son announcing . . . that he has come of age,” cited in Kingston, Oxford History, 300.
is to know how to subjugate just enough to allow the motherland to perform her role as if naturally,” without the role of father being made explicit.\textsuperscript{112} If we can accept this premise we might also find that the implication in the above *Argus* passage was a desire to mature into the father figure that could adequately protect the “mother.” The difficulty for Australian colonies in this conception was that the subjugation of the Aboriginal population disturbed the narrative of a benevolent, and indeed legal, polity. This could be resolved by aligning closer with the imperial family and thereby reframing any perceived threat to the Empire as equally a threat to Australia. In short, if Australia was always potentially being invaded it could disavow its own founding act of invasion, while any internal acts of force were deemed necessary protective measures.

The most useful way of understanding the familial metaphors of Empire, then, is “within the realm of fantasy,” with “home” being “a space that must be defended” from outsiders.\textsuperscript{113} This conception of home masqueraded as the impossible ideal of total cohesion between the colonies and England, an ideal which, as we will see, found its equivalent in the British press.\textsuperscript{114} Understood as a fantasy construction, the force of press coverage of the NSW contingent might be read as less about defending Egypt or avenging Gordon than as buttressing notions of “home” and “mother” crucial to the Australian imaginary. This conception, moreover, validates another key feature of settler press discourse exemplified in the *Echo* passage cited above. Namely, the audience for Australian press appeals was British as well as Australian and they must be read as responding to the colonial position as seen through British eyes.

**“To ‘advertise’ these colonies”**

As with the Australian contribution to the Waikato War before it, the NSW contingent to the Sudan prompted local newspapers to speak to a British readership. Rather than explicitly defending the settler enterprise as in the early 1860s, though, coverage of the Sudan episode circled around the initiation of a more harmonious and mutually advantageous collaboration. Examples of this were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2003), 38.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Hall and Rose, “Introduction,” 25.
\end{itemize}
frequent and diverse. In the lead up to the contingent’s embarkation an *Argus* editorial declared:

The effect of the offers of troops for the Soudan cannot fail to have a strong effect on the popular imagination in England, and to ‘advertise’ these colonies—a difficult and costly process—in the metropolis itself . . . The most hopeful sign of the day is that Australia has been ‘discovered’, and that her local ambition and her Imperial sympathies are at last being understood.\(^{115}\)

Disregarding the historical resonance of British “discovery” of Australia, imperial appreciation of the colonies is clearly understood as the contingent’s key achievement. The *Brisbane Courier* also recognised the opportunity to present Australian loyalty to the mother country: “Nothing would make our fellow-countrymen in England understand us better, or enable them to appreciate at once the genuine attachment of Australia to the Empire, and its claim to be treated as an important section of that Empire” as the sending of troops.\(^{116}\) Likewise, upon learning of Dalley’s offer, the *SMH* assured its readers that not only did they now have a captive English audience but that the emotional response to the offer was mutual: “If the news of the Egyptian difficulties created a deep impression here,” writes the *SMH*, “the news of our offer of assistance has created a deep impression there.”\(^{117}\)

This was not merely publicity for its own sake but the expression of a vital message. Three months later, deflecting criticism of the contingent’s economic expense, the *SMH* noted: “It has been common to remark that the colony has been advertised, and there is a vulgar sense in which that word is used to which no one would desire to attach any great importance.”\(^{118}\) “But,” it conceded, “it has been important to bring closely home to the British mind the political weight which these great and growing colonies are destined to exercise.”\(^{119}\) Beyond self-promotion, the press coverage of the contingent was responding to how Australia saw itself from Britain’s perspective. The colonies could here present not only an idealised version of themselves, they also could make good the settler colonial project as substantiated through British responses to the contingent. As we have seen, it was through acts of warfare that colonists might surpass all previous efforts to prove their worth. While

\(^{115}\) *Argus*, 23 February, 1885, 4. Even the *Bulletin*, for all its criticism of the contingent, had to concede that “as an advertisement its value is probably incalculable.” *Bulletin*, 28 February, 1885, 3. However, this idea could at times be balanced by the stated “material” effects of the contingent. *Mercury*, 10 April 1885, 2.

\(^{116}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 13 February, 1885, 4. For a similar statement see *Argus*, 20 February, 1885, 4.

\(^{117}\) *SMH*, 16 February, 1885, 6.

\(^{118}\) *SMH*, 15 May, 1885, 6.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.
reminding its readers that colonial sporting exploits had provided some evidence “that the Australian climate was not ruinous to the English physique,” the SMH knew that nothing had yet satisfied the British imagination as had colonial troops.120

Evidence of this satisfaction lay in scrupulous monitoring of British newspapers. “It is impossible,” the same editorial continued, “to read the notices in the English press without becoming aware that the English mind has wakened up on the subject,” and “that the history of the British Empire has entered on a new phase.”121 Eager colonists could in turn read of a thoroughly agreeable reflection of their importance. Superlative accounts of the NSW troops from, among others, the St James’s Gazette, the (London) Daily Telegraph, and the Pall Mall Gazette were reproduced with consecutive passages praising the colonist’s masculinity, their unified patriotism, their civilisational progress, and the moral and racial boost they offered the Empire.122 Even Lord Loftus’ widely transcribed speech to the contingent reminded the troops that: “The eyes of your gracious Queen will be bent upon your exertions, and in every part of the world where your flag floats men and women and children will eagerly read of your exploits.”123 The basic operation of these passages was to allow colonists to see in British reports a reflection of themselves as a cohesive community. The individual colonist was asked to imagine British readers appreciating a united Australian feeling toward Britain, thus comprehending their emerging nation through British eyes. And it was through this gaze that Australia could be discerned as a distinct entity. This process accords with Slavoj Žižek’s idea of “symbolic efficiency,” or, “for a fact to become true it is not enough for us just to know it, we need to know that the fact is also known by the big Other too.”124 That is to say, only through its endorsement by the mother country could this colonial gesture achieve its aim.

For a sense of identity to be beholden to external endorsement, however, was also to be vigilantly guarding against its reproach. Colonial unease over British condescension was widespread and notorious.125 One year after the Sudan crisis, in a disparaging review of James Froude’s Oceana, New Zealand political figure Edward Wakefield (Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s nephew) conceded of his fellow

120 Ibid; A similar idea is expressed in “Advance Australia!,” Evening News, 13 February, 1885, 5.
121 SMH, 15 May, 1885, 6
122 “The Australian Contingent,” SMH, 15 April, 1885, 10. See also SMH, 4 April, 1885, 10.
125 See for example Mercury, 14 February, 1885, 2.
colonists: “the people of these young colonies . . . are self-conscious just as boys and girls are in whom the mental and physical powers are prematurely and exceptionally developed.”126 Similarly, exactly one year prior to the troop’s embarkation, Sydney’s Daily Telegraph had recognised that “the bad odour of past operations of our countrymen still clings to English nostrils.”127 The need to overcome this irksome sensitivity made positive commentary on the contingent all the more necessary.

This was no easy task. The Argus in May 1885 attempted to manage these concerns but ended up producing its own tensions. It began by stating with outward relief that “England is apparently a great deal happier than it was because of the Australian contingent to the Soudan.” It then offered a densely figurative sketch of the contingent’s British reception:

This is the last military baby of the nation, or perhaps it should be said the first grandchild. The child is a fine one. That we all know. And quite the usual course has been followed of calling in the experts to pinch the little arms and feel the little weight, and to extol the merits of the interesting stranger.128

Read beside other editorials cited above, this oddly triumphant infantilising of the contingent can be contrasted to depictions of the colonies’ maturation, a disparity epitomising the dual tropes of colonial independence and dependence.

Yet the complexities of this illustration are better understood by refocussing on how the contingent ostensibly united the sparring colonies under British inspection. Speaking of acting-Premier Dalley, the Argus wrote: “We trust that it is not a fly in his ointment that no one in England ever seems to refer to his corps as other than the ‘Australian Contingent,’ its identification with New South Wales being either quite forgotten or completely ignored.”129 It is the variation in tone here from an earlier editorial that is most striking. In February of that year, the Argus had indignantly rejected British accounts charged with “ignoring” Victoria and thus heightening the intercolonial race for British acclaim. Indeed the thought of New South Wales being singled out for praise owing to Britain’s sole acceptance of their troops bordered on the incomprehensible. “The messages from England,” wrote the Argus:

127 Cited in Trainor, British Imperialism, 43.
128 Argus, 9 May, 1885, 8.
129 Ibid.
speak of a desire to ‘compliment the colony’. The use of the singular form of the word is, we may presume, accidental, as it would be felt by many to be somewhat of a rebuff if, while New South Wales is favoured, Victoria, which was really the first to show the way with her gunboats, should meet with another refusal.\textsuperscript{130}

Returning to the previous May editorial, this tension was now seemingly resolved. The point, however, is that this resolution occurred at the rhetorical level through the English reference to the contingent as “Australian” rather than colonial, a reference apparently based on English ignorance.

The \textit{Argus} understood that acceptance of colonial unity by English readers demonstrated not just the success of the contingent but metropolitan obliviousness to this “interesting stranger.” “England deals with us broadly,” it continued, it “knows little or nothing of our local distinctions, and this is one of the great lessons taught by the contingent.”\textsuperscript{131} Dalley’s alleged original motivation (for NSW to get one up on her more prosperous Southern neighbour) is again acknowledged only to be superceded by the meaning accorded to the contingent in Britain: “We do not know whether Mr. Dalley merely meant to do good for New South Wales, but the fact is that in sending the contingent he achieved greatness for Australia.”\textsuperscript{132} In this, the \textit{Argus} conceded that the contingent’s ultimate significance lay not in its performance on the battlefield (which was proving to be non-existent), but the continued satisfaction of the mother country: “If the corps goes to England for exhibitionary purposes, that will be its crowning honour, and we shall all feel sure that we shall be as well and truly represented in the perils of London as we were in the dangers of the Soudan.”\textsuperscript{133} The success of this rhetorical procedure lay not in the \textit{Argus’} statements of Australian wholeness per se, nor even that this wholeness was unfulfilled until ratified externally. Rather, the affirmation of colonial unity was made possible by British misrecognition. Only under this mistaken scrutiny could the \textit{Argus} ascertain Australia’s proper place within the imperial order.

Still, the colonial press was nothing if not heterogeneous. A \textit{Mercury} editorial taking a more pragmatic stance complicated even an idea as prominent as realising Australian cohesion through British observation. The \textit{Mercury} fully granted that

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Argus}, 17 February, 1885, 4. This position was attacked head-on a few days later by the \textit{Evening News}. See “Australian Loyalty,” \textit{Evening News}, 20 February, 1885, 4.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Argus}, 9 May, 1885, 8.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
the contingent had “caused an outburst in the London Press,” and that the English view of the colonies had greatly improved from being that of a “nuisance.” Yet, belying the same evidence the Argus had depended upon, the Mercury saw this praise as excessive. Indeed, of the contingent’s importance the Mercury submitted that, “the London Press has said a great deal more than has been heard in the Colonies.”\footnote{Mercury, 21 May, 1885, 2.} It then quoted the London Daily Telegraph’s excited proclamation praising the apparent emergence of Australia as a world power before hastening to add that this bore little resemblance to fact. Rather, contra the Argus, the Mercury saw colonial disunity as the reason for disproving the Telegraph:

If the contingent had been an Australasian one, if the Colonies had joined together to send a force to help the Mother-Country in the hour of her need, the fine writing would have also been true writing, but as it is, the fact remains that New South Wales stands alone, and appears to be resolved to so stand.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Mercury continued that though the New South Wales action was to be praised, “very much more remains to be done before the Empire will be consolidated as a whole.” In other words, the Mercury, as opposed to the Argus, flatly denied the terms in which London’s Daily Telegraph had hailed a consolidated Australia. Such passages bear witness to the competing claims that limited any discursive cohesion in something as unwieldy as the newspaper press. However, despite relying on the imperial press network to contradict the Telegraph, the Mercury still foresaw the potential for this sentiment to be realised. Crucially, it ended by hoping that such unity was possible through the global system of telegraph communications: “The whole earth now vibrates with messages of moment from one portion of the British Empire to the other . . . Surely, when such things exist, it is folly to declare that no new national organisation is possible.”\footnote{Ibid.}

“Who are the patriots?”

It is conventional wisdom that genuine dissent in Australian newspapers toward the offer of the NSW contingent was rare.\footnote{For further exceptions to this see Saunders, Sudan Campaigns of 1884–85, Ch. 5.} While reading even a few days’ worth of papers will uncover enough evidence to complicate this view, it is true that editorials around the country were largely in agreement. They were, moreover, quick to curtail any oppositional responses. This foreclosing of debate was
exemplified by a *Brisbane Courier* editorial that held a different understanding of unity:

Now the time is past for differences of opinion; the offer having been accepted it is our business—the business of all Australians—to make it evident that our proffered help was worth accepting . . . It is too late to argue the advisableness of the movement, and it is not too early to insist that no ebullitions of local feeling should be allowed to interfere with its success.\(^{138}\)

The following day the *Argus* likewise asserted that, “we should be the active friends of the mother country, determined to sink or swim with her,” and, for this reason, the offer of the contingent proved that “Australia definitely abandons the idea which has often been advocated in the radical press, of the ‘neutrality’ of the colonies.”\(^{139}\) Yet this rhetoric is riddled with ambiguities, as this chapter has demonstrated. These passages illustrate how calls for a unity that transcended ideology and politics were themselves supremely ideological gestures. By attempting to block “differences of opinion,” and dismissing dissidents as by definition “radical,” the mainstream consensus endeavored to confirm itself as common sense.\(^{140}\)

Yet, however sporadic, dissenting voices remained significant in the letters pages of these same newspapers, or, indeed in more systematic fashion, in the so-called radical press. Though narrative options for discussing events in the Sudan were largely curtailed in the major dailies, the knowledge that alternative views existed disrupted the fiction that only one account was possible. Arguing against them, moreover, only publicised their presence. Yet this cut both ways. At one level the positing of a “radical press” reinforced the internal consistency of a mainstream consensus, casting those outside it as deviant. Indeed the *Bulletin* itself, perhaps the most singular and irreverent periodical in Australian history, was under no illusion as to the power of its mainstream rivals. As Sylvia Lawson explains, the *Bulletin*’s “very hostility to the major dailies conceded their potency.”\(^{141}\)

This was more than moral outrage. The *Bulletin*, rollicking, impertinent and proudly colonial from its inception, defined itself in relation to the stately and respectable publications of urban Sydney and Melbourne, while aligning with

\(^{138}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 17 February, 1885, 4.

\(^{139}\) *Argus*, 18 February, 1885, 4.


marginalised rural voices. We can here discern the class-antagonisms of the colonies. The *Bulletin* attempted to give voice to working-class concerns over what it saw as an elitist mainstream. Hence the *Argus*, the *Age*, the *Daily Telegraph* and especially the *SMH* all came under fire from the *Bulletin*’s editorials, poems, cartoons, satirical prose and letters. As against the ostensibly more detached major dailies, perhaps no other publication was so vocally and openly reflective of both its and its competitors place in colonial society. This mode of rhetoric alone did much to subvert the tone of divine authority of the major dailies. More to the point, its imprudent acknowledgment of, among other things, cruelty toward the Chinese and the enduring legacy of Australia’s convict origins made the *Bulletin* a particularly discomforting presence in polite society.142 In 1885, when the mainstream papers were rhapsodising over the Sudan expedition and the virtues of fighting and dying for the Empire, the *Bulletin* attacked this position at its core.

Yet the *Bulletin*’s case was at least ostensibly preceded by that of NSW elder political statesman Henry Parkes. Upon the offer of the NSW contingent, the *SMH* famously published a series of letters by Parkes which have been hailed as the chief nonconformist presence in the major dailies by retrospective commentaries on the episode, not least that of Parkes himself. As he explained: “from the first moment [of the acceptance of Dalley’s offer] all my faculties of common-sense and discernment, all my feelings of patriotism and loyalty to the Empire, were opposed to this movement, which I looked upon as uncalled-for, unjustifiable, and quixotic.”143 In Parkes’ recollection, his opinions led to “all the papers published in Sydney set[ting] upon me like ravenous wolves.”144

Parkes’ letters were indeed undeniably significant for the correspondence and commentary they provoked.145 They also revealed much about the colonial press as a public sphere and the privileged access to it for someone of his standing. Yet Parkes’ accusations, grounded chiefly in practicality and legislative legality (not to mention cynical politicking), inadvertently captured the complexities in appealing to both colonial nationalism and imperial patriotism.146 In attacking the militarism he saw proliferating, Parkes declared: “there can be no greater folly than to foster a

142 Ibid., 52-53, 57-69, 87-88; 137-40.
144 Ibid., 421.
145 Including a response in the *SMH* by future Prime Minister George Reid. See “To the Editor of the Herald,” *SMH*, 20 February 1885, 3. A point-by-point rebuttal to Parkes was also offered by the *SMH*. See *SMH*, 20 February, 1885, 6; *SMH*, 24 February, 1885, 6.
spurious spirit of military ardour in a country like ours, where every man is wanted to take his part, in some form or other, in colonising work.” He goes on to argue in a much-quoted passage: “With the right hand we are expending our revenues to import able-bodied men to subjugate the soil, while with the left hand we propose to squander our revenues to deport men to subjugate Sir Edward Strickland’s ‘Saracens’.” In other words, though he has been billed as an anti-imperialist, Parkes was arguing from within imperialism, not against it.

Settler Australia was in its very existence an imperial project of conquest. The “subjugation of the soil” and the establishment of vast numbers of white British immigrants were constitutive settler colonial acts and cannot be extricated from the broader process of British global expansion. Lest any reader mistake Parkes’ loyalties, he concluded with a forceful disclaimer:

One word on the higher question of genuine loyalty. I yield to no man in attachment to the throne and institutions of England. But my notion of loyalty is a steady and consistent performance of duty as citizens of the Empire . . . If a time should unhappily come when England shall be engaged in a great conflict with a great Power . . . our first duty will be to hold inviolate the part of the Empire where our lot is cast; and, this sacred trust secured, to give life and fortune freely, if we have them to spare, beyond our own shores.

In desiring to protect Australia first in the event of war, Parkes is less challenging loyalties than negotiating between them. In the emotional aftermath of Gordon’s death, any rational political figure would have been highly alert to accusations of being anti-Empire. Hence Parkes could tell his readers that, through his dissent, he was even more for the Empire, even if his idea of loyalty had to be qualified. To understand Parkes’ position, then, we have also to understand that Dalley’s offer took place within, and was constrained by, a particular field of social relations, namely that of the commonsensical patriotic militarism befitting good members of the Empire. It was the force of this consensus which made Dalley’s offer so logical. To this extent at least, Parkes, ever the politician, was restricted in his appeals.

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148 Ibid. The Age similarly questioned the wisdom of sending “married men and fathers of families” to fight in an affair that had little to do with their primary local responsibilities. Age, 5 March, 1885, 4.
149 A.W Martin claims in his biography that Parkes and the Bulletin were “one in their rejection of British imperialism.” A.W. Martin, Henry Parkes: A Biography (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 350.
The *Bulletin*, by contrast to Parkes, hacked at the contingent’s moral roots.\textsuperscript{151} Unforgiving in its iconoclasm, the *Bulletin* delighted in subverting what it saw as an obsequious consensus and worked to test the boundaries of public speech. Where, for instance, the Crusades were evoked by the *SMH* (cited above) to stress a shared and sacred heritage of Anglo-Saxon-ness, the *Bulletin* insisted that the Crusades belonged less to the lineage of Christian civilisation than to the “barbaric age.”\textsuperscript{152} Where the meager savings offered to a *SMH* donations appeal by “A little boy at Manly” was widely seen to poignantly embody colonial patriotism, the *Bulletin* saw instead a metaphor for a naïve and reckless jingoism.\textsuperscript{153}

The story of the *Bulletin*’s paradoxes in general and its specific opposition to the NSW contingent has been well told elsewhere and requires little further expansion.\textsuperscript{154} Though without wishing to disregard both Sylvia Lawson’s and John Docker’s warning against decontextualising single elements from this multi-faceted publication, one particular leading column merits remarking upon for its description of the power of press language in framing public debate.\textsuperscript{155} Entitled “Who Are The Patriots?,” it opens by noting that supporters of Dalley’s “martial coup have enjoyed a very distinct advantage over their opponents,” namely, “their audacious assumption that to be excited by a warlike fervour is patriotic, whereas a deliberative and judicial . . . attitude is unpatriotic, if not actually treasonable.”\textsuperscript{156} It then explains: “Jingo partizans . . . have appropriated such terms as patriotism, national honour, prestige, valour, and glory, to themselves, and have taunted the dissentients from their craze with being meanly pitifully deficient in these splendid attributes and emotions.”\textsuperscript{157} In other words, these terms, in the hands of the mainstream press, attained their specific meanings only through their relationship to the ideology of imperial loyalty.\textsuperscript{158} With mainstream speech regulated by a common-sense devotion to the Empire, each of the terms identified by the *Bulletin* was devoid of any positive content until understood in its imperial context.\textsuperscript{159}

Having drawn out the ideological underpinnings of conventional press reportage, the *Bulletin* was forced to fight its counter-struggle. After identifying the hegemonic

\textsuperscript{151} See also the particularly virulent criticism of the contingent in “The Return of the Contingent,” *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate*, 22 May, 1885, 2.
\textsuperscript{152} *Bulletin*, 28 February, 1885, 3.
\textsuperscript{153} Inglis, *Rehearsal* Ch. 4.
\textsuperscript{154} Lawson, *Archibald Paradox*; Inglis, *Rehearsal*.
\textsuperscript{156} *Bulletin*, 7 March, 1885, 3.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 100-03.
imperial meanings of these terms the Bulletin offered its redefinition of them. That is, patriotism for the Bulletin meant not showing blind allegiance to the Empire. The Bulletin understood that in attacking the targeted rhetoric it needed to first unfix the dominant connotations they had acquired before replacing these with its own. Once new meanings had been secured, its argument could proceed. With the mainstream press retaining a firm grip over these words, however, the Bulletin was left to snipe from the sidelines, defining itself in opposition to the SMH.

What the Bulletin missed in offering its counter-definitions was that even if successful in reconfiguring the language it disputed, it merely substituted one set of conditional terms for another. A “master signifier” such as “Empire” was invested with the provisional meaning of a particular historical moment and, as the Bulletin’s argument itself implied, there was nothing preventing other meanings arising in different circumstances. This appears to be overlooked in the editorial that saw the play of meaning ceasing once their truth, hitherto obscured, had been ascertained. In this the Bulletin struggled to square its implicit concession to the slipperiness of language with the maintenance of its own nominated definitions. The real issue was not of fixing forever the true meaning of these words, but the more limited aim of combating the way they had come to be naturalised in public speech and their common frames of reference. What this semantic contest reveals is that the different truths granted to these terms by the SMH and Bulletin were sustained by opposing ideologies. The SMH and the Bulletin existed in contending discursive communities, competing for dominance.

The colonising of language was a theme to which the Bulletin returned repeatedly. Even in its seemingly radical dissent, however, the rhetoric of national loyalty was redefined only within strict limits. The fundamental idea of patriotic virtue itself remained unchallenged, perhaps unchallengeable. The object of patriotism was simply shifted from Empire to nation and its nobility refurbished. Nor was the anti-Empire line as self-evident as it appeared. In 1885 the colonisation of Australia was (as it remains) a continuing project and the Bulletin’s own position was underwritten by a basic identification with white Britishness, increasingly so as perceived threats to Australia’s racial purity intensified. As such, the Bulletin remained caught between opposing imperialism while championing its legacy of exclusionary white settler sovereignty over the land and its first inhabitants. The

Bulletin’s definition of Australia itself was by turns confidently asserted and conflicted. Its conception of national unity was just as internally fragmented, just as dependent on exclusion, as its mainstream rivals. Indeed reading the Bulletin both for its own inconsistencies, and especially against those of the major dailies, clarifies how fraught claims of unity were. Just as the mainstream press found unity in excluding aberrant “radicals,” so too did the Bulletin see unity in restrictive white working-class nationalism.

Excoriating as it could be with reference to Australia’s convict heritage, the Bulletin’s position also shared one particular settler characteristic with its more jingoistic adversaries. Two weeks after the embarkation of troops from Sydney an attendee of the New South Wales legislative assembly had claimed that through the imperial acceptance of the contingent, “his country was glorified, and that the disgrace of Botany Bay was being washed out in the waters of the Nile.” This was precisely the kind of penitence the Bulletin poked fun at. Indeed the Bulletin also drew upon the lurid history of convictism and its victims to score its own “anti-imperial” points. As Terra Joseph has suggested, however, “the figure of the convict does not serve as a criticism of the ideology of imperialism; quite literally, it whitewashes settler colonialism.” That is, the focus “on dispossessed and disenfranchised white immigrants . . . rewrite[s] Australian history as a white story.” What resisted either atonement or easy ridicule was the ongoing struggle on and over Australian soil between Aboriginal Australians and settlers, historically including both the “convict” and the contemporary colonist. The acknowledgement of one sordid past thus worked to elide another.

Such blind spots can even be seen in the Bulletin’s basic position regarding the Sudan crisis, a position broadly shared in Britain by Gladstone. Condensed in an editorial line at once strikingly logical and conspicuously absent from the mainstream editorials, it asked:

If it be noble and elevating for Britons in Australia to offer their lives and their fortunes (nobody has yet done the latter) for their mother country’s sake, is it not noble and elevating also for the Arabs of the Soudan to lay down their lives and fortunes for the love of their mother country?

162 Lawson, Archibald Paradox, 130, 40.
164 Lawson, Archibald Paradox, 131-40.
166 Ibid.
167 Bulletin, 28 February, 1885, 3 (original emphasis).
By directly questioning British and Australian moral authority, the *Bulletin* appeared to dismantle the fundamental premise underlying imperial ideology. Nonetheless, echoes of Australia’s own history can be sensed. The *Bulletin’s* critique of the NSW contingent cannot be openly stated to have its analogue in settler Australian origins of invasion and Aboriginal resistance, even though these were subjects later tentatively broached in its pages.\(^{168}\) As Sylvia Lawson concludes on the matter, “very often,” for the *Bulletin*, “unlike the Chinese, the first Australians were editorially invisible, out-of-print.”\(^ {169}\) And yet its logic remains clear. Here we can see that the unconscious of the text is not so much repressed as displaced. That is to say, the anxiety at the heart of settler society, its fundamental illegitimacy, is perfectly articulated by the *Bulletin*, only removed to a different locale.

**“Take me, conquer me if necessary”**

To conclude I return briefly to the ways the NSW contingent functioned to bring together themes of war, colonial expansion and race. It pays to remember that whereas during the Waikato War the subject was a corresponding settler colony, the Sudan crisis provoked responses to a different mode of empire building. Yet they could be equated when it was deemed ideologically convenient to do so. In the following, the *SMH* configured the basic precepts of intervention in the Sudan to retroactively vindicate the history of its own society.

Taking it upon itself to justify colonialism through “broad principles,” the *SMH* conceded that “[w]e have no right anywhere if the claim of prior occupation is to hold—no right in India, Australia, South Africa, or New Guinea unless we found our right upon a broad conception of our mission.”\(^ {170}\) Having set up the problem, the solution offered by the *SMH* is telling. “And what higher mission is there ahead of Anglo-Saxondom, as represented by the British Empire,” it asks, “than to answer the cry of the savagedom of the world—Take me, conquer me if necessary, but govern and instruct me?” The *SMH* continued to draw the requisite link with the

\(^{168}\) Docker, *Nervous Nineties*, 28, 68.  
\(^{170}\) *SMH*, 13 February, 1885, 5. See also *Brisbane Courier*, 27 February, 1885, 4.
current campaign: “And where is the cry more loud and more urgent than at present from all the wild tribes of the Soudan?”

Immediately we can read a technique of disempowering Indigenous territorial claims so as to manage the obvious problem in acknowledging their existence. As Lorenzo Veracini has noted, this rhetoric perpetuates a logic whereby “[p]rior occupancy becomes . . . a mere historical accident, and while indigenous peoples have arrived earlier they have no qualitatively better claims than those of later arrivals.” The SMH’s reasoning here reveals little that is new, but what must be stressed is the conflict between what it recognised as requiring justification and its rationale in doing so. The SMH in effect offered a moral grounding for what it seemingly accepted in advance was immoral.

One of the more cynical ways of pardoning colonisation, as in the above passage, was to rewrite the act of conquest as one based on express invitation. The manoeuvre was firstly to construct invaded peoples as “savage” and then impute to them the conscious desire to be not only “instructed,” but aggressively possessed. The analogy here is of the abuser who after the fact accuses their victim of soliciting the abuse. This formulation is immediately contradictory since if “wild tribes” were fully alert to their need to be governed and instructed, and were pleading to this effect, they were unlikely to necessitate “conquering.” Yet it was exactly this expansionist impulse that had to be rewritten into a narrative that invited the newspaper reader to experience their nation, or colony, as participating in a noble quest, an onerous duty of the kind that would find classic expression in Kipling’s *White Man’s Burden*.

For Sara Ahmed, this reasoning leads to a metonymic sliding between affective signs that depend “on past histories of association.” That is, the movement between the set of signs employed by the SMH, (the sample of conquered lands, the talk of rights, prior occupation, mission, savagedom, government, etc.), carry an affective, if implicit, charge gained through accreted historical connotations. Each word conveyed, and hence circulated and accumulated, the accepted meanings associated with them. “Savagedom” was thus a historically loaded negative condition and something to be expelled by a (historically benevolent) “mission” to implant civilization and governance. As Ahmed’s formulation suggests, the affective

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171 Ibid.
174 Ibid., 127.
element is felt in the communal identification with these histories. “We” identify with “our” mission to rescue “them” from savagedom.

The end of this reworked narrative was therefore not to celebrate illegitimate imperial expansion, clearly something the SMH has spent some time pondering, but, in a discursive twist, to incorporate settler history into a grander scheme that could avoid such reflections altogether. The point, as I have argued, was not the consistency and accuracy of the justifications offered. Rather, it was the multiple displacements of the imperial impulses necessitating such entities as the NSW contingent in the first place. I have suggested that the function of the contingent was as a signifier that resisted a single meaning, containing instead a shifting array of anxieties. Its ideological value existed not despite of its inconsistencies but because of them.

Accordingly, the crucial move in the above editorial was less in determining a correct solution to its stated problem, than the statement of the problem itself. For the SMH, the act of justifying the “rights” of invading and occupying foreign territory on any “broad conception of our mission” assumed such rights pre-existed and only required elaboration. Though depicted as a dispute which ultimately took the side of reason, the SMH, in its framing of the problem seemingly wins the ideological battle in advance, leaving subsequent respondents to debate only the adequacy of their proposed “principles.” The contradictions that settler narratives were asked to withstand, however, demanded a capaciousness of discourse that would continually leave open spaces from which challenges to it could be made.
CHAPTER FIVE

“’Australia’ in English ears just now has a magic sound”:

The South African War, 1899-1902

Of all the foreign conflicts during the long reign of Victoria the South African War (1899-1902) had the deepest resonance in both Australia and Britain.¹ Events in the Sudan in 1885 and other comparable small wars gave little warning of the challenge that would confront the Empire in South Africa where the scale and gravity of conflict was unprecedented. The war occupies a unique position in imperial historiography. It both concluded the century of unquestioned British predominance and ushered in the era of its gradual eclipse by emergent powers.² As if to symbolise the transition, the aged Queen herself died during the war’s duration and only weeks after Australian Federation. On the eve of the war, itself the capstone of the “scramble for Africa,” the territories of the British Empire had never been more vast. And yet unease was pervasive.³ The jingoism that the war famously occasioned was, in its own way, a slightly frantic signal of the growing lack of confidence in Britain’s imperial project. Meanwhile, the national federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 appeared to mark a more forthright proclamation of their individual character even as they bombastically announced their imperial loyalties.⁴ By the end of the war perhaps 20,000 Australians, including women as nurses from all six colonies had served in some capacity in waging war in South Africa.⁵

Building upon the analysis of the Sudan crisis, this chapter concentrates on the attempts to secure an Australian identity at a time of imperial alarm, when Australians were ambiguously defined against both their internal racial “others,”

¹ Commonly labelled the Boer War or, more properly, the Second Boer War, I use the “South African War” so as not to elide the significant non-Boer African involvement on both sides of the conflict. See Shula Marks, “War and Union, 1899-1910,” in The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 2, 1885-1994, ed. Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 160.
⁵ Craig Wilcox, Australia’s Boer War: The War in South Africa, 1899-1902 (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), xiii, Ch. 11.
and the South African Boers. Attending to the representation of the “Bushman” soldier, I examine the peculiarly Australian anxieties over racial and gendered decay. The attempts to relieve these anxieties saw recourse to tropes of Australian land productivity and territorial inheritance. Yet not only did these same rhetorical defences betray their own tensions, but the newspaper form itself gave space to dissidents and opened up public debate during the first “phase” of the war.⁶ Although British confirmation of Australian achievements retained its importance, the press system was such that challenges to dominant views were increasingly present.

The pretext for British military intervention in South Africa in 1899 was the need to secure political and civil rights for the Uitlanders (foreigner), the appellation applied to mostly British (though with a significant Australian component) migrant workers in the Transvaal goldfields.⁷ In reality, the origins of the South African War continue to be intensely debated.⁸ The most persuasive view suggests that the South African War was undertaken with the broad imperative of safeguarding territory within the African continent that would achieve one or more of three main goals: fortifying buffer regions against internal threats; acquiring territory for markets, resources (including, it is worth stressing, the world’s largest known goldfields) and trade; and pre-emptively capturing these territories before rising European powers had a chance to do so.⁹ Thus, for John Darwin, the underlying rationale for British involvement was the strategic aim of “defend[ing] their regional supremacy and its geopolitical corollary, control of the Cape and the sea route to India.”¹⁰ An ancillary element of this strategy was the protection of the Indian military reserves upon which the Empire, including the Australasian colonies, at least potentially, depended.¹¹ The possibility of compromised routes to and via the Cape thus also endangered those routes perceived as vital to Australia.¹² To this extent the common aside that the South African War had slight practical bearing on

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¹⁰ Darwin, Empire Project, 241.
¹¹ Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, Africa and the Victorians, 13.
Australian colonists is misleading.\textsuperscript{13} Strictly divorcing Australian concerns from British involvement in Africa overlooks the imperial context for a national one.

At this time South Africa consisted of two Boer-controlled republics, the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and the two British colonies of Natal and Cape Colony amidst black African territorial fragments. British observers had long recognised the effective rule of a dominant white minority over an overwhelming black majority as potentially explosive. The South African Boers for their part claimed to be defending their homeland against political, economic and cultural intrusion. By the late-1880s the discovery of the Rand goldfields, adding to the post-1860s discovery of diamonds, had transformed the South African economy, and along with gains in wealth and power came the means to set a dangerous precedent of independence from Britain. Yet the very wealth that granted this power attracted British speculators in numbers that threatened Boer sovereignty, generating racial animosity between the two principal white minorities. This “sudden conjuncture of ethnic, economic and geopolitical tensions,” according to Darwin, soon “turned South Africa, almost overnight, from a colonial backwater into the most volatile quarter of the Victorian empire.”\textsuperscript{14}

The unfortunate third party, black South Africans, were, with significant exceptions, of secondary consideration to white South Africans, politicians and strategists in London, British Uitlanders, and colonists alike. Strange as it may now seem, the racial problem defining the South African War for contemporary commentators was that existing between the two major white populations. The approximately 100,000 black Africans involved in different capacities on either side, however, belied the official idea that this was a “white man’s war.”\textsuperscript{15} South Africa’s demographic imbalance between its white and black populations also differentiated it from settler colonies such as Australia. Partly for this reason, South Africa troubled British imperial narratives in ways that other white settler colonies did not. South Africa, unlike Australia, resisted any comfortable assimilation into an imagined Greater Britain.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{14} Darwin, \textit{Empire Project}, 219.


\textsuperscript{16} Dubow, "How British?", 7-8.
Along with these concerns lingered a recent history of tension between British and Boer. The humiliating memory of British defeat by the Boers at Majuba Hill in 1881 was stirred fourteen years later by the comically inept Jameson Raid of 1895, a botched attempt by Cecil Rhodes’ acolyte Leander Starr Jameson to foment an Uitlander rebellion as a rationale for British annexation. Thus, “at one level,” for Shula Marks, the South African War was “about colonial self-determination—however limited—but at another, it was also a war for the survival of a settler society, and about the credibility and international reputation of the British Empire, raising major moral issues of global importance.”

Indeed the imperative for the British of maintaining a veneer of dominance was crucial. For Prime Minister Salisbury, “the real point to be made good to South Africa is that we not the Dutch are Boss.” This was a point the SMH also noted, with its own racial inflections, in an editorial at the outset of the war. The Uitlander issue, it claimed, was surpassed in import by the “main question,” that is, “whether British rule is to be paramount and unquestioned in South Africa or not, and if the divided counsels of a divided race are to be superseded by a governing force which will not be Uitland, nor colonial, nor Afrikander [sic], but simply British.” From a longer historical view, then, Stanley Trapido has argued that the war which commenced on 11th October 1899 “was the culmination—if not an inevitable one—of a hundred years of British domination of the region.”

Calamity struck early for the British when the Boers inflicted upon them a series of startling defeats in the war’s opening months. The most shocking of these occurred during “Black Week,” as the 10th-17th December 1899 came to be known. Within a few days British forces sustained three resounding and traumatic routs at Colenso, Stormberg, and Magersfontein at the cost of some 3000 British soldiers. Many contemporaries viewed these events as a harbinger for the impending fate of the Empire on which the sun was never supposed to set. This was clearly not just another passing African military adventure for British and colonial troops. Seeking emotional relief, this particular catastrophe would find its inverse in the riotous

17 Marks, "War and Union," 157.
19 SMH, 13 October, 1899, 6.
celebrations following the so-called relief of the Boer siege on the otherwise unremarkable town of Mafeking in May 1900.\textsuperscript{21}

Crucially, both the disasters and triumphs of the war penetrated British (and Australian) imaginations as deeply as they did largely through their ubiquitous media coverage. In the extravagance of the Mafeking celebrations (begetting even its own verb: "mafficking") it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the painful jolt of Black Week prompted the apparent catharsis witnessed later. In other words, celebratory imperial narratives distracted from closely related traumas. Significantly, too, as Paula Krebs points out, in their reporting of Mafeking the British press attempted to muddy the division between a respectable middle-class patriotism and a crude working-class jingoism in order to construct a broader notional "public."\textsuperscript{22}

Communication developments therefore saw the South African War described as the first “media war.”\textsuperscript{23} Though modern media forms had influenced the direction and representation of conflict since at least the mid-century Crimean War, events in South African War were mediated to a hitherto unmatched extent. This created both obstacles and opportunities for the war’s promoters and detractors alike, giving a second life to news reports through their recycling in interviews, poems,

\textsuperscript{21} For Mafeking’s cultural resonance see the opening chapter of Paula M. Krebs, \textit{Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 2-3.

visual imagery and theatrical and music hall translations. The rise of the celebrity journalist also saw such figures as A. Conan Doyle, Winston Churchill, J.A. Hobson, Kipling, Mark Twain, and from Australia, Harry “Breaker” Morant and Banjo Paterson among others reporting or commenting on the war and giving it a global profile that touched public lives.

The wire telegraph also came into its own during the war, its imperial value evident in a brief example. Arguably the major anti-war British organ was the Manchester Guardian, and it was this publication that also informed like-minded colonial citizens. Yet where Australian colonists would have to wait up to seven weeks to receive each edition by mail, they were the recipients of the Colonial Office’s pro-war telegrams within hours. We can only speculate as to how this contributed to Australian attitudes to the war, but given the recent appetite for the freshest news available, out-dated opinion would likely have registered only with partisan devotees. The imperial press system was, moreover, deeply inter-reliant. Australian newspapers depended on their British counterparts for reports from South Africa, while the British press itself depended on South African organisations. In some instances, Australian readers gained much of their information from the reports of a select few British journalists, Churchill prominent among them. The result was a marked standardisation of coverage on events in South Africa, with a distinctly British bias.

“To try again”

Australian historiography has often noted the South African War’s coincidence with Australian Federation in passing. At the time, however, an anticipation of the part that war would come to play in forging their nationhood suffused the federating

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26 O’Hara, "New Histories,” 618.
28 Ibid.
29 For a short but considered discussion of the sentimental links between the two see John Hirst, "Blooding the Nation: The Boer War and Federation,” in The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire, The Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference, Nov 1 1999, ed. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra: Department of Defence, Army History Unit, 2000). The six Australian colonies were officially “states” from 1901, though as this chapter is not chronological I retain “colonies” to avoid confusion.
At the federation celebrations, A.B. Paterson himself offered a verse which claimed Australia’s involvement in South Africa as the key to entry into “the Sisterhood of Nations.” John Hirst has since argued that the gratification felt in British praise for Australian troops, and the effect this had on national self-perception, meant that the similar response hoped for in federation “had become less necessary just as it was to be established.” As in Sydney in March 1885, the crowds that flocked to farewell their troops hinted at the initial Australian public enthusiasm for the war. Again, more than 200,000 of Sydney’s citizens lined rain-soaked streets for two miles leading to Circular Quay, singing imperial anthems, waving ribbons and shouting patriotic slogans. Unlike in 1885, however, since each colony could now supply their own troops, similar scenes were replicated throughout the country’s main city centres.

Yet within Australia, as in Britain, anxiety was widespread. New social movements were testing the social fabric. The rise of feminism and the suffragettes challenged patriarchal systems, while the 1890s saw the first labour parties arise out of industrial strikes and organised union agitation. These developments, forcefully articulated in working-class newspapers, alarmed the middle and upper classes. More frightening still, the financial depression of the early 1890s, producing often extreme poverty, had highlighted the retrospectively conceived “long boom” of the

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30 Of the voluminous books on the South African War the major publications dealing with Australia are mostly of a nationalist slant. See Wilcox, *Australia’s Boer War*; Field, *Forgotten War*; and the Australian-focussed chapters in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, eds., *The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire, The Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference, Nov 1 1999* (Canberra: Department of Defence, Army History Unit, 2000).


32 Hirst, “Blooding the Nation,” 221. This seems to be a point overlooked in John Griffiths’ discussion of Antipodean sentiment toward both Imperial Federation and the South African War. See John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Ch. 1.


A calamitous drought that would last until 1903 followed the depression and further ruptured the hitherto buoyant mood of the colonies, underscoring the ambivalence toward the environment that had long marked Australia’s distinction from Britain. What the land had given in gold and grassland, it had taken away as it sucked the remaining moisture from crops and livestock.

Demographically, too, by the turn of the century the Australia-born white population, or “natives” as they had taken to calling themselves, easily exceeded those from the “mother country,” and this strengthened the movement to formalise in parliamentary legislation the racial purity upon which Australia’s future progress was thought to be grounded. The South African War thus presented both a challenge and an opportunity to colonial Britishness, compounding existing invasion anxieties and complicating notions of white supremacy and imperial belonging.

In this context it is unsurprising that the war represented another opportunity to demarcate a coherent Australian identity within the Empire. Given the inability of the Sudan crisis to generate any lasting mythology, events in South Africa allowed Australians, in Leo Amery’s words, to “try again.” If we can believe certain official voices, the war was something of an obsession for Australian colonists in its early months, and one that cut across class divisions. In March 1900, the Tasmanian Governor claimed: “Each morning the newspaper offices are surrounded by crowds

35 Western Australian again proved the exception by largely avoiding the effects of the depression through the timely discovery of goldfields.
37 The Immigration Restriction Act 1901, cornerstone of the so-called White Australia policy, was among the first pieces of federal legislation passed. On the characteristic manoeuvre of claiming settler indigeneity, Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson have noted: “One of the principal functions of the indigenizing narrative is to legitimize the settler; to put the settler in the cultural and discursive place of the indigene whose physical space has already been invaded.” Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, "Settler Colonies," in A Companion to Postcolonial Studies, ed. Henry Schwarz and Saneeata Ray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 364. See also Julie Evans et al., "Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility," in Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility, ed. Julie Evans, et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 9.
of people anxious to learn the latest news from the seat of the war, and the telegrams daily posted outside these offices are eagerly read by all classes.”

Likewise, much Australian academic assessment of the war has focussed on the public response. The most influential of this scholarship has seen arguments range from claiming near unanimity of support for the war on the one hand, to, on the other, the suggestion that this alleged enthusiasm was only “manufactured spontaneity.” In this latter view, Australians were misled into fighting in South Africa. Rather than “imperialist fervour” explaining Australian support for the war, Chris Connolly has suggested that it was instead a product of conscious manipulation on the part of the British Colonial Office. As Connolly notes, “Most newspapers in New South Wales supported the war once it had begun, but like the patriotic accounts they provide direct evidence for the viewpoint of only one section of society.” Contemporary opponents of the war thus contended that propagandistic press machinations distorted information and censored letters to favour a narrow, elite pro-war perspective.

Craig Wilcox, on the other hand, suggests that Black Week marked a turning point in attitudes that resulted in the scotching of most public dissent, including that of the working class. Even the Bulletin in its own idiosyncratic manner briefly recanted its anti-war platform after Black Week to proclaim: “The empire, right or

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42 For the latter view see Chris Connolly, "Manufacturing 'Spontaneity': The Australian Offers of Troops for the Boer War," Australian Historical Studies 18, no. 70 (1978); "Class, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War," Australian Historical Studies 18, no. 71 (1978); Field, Forgotten War, Ch. 1. For the former view see Penny, "Australia's Reactions."; "The Australian Debate on the Boer War," Historical Studies 14, no. 56 (1971); Craig Wilcox, "Looking Back on the South African War," in The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire, The Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference, Nov 1 1999, ed. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra: Department of Defence, Army History Unit, 2000).
43 Connolly, "Manufacturing 'Spontaneity'," 106-07.
44 "Class, Birthplace, Loyalty," 211.
46 Wilcox, Australia’s Boer War, 428n.
wrong.” In an apparent reflection of public sentiment this misjudged campaign led to a sharp drop in circulation. According to Wilcox, Black Week witnessed the peak of Australian enthusiasm. This followed a period of initial scepticism, and was followed in turn by profound disillusionment as the harrowing facts of the later guerrilla phase of the war, with its “concentration camps” and shocking civilian casualties, came to light, and as jaded readers turned their attention to the Boxer Rebellion in China.

Important though these studies are, their range is restricted to weighing conscious political reactions and overt manipulation. Far less scholarship exists of the relation between Australian press rhetorical responses to the war and the tropes of settler colonialism. To clear the way for this new assessment, I do not consider in any depth many of the traditionally favoured topics of Australian historians, notably the “Breaker” Morant saga and the infamous later phases of the war, not to mention the 500-odd Australians sent to China in 1900. I instead attend to certain neglected themes that framed Australian newspaper discussion of the early stages of the war, namely, those of race, gender and the varied legitimations underpinning settler narratives.

“**The mother nation’s gift**”

The imminence of the South African War prompted a reaffirmation in the Australian press of the mutually beneficial ties between the colonies and Britain. This was to be expected. With Australia’s sense of its own superiority resting on British supremacy elsewhere, Australian newspapers with few exceptions saw maintenance of this supremacy as paramount. The prevalence of this view led to official British war policy being, for the most part, quarantined from editorial scrutiny. Further, British predominance and revitalisation, so Australian editorials claimed, could best be secured with colonial assistance.

Attempts to promote Australianness alongside Britishness, however, could lead to awkward confrontations with colonial history. In the immediate prelude to the war,

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47 Bulletin, 10 February, 1900, 6. The Bulletin later “regained its truculence,” once the British had recovered ground. Connolly, ”Class, Birthplace, Loyalty,” 221.
48 Penny, ”Australia’s Reactions,” 115.
the *Argus* attempted to simplify the matter of national identification by drawing a straight line from Britishness to Australianness, reframing national belonging as racial heritage. “It is a great thing,” proclaimed the *Argus*, “to be British in blood and brains, in courage and purpose, and to have inherited British laws and literature. We are heirs to the civilisation of a splendid people.” Here colonial readers were assured that they were, in fact, self-evidently British. Yet attempts to present readers with a stable identity paradoxically threw the validity of colonial Australia’s existence into question. As part of an anticipatory defence of Australian involvement in the war, the *Argus* continued:

The continent we live on is the mother nation’s gift, and with it her Australian children have received complete political liberty. Also, under the British flag Australia has enjoyed absolute security for more than a hundred years. We have not had to repel an invader; we have not dreaded the earth hunger of European powers, who, if ever they looked in this direction, saw the British flag floating in the breeze, and thenceforth sought to gratify their territorial ambitions in other parts of the globe . . . And for the future our progress and prosperity are bound up with the stability of the empire.

A rhetoric of legitimation structured settler discourse. In Australia’s case, the fiction later known as *terra nullius* licensed territorial conquest. Accordingly, the *Argus’s* conceit of “gift giving” rested on a benign assumption of white possession and the elision of Aboriginal land ownership. The reciprocal nature of giving and receiving between two consenting parties rendered the bequest of the Australian continent uncontroversial; after all, one cannot give as a gift that which belongs to someone else. Yet inherent in the giving of a gift is the (unmentioned) social contract of reciprocation. To even acknowledge a gift, as Slavoj Žižek points out, is to compromise it: “the moment a gift is recognized as such, it gives rise to a symbolic debt in the recipient, it becomes entangled in the economy of exchange, and thus loses the characteristic of pure gift.” This symbolic debt was to be played out repeatedly in the trope of white Australians proving themselves as worthy recipients of the land.

In the above passage there is also a denial of Australian settlers’ own contribution to the claiming of the continent. In much settler discourse, the ostensible rationale for boasts of progress was the heroic taming of an unforgiving land. This triumph over adversity was seen to validate settler territorial occupancy with settlers,

50 *Argus*, 2 October, 1899, 4.
51 Ibid.
through these trials, making the land their own.\textsuperscript{54} Here, though, the land is portrayed simply as a gift bestowed from mother to child, an act for which the child cannot be held responsible. The language of inheritance thus played into the metaphor of the natal dynasty (as we will soon see, this same logic was problematically applied to the Boers). The Australian settler here faced a dilemma. To justify their presence on the continent, the evolution of the nation was celebrated and its achievements publicised to the outside world. At the same time, white Australia’s origins necessitated a disavowal of that same history and its re-inscription within a British narrative, forcing a renunciation of settler achievements. Australian press discourse relating to the South African War transpired between these two poles of self-congratulation and denial.

The \textit{Argus}' celebration of the lack of invasions of Australian soil overlooked that the “gift” itself was the stolen product of the same “earth hunger” and “territorial ambition” it decried. The irony in the suggestion that the land came with “political liberty” and security against the invasion of predatory European powers spoke to the perturbing recognition that control of the continent was precarious, and it contained a haunting implication: if the land had once been so easily overrun, might not history repeat itself?\textsuperscript{55} This spectre of invasion was one that would continue to trouble Australian public discourse in years to come.\textsuperscript{56} As such, we can read the idea of the “gift” of the Australian continent as a more comforting method of assimilating violent conquest into the narrative of colonial origins.

Another \textit{Argus} article describing the march of troops through Melbourne later that same month illustrated the contortions of newspaper accounts of colonial history. The article began with the emotional reminiscence of an elderly woman who as a child had watched with her mother the imperial troops’ return from Waterloo with “the same spirit which animates the young community just awakened by the call to arms.”\textsuperscript{57} With the South African War located on a historical path stretching from Waterloo to the present, Australians could simultaneously read of themselves as steeped in a glorious historical tradition and as representatives of a vital “young community.” The value of this lineage again lay in its replacement of an ignoble past with a narrative grounded in Britain’s martial tradition. The \textit{Argus} grasped this point well: “the feeling that the event is a historic one animates all, and parents

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  \item \textsuperscript{55} Walker, \textit{Anxious Nation}, 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 98-112.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{Argus}, 30 October, 1899, 4.
\end{itemize}
who are linked in memory with some outstanding event of the past wish to give their children a land-mark of national importance on which to fix their backward gaze.”58 Read together, the irony of the above passages is striking. The Argus, on the eve of national federation, celebrated the building of a national narrative for future generations. Yet this same national memory must skip lightly over British invasion.

Articles detailing the imposing statistics of the colonial contribution to the Empire supported these narratives. The point of these statistics was mostly to reiterate what was known.59 Readers in the colonies, thumbing through their morning newspaper, could casually absorb the confidence and self-satisfaction that came with belonging to the Empire. The exactitude of these figures, largely nebulous in themselves, was likely intended to force an impression upon readers’ minds. The West Australian, upon one such stocktaking thus suggested: “In the first place it is well to be occasionally reminded of what the Empire exactly is.” After a lengthy compilation of a daunting array of numbers, it contended that: “These figures are particularly worthy of remembrance at a time when there is a tendency in some quarters to take a pessimistic view of Australasian progress and prospects.”60 Later, lest the reader misunderstand the implications of such a remembrance, the article framed the figures in the rhetoric of white racial “responsibilities” and explicit reference to Rudyard Kipling’s “latest poem,” “the white man’s burden.”61

Literary allusions were not uncommon. An SMH article aiming to slot Australia into Britain’s martial ancestry through nods to figures from Shakespeare to Kipling captured the force that literature had in forging transnational ties. On seeing the patriotic celebration of Australian troops leaving Circular Quay the SMH reasoned: “Probably, if that enthusiasm were analysed it would be found to have been largely fed by the battle-literature of our race, and particularly by what the poets have said and sung in all ages in celebration of British prowess.”62 The passage continued in a suggestive anticipation of Michael Billig’s notion of “banal nationalism” as a kind of social unconscious that simmers ready to explode in moments of “hot nationalism.”63 The SMH asserted that these,

58 Ibid.
60 West Australian, 18 March, 1899, 4-5.
61 Ibid.
62 SMH, 4 November, 1899, 8.
war-notes have insensibly entered into the national mind and influenced it, perhaps only to be awakened into recollection in times like the present, but always in readiness at the back of the national consciousness to inspire and inform the patriotic ardour of the race. 64

It then noted the influence of poets such as Kipling in forming the “traditions of the race to which it is our boast to belong.” The emergence of war and its widespread mediation here allowed the reader,

to comprehend what a nation-making force they have exerted, and how masterfully they have welded and shaped that national sentiment which makes so powerful an appeal at a time like this, when we wait hour by hour for news of the progress of our soldiers in the field. 65

Perhaps it should be unsurprising that a popular newspaper would suggest that sentiments of war relied as much on textual representation as on the events they depicted. The collection of canonical images from which a community sustained its culture was here described as an inventory fashioned over time, a well of sentiment from which “national consciousness” may be drawn. Though the press delivered news in the present, the comprehension of this news came from knowledge of the literature of the past. The images and memories of the nation were there to be picked up and deployed in a symbolic grammar that could interpellate the reader as a part of that heritage. The SMH strained to place Australia within this order but was undermined by the knowledge that it had yet to earn its own martial story.

Notions of temporal progression had other benefits. From the vantage point of teleological racial development readers could comprehend the embarrassments of Black Week as merely marking the end of an epoch. As the SMH asserted in a later editorial, the “old order of things is changing and giving place to new,” while the “events of the past few years form a sufficiently eloquent prelude to the probable revelations of the future.” 66 The reasons for this rebirth were never far from the surface: “The momentous uprising of the British race in all parts of the world,” it continued, “called forth by the war now in progress in South Africa is an event which we may take for granted will have already struck the key-note of the future so far as concerns the part to be played by our own race and kin in its development. 67

This identification with the British race then duly shifted to a localised nationalism: “This year 1900 should not close before Australia is federated, so that we may look to enter on the new century equipped and ready at all points for the responsibilities

64 SMH, 4 November, 1899, 8.
65 Ibid.
66 SMH, 1 January, 1900, 4.
67 Ibid.
of our national life.” Whether national or imperial, temporality was evoked to grant inevitability and order to chaos. The Australian colonies could then be cast in this imperial drama not only as a repository of the “British race,” but its vanguard.

“The Celestial is an honoured guest here compared to the Britisher in South Africa”

Complementing the stress placed on Australia’s intrinsic Britishness, the early stages of the war offered ample opportunity to compare Australia with its racial others. Here too, the fusion of history and racial dogma led to some discomforting conclusions. It is apt that some of the most telling of these would occur in the Hobart Mercury, representing a Tasmania whose devastating frontier violence and carcereal origins made historical recitations particularly vexing.

Early in 1900, the Mercury attempted to grapple with “an argument advanced in certain pro-Boer papers,” namely, equating the oppression and exclusion of Chinese immigrants in Australia with Boer treatment of “Outlanders” in South Africa. The Mercury promptly dismissed this equivalence as fallacious and disloyal. Yet its logic in doing so was revealing, resting chiefly on ancestral and racial differences between Australia and South Africa. “The Chinese,” the Mercury wrote, “never rescued [the Australian colonies] from the attacks of the natives . . . but Great Britain did.” Moreover, “these colonies”:

never invited the Chinese to come, but the Boers did expressly invite the British to develop their country. There were no Chinese in these colonies when they were acquired by the British, but there were British subjects in the Transvaal when it was given back on conditions, and the rights of those subjects were expressly secured by stipulating for the equality of all white men.

Leaving aside the veracity of the Mercury’s historical comparison, a basic inconsistency existed between claiming rights based on origins, while dismissing the rights of the original populations in both Australia and South Africa. The lack of “invitation” here substantiated the legitimacy the Mercury granted to Australian exclusionary policies toward the Chinese. Yet by arguing for the prevention of Chinese immigration on the grounds of both their lack of invitation and their

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68 Ibid.
70 *Mercury*, 3 January, 1900, 2.
absence in the colonies at the time of their British “acquirement,” the *Mercury* at once uncannily evoked Australian origins and de-legitimated them.71

Underscoring this bind was the need to abject those others who compromised the racial purity of the settler social order. By managing this matter through reversion to racial truisms, the *Mercury’s* assertion of difference belied its confident tone. “But there is another and absolutely conclusive difference,” the *Mercury* continued:

The Chinese in these colonies occupy the position of the dark races in Africa, that is, they are apart from white civilisation, and cannot be made a part of it. Every country has, beyond doubt, the right to protect itself from the influx of an alien and dissimilar race, and it is agreed in Africa that the black races must be treated as inferior.72

According to its earlier reasoning, however, the *Mercury’s* “dark races in Africa” would maintain their legitimacy by being in the country first and by not “inviting” outsiders. It follows that by arguing for black African equivalence with the Chinese the *Mercury* risked affording the Chinese the same legitimacy. The *Mercury* thus adopted the untenable position of both accepting a self-evident logic, while overlooking how this same logic might be applied to its Australian analogue. Trapped in this impasse, the *Mercury* supplied an unintended argument for the illegitimacy of colonial Australia. Clearly, though, the aim of such passages was not internal consistency but to loudly assert the “non-whiteness” of others. To remain consistent with the *Mercury’s* argument, whiteness must be viewed as less a physical trait than a fluid and negotiable aspiration.73

That whiteness is an imagined identification, however, should not imply that it did not (and does not) have real effects, nor that candidature to achieve it was universal.74 Warwick Anderson argues that it was the perceived threats from Asian competition during this time that saw the exclusive properties of whiteness being

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71 As we saw in the letter of “Victorian Colonist” in chapter three, such contradictions had been earlier grasped by colonists. An 1878 letter to Sydney’s *Evening News* likewise wrote: “The aborigine would indeed have a better case against the Anglo-Saxon than the Anglo-Saxon has against the Chinese. The aborigine never intruded himself into the Anglo-Saxon’s country, and therefore he could say with perfect justice that the Anglo-Saxon had no right to his land. But can the Anglo-Saxon maintain this position against the Chinese? Everyone knows he cannot. Then why object to his presence? On the score of demoralising and disturbing existing society, you have no right to protest, for you are simply reaping the just reward of your conduct to the aborigines. You have no right to do a thing today and object to someone else doing the same things tomorrow.” Cited in Ann Curthoys, “An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous” in *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, ed. John Docker and Gerhard Fischer (Sydney: UNSW Press 2000), 25.
72 *Mercury*, 3 January, 1900, 2.
73 Homi K. Bhabha, “’The White Stuff,’” *Art Forum* 26, no. 9 (May 1998).
emphasised. Yet to the *Mercury*, the arrival of the Chinese in Australia subsequent to white colonists verified settler indigeneity. By the same token, however, the reference to origins suggested the presence of Aboriginal Australians served to re-position settlers as invaders. This weaving of the Chinese problem into the question of origins indicates the complexity of Australian racial thought. Such passages also serve to remind us that although Chinese and Aboriginal people occupied different structural positions within Australian society, their similar negative relation to the white settler should not be overlooked. Just as both the labour of the Chinese and the “native” were in their own ways continuing to prove crucial to the colonisation of Australia, the presence of each also contained a threat; the Chinese to the wages of Australia’s white labour force, and the “native,” more fundamentally, through their rival claims to Australian sovereignty and land possession.

The erstwhile songwriter and *Bulletin* contributior Perce Abbott also made the racial comparison between Chinese and British emigrants to South Africa. Abbott, speaking up for Uitlander rights in Sydney’s *Evening News*, complained that a “Chinaman is supposed to be the worst-treated of all the aliens in English-speaking countries, but the Celestial is an honoured guest here compared to the Britisher in South Africa.” Again, Abbott’s reasoning becomes problematic when applied elsewhere. He passionately draws a historical narrative to impugn the Boers and vindicate the war effort. “Let there be no sentimental nonsense about ‘robbing the Boers of their country’,” implored Abbott. “The Dutch,” he continued, “waded breast high in the blood of the innocent, harmless natives of the soil.” After several lurid examples of this blood-letting, Abbott concluded that British conquest of the Boer would be “poetic justice.” He then duly recounted the justifying scenario:

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76 For a general formulation of this operation see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11-12.
79 “Why Should We Fight?,” *Evening News*, 12 October, 1899, 5.
80 Ibid.
The Boer found a picturesque and moral savage on the land; he killed him off, turned his land into a pig farm, and squatted his own filthy carcass with its nameless offences against decency and morality. The Briton comes next, and turns the pig farm into an El Dorado.81

Thus, “Having brought about this state of affairs, the Briton naturally wants a say in the ordering of them,” even if, “in the process of objecting to it, the Boer follows the exterminated nigger.”82 Where, then, was Australia placed within a parallel historical synopsis? Were Australians, with their treatment of outsiders and their “killing off” of “natives,” equally candidates for invasion? Or did their land productivity as fellow Britons nullify the analogy? Any such comparison was surely inadmissible for Abbott or his readers but it nonetheless shone a light on a potentially disturbing rationale for fighting the Boers. The subject position of those such as Abbott was fraught, caught between identification with Britishness and the Empire, and the disavowal of the structural similarities between Australian and Boer territorial expansion. It was perhaps for this reason that the “anti-Boer” language in Australian newspapers could take on a startling spitefulness, which, as we will now see, found its basis in the double movement of denigrating the Boers in racial terms and comparing Boer and Australian land tenure.

“**The twang of foreign Dutch . . . is hateful to our ears**”

Abbott’s polemic shows that even where comparisons between British and Chinese were historically problematic, they at least retained an apparent clarity of racial division. Contrasting Australians to the Boers, however, blurred even this clarity. An article from the *West Australian* at the beginning of 1900, reproduced from the British periodical *The Nineteenth Century*, returns us to the *Argus* editorial three months prior that depicted the Australian continent as England’s gift. Though a conscious comparison might have been unlikely at the time, a juxtaposition of the two pieces reveals a telling contrast between Boer and Australian territorial possession. Whereas, for the *Argus*, the basis for Australian growth and progress was the “gift” of Australian land, readers of the *West Australian* now could discern that the unplanned acquisition of South African land was a sign that the Boers did not deserve it. Any potential Boer accomplishments were, rather, a mere side effect of British colonisation. “The Boers,” the article suggested, “are said to have been the pioneers of civilisation; but in fact they were only refugees from the levelling-up

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
influence of a civilised community.” In a forceful elision of Boer agency the resources of the land were said to have simply fallen into their laps:

In self-sought isolation they have tried to escape the tide of civilisation. But in vain. Through no fault of theirs, they have become the owners of a fabulously rich mineral country. Through no fault of theirs, the hidden wealth was discovered. Without effort on their part Johannesburg has sprung up, and the gold mining industry has been firmly established.\(^8^3\)

In this rhetorical transfer the writer must first confront Boer “ownership” of the country before disowning it through the passivity of his writing. The Boers merely “became owners,” “hidden wealth was discovered,” Johannesburg simply sprung up and the systematic extraction of resources “has been firmly established.” No struggle for land, no coerced labour or exploitation, only a spontaneous sequence of events mistakenly credited to the Boers. This was, moreover, a double-effacement. Though the Boers only passively received their bounty rather than producing it through their industriousness they were at least acknowledged to exist, an indulgence patently not afforded to Black Africans whose labour and land tenure preceded either British or Boer. Prior to the European, it would seem, there was only nature.

The key difference between Australian and Boer settlers, then, was the fruitful use of this nature. This had further implications for their claims to whiteness. At the onset of the war, the Melbourne *Age* offered an editorial vindicating a hostile response to alleged Boer transgressions. These included the Boer’s audacious issue of an ultimatum to their British superiors, their injurious treatment of the mother country’s sons along with their oppression of the local black population, and their seemingly irreversible stagnancy in the march toward civilisation. Of the latter two points, the *Age* was clear that any distinction between South Africa’s black and white populations was collapsing: “As a people, [the Boers] are quite as unprogressive as the black laborers who are virtually their slaves.”\(^8^4\) The more egregious offence to the *Age*, however, was the lack of productive use to which the Boers had put their supremely “fertile” soil. The editorial went to some effort to provide evidence not only of the inherent inability of the Boers to make use of the land they had inherited, but that this failure was tantamount to a relinquishing of their claims to it.\(^8^5\)

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\(^8^3\) “The Situation in South Africa,” *West Australian*, 8 January, 1900, 7.

\(^8^4\) *Age*, 21 October, 1899, 8.

\(^8^5\) See also “The Trek of Nineteen Hundred,” *SMH*, 29 January, 1900, 7.
Moreover, and this was the key point, this was a failure particularly noticeable once set against the Australian colonies. A roll call of witnesses, tables and statistics laboured the point. Thus, “in the year 1892, while Victoria exported wine to the value of £63,000, the Cape Colony exported only £17,000 worth.” Likewise, a comparative table demonstrated “the difference in placing great natural resources within reach of the unprogressive Boer and of the enterprising Anglo-Saxon.”

Though the comparison made was both a colonial and a racial one, it served to benefit a far wider collective: “In the interests of humanity the Boer has no more right to lock up these great resources of nature than had the Bantu race which he displaced.” We need not draw out the comparison with Australia again, but it does pay to consider the undertones of Australian self-exoneration accompanying the vilification of settlers elsewhere. Needless to say, Australian settlers’ own rights to their resources were self-evident. And yet the implication was that the productive use of their appropriated resources must be constantly proved and proclaimed lest they leave themselves open to their usurpation in turn. Etching deeper the boundaries between “pure” white Britons from aberrant whites elsewhere eased the precariousness of this position.

With the Boer thus framed for the Australian reader it is unsurprising that a major theme of Australian commentary on South Africa was the hierarchical positioning of Australians above Boers through aligning Australia with an elevated Britishness and relegating Boers into an inferior racial station. An Argus editorial in the lead up to the war in July 1899 did this most explicitly in an overt comparison of South African Boer and “native.” The Argus, consistent with the familiar discourse of impending Indigenous extinction, frankly concluded: the “Boer is a vanishing quantity. In one sense he is an aboriginal, to be put up with because he is disappearing.”

Similar accounts elsewhere were more considered, though with similar effect. Some months later an Argus article describing, in ethnographic mode, “The Boer and his Habits,” related in detail the Boer’s “primitive,” “superstitious” and “backward” nature. The writer spared no insult. Their religious rituals were curious and naive. They had a “lively dread” of “the blacks,” but in ritual and custom black African and Boer were, it was implied, closer to one another than the Boers were to the British. The conflation of Boer and black African was emphasised in a passage describing

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86 Age, 21 October, 1899, 8.
87 Ibid (emphasis added).
88 Argus, 22 July, 1899, 8.
how the Boers “still retain the mediaeval belief in witches and witchcraft,” and although “Europe no longer knows these old delusions . . . they survive in Africa.”

Here the Boers had succumbed to primitivism, left behind by the march of progress and ill-equipped to bring civilisation to the world. Tainted by Africa, they had become hybrids, conceding their pure whiteness to the British. The implied corollary was that Australians were progressively white and hence justified in assisting the British in maintaining supremacy in South Africa for the good of the world. The Argus’ favourable positioning of the Australian over the Boer was no doubt a reassuring, if predictable, comparison for Australians sensitive to their own distinctly non-European landscape and original population.

The key feature of all this was the degradation of the Boers despite their whiteness. Whiteness was thus no bar to inferiority. Though unsettling in the potential for this fluidity to threaten the stability of Australian racial privilege, its reversal offered promise. If the superiority of whiteness could be stripped of a people, it could also be earned. Australian readers might well infer that though European ancestry alone was insufficient to secure their place on the upper rungs of the racial ladder, through their deeds they could prove themselves as white, and crucially, whiter than the Boers. We can thus read the unsteady movement between the necessity of maintaining a mutable identity and of securing it at appropriate moments. It was this uncertainty, I claim, that motivated the meticulous and repetitious cataloguing of the Boer’s supposedly repellent customs.

Aversion to the Boer extended to more symbolic practices. In a letter to the SMH, “Patriotism” wrote to express that he or she “hoped that the Transvaal and Orange River colonies will be British not merely in a political sense but also in name,” before clarifying, “When I say ‘name,’ I mean that every town, district, or place should be rechristened with an English baptism, and the faintest twang of foreign Dutch removed for ever. It is hateful to our ears.”

Paul Carter has superbly illustrated the significance of the naming and re-naming of place to the British colonial enterprise. In this case, however, the problem was less the discrepancy between existing European categories and the unknown of the colonial landscape, than the attachment of the wrong European names. Although South Africa might readily succumb to military and political domination, it remained disconcertingly uncaptured symbolically.

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89 “The Boer and his Habits,” Argus, 28 October, 1899, 4.
90 “Renaming the Conquered State,” SMH, 7 June, 1900, 3.
91 Carter, Road to Botany Bay, 42-51.
Yet there is something oddly emotive and irrational in the desire of this contributor, something in the painful incongruity of the Dutch language that sounded “hateful.” The choice of baptismal reference suggests that the symbolism carried as much weight as the act of renaming itself and hinted toward a need to wipe clean the sins of the past for the land to be reborn. It is possible then that the symbolised traces of Dutch sovereignty, themselves etched over black African names, mirrored the illegitimacy of the Australian experience too closely. Anne McClintock has argued of the recurrence of colonial baptismal rhetoric that “the desire to name expresses a desire for a single origin alongside a desire to control the issue of that origin.” In this sense, I wish to suggest, the “rechristening” signified a fetishistic displacement onto a linguistic sign of an otherwise irresolvable historical contradiction. In other words, the rewriting of English names on conquered landscapes could ostensibly remove traces of the violence required for the forceful imposition of imported societies.

Elsewhere, however, the anti-Boer narrative was challenged. On the first day of 1900, Louisa Lawson’s feminist *Dawn* reproduced an article from the Transvaal Committee of Manchester. It stated: “South Africa is often spoken of as an ‘English Colony.’” Yet, it corrected, “It is not an English colony. It is a conquered colony which we seized as the prize of war, against the will of its inhabitants.” Importantly, the aggrieved “inhabitants” this article speaks of are not black Africans but the “Dutch.” Indeed, in a two page article on the “Story of the Boers,” black Africans surfaced only twice and in each case they were cast as antagonists to the expansion of the Dutch as they “gradually subdued the wilderness, planted trees, built farmhouses and towns, and spread civilization over an ever-growing territory,” and all the while being thwarted by the English.

We can reasonably guess why the *Dawn* elected to reproduce this piece. Besides its proffered rationale that “knowledge of South African history is essential to a right understanding of the present difficulties,” the *Dawn* was explicit in its choice of “pro-Boer” material. C.P. Scott, editor of prominent “pro-peace” *Manchester Guardian*, himself strongly influenced this particular article. More than simple

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93 Ibid., 184-85.
94 See for example ”The Story of African Development,” Advertiser, 11 November, 1899, 8.
96 Ibid.
97 The Manchester Transvaal Committee declared that it was “pro-peace, not pro-Boer.” See Steven C. Call, ”Voices Crying in the Wilderness: A Comparison of Pro-Boers and Anti-Imperialists, 1899-1902” (Master’s Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1991), 23.
anti-war radicalism, however, there is here an explicit pro-settler rhetoric suggesting transnational sympathies with another colony struggling against a harsh environment and external interference in dealing with its “natives.” Such articles, countering the rhetoric more commonly read in Australian newspapers, suggested a fraternity that complicated the Boer-British division. Usually far less complex were the distinctions made between British and “natives.” Yet even these seemingly unshakeable racial categories could be doubted. This was despite, or perhaps because of, attempts to exhibit the singular nature of Australian martial aptitude.

“The unpleasant risk of confusion”

Just as during the Waikato and Sudan episodes, we can read in Australian commentary on the South African War a seeming desperation for a British audience to notice and approve of Australian actions. This was again manifested in ideas of sacrifice and martial display, most notably during the embarkation of troops. In their “Farewell to the Contingent,” the Brisbane Courier recognised that the “knowledge that the Empire is looking on makes us desire to show that the willingness to help the mother-country has genuine grit and ability behind it.”

Such sentiments emphasised not only the importance to the colonies of their recognition, but the attendant requirement to perform on the battlefield for their imagined spectators. Yet the language here was of “desire.” What colonial newspapers required was more first-hand proof that Australia weighed heavily on English minds. The recent journalistic innovation of interviews answered this calling.

In December 1899, the Advertiser afforded a chance for Australian readers to overhear what Britons were saying about them through an interview with eminent British-born Australian writer and editor of the Australian Review of Reviews William Henry Fitchett upon his return from a trip to London. Fitchett declared that in London he witnessed how:

The British people are proud of Australia, and, of course, they have reason to be. ‘Australia’ in English ears just now has a magic sound. While England does not need the troops we are sending, the fact of our offer thrills the public mind with delight. Although England is very prosperous, I don’t think Australia has reason to envy her or any other part of the Empire. The social opportunities

98 “Farewell to the Contingent,” Brisbane Courier, 1 November, 1899, 4.
99 Newspaper interviews were a recent phenomenon, one of the first being W.T Stead’s interview with General Gordon in 1884.
for freedom of environment and everything that makes civilised life worth having are greater in Australia.\textsuperscript{100}

Fitchett was a celebrated Australian man-of-letters feted in Britain. In 1896 the Argus had commissioned him to pen a series of patriotic accounts of famous British military adventures later compiled as the international publishing sensation “Deeds that Won the Empire.” Fitchett now had the chance to inform Australian readers how highly those in Britain regarded them and indeed considered them in many ways superior to Britain. The recognition of the superfluousness of colonial troops to the war only stressed their performative element while the “magical” pleasure Australia evoked in England evinced the fantastical nature of the white colonies in British public consciousness. Yet this was also an attempt to convey to an Australian reading public that its fate was being monitored closely by an adoring other. The Advertiser was intended primarily for Australian eyes, yet this article’s appeal lay in the idea that Australians could witness the approval given to them and their land by British spectators. The important point, in other words, was not simply the message \textit{per se}, but the respective positions of its utterance and its reception.

The SMH’s London correspondent similarly testified to the significance of colonial activity for British readers. The correspondent ventriloquised London opinion in order to situate Australian colonists as imperial partners, reporting: “What are they thinking, and what are they doing in Australia and in Canada, in this supreme moment in the fortunes of the Empire?’ is a question asked in effect often enough and with genuine concern.”\textsuperscript{101} Later, the correspondent claimed that an English “man in the street” knew the “signs of the unity of spirit throughout the Empire which anyone can read.”\textsuperscript{102} We can assume that this man in the street read these signs at least partly in the press and that his information on the colonies was likely to have come from colonial news sources themselves. This being the case, we have the curious dynamic of Australians reading positive British opinions of them from the pen of a correspondent for a major colonial paper \textit{as though} through the mouths of the English public. Australians were thus treated to an account of their uniqueness in the eyes of Londoners who knew “that in a war which requires sharp-shooting and knowledge of bush-fighting, the Australian troops will be ‘just the chaps for the Boers’.”\textsuperscript{103} This enactment of a British gaze presented for Australian

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\textsuperscript{100} “The Rev. Dr. Fitchett,” Advertiser, 23 December, 1899, 11.
\textsuperscript{101} “Australian and Imperial Topics,” SMH, 7 November, 1899, 3.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
readers a self-generating fantasy image of themselves as bush-trained martial forces from their most important observers.

Barbara Penny has suggested that approximately one-third of Australian troops to South Africa were these so-called “Bushmen,” “that is, mainly amateurs at soldiering, supported by public subscription, and from backgrounds conforming roughly to the demands of the popular vision.”104 As we will see, the aptness of this designation for an increasingly urbanised Australian populace did not go undisputed. Nonetheless, the Australian soldier figure was a frequent catalyst for concerns over racial heritage, Australian affinity with the “mother country,” and colonial masculinity. Though the war presented a chance to celebrate colonial progress as a contributor to Britain’s global project, the embodiment of this progress in the atavistic figure of the bushman symbolised Australia’s distinctiveness. In other words, inscribed in the ruggedness of the bushman was the myth of white Australian indigeneity.

This mythology was problematic. On the one hand, the bush served as a nostalgic symbol of Australian origins. Yet on the other it remained, in Bernard Smith’s description, a location in which to project “fear and guilt.”105 The “back blocks”, as Jennifer Rutherford has pointed out, were historically a “trope for unlimited and uninscribed space,” suggestive of “an unknown, uncontainable element of the real.”106 As we have seen, this unlimited space harboured unease both in its unrealised potential and in the implied obligation to fill it while protecting it from external threats. Yet the depiction of the hand as potentially threatening complicated the exceptionality with which the bush supposedly endowed its inhabitants, and even more so given Aboriginal Australians supposedly intimate territorial bond.107 In other words, if the bush was perceived by settlers as a location of fear, what was to be made of its soldierly offspring?

In portrayals of the bushman soldier as a symbol of Australian difference, and one that further evidenced Australia’s Britishness, proof was found in his (always his) aesthetic physicality and his origins. As an Advertiser editorial claimed: “The ‘back blocks’ produce pretty well the only romantic figure left in colonial life.”108 In

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104 Penny, “Australia’s Reactions,” 120. On the “Bushmen,” see Field, Forgotten War, Ch. 4.
107 “Expulsion, Exodus.”
108 Advertiser, 18 January, 1900, 4.
imagery that would recur in future descriptions of the Anzac digger, it described the “hundreds of rough but picturesque fellows, deficient no doubt in some of the urban graces and refinements of civilisation, a bit ‘free’ occasionally in many hours of relaxation, but brave and manly to the core.” Thus for the Advertiser: “No body of troops we can send to the war will be more distinctively Australian. It will be thoroughly racy of the soil.” And it was precisely these characteristics that offered “splendid proofs that Australia is breeding a race of men capable of holding its own against any foe.” The act of war therefore offered a chance to reverse claims of colonial inferiority, and to reject any remaining doubts over the attributes of colonial soldiers.

Alongside these confident assertions, however, lay doubts. These culminated at the end of the same editorial when attempts to define colonial identity by conflating environment, masculinity and race broke down. The provocation for this was a question over whether “bushman” was an appropriate label for Australian troops. Here, again, we can see how symbolic designations could disturb efforts to stabilise meaning. The Advertiser reported how a “Sydney legislator . . . raised the curious and not unimportant point that the word bushman may be misunderstood in South Africa, and cause undesirable prejudice against the corps.” “What is feared,” the article continued, “is the unpleasant risk of confusion with the African ‘bushmen’ or bosjesmans, one of the lowest and most degraded races in the world, which is held in general contempt.” Finally, before suggesting less ambiguous name changes, the Advertiser cautioned: “We do not wish to give anyone the impression that we are sending aboriginals.”

This was an unusually overt apprehension that the British and South African onlooker might wrongly identify the Australian soldier as racially compromised. In positioning Australian soldiers as uniquely able to flourish in the South African environment, Australians risked existing in the British imagination not only as too close to the Boers who, though supposedly embodying a retrograde whiteness, remained nominally white nonetheless. They also exposed themselves to being

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid. In fact, it seems that Aboriginal Australian “trackers” were deliberately used as part of the war effort in South Africa. See Dale Kerwin, “The Lost Trackers: Aboriginal Servicemen in the 2nd Boer War,” Sabretache 54, no. 1 (March 2013).
114 In a complementary fashion, a “friendly Uitlander” seemingly felt compelled to write in to clarify that “the Boer is not a ‘Blackman,’” but rather “a rough, hard-living, and fairly hard-working farmer.” “The Boers,” Evening News, 3 October, 1899, 5.
understood as unequivocally inferior “natives.” This was doubly problematic given
the bushman’s territorial distinction. For if the *Advertiser* attributed the singularity
of the Australian race to their environment, it only made sense that the greatest
beneficiaries of these blessings would be those “natives” who had dwelled in that
environment the longest.

As the war progressed new suggestions exacerbated the difficulties of claiming a
fundamental Australianness. A series of editorials and letters appearing especially
in the *Advertiser* and the *SMH* notified readers that the proud colonists who had
left Australian shores for South Africa might elect to stay there and “settle” a
different British colony. What the reports initially saw as the harmless prerogative
of young men taking advantage of accessible land turned to panic when restated in
often racial terms comparing South Africa and Australia. The primary fear was that
Australia might lose its best men overseas, carrying grave implications for
Australian “stock.” Further, letters on the matter reprinted from Britain indicated
the geographical reach of this notion. Indeed, one of the more compelling
deterrents for Australians seeking work in South Africa was that by competing with
low wage Black African labour, colonists might be perceived as only “white
Kaffir(s)” who would therefore “sink in the public estimation.”

Complicating this view was the balance to be kept between the assumptions of, first,
the naturalness of seized foreign land, and, second, fears that the removal of the
physical bodies needed to substantiate settler claims of possession would stymie the
consolidation of Australian colonisation. The idea that the same soldiers lauded for
proving Australia’s worth might eschew Australian colonising work for the
unpatriotic quest for individual gain elsewhere was troubling to many. That this
concern would arise when there was so much empty space in Australia left to fill
and make productive hinted at further concerns over the vastness of the territory
that required taming. As one letter writer had it:

*Tens of thousands of square miles now lying idle and uncultivated are
available for distribution. To no nobler purpose could a land grant be allotted
than to be the means of inducing these brave and most desirable colonists to
make their homes in the land of their birth, within our own great territories.
Australia needs them.*

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115 “A Warning from South Africa,” *Advertiser*, 27 August, 1900, 7. See also *SMH*, 19 June, 1900, 4; “South Africa,” *Advertiser*, 27 August, 1900, 5; “New South Wales or South Africa,” *SMH*, 27 August, 1900, 8.

116 “Lots of Bone and Sinew,” *Advertiser*, 27 April, 1900, 6. For the *SMH*, this was the natural inclination of “the roving spirit of our race, always prone to seek new pastures,” *SMH*, 10 May, 1900, 6.
The perceived need to seduce Australian troops back to their “native land” raised questions over their loyalty and made explicit the economic primacy of the colonial venture. Wealth, production and land rights were, despite widespread claims, apparently prioritised well ahead of colonial patriotism. This was more than a political issue. For if Australian settlers could not affirm their intimacy with the land, if they were happy to swap one home for another, on what grounds could they claim indigeneity?

Moreover, the trope of Australia as breeding a fitter and more masculine race than the decrepit variety emanating from the old country captured a uniquely modern paradox.117 It was through its pre-industrial yeomanism that Australia held the potential to improve the British race. Yet this was now threatened by the same technological advancement crucial to the corresponding national narrative of progress. As the SMH noted earlier in 1899, “nothing is more common than to hear that neither we in Australia nor the members of the race from which we spring are as virile and physically robust now as the race was in former times.”118 In Britain’s case this was put down to increasing mechanisation and urbanisation which were “draining the manhood of the country districts, and enfeebling it amid irksome conditions of life, laborious occupations in enclosed spaces, and insanitary dwellings and surroundings.”119 To the SMH these trends had resulted in “the stunted and weedy types of men familiar in the London slums and the manufacturing quarters of towns like Birmingham and Sheffield.”120 Countering this tendency, Australia was said to be avoiding a similar trajectory through the colonial vibrancy evident in recent successes in the sporting arena and, notably, in the celebratory British response to the Australian Lancers that had paraded in Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations of 1897, the reports of which were read in Australia with extreme satisfaction.121

By way of appraisal the SMH assured its readers that, “It is quite certain that a group of average Australians would satisfactorily stand the test of comparison with a corresponding group of those new arrivals from England with which our population is yearly recruited.”122 Still, the SMH concluded pessimistically by envisaging a future decline “sourced,” along with deficiencies in climate, food and

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117 For more on warfare and the “Coming Man,” see White, Inventing Australia, 72-84, 104.
118 SMH, 1 February, 1899, 6.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
122 SMH, 1 February, 1899, 6.
urbanisation, in the “defective vitality of Australian women.” In the final instance it warned: “if women in general fail to lead healthy and natural lives . . . degeneration of the Australian type as a whole would follow sooner or later as a matter of course.”123 This was a considerable problem. Jane Carey has documented women's role in propagating a physically and mentally fit white Australian race and the scientifically informed obsession with "preventing white racial degeneracy" in the early 20th century. As Carey points out, if settler colonialism was driven by the need to eliminate the native population “then the imperative of vigorous white propagation was its necessary corollary.”124 Here the panic of maternal failure can be read alongside the parallel fear of England failing to supply the strongest British citizens to the colonies. In both cases the “mother” was both the carrier of the race and the source of its possible dissipation.

Yet even within the same publication slippage between discourses was prevalent. One year after the above pre-war editorial we can read another which saw a dramatic shift in tone, and one shaped by the importance of women to the war effort. Far from warning that women were at the root of Australian deterioration, this time the SMH solicited the women who “serve as spurs to the martial instincts of mankind” in support of the war:

Woman herself is one of the most active forces in the stimulus towards war, as well as in its maintenance. She it is who glories in martial ardour, and by none is the thrill of heroic deeds more acutely felt. She does not merely suffer her son, brother, or husband to go to the war, she buckles on his sword in an ecstasy of proud emotion and sends him forth thrice armed in the consciousness that those nearest and dearest to him are in the strongest sympathy with his mission.125

An idealised masculine solider is then positioned as the longer-for object of “woman’s” libidinal energy, clearly outlining the characteristics Australia’s male population should embody if they wished to receive these affections:

All that pertains to the soldier—smartness, healthy physical development, and the doing of daring deeds—finds a response in the heart of woman, and she indicates in a decisive way her preference for the type of man possessing these qualities over the slothful peace-loving civilian.126

Female agency here is confined to her relationships with her masculine counterparts. Though an “active force,” she is more accurately only the necessary

123 Ibid.
125 SMH, 10 February, 1900, 8.
126 Ibid.
stimulus of their would-be warrior’s action, and the motivation for his transformation from sloth to soldier. That is, “woman’s” agency is in response to her (male) relations, and as a subject she is secondary to her role as incubator and lover of her nation’s troops. In such ways, the feminine presence fluctuated between women as signifying a (potential) scapegoat for Australia’s racial failings, to the very reason for Australia’s (potential) martial glories. More than simply containing and managing colonial anxieties then, the possibility of other conceptions of women’s role(s) suggested at once the equivocal meaning of progress and the need to remove uncertainty from ideas of Australian masculinity.\footnote{On the symbolic role of women in the white British colonies see Dominic David Alessio, “Domesticating ‘the Heart of the Wild’: Female Personifications of the Colonies, 1886-1940 ” Women’s History Review 6, no. 2 (1997).}

“A true born Englishwoman”

Journalists themselves were prone to vocational introspection and well recognised the significance of the media to the public understanding of events in South Africa. Newspapers, moreover, not only represented these events to their readers, they also reported on the manner of their representations. It is not incidental that the press regularly invoked the words “theatre” and “drama” to describe the war, as its theatrical elements were central to sustaining a consistent readership.\footnote{As in the Argus, 25 October, 1899, 6.} As it appeared in text, the war was narrated through fragmented episodes that were framed, edited, and re-presented. That newspapers called upon the reader to fill the gaps in the sequence of events presented to them further positioned readers within the narrative that they, with editorial guidance, read into existence. The SMH thus applauded correspondent’s reports, writing that “it is clear that the men of the pen are taking a very active share in the thrilling events that are being enacted,” and “so direct is the narrative that we can vividly follow all that is taking place.”\footnote{SMH, 20 January, 1900, 8. See also Mercury, 24 January, 1899, 2.} It then catalogued a series of comparable events where correspondents took the place of the traditional war hero. This emphasis on narrative and written description was more significant than the SMH likely intended. Rehearsing themes of military heroism and courage began to narrow the division between the war and its press symbolisation. The focus on the workings of the press itself began to dissolve the nominal objectivity of war coverage to the point where the journalists were the action on which they reported.
This style of reportage played into the need for the adventure tales that first and foremost sold papers. By focussing on exciting events rather than more substantial issues it also tended to distract from deeper analysis of the war. This was to be expected. Within the Australian press the framework for understanding the causes and significance of the war was fairly uniform, leaving journalists to concentrate on its more sensational details. Even so, the dominant account of the war in the major dailies was not impervious to critique and letters to the editor often presented visible challenges. Perce Abbott, cited earlier, could even remark that the “people who abuse England, and sympathise with her enemies, are mostly newspapermen.” More credibly, the historian Bobbie Oliver has argued that dissenters could be grouped into four main categories: those who thought the war was based on securing goldmines and territories and was therefore unjust; pragmatists who felt departure to South Africa would leave Australian defences too sparse; those morally opposed to reported human rights abuses; and, finally, radical movements suspicious of capitalist motives working against labour interests. In each case dissent demonstrated the antagonisms within Australian society even as newspapers elsewhere extolled social unity.

A letter to the *Advertiser* immediately following Black Week can illustrate how the tropes sustaining Australian war narratives could be subverted. Against any suggestion that sending Australian troops was done out of necessity the letter-writer insisted that this, rather than showcasing the combined strength of the Empire, only “demonstrates to all the Powers that she is weak and in want of the assistance of her colonies.” As for the heralded “bushman,” the writer had “also read that the British people think Australian mounted troops would be just the ones to deal with the Boers, as they are so used to the bush and country life.” “Nothing,” countered the writer (in an argument anticipating future debates over Russell Ward’s “The Australian Legend”), “is more ridiculous than that, for if they knew the truth they would soon discover that Australians are not all bushmen. How many among the South Australian contingent are there who know anything about bush life? Few if any.”

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130 “Why Should We Fight?,” *Evening News*, 12 October, 1899, 5.
133 Ibid.
Here, however unintentional, were cracks in the mythology building up around the Australian troops, with a reader writing back to his newspaper to correct the supposed British perception of Australia. It was, moreover, the dialogic structure of the newspaper that opened spaces for public challenges to the stories they were reading. But why were such challenges permitted at all? Perhaps the swift refutation of such opinions in subsequent letters and editorials provides the most convincing answer to this. We need not be overly cynical—the Victorian-era press certainly contained an idealistic vision of itself as crucial to a healthy polity. And Australian newspapers, as the foregoing chapters have shown, were undeniably diverse, priding themselves on their political independence. Yet with the mainstream press characterised by overwhelmingly positive support for the war effort and rebuttals to oppositional letters, occasional openings for dissenting views also served to “inoculate,” in Barthes’ sense, editors against charges of bias.\(^\text{134}\)

In the debates attending the South African War we can detect other similarities to the Sudan episode. As was the case then, it was in the radical press, most famously represented by the *Bulletin* and the *Worker*, where dissent against mainstream views was most overt.\(^\text{135}\) The *Bulletin’s* vocal “pro-Boer” opposition to the war predated Australian involvement and was based on theories of elite financial intrigue, as well as nationalist ideology and pragmatism. The *Bulletin* also promulgated anti-capitalist conspiracy-theories based in an increasingly ugly anti-Semitism that targeted the “large financiers” of “Jewhannesburg.”\(^\text{136}\) Likewise, perhaps the most significant dissenting letters to a mainstream publication were those of renowned University of Sydney History Professor George Arnold Wood who, reminiscent of Henry Parkes’ role in Sydney’s public sphere in 1885, sparred with pro-war rivals in Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph*. The exchange carried out in the pages of the *Telegraph* between Wood and his fellow professor Mungo MacCallum is, again, of interest in tracing the boundaries of acceptable debate.\(^\text{137}\) Wood’s letters critiqued supporters of the war, though this was support he “admit[s]” was advocated by “a majority of those persons in this colony.”\(^\text{138}\)

These letters stirred controversy and were countered by *Telegraph* editorials and letters. On the grounds that his “highly reprehensible” views were “unworthy of a

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professor of history,” even his own university censured Wood.\textsuperscript{139} Yet, as with Parkes, Wood was ultimately arguing against a narrow conception of the “unjustness” of the war while highly supportive of his own idea of the Empire. As he reminded another respondent to his letters:

> There are few persons in this colony who feel towards England a love stronger than I feel: few who value more highly the great work that England has done and is doing in the world, few who more ardently hope that the future of the Empire will be even more glorious than the past. And it is for that reason that I resent so bitterly the policy of those who . . . have broken away from England’s noblest traditions.\textsuperscript{140}

Later, broadening his geographical audience, Wood wrote a letter to the \textit{Manchester Guardian} in which he claimed that dissent was far more prominent in Australia than the mainstream press was letting on.\textsuperscript{141} To complete the exchange of prominent Australians speaking through the British press, an unnamed Alfred Deakin told his readers in the \textit{Morning Post} that Wood’s view was “not an Australian growth.”\textsuperscript{142} Indeed of the many famous Australian commentaries on the war, perhaps the most striking remain the writings of Deakin who wrote anonymously on Australian matters for the \textit{Morning Post} during the war and continuing until 1914.\textsuperscript{143} Deakin’s articles, in which he could even refer to himself, as an actor in the events described, in the third person, offered one of the more prominent channels through which Britons could receive regular positive information of Australia and a corrective to British ignorance of the colonies.\textsuperscript{144} Yet though Wood’s and Deakin’s were arguably the most conspicuous cases of Australian attitudes to the war being negotiated in the press, there were less celebrated examples that are no less interesting for that.

The case of prominent Irish-born suffragette and political activist Mary Lee can serve to tie together the threads of this chapter. Never shy of publicising her strong and often controversial opinions, Lee sparked a brief skirmish within the \textit{Advertiser} of her adopted home-town of Adelaide when she wrote to condemn the

\textsuperscript{139} Cited in Wilcox, \textit{Australia’s Boer War}, 331-32.


\textsuperscript{141} Wilcox, \textit{Australia’s Boer War}, 334.

\textsuperscript{142} Cited in ibid., 334.

\textsuperscript{143} For examples of Deakin’s writings on the South African War see Alfred Deakin, \textit{Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1900-1910} (Carlton: Melbourne University Press 1968), 10-11, 24-27.

war.145 Her chief grievance was the death of young men, “our bravest, best, noblest young man—blood—their grand young limbs picked to the bones by vultures, whose hellish avarice, in its furious hunger of selfishness regards neither God nor man.”146 Her address was not directed toward the editor but rather to an imagined female readership in an appeal to act against current policy. The newspaper thereby enacted its role as a conduit of argument between readers. To this readership Lee urged: “Oh England! Mother of peoples, where is your motherhood now? . . . Mothers, wives, sisters, daughters of South Australia! Arise! I say, and protest with one voice against our further soiling our souls and our hands in this most infamous jobbery.”147

The powerfully gendered rhetoric of these passages enlisted maternal metaphors to campaign against an involvement itself justified by the familial bonds of colony and mother country. For Lee, the high-minded civic virtue of the colonial son fighting for the imperial “mother” at a figurative level jarred with the maternal appeal to mothers to protect their physical sons from injury and death on the battlefield. In other words, the differing meanings of motherhood showed up the clash between legitimating war through the rhetoric of patriotism, loyalty, etc., and realising the actual aims of war as to injure and kill human beings for political, territorial and cultural-symbolic reasons.148 Clearly, as Anne McClintock has noted, the concept of “Motherhood is less the universal and biological quintessence of womanhood than it is a social category under constant contest.”149 This contest was played out in the following days with Lee’s rhetorical tactic earning her a rancorous response. In this one minor exchange Lee’s plea was reshaped into a conversation taking place at the intersection of imperial and racial patriotism, and gender identifications.

The next day’s Advertiser came with a letter dismissing Lee as “hysterical” in the familiar trope of feminine excess. Where Lee’s rhetoric had hinged primarily on gender, however, the immediate retorts were conspicuously raced. Though conceding that the war no doubt caused unnecessary deaths, the respondent appealed to the greater good by considering, without irony, “the beneficial results that will arise from the occupation of South Africa by so progressive and fair dealing

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146 “Another Contingent,” Advertiser, 19 December, 1899, 8.
147 Ibid.
149 McClintock, Imperial Leather, 381.
a race as the British, who protect the natives and give every white man worth his
salt a fair show to make his living.”150 The writer then explicated the virtues of the
British in South Africa over the Boer. Whereas the Boer “is content to lie in a
disreputable shanty all his life, with a cow-dung floor . . . the Briton opens the
country to the teeming millions of the world to do as our South Australian pioneers
did with this fair land, which for centuries was the black man’s hunting ground.”151

Making productive that which the nomadic “black man” was only wasting and the
self-evident progress of colonisation in South Australia thus justified the further
colonisation of South Africa by the British. Additionally, the writer mocked Lee for
not failing to “enjoy . . . the advantages of colonisation here,” implying that she
should consider herself lucky that Australia was colonised by the British rather than
the French. The writer noted the irony that Lee’s complaints rested on knowledge
only made possible by the British colonisation that allowed the transcontinental
telegraph to register “the pulse of the whole civilised and uncivilised world.”152 That
is, without colonisation there would be no telegraph and hence no timely
knowledge of events in South Africa for Lee to campaign against.

Lee’s letter received further replies in the following days, two from women who
both admonished her on grounds of gender and race. Both letters confronted Lee
on her own terms, the first labelling herself “A Soldier’s Mother and Sister,” and the
second “Englishwoman.” Both also attempted to demarcate positions of authority
from which to overrule Lee. The first writer authenticated herself as “a true-born
Englishwoman” who wished to “advise the mothers of Australia to proclaim to the
world that they are descended from the same stock that bred the boys of the bull
dog breed that made Old England’s name, and also that they mean to help her keep
it.”153 The writer here began with gendered opposition to the war before turning this
back on Lee by reconfiguring her argument in racial and historical terms.

“Englishwoman” similarly rehearsed the idea of Lee’s “hysteria” only to shift the
debate from gender to race, thereby diminishing Lee’s authority to speak. She
wrote: “No, Mrs. Lee, your appeal is useless. We are English, thank God – (I very
much doubt if ‘Mary Lee’ is) – and it is to such brave boys as those who are falling . . .
to whom we owe the splendid liberty that no other nation enjoys.”154 The point
here is not to suggest that race always trumped gender or vice versa, but that these

150 “The Boers and Mrs. Mary Lee,” Advertiser, 20 December, 1899, 8.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 “Replies to Mrs. Lee and Mr. Lester,” Advertiser, 22 December, 1899, 8.
154 Ibid.
categories could be used in conjunction as discursively expedient tactics, employed in often conflicting ways to manage particular tensions.

The references to the liberty of Australia, sprinkled generously throughout and employed frequently in the need to justify war enthusiasm, sat uneasily both with Australia’s carcereal past (though admittedly easier with South Australia’s proudly convict-less founding), and the ongoing confrontations with the Aboriginal population. But these are the contradictions that flood the press during the South African War as newspaper editorials struggled to reconcile numerous elements that could not be reconciled, contain discourses that bled into one another, and foster unity and essentialism in a medium defined by fracture and ephemerality. And if the case of Mary Lee was only one example of many that displayed these contradictions, once attention turns to British commentary on Australia we can see how similar preoccupations were adopted, adapted and challenged in the mother country.
CHAPTER SIX:
The View From Home

We have seen in the three conflicts discussed thus far—in the Waikato, the Sudan and South Africa—an evolution in the forms of discourse by which the Australian colonial press treated the export of Australian troops to foreign theatres. During the Waikato War, Australian newspapers found in their British counterparts both allies and critics of the war’s rationale, which they saw as protecting and facilitating settlement in the Antipodes. Leading Australian papers bristled at suggestions made in prominent quarters of the British press that this project might be, to put it bluntly, more trouble than it was worth.

A stark contrast appears in the 1885 coverage of the NSW contingent to the Sudan. Here, in the wake of General Gordon’s death and Australian dismay at the New Guinea compromise reached with Germany, Australian papers pushed the case for the colonies to be regarded as a vital and loyal member of a unified Empire. By the time of the South African War, the Australian colonies, verging on national Federation, paradoxically sought to prove their national credentials by fighting in the British imperial campaign against the Boers. Yet even as British observers recognised Australia as a substantial partner-in-Empire, the narrative of patriotic celebration raised uneasy social and historical questions.

Though each moment occurred within a distinct set of circumstances, all three conflicts served as a platform for colonial media efforts to come to terms with irreconcilable traits of Australian society. And in each moment we can discern a desire to be validated. One of the features noted in respect of each conflict is a certain pattern in the sense of address of editors, correspondents and letter-writers in which they either imagine, or cite directly, the “view from home,” which is to say, how the imperial centre regarded the overseas military adventures of its Antipodean colonists. This chapter materialises this view; providing further examples from British papers in which Australian involvement in the three conflicts in New Zealand, North Africa and South Africa became the subject of debate, public commentary and published opinion.
The Waikato War: “What is the use of the colonies?”:

Obeying, as it would seem, an inevitable law of their existence, the English race still pushes on, and its ramifications continue to extend . . . matters have at length arrived in that settlement at a point when the interests of 40,000 British men, women and children, firmly and ineradicably established in the provinces of that section of the Australasian territory, must be the first consideration.


To better understand the heat generated within the Australian press over British discussions of the virtues of settler societies during the Waikato War requires a view from the settler’s perspective. What kind of commentary could have so raised colonial ire? Examples are not difficult to come by. Take the assessment of the Illustrated London News (ILN) where imperial frustrations toward the colonies, embodied here as troublesome children, witnesses the necessary, if reluctant, accommodations made by elites in London to colonial demands. The ILN would have none of the argument that Māori “savagery” caused the war. On the contrary, to the ILN it was “impossible to talk away the fact that the real or the occult cause of the war is to be found in the coveting of their neighbours’ land by the English settlers.”

The ILN complained that Parliament was asked to supply a large loan to colonists to fund a war that was “unrighteous, at least, in its objects and origins,” and “which is being carried on for the benefit of settlers who find the ordinary process of money-making which a new country affords too slow.”

It is clear why an adjacent settler colony might find this attitude perturbing. Colonists were charged with offering “specious inducements” and of having “curious audacity” in their demands on the Imperial Government. Then, relinquishing all responsibly for the conflict, the ILN stated: “As to the argument that this country cannot in justice allow the colonists to bear the whole weight of the burden which this war entails, the simple answer is that it is purely a colonists’ war, originating in a purely colonial policy.” Read against an Australian press narrative, the ILN’s shifting of responsibility for the Waikato War to colonists was the inverse of the Argus’ claim in chapter three that colonists were merely implementing imperial policy. The ILN concluded ominously that, “the time is not far distant when Parliament will have to decide whether we in this country are not

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1 “England and Her Colonies,” Leeds Mercury, 1 October, 1863, 2.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
paying too dearly for those bright gems in the Crown of England, as our self-governing and generally half-rebellious colonies are fancifully termed.”

For the \textit{ILN}, it was not always thus. Nine months prior the same paper had in a less exasperated state argued for the protection of Britain’s colonial investment in New Zealand (see the above epigraph). This earlier position was framed as an ultimatum unbettered in its all-or-nothing defence of settler colonialism: “We have to choose between two interests . . . the very existence of a large body of our fellow-countrymen, and the more or less doubtful rights of a race which seems to have relapsed into its primitive savagery.”\textsuperscript{6} In the last instance, according to the ILN, “it is impossible for Englishmen to have two opinions with regard to [the Waikato War’s] nature and extent.” With volunteers now “going over from all parts of Australia... the colonists seem determined to take the matter into their own hands, and to carry on a war which will determine, once and for ever, the question of English supremacy in New Zealand.”\textsuperscript{7} As such, it concluded: “Let such steps be taken as will secure now and for ever the safety of a large, industrious, and well-conducted British population from murder and spoliation.”\textsuperscript{8} This wavering of opinion between 1863-64 indicates the growing impatience felt as the war dragged on. The point for the time being was that Australian commentators could, and evidently did, read hostile accounts such as that of the \textit{ILN} in July 1864, and seemingly drew equivalences that relied as much on their common identification as settlers of the South Pacific than as separate colonies or proto-nationalists.

The dispute over whether the Imperial Government could justify expending public funds on colonial defence was central. James Belich has argued that “it is difficult to imagine a government more reluctant to part with such resources than that of Britain in the early 1860s.”\textsuperscript{9} Consequently, New Zealand Governor George Grey “had the will to invade . . . but he did not have the means,” while, by contrast, the “Imperial Government had the means, but it did not have the will.”\textsuperscript{10} Belich attributes this lack of will partly to “the French, American, and Russian war-scares of the period.”\textsuperscript{11} Yet as far as British press commentary was concerned, similar parsimonious views may equally have reflected the lack of urgency in dealing with

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{6} “New Zealand,” \textit{Illustrated London News}, 31 October, 1863, 430.
\textsuperscript{7} “New Zealand”, \textit{Illustrated London News} 31 October, 1863, 429-430.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
such matters during a relatively optimistic geopolitical moment.\textsuperscript{12} Despite persistent fears of lingering European hostilities following the Crimean War (1853-6), and notwithstanding the brutal shock of the so-called Indian Mutiny and other imperial small wars, imperial elites, as John Darwin notes, could remain confident that, "As long as Europe was 'quiet' . . . they could deal with the threats to their imperial authority posed by local resistance."\textsuperscript{13}

In this climate, British newspapers afforded military volunteers from Australia little more textual attention than a brief acknowledgment of their efforts, before attending to more pragmatic matters. A two-sentence snippet from the \textit{Blackburn Standard} was characteristic: “The intelligence from the Australian colonies is of little interest beyond the fact that the colonists still continued zealous [sic] in sending volunteers to New Zealand. The working of the gold fields has been much interrupted by floods.”\textsuperscript{14} In sum, though the availability of Australian troops could occasionally act as a rhetorical palliative to fretful reports of Māori violence, we rarely encounter the narrative pathos and excitement that, as we will see, accompanied events in the Sudan in 1885 and South Africa in 1899.\textsuperscript{15} Quite simply, the threats to the Empire that would from the 1880s occasion anxious pronouncements of imperial and racial unity were more manageable at mid-century so that the Waikato War can be read in British newspapers as more a cause for frustration than celebration.\textsuperscript{16}

British press assessments were, however, far from unanimous. Opposing those who argued that the colonies should finance their own conflicts were other publications advocating further imperial expenditure to defend New Zealand’s settlers. This tension was apparent in the conflicting editorial positions of the \textit{Standard} and the \textit{Times}. In a June 1864 editorial the \textit{Times}, echoing the above \textit{ILN} passage, rejected the significance of the fiscal link between the colonies and Britain. The \textit{Times} distinguished between the two complaining that “whenever a set of land-jobbers in New Zealand find it convenient to appropriate a new tract of land the people of


\textsuperscript{14} Blackburn \textit{Standard}, 18 November, 1863, 2.


Middlesex are . . . called upon to pay for the vicarious luxury the colonists are thus allowing themselves at the antipodes,” and in their defence against “recalcitrant savages.”17 This position would harden. Some months later, the Times compared itself to “a parent with a number of grown-up children,” exasperatedly wishing to split from his “impetuous” and “petulant” “youngsters” before finally regaining some sense of “natural affection.”18 Such claims served further notice to colonists reading on elsewhere that imperial unity had its limits.

The Standard, by contrast, could not abide these objections to imperial assistance for the colonies and rebuked the Times, or so it is implied, for “coolly weighing the blood of their women and children against the gold which helps to protect them from a savage massacre.”19 “Cold, indeed, is the philosophy,” scowled the Standard, “and wretched the statecraft which can deal grudgingly with those stems of the parent tree which have taken root on distant shores.”20 The Standard asserted that there “is an affinity among nations as well as among persons. The transfer of a Cockney to Wellington, Otago, or Auckland, does not forthwith make him an alien and a foreigner.” “Fiscal purposes”, the Standard explained, “are not the only ties which can bind England to her colonies. It may be that the Englishman in Middlesex has kith and kin on the borders of the Waikato district.”21

Though impassioned, this exchange over the responsibilities for colonial defence took place within a common set of assumptions. An unquestioned agreement as to the naturalness of the Empire belied the antagonism between the two positions. Up for dispute was only the course the Empire should take to maintain the supremacy that both publications accepted in advance. Where the Times saw the costs of footing the bill as prohibitive, the Standard saw it as the requisite long-term investment for the benefits the colonies provided. More to the point, this debate both influenced and relied upon similar discussions in Australia. Australian papers appropriated editorials such as those of the Standard to further their own cases, while influential voices in the British press seized upon and lifted arguments made in the settler press to give authenticity to their accounts.22 To Australian editors reading British accounts, the issue was clear cut—the colonisation project, which all

17 Times, June 14, 1864, 11.
18 Times, 3 December, 1864, 6; See also Times, 14 August, 1863, 8; Times, 24 December, 1863, 8; Times, 16 July, 1864, 11.
19 Standard, 15 June, 1864, 4.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
could agree was necessary for the ongoing expansion of global capital, required pastures that were not willingly ceded by its Indigenous owners and from whose expected resistance colonists required protection. Though this was a debate over funding, it called upon the broader legitimations, and anxieties, of the settler project. These were views mirrored by influential voices in Britain.

“Our embryo empires”

Significantly, the Standard framed its defence of imperial assistance to colonists in global terms, dismissing any idea of the parochial significance of the Waikato War. Post-European New Zealand history, as Peter Gibbons has noted, was “not sui generis, but a component of a much wider process, the expansion of European power into the global arena from the fifteenth century onwards.”23 As such, we need to understand settler colonialism from London’s viewpoint as part of a worldwide, rather than national, development. And it is here that Australia retained a visible presence in British press discourse.

The Standard chastised those who argued against funding the conflict: “It is a narrow policy which reckons up the money value of every Imperial bayonet that defends New Zealand civilisation against aboriginal barbarism, and declare it to be all loss.” The reasons for this were then detailed:

The home country has been rendered great by her colonial empire. Wherever the English colonist has been able to find a resting-place for the sole of his foot thither has he summoned the manufactures of Manchester and Birmingham. The wilderness has become not only a fruitful field, but a profitable market. The rapid growth of our large towns, the gathering myriads of our manufacturing districts, and the enormous increase of our commerce, are elements of material grandeur for which we are indebted to the hardy pioneers who have gone forth from our shores and transferred the habits and requirements of civilisation to the prairie, the savannah, the jungle, and the bush. The extraordinary increase in our exports consequent on the establishment of the Australian colonies is a fact to be borne in mind whenever the cost of defending our colonies comes under discussion. We owe a debt of gratitude to our distant relatives—the advanced guard of the civilised world—the outposts of trade and commerce.24

Presented here for the reader was no less than an outline of the vast “settler revolution,” with its capitalistic impulses and spatial expansion transplanting

24 Standard, 15 June, 1864, 4. For a near-identical sentiment drawing upon Australia see “England and Her Colonies,” Leeds Mercury, 1 October, 1863, 2. This was an article reproduced from Fraser’s Magazine.
“civilisation” to whole swathes of the earth’s surface. As we have seen, this was a view from home which would complement similar visions in Australian papers.

For both the Times and the Standard, familial rhetoric was not absent so much as secondary to material concerns. It was this order of things, and especially the evident questioning of the settler’s way of life, that was to be reconfigured later in the century. Thus the praise for the colonies likely refurbished the idea that, despite platitudes evoking “kith and kin,” the benefit of the colonies was more economic than filial. The Standard recognised that the search for wealth that compelled colonial expansion was buoyed by the recent discovery of the gold that “has been immensely augmented by the ‘diggings’ of our embryo empires,” a teleology that positioned the white colonies as not only members of the current Empire but as incubators of a future one. But this was so primarily in a utilitarian sense. Even racial differences between colonists and Indigenous populations were presented in financial terms, with different sub-groups assessed for their monetary value and as markets for English goods. “An English colonist,” continued the editorial:

is a very different customer from a naked savage. Even the polished Hindoo is a poor purchaser. The native inhabitants of India are only worth about sixpence a head to the home market, while the colonists of Australia and New Zealand may be calculated as good for four or five pounds a-piece.

So, too, did the Standard praise the ability of the colonies to provide space for Britain’s surplus population. Sentimental as it may have been in opposing the Times, the Standard could not overlook the utility of the colonies which “have served to draught off our superabundant population.” This population had, moreover, been put to good use: “It is far better,” observed the Standard, “to have customers abroad than paupers at home.”

The tendency to locate positive attributes in the colonies and to contrast these with the metropole ran up against other problems. Namely, a racialised and gendered moral panic over the need to prevent British decay accompanied the demographic and economic gains of the colonies. “Would to Heaven,” the Standard beseeched, “we could transform more of our starving seamstresses into emigrant housewives, rearing hearty young families of Anglo-Saxons in Canada, Australia, or South

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26 Standard, 15 June, 1864, 4.

27 Ibid.
Africa, instead of tottering on the verge of prostitution at home.”  

It would be difficult to locate a more summary evocation of the interconnections between global colonialism, class, gender and domesticity than this Wakefieldian plea. The *Standard* presented the colonies as locations of exported whiteness, wealth production, and domestic reproduction in perpetuity, and thus as redeeming the threat of metropolitan degeneracy.

The white settler woman was consequently doubly sexualised. The replacement of the original population with the settler one, if settlers were to claim themselves as somehow “indigenous,” was primarily a project of energetic biological reproduction. Yet metropolitan prostitution stressed the darker shadow of industrial capitalism and signalled the potential for Anglo-Saxon racial decay if it did not expand. In the Australian case, at least, the strict division between metropolitan sexual excess and colonial domesticity, and its class connotations, was obviously false. Not only did Australia’s colonial population derive from the very surplus of Britain’s allegedly idle metropolitan labour force. Equally, the fantasy that contrasted the debauched metropolitan figure with the pure, white colonial one was destabilised by rumours of miscegenation in the colonies and the general depravity inherited from its convict-stained founders and forebears.

Patrick Wolfe has claimed that “as a direct articulation to land, which it claims to render productive, settler-colonisation is gendered in a peculiarly thoroughgoing way.” Indeed, given that the ownership of property, in a Lockean sense, required the admixture of labour and land, the genderedness of settler colonialism took on a distinctly aggressive aspect. It was not only that possession coincided with penetration. Rather, if Indigenous inhabitants’ apparently passive existence on the land nullified their rights to it, European land claims were upheld in proportion to their penetration of territory. More specifically, Beenash Jafri has suggested that

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29 The classic postcolonial treatise on this conjuncture is Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).


32 For a historical account of colonialism and miscegenation, a word coined at the time of the Waikato War, see Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

settler colonialism is discursively naturalised through a set of “settling down” practices. The presentation of hetero-normative family relations worked to sanitise and give an ethical basis to the violence of settler colonialism “such that the calls to own property or start a (nuclear) family become delinked from their historical contexts and reconfigured as natural, innate, ahistorical desires.” In this sense, the ephemeral, detached exploitation implied in the reference to metropolitan prostitution stands in for the alienating forces of capitalism that warranted colonial expansion. The wholesome “family rearing” of the colonies, by contrast, offered a pleasing alternative to the squalor of British cities. The irony of this situation was that the illicit economy of metropolitan prostitution at least implied paid labour while the “legitimate” reproductive, and hence perpetually-settled, economy of (still laborious) marital family relations was, it would seem, to be voluntary. The contradictions inherent in this position meant maintaining an uneasy editorial balance between seeing the colonies as central to the imperial economic system, and imagining them as innocent of its adverse effects. Invisible here was the removal from the land of its original inhabitants, with the resultant rupture of their social and familial relations, to make way for this new idealised settler family. For British observers, this Indigenous presence elicited an altogether more conflicted response.

“Tribes of congenial cannibals”

If Australia retained a notable, albeit oblique, presence in the British press at this time, this was partly because the Australian colonies offered a basis for certain racial comparisons to be made. British press reports recurrently discussed Australia alongside its neighbouring settler colony as dual representatives of the Tasman branch of the British World. This was not without ambiguity. James Belich has

35 This discourse also elided the practice of Indigenous women turning to sexual transactions after their traditional economies and social relations had been decimated. See Victoria Freeman, “Attitudes toward ‘Miscegenation’ in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, 1860-1914,” Native Studies Review 16, no. 1 (2005): 56-57.
37 On the trans-Tasman relationship see Times, 23 October, 1863, 6. This point, along with the primacy of British over colonial Australian or New Zealand identification, is briefly touched upon in Jeff Hopkins-Weise, Blood Brothers: The Anzac Genesis (North Shore: Penguin Books, 2009), 15. On the links between the “Tasman World” see Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hempenstall, and Shaun Goldfinch, eds., Remaking the Tasman World (Christchurch: Canterbury University, 2008).
argued that notions of English superiority over Māori were products not of colonial New Zealand but of metropolitan Victorian Britain. Yet discursive flows were more fluid than this. The colonies could themselves shape racial perceptions within Britain and ideas of race circulated in much the same way as did capital and material resources. As a result, British readers browsing a range of newspapers in the early 1860s met a perplexing array of racial categories in which to understand stories from the Empire. These could be extreme, as in the frustrated and frankly irrational venom of one letter writer who considered that the inability of Māori to learn the English language meant that “if every one was removed from the face of the earth, [it] would be a boon inestimable to the human race.” Portrayals elsewhere, however, were often ambivalent, as epitomised in the impression of Māori as “congenial cannibals.” Still other descriptions swung the pendulum the other way. An article in the Morning Post thus saw Māori physical and moral qualities overall as potentially “equal if not superior to the white man.”

The Dundee Courier & Argus similarly described Māori as “savages,” yet at the same time, “a race of men who are the equals of the Europeans in natural faculties, whether physical or mental.” Such claims complicate Belich’s contention that the “European monopoly of the higher mental facilities was the inner tabernacle of Victorian racial attitudes,” and that “[t]o question it was to question a whole world view.” Indeed, further complicating any binary racial division, this same article saw the real danger to New Zealand’s composition less in Māori than in the admission of “strange, wild-looking” Australian volunteers. The true question, and

38 Belich, New Zealand Wars, 330.
40 Hampshire Advertiser, 31 October, 1863, 2.
41 "The War in New Zealand," Belfast News-Letter, 19 October, 1863, 4, an article itself reproduced from The Times. References to Māori cannibalism in the British and Australian press were frequent. For a theoretical elaboration of the ambivalence underlying such phrases as “congenial cannibals,” see Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 118-19. For the application of these insights in the colonial Australian context see Barry Morris, "Frontier Colonialism as a Culture of Terror," Journal of Australian Studies 16, no. 35 (1992). For a small sample of the more vitriolic British assessments of Māori culture see Hampshire Advertiser, 31 October, 1863, 2; Times, 19 January, 1864, 6.
42 "New Zealand," Morning Post, 13 May, 1864, 6.
44 Belich, New Zealand Wars, 326. The Standard likewise reported: “Men who have lived long in this country and are well capable of judging, assure us that the aboriginal inhabitants of the beautiful islands are in no way inferior, intellectually or physically, to the Europeans who have settled amongst them.” Standard, 16 September, 1864, 4.
one that surely made any Australian readers shudder, seemed to be whether it was “desirable to introduce such a class into one of our more reputable colonies.”

When fierce Māori resistance clashed with British notions of racial supremacy, readers could be offered more optimistic appraisals of the settler colonies. And here New Zealand and Australia’s discursive association might refocus on their mutual progress. Observing this progress extended to monitoring the racial purity of the colonies, an obsession that, as we will see, would continue later in the century. New Zealand especially had achieved a level of Anglo-Saxonness unmatched even by other white colonies, Irishness remaining the disqualifying trait. The Bristol Mercury, for example, recorded that: “No other colonies, so far as we are aware, have a population so homogenous and so purely Anglo-Saxon as those of New Zealand,” before clarifying, [t]he Irish race abounds in Canada and Australia, and the German element is largely visible both in the American settlements and at the Cape of Good Hope.

What is striking in such passages is that the vindication of settler colonialism rested on analogous illustrations of it. It was to aid this argument that sympathetic British papers evoked the more familiar example of Australia. In another editorial, the Standard reduced New Zealand’s colonisation to a fundamental query: “The problem is, in fact, whether we have or have not a right to colonise the waste or sparsely-peopled spaces of the earth.” To resolve this problem the Standard, mirroring Australian editorial reasoning, pointed to a logical comparison: “Technically Australia was the property of the aborigines, not one jot the less indubitably than the lands of New Zealand belong to the Maori nation.” The mere application of the past tense thus rhetorically stripped Aboriginal Australians of land ownership, while the term “technically” implied that Indigenous property rights were a legalistic quirk, not to be taken seriously. According to the Standard, if Māori land sovereignty acted as a precedent, it followed that “all America was the hunting-ground of the Red Indian, and New Guinea is the inheritance of the woolly-headed Papuan.”

The logical point behind the homogenising of various Indigenous peoples was to draw an equivalence that would undermine Māori rights. Since one could not

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46 “New Zealand,” Bristol Mercury, 30 May, 1863, 5.
47 Standard, 28 April, 1864, 4.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid. See also, Times, 19 November, 1863, 8.
seriously consider these other colonies as illegitimate, so this argument ran, it followed that the colonisation of New Zealand was also legitimate. Reversing this rationale, however, could prompt a frightening realisation; if New Zealand’s colonisation was unlawful, so too would previous acts of colonisation be retroactively discredited. Perhaps for this reason, as in Australian papers, such suggestions required swift dismissal and anxious disputation in the same breath. For this reason, too, I would argue, those British commentators or “philanthropists” who insinuated this interpretation, earned hasty rebuke in colonial papers.

Managing these tensions compelled the disavowal of the reasons for Indigenous resistance. This could even entail the wilful elision of history itself. Summarising the year 1863, the *Daily Telegraph* declared that the “Maori War in New Zealand is absolutely devoid of Imperial significance.”50 More bluntly, a *Times* editorial on the last day of 1863 summarised the year thus: “The colonies have for the most part happily avoided any contribution to contemporary history.”51 In detailing various colonial circumstances it observed that the “Australians of New South Wales and of Victoria are highly prosperous, and they have neither an aristocracy to envy nor even an aboriginal race to fear or to exterminate.”52 A more explicit relation between settler wealth production and the disavowal of Indigenous hostility to its processes would be hard to find. As the *Times* understood it, the society that was free from both class conflict and the concerns over an “aboriginal race” was outside of history, and in this Australia’s role as a prospective utopia for British readers was seemingly complete.

In the same editorial the *Times* contrasted the Australian situation to that of New Zealand where, unless Māori submitted to their defeat at the hands of New Zealand’s settlers, that “savage race . . . will probably within a few years have ceased to exist.”53 Australian settlers, by contrast, were silently productive, necessitating no external military commitments. Though outwardly complimentary, for the *Times’* many colonial readers, this depiction could only reinforce the view that London was disinclined to fund their military protection. The bind triggering much of the rhetorical inconsistency coming from the colonies was understandable from this perspective. On the one hand settlers despised the mother country’s censure of force toward “natives.” Yet it was only through publicising the extreme threats faced by settlers that they could hope to secure imperial backing to quell it.

50 *Daily Telegraph*, 31 December, 1863, 5.
51 *Times*, 31 December, 1863, 8.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Where this disavowal of history was not attempted, the Australian comparison provided a more discomforting reason as to why there was apparently no “aboriginal race to exterminate.” In a more morose register, reference to settler violence toward Australia’s Aboriginal population could frame the rhetoric of Māori subjugation. According to the prominent analyst of the war and future House of Commons MP, J.E. Gorst, who had spent the opening years of the 1860s in the Waikato, Australian colonists had provided an instructive warning to Māori in the nefarious intentions of British settlers. The “fate of the Tasmanian and Australian black is well known to them [Māori],” Gorst explained, and so much so that they “say that as the English dog and rat have entirely exterminated the native dog and rat, so the Englishmen will destroy them.”54 Somewhat less sympathetically, in August 1863 the Standard predicted that the “blacks of Australia, and the grand Maories of New Zealand, will be alluded to by the next generation as beings of the past.”55 In this editorial, with its confusion of historical tenses, a sense of hope tempered regret. The Standard peered into the future to predict the past, thus recording history from the perspective of the anticipated victors of racial conflict.56

The rhetorical function of this historical viewpoint was considerable. If Māori fate was sealed in advance and their disappearance inevitable, then the white man’s march, unjust though it may be, could not reasonably be countered. Regret and anticipation were here not antithetical, but, on the contrary, profoundly co-dependent. To regret Indigenous demise in the very face of their sustained resistance to white settler sovereignty, one first had to fantasise the demise to be regretted. Through this “proleptic elegy,” as Patrick Brantlinger has termed it, the mourning of Indigenous people and the seizure of their land could proceed simultaneously, allowing the “native” to appear in settler narratives without subverting them.57 As was often recognised, however, the cause of this regrettable

55 Standard, 21 August, 1863, 4.
56 For similar comparisons see, Morning Post, 14 April, 1863, 2; Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper, 30 August, 1863, 6; Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet, and General Advertiser, 11 September, 1863, 6.
fate was widely known to be colonisation itself. Both Australian and British newspapers grappled with this same dilemma. Given the “absurdity” of relinquishing settler territory, but faced with anticipated Indigenous decimation, it is little wonder that opposing rationalisations were so forthcoming. It is little wonder too that these matters generated intense disputation as papers passed between Britain and the colonies.

For the *Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser*, the “trial of might” in the Waikato was pre-determined on the grounds of British racial supremacy. To prevent any protracted suffering Māori subjugation should therefore be merciless. “In Tasmania,” the article reminded its readers, “the aboriginals have wholly disappeared . . . extirpated by the European settlers as so much vermin.”58 It was, moreover, this “same fate, by a slower and less reprehensible process, [that was] befalling the native Australian.”59 It was this “fate,” despite apparent Māori racial advantages over “the nude savage of Van Diemen’s Land,” that was being cautioned against.60

However, the same article then claimed that accusations of cruelty in depriving Māori of their land were “nonsense” as they neither occupied the land nor fruitfully used it. It summoned Australia again to authorise the taking of Māori land. For if the “principle” of the Treaty of Waitangi was to hold, it might as well be “that the few black natives ought to have been allowed, if they chose, to forbid the formation of a single British settlement in the vast Island-continent of Australia. Such doctrine is manifestly absurd.”61 Within the one article, then, a British newspaper has twice appealed to Australian settlement, the first to warrant Māori suppression so as to avoid the Tasmanian experience, and the second to equate the demonstrable “absurdity” of lawful Indigenous resistance to British colonisation.62 In other words, the purported benevolence of the *ends* of colonisation could not align with the *means* it entailed.

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59 Ibid.  
60 Ibid.  
61 Ibid. 
62 Equating the Tasmanian experience with Māori fate was to be the topic of an Anthropological Society debate only two months after this article appeared, indicating that it was not an uncommon comparison. Ann Curthoys, “Cultural History and the Nation,” in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003), 35.
This rhetorical inconsistency plagued British commentary on the Waikato War. It also likely echoed the crises of legitimacy in the metropole. As we have seen, British editorials could displace the consequences of imperial expansion onto the colonies themselves, as if these consequences were somehow divorced from the broader project of Empire. For colonial Australian readers, the Waikato War offered a chance to emphasise why they were vital to the Empire. In this they could find support in some sympathetic British allies. Yet their position within the British press, though sparse, was seldom stable. Their importance in the imperial scheme of things was frequently disputed and, even when they were praised, this was for the most part for their economic value, rather than their natural place in imperial affections. In 1885, however, the British press received the latest colonial military gesture with renewed enthusiasm.

The Sudan Crisis: “Their first warlike operation”

Long I have dreamt of them, growing greatly,
The lads I love, getting big and bright;
And the way they have shot up and strengthened lately
Must fill a father with fond delight.

“My Boys” (A Carol for Our Colonies), Punch, 28 February, 1885, 102.

Whereas British newspaper commentary on Australian troops in New Zealand reflected wider debates over the costs and benefits of the settler colonies, a reading of British press responses to Australian involvement in the Sudan revealed near unanimous refrains of colonial loyalty to the Empire. Put simply, British commentary on the NSW contingent served to reassure readers that all was well with the Empire while giving a timely reminder of global British solidarity to imperial challengers. This was an idea bolstered by communications networks. In 1885, a New South Wales correspondent for the Times told his readers that far from the colonies being “cut off from the old world,” the “daily telegrams announcing the progress of the expedition up the Nile were looked for with eagerness.” A key function of the press system connecting the white colonies to Britain at this time, then, was to encourage the reader, in Simon Potter’s phrase, to “think imperially.” As the Times somewhat superfluously reminded its readers: “Just now hardly a day

63 The Imperial Federation League was founded in London in 1884.
64 “Australia and the Mother Country,” Times, 2 April, 1885, 10.
passes without the colonies being brought before our notice in some prominent way.\textsuperscript{66} The dispersed members of the so-called British World thus became a regular textual reference point.

By contrast to the “extreme sensitivity of the Imperial Parliament to military expenditure” in the 1860s, the fact that the NSW contingent was to be fully funded by the colony meant that the offer was welcomed in Britain almost entirely without reservation.\textsuperscript{67} Mounting anxieties within Britain certainly made this situation desirable. So too did the imagined thrills of Empire. Accompanying the new phase of imperial aggression was an enthusiasm for the excitement that war and travel were thought to offer. In the pages of the press the exotic existed in the everyday. If adventure tales were, for Martin Green, “collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night,” newspaper reports of Empire were what greeted them each morning upon waking.\textsuperscript{68}

Yet the reiteration of this soothing voice raised the question: if it was so clear that the Empire was strong and that the colonies were loyal, why the need to repeat this mantra? I maintain that these assertions were roused not by an abundance of imperial confidence but the lack of it. Just as concerns had grown since mid-century over the perceived threats to British supremacy from rival powers, democratic ideas “infecting” the public, and racial contamination from colonised peoples, so too had the need to consolidate white Britishness intensified.\textsuperscript{69} These apprehensions were rooted in history. What was emphatically not allowed to happen was another splintering of the Empire as had occurred during the American Revolution. In a speech reproduced widely in British newspapers in early 1885, Prime Minister Gladstone, often denigrated by rivals as a “little Englander,” a promoter of colonial independence and an opponent of Imperial Federation, spoke to this fear. Gladstone saw in the offer of New South Wales troops “a most gratifying contrast” to “the shock of a great dismemberment of the empire,” that had accompanied the loss of the American colonies.\textsuperscript{70} Compounding memories of this dismemberment was the recent New Guinea annexation crisis where Britain’s equivocal response both to Australian lobbying efforts and to German aggression

\textsuperscript{66} Times, March 18, 1885, 9. See also Birmingham Daily Post, 21 February, 1885, 4.
\textsuperscript{67} Belich, New Zealand Wars, 123.
\textsuperscript{68} Martin Green, Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 3.
\textsuperscript{69} Bell, Idea of Greater Britain, 1-6.
\textsuperscript{70} “Summary of News,” Manchester Guardian, 21 February 1885, 7; See also Glasgow Herald, 21 February, 1885, 4.
generated concern in some publications that the perceived disloyalty to Australia had weakened the imperial bond.\textsuperscript{71}

The value of the NSW contingent, then, for both Australian and British newspapers, was to restore order to a particular way of perceiving the colonial relationship to Britain. The crises in the South Pacific had alerted the colonies to their complicated standing within the imperial hierarchy. The contingent gave Australian newspapers a chance to assert a fundamental loyalty unshaken by colonial complaints while the British response allowed this sentiment to be publicly accepted. This exchange enacted, in effect, a two-way gesture of reassurance. This was not necessarily to state the reality of the situation, but to publicise a mutual understanding that tensions had been resolved and to return a sense of wholeness to an apparent state of rupture.

The irony was that both Australian and British papers articulated the same anxieties over how to maintain colonial ties to Britain.\textsuperscript{72} And yet, following fiery remonstrations in the Australian press after the New Guinea crisis, there was soon felt a boom in patriotic sentiment toward the Empire. To the \textit{Times} Australian correspondent the reasons for this volte-face were clear: “A week ago we were all grumbling at the mother country; to-day we are fired with enthusiasm to help her. It is General Gordon’s death which has effected the transformation.”\textsuperscript{73} Thus, rather than seeing the colonies as a burden, as Duncan Bell has characterised the situation in the 1860s, or feeling the need to justify expenditure upon them, British editorials could now fit the settler colonies into a new and celebratory imperial narrative.\textsuperscript{74} Australians could also bask in the admiration of their British spectators. Just as Australian newspapers saw colonial progress as dependent on its imperial roots, so too did prominent organs of the British press, perceiving a need for rejuvenation, see the martial enthusiasm of its young colony as a statement of lasting tradition. The British reading public could then identify an improved version of British society in the colonies whose innocent loyalty was untainted by political expediency. In each case the press acted as a site on which to misrecognise a particular vision of social stability.

\textsuperscript{73} “Australia and the Mother Country,” \textit{Times}, 2 April, 1885, 10.
\textsuperscript{74} Bell, \textit{Idea of Greater Britain}, 31-34.
“The political significance of it marks an era in history”

The potential of the colonies to distract from (if not solve) problems besetting Britain was evident in the days leading up to the news of the New South Wales offer. Referencing Imperial Federation in the context of the Sudan crisis, the *Daily News* in February 1885 recognised that: “The importance of the colonies meets the modern politician at every turn. The manner in which they have settled or are settling the relations of the land and the people is worthy of the most attentive study.” More than locations of bemused curiosity, disdain or encumbrance the colonies were here objects of “study,” and a place where encouraging lessons could be learnt. These ideas increasingly located Australia as an ever-more central component of the Empire. A focus on the white colonies continued to emphasise the virtues of emigration and the benefits of territorial expansion, with doubts suggested only by the hesitancy as to whether the colonists had in fact finally “settled” the relations of the land and its people.

What was certain was that this diffusion of Britishness should benefit not only its recipient localities, but the Empire as a whole. The colonies established by British migrants apparently verified the Empire’s forward-looking, progressive elements while allowing for the negation of its dishonourable ones. Rather than demonstrating the aggressive logic of settler colonial expansion, the seizure of Indigenous territory and its attendant violence could be understood as mere side-effects of the grand project of circulating the British race. This assignment required thinking of the Empire as an organic and unified body in which each part performed a specified role. If a narrative of imperial improvement was to be convincing, it was critical that it be seen as natural, inevitable and immanent. In this newspapers and periodicals served a pivotal role. Potted histories, editorials and letters reinforced the idea of a British imperial community and reminded readers of the vast interconnected scope of the Empire of which they were a part. Often this entailed a re-narrativisation of past events and the New South Wales offer of troops to the Sudan provided an opportune chance for this.

A London *Daily Telegraph* editorial dedicated to the NSW contingent (reprinted in Australian newspapers), perhaps spotting a chance to amend the historical trauma of losing the American colonies, saw the arrival in the Sudan of the *Iberia* and its military cargo of Australian “bearded white men,” as a historical moment echoing

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75 *Daily News*, February 10, 1885, 5.
77 See for example “How We Gained Our Colonies,” *Leeds Mercury*, February 28, 1885, 1.
that of the Mayflower. The arrival of the contingent, wrote the *Telegraph*, “speaks to our imagination as few recent events have done.” The extravagance of this rhetoric was tied to its familial aspect. Such was “the birth of a new power in the world—the debut of Australasia on the stage where nations play their part,” that “[n]ever in history had the like been witnessed.” If Australians needed proof that their martial gesture had secured the correct response they were to receive it here through an emotional torch-passing, marking a distinct break with assessments made in the 1860s. The *Telegraph* noted of Australia that although “[s]he had counted for little before; she has ever to be reckoned with in future.” Thus, “With almost paternal interest the home-staying Briton dwells upon the apparition of the new Australian force side by side with the historic regiments of the old land.” This interest was in large part owing to their “admirable physique, and of the fact that they are men, not boys,” a depiction supplemented by a collective display that characterised the “enthusiasm, and almost recklessness, of national youth.”

The signs offered by the contingent had, for the *Telegraph*, global, and distinctly theatrical, significance. “The great drama now in progress,” it declared:

> may have in reserve far more momentous acts than any yet played. Its stage may widen indefinitely, and its scenes be shifted from African deserts to Asiatic steppes; but in proportion to the urgency of the case will be the assurance that the British Empire . . . is one, indivisible and invincible.

Now that the colonies had established their worth, that is, their participation in the Empire would prove pivotal to its global expansion and defence. Implicitly conceding the affective limits of the ephemeral daily press, the *Telegraph* even anticipated artistic representations of the Empire’s unity, seeing in the contingent “a theme for the poets and painters of the future such as those of the present might envy from their hearts.”

Such views were not uncommon. The *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury* also marked the NSW contingent’s embarkation as a day “memorable in the history of the Australian colonies.” Importantly, this account was written from

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78 *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March, 1885, 5. It was these editorial claims that were disputed by the Hobart *Mercury* as discussed in chapter four.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 For theatrical metaphors in war reporting see Glenn R. Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899–1914* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Ch. 5.
84 *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March, 1885, 5.
85 Ibid.
the perspective of the future. In a hopeful prophecy the article foretold that: “When, a century hence, the rise of the great Southern Empire shall be matter [sic] of history, foremost amongst the deeds of its founders will be their first warlike operation.” These mixed tenses, whereby readers could comprehend actions of the present read in the future as a great moment of the past, again spoke to a wish to maintain control of a particular teleology. In this the NSW contingent could clear from the British imagination escalating imperial worries with bygone troubles recast as so many necessary means to an end.

This was, moreover, a vision that overlooked the near century-long “warlike operation” against Australia’s Aboriginal population. While the Telegraph granted that “we have conquered as much as we have colonised,” this admission pertained only to certain locations. Though the Empire had “picked the glittering diadem of India from the trampled soil of hard-fought fields,” the Telegraph breezily claimed that they owed their hold on “Australia to the arts of peace.” A similar elision of Aboriginal Australian resistance to invasion and frontier expansion can be read in the supposed contrast with New Zealand described by the New South Wales Times correspondent who noted that: “Hitherto this has been the peaceful portion of the world; New Zealand has had its native wars, but Australia has not even had that trouble.” The attempted physical removal of Indigenous presence to make way for the settler population mirrored their textual removal to facilitate a triumphant settler history that was then slipped into the story of British martial glory. The contingent thus functioned to replace a disturbing “first warlike operation” with a more tolerable one.

“The whole world will understand”

As far as Britain was concerned the NSW contingent fulfilled its function in the very immediacy and publicity of William Dalley’s offer. Not that the symbolism of the contingent lessened its import. On the contrary, because the contingent’s impact rested not on its martial utility but on its “moral value,” this could, counter-

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87 Ibid. Indeed, for one letter-writer to the Times, the martial history of the Australian colonies extended back to the New Zealand Wars. T. W. W, “Colonial Aid in War,” Times, 6 April, 1885, 8.

88 Daily Telegraph, 31 March, 1885, 5.

89 “The Australian Contingent in the Soudan,” Times, April 24, 1885, 13. For a similar sentiment see “A Tour in Australia,” Essex Standard, West Suffolk Gazette, and Eastern Counties’ Advertiser, March 28, 1885, 7. See also Dilke’s position discussed in Anna Johnston, “Greater Britain: Late Imperial Travel Writing and the Settler Colonies,” in Oceania and the Victorian Imagination, ed. Richard D. Fulton and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 36.
intuitively, magnify its meaning. Precisely because it was not required for practical purposes, the NSW contingent showcased for British readers the supposedly instinctive familial spirit of the Empire. This much was conceded by the *Morning Post* which knew that the significance of the contingent lay not in numbers alone:

> Whether the Australian contingents be large or small is of little importance compared with the great fact to which their presence in the Soudan will testify—namely, the community of interest shared by the United Kingdom and by our distant colonies at the Antipodes.

This sentiment most immediately rested on a sense of relief that Australians had remained loyal following their rebuffed New Guinea annexation. It also advertised the global nature of British imperial defence to would-be challengers. As a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* expressed it:

> We are not exulting so much over the colonial offers of aid because colonial soldiers are actually wanted in the Soudan, but because the spirit shown in such offers may come in the light of a much-needed revelation to the European Bears, Eagles, and other insects of prey, which have for some time past been casting greedy glances on Mother England’s little domicile.

The contingent, in other words, was political theatre for the benefit of a European audience.

The assignment to better promote this progressive view of the colonies was taken up in a series of articles titled “A Tour in Australia,” published in *The Essex Standard, West Suffolk Gazette, and Eastern Counties’ Advertiser*, and which the author W. H. P. Arden described as part of a mission to educate British readers. Shrewdly capturing the concerns of Australian commentators, Arden observed that the “dark ignorance existing among the British public of anything pertaining to Australia is lamentable and amusing.” This was primarily “because it causes indignation amongst the Colonists, and tends to show them that they and their country are not appreciated as they have a right to be, forming, as they do, an

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90 “A regiment or two of sturdy colonists will be a real help to us. But the moral value of the aid they have volunteered to give is of infinitely greater importance.” in “Shall Chester or Wrexham Control The Dee?,” *Wrexham Advertiser, and North Wales News*, 21 February, 1885, 5.

91 *Morning Post*, 16 February, 1885, 4.

92 For the *Manchester Guardian* the offer exceeded diplomacy or practicality to make “a proclamation to the whole world that men of English blood beyond the seas are English still.” *Manchester Guardian*, 16 February, 1885, 5.


integral portion of our Empire.” Arden then showered the Australians with praise. He also heavily pronounced their colonial otherness, contradicting proclamations of racial homogeneity for Britons around the globe: “For they are distinctly a race by themselves,” wrote Arden.

Again, this was a distinction complicated by the Irish question in the colonies. Likely reflecting the ongoing Home Rule political crisis within Britain which came to a head in this period, British newspapers took up and disputed the Irish racial composition of the New South Wales population. When the *Pall Mall Gazette* described New South Wales as: “the most English and most thriving of the States that have sprung from [England’s] loins,” a correspondent wrote in the following week to note that New South Wales was, in fact, the “most Irish of the great colonies, a third of the population being Celts and Catholics,” citing William Dalley’s own Catholicism and Irish heritage. The exchange was not lost on the Irish nationalist press. The following day *Freeman’s Journal* accused Dalley of being ashamed of his Irish-Catholic background, “[j]udging by the Anglicised edition of his name.” From this piece of evidence the article deduced disparagingly that: “If the rest of the Irish in the colony are of the same stamp it is easy to understand these effusive professions of loyalty to England.” And it is here that, perhaps in spite of itself, *Freeman’s Journal* gets to the heart of the matter. Despite the tone of condescension, the implication was clear—both the NSW contingent and the gushing voices of patriotism coming from the Australian colonies derived, in part, from a sense of their own historical inferiority. Underlying claims of a united and venerable heritage from England was the knowledge that the white British colonies remained tainted.

Yet as with Australian depictions of the NSW contingent, colonial distinctions featured to strengthen the overriding aim of declaring the importance of the colonies to the Empire. Where, in the Australian case, difference could never

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96 Ibid (original emphasis).

97 Out of ignorance or courtesy, the fact that Dalley’s parents were also convicts was not mentioned. For the original editorial see *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 February, 1885, 1, and for the responding letter see “Correspondence,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 February, 1885, 1. The *Pall Mall Gazette* seemed to take the correction on board in future. See the description of the contingent that stressed its “Irish element” in “Correspondence,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 December, 1885, 6.


99 Ibid.

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approach actual separation from the mother country, in the British press, a shaken metropolitan society required the celebration of an exceptional offshoot guarded from the problems beleaguering “home.” The colonies acted as a space upon which British readers could imagine a virile and rehabilitated idyll *out there*.

Consequently, returning to Arden, we can see that even his presentation of Australia as unique was made within the strict confines of Western racial categories and, as such, Australia remained a secure object of knowledge. The NSW contingent had seemingly rendered the otherness of Australia compliant with a British epistemology. Arden elsewhere balanced colonial racial quirks with British concepts of commodified pastoral production and ideas of private property, notions that marked white Australians off from the Aboriginal population that represented a far more radical “distinction.” Here colonial racial variance was acceptable as a sub-category of whiteness and in assistance to British expansion.

Demarcating Australian difference, then, served to consolidate the perception of imperial power.\(^ {101}\) To truly demonstrate the strength that would appear revivifying to a British readership, Australian enthusiasm for the Empire had to appear autonomous. The unspoken clause was that this show of spontaneity was useful only if the colonies remained at Britain’s bidding should the need arise. Arden’s key concerns were again the New Guinea affair and the delicate matter of the rejection of offers of troops from other Australian colonies. Arden warned of the urgency with which “Englishmen belonging to all grades of society must take a deep interest in this great southern Continent, and they should exert themselves to maintain the connection between it and the mother country.”\(^ {102}\) Reversing fears heard in the Australian colonies, Arden obliquely referenced the traumatic moment of American separation from the Empire to claim that it would be England that would lose most “if that connection were severed,” while “Australia being isolated from the civilized world, would lose little.”\(^ {103}\)

We need not labour the point to notice a marked shift in rhetoric from the 1860s to the 1880s. The ubiquitous familial metaphors took on new significance in this period and symbolised the white colonies’ growing prominence in the imperial imagination. As indicated above, however, the ground these metaphors were expected to cover saw them frequently lapse into ambiguity. The *Leicester*

\(^ {101}\) For explicit reference to the contingent as proving “racial sympathies,” see “The English Race,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 28 June, 1885, 6.


\(^ {103}\) Ibid.
Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury article cited above, for instance, compared aged British frailty with colonial youth, though in doing so it encountered new problems. If “[i]n some future age a big bully of a nation may threaten the existence of a poor worn-out Old England,” it pondered, “[t]hen one of her strong sons from over the Pacific or Atlantic may come with his ironclads and his battalions, and form a bulwark of defence round about her.”104 In a further nod to the strength of the reciprocal relationship, the article counselled that just as “[c]hildren are to honour their parents; and parents are not to provoke their children to wrath, but are to nourish and cherish them...” so too “should it be with parental and youthful nations.”105 That this passages highlighted metropolitan anxiety is clear enough, and in this the colonies provided some solace. Yet this solace came only with the knowledge that the colonies were complying with British expectations. For the comforting image of the colonies to have its effect, they had to occupy the dual position of independent, martially equipped saviours and of deferential children. Indeed premonitions of imperial decline aroused something of a mixed metaphor whereby the British metropole was at once “worn-out” and “old,” while offering the childishly meek admission that they might be confronted by a “big bully.” The difference between the descriptions of Britain and the Australian colonies was stark. Where the Chronicle granted Britain the worst aspects of youth and old age, the colonies represented the best of both.

The instability granted to familial roles was equally evident in the varied gendered images through which the NSW contingent could come to stand in for all manner of meaning.106 A Standard editorial from the 7th March saw the offer of the contingent and the unity it evidenced as “compensation” for the “period of stress and storm through which this country is passing,” and as such, it could “gratify the patriotic imagination with a vision of the remote but related resources” of the Empire.107 For this diverse readership to “imagine” the Empire’s geographical range, connectedness and loyalty adequately, however, it was necessary to circumscribe invocations of Australia. Not least, any hint of retreating from military threats to

104 “True Federation,” Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury, 14 March, 1885, 8.
106 For example the letter by “Australis,” “Mr. Gladstone on the Union of English-Speaking Peoples,” Times, 18 February, 1885, 12. See also the mixed metaphors in “1885,” Ipswich Journal, 31 December, 1885, 3. McClintock, Imperial Leather, 357-58.
107 Standard, 7 March, 1885, 5.
the Empire was variously “unmanly”, “feminine” and “womanish.” With its editorial focus on colonial progress and masculinity, the Standard’s readers could see in colonists an exemplification of their imperial ideal. Yet with British newspapers throughout the century replete with depictions of NSW as, by turns, the mother of the Australian colonies, a maturing son, a young daughter, and all the while remaining eminently manly, this was a flux epitomising the futility of attempts to secure a community identity within neat gendered categories. It equally demonstrated the problems of containing the contradictions of Empire within the diversity of the newspaper press. As Adele Perry suggests, such shifting familial metaphors expressed the impossibility of asserting hegemonic meanings onto the colonies.

Inseparable from much of this rhetoric was a more overtly politicised discourse praising the Australian colonies for their so-called traditional values. The same Standard editorial cited above suggested that “Englishmen” should be proud to belong to the same “kith and kin” as the Australians. This was attributed to their proving that “the old traditions still survive,” with Australians retaining belief in their “Imperial duties.” More specifically, colonists had “formed their ideas . . . before the wave of modern Liberalism, with its shallow humanitarianism and feminine ideals, had obtained vogue.” This, it continued, was timely: “for they speak at a moment when the theorists who would fain have destroyed the British Empire in the name of imaginary blessings to mankind are shamed into silence.” But, crucially for the Standard, “our flesh and blood in the Colonies are not content with speaking. They likewise act.” Precisely because of Australian colonists’ apparently spontaneous patriotism, the Standard could confidently record that colonists had not “degenerated,” from their forebears but had improved upon them. Lest the reader be in any doubt as to the allegiance of the Standard, it

108 Ibid. Likewise, the SMH reprinted an article from the St James Gazette that declared “Australian fellow-subjects” were “untarnished by the womanish sentimentalism which bids fair to paralyse the mother-country.” “The Australian Contingent,” SMH, 15 April, 1885, 10. See also “Australia and the Mother Country,” Manchester Guardian, 13 February, 1885; Glasgow Herald, 5 March, 1885, 4.
109 Streets, Martial Races, 10-12.
110 For an extended discussion of gender and British journalistic discourse see Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, Gender and the Victorian Periodical (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
112 Standard, March 7, 1885, 5.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
concluded: “In times off difficulty there is only one motto for an Englishman who loves his country. It is ‘One Empire, one People’.”

Resembling a pattern demonstrated in coverage of the Waikato War, the Standard took umbrage at humanitarian interference into imperial affairs. The colonies represented everything that the Standard understood to be dissipating in the metropolis. The settler colonist, previously held as an inferior figure against whom metropolitan Britons could assert their superiority, was now at the forefront of Empire, establishing the “manly” virtues of the frontier, and this precisely because of his lack of humanitarian qualms. It was this colonial figure and his representation in the press that captured an irony found in varying degrees throughout certain British newspapers in their coverage of the NSW contingent. The Australian colonies simultaneously represented progress via tradition. The Standard viewed the Australian colonies as having improved upon their British ancestors in a tale of racial progress and in doing so, halting fears of colonial degeneration. But it could do this only by claiming that the colonies had maintained the traditional British temperament and had not succumbed to what it saw as liberal trends. Colonial ideas deserved praise precisely because they were unspoiled by fashionable political and philanthropic notions as the Standard saw it. In other words, by contrast with the governing “Liberal” principles in Britain, it was because Australian imperial principles were of the past that they offered direction for the future.

Nor was this idea confined to England. On the 5th March, shortly after the embarkation of Australian troops, an article in the Welsh Western Mail sung the praises of the contingent and distinguished Australians for their apparent lack of moral concern over events in the Sudan. “It is,” affirmed the Western Mail:

instructive to observe that the Colonists of New South Wales are tortured by none of those misgivings as to the righteousness of making war upon the people of the Soudan which vex the souls of those English electors who are chiefly distinguished by their idolatry of the Divine Gladstone.

The reasons offered by the Western Mail are telling:

Whether it is that they have not yet been educated up to the pitch of understanding the rights of man, or that the Imperial spirit burns more brightly in young and vigorous communities, whose circulation has not yet been enfeebled by old age, the Australians certainly seem to have had their

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117 Ibid.
imaginations fired in an extraordinary degree by the prospect of fighting side by side with English soldiers.\textsuperscript{118}

The deficit of history in the colonies, read in Australia as a cause of anxiety, was for the \textit{Western Mail} a virtue and a source of “vigour.” This was ostensibly because in their youth the imperial passion of the colonies had surpassed their liberal sentiment. The writer castigated the lack of imperial feeling elsewhere and urged Britain to absorb the salutary lessons offered by Australian colonists. Yet it was the political innocence of the colonies and resonance of this for Australian history that remained most significant. Of the reasons given for New South Wales’ celebrated act of “imperial spirit,” youthfulness sat side-by-side with an attributed ignorance of the sarcastically-branded “rights of man.” In a passage of impressive doublespeak, Australia had proved itself an exemplar of racial progress precisely by remaining loyal and pragmatic traditionalists.\textsuperscript{119}

The point of framing the colonies in these ways was to grant them a more historically laudable position within the Empire. During the Waikato War the violence of Antipodean colonists on home soil had been cause for reproach, with their imperial ambitions regarded as a nuisance. By the time of the Sudan crisis, the British press was increasingly framing the colonies as expedient and worthy partners in a new era of British expansion.\textsuperscript{120} The colonies now lent a hand in existing imperial conflicts rather than instigating embarrassing predicaments on their own frontiers. This repositioning of the colonies, however, also highlighted a contradiction at the heart of the British Empire, namely, the co-existence of the Empire’s proud promotion of progressive political ideals domestically with the necessary violence of consolidating foreign territorial gains. The settler colonies, far from London, were the crucible in which this contradiction was played out.\textsuperscript{121}

Read as part of the overall British response to Australian involvement in the Sudan, the broader point was that the NSW contingent worked as a multivalent sign rather

\textsuperscript{118} “New South Wales to the Front,” \textit{Western Mail}, 5 March, 1885, 2. See also the \textit{Times} description of “Colonies with keener Imperial instincts than ourselves, endowed with the perception, which we are in danger of losing, that nations are knit together, not with invoices and bills of exchange, but with blood and iron.” \textit{Times}, 11 March, 1885, 9.

\textsuperscript{119} On the Antipodes as the way forward for Empire see Antoinette Burton, ”New Narratives of Imperial Politics in the Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World}, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 220-23.


\textsuperscript{121} For a local discussion of how Australian colonial politics was at once progressive and regressive depending on the race of the subject in question see Leigh Boucher, ”Race, Rights and the Re-Forming Settler Polity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Victoria,” Journal of Australian Colonial History 15 (2013).
than as a “fact.” The contingent represented colonies that were at once manly and feminine, child-like but strong. They were bereft of education and knowledge, yet well aware of their “imperial duties.” They apparently exuded conservative tradition by eschewing progress, and yet represented the way forward for the Empire. They acted independently so as to prove the Empire’s strength, while demonstrating the Empire’s unity by being at Britain’s beck and call. Not least, they showed that the colonies were of one blood with the mother country (or was it Ireland?), but remained a race apart.

“It pictures to the imagination . . . our vast extent of empire”

A letter published in the *Manchester Times* neatly expressed some of the meanings captured by the NSW contingent in the British press. The correspondent was “Verax” (meaning truth teller), a pseudonym of one Henry Dunkley, the editor of another Manchester newspaper, the *Manchester Examiner and Times*. That Dunkley wrote letters as well as editorials in related publications ostensibly allowed him to employ different “voices,” and even to corroborate his own views. In this particular letter, as “Verax,” the direct address to the reader implied a personal touch: “It is best to be candid with my readers,” he writes, “I like to take them along with me, and indulge in ‘no sort of mechanique’ after the manner of conjurers, without letting them into the secret.”

“Verax” used the latter half of his long letter to rationalise the presence of other Empires in the Pacific. Tellingly, he does this based on the confidence newly created by the actions of the Australians. “Why should we make ourselves uncomfortable over a few thousand acres of African sand,” “Verax” inquired, “when the best part of the world is filled with our rising commonwealths?” In a nod to the recent New Guinea crisis, he then asked, “why should these same commonwealths grow uneasy if Germany or France settles down upon some uninhabited island in their neighbourhood and hoists its flag?” The evident centrality of threats to British supremacy then necessitated a forthright assertion of power and intent, achieved though the press channels open to him. “Verax” evoked both the inexorable march of British imperialism and the rejuvenation of Empire by granting the young

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125 Ibid.
colonies the responsibilities of consolidating their influence in the region. In any case, he declared, the “die of empire is now cast, and the Australian and New Zealander are the future lords of the Pacific.” Verax’s” attitude of casually appointing from afar just who were to be sovereigns of a sizable portion of the earth’s surface was not only an extravagant imperial fantasy. In designating a future world order as he saw it, “Verax,” through a simple rhetorical gesture, effaced any Indigenous presence and claims to land. The implicit message was that vast territorial rights could not be held by peoples who by the same logic did not exist.

Though incorporating Australia into a British “us,” “Verax” went on to more clearly demarcate the familial relationship. He painted the Australian colonists as naïve and willing offspring who “take our conclusions on trust,” while depicting New South Wales as the “eldest born,” who “led the way, and the rest would fain follow.” Verax claimed this innocent fidelity to the Empire as the culmination of a linear progression from the “horror” and “terrors” of “penal settlement,” through to the building of the city of Sydney. From here “Verax,” like Charles Dilke and Goldwin Smith before him, viewed political federation as superfluous given the sentimental and organic links between the colonies and Britain now demonstrated by the contingent. Yet, he claimed, the contingent only had the impact it did because it was a spontaneous, impulsive display of independent affection. As such, he assured his readers, it was something of which “we” can be proud. Indeed, “there has been nothing like it in the history of the world.”

All too aware of his rhetorical flourishes, “Verax” had earlier acknowledged that:

I have perhaps worked up this picture a little too elaborately, but I have done so for a useful purpose, and in small matters of rhetoric the end may be held to justify the means. So far I have been settling my text; I wish now to enlarge upon it for a few moments.

Leaving aside the echoes of this reference to textual “settlement,” where the end was also said to justify the means, it is the self-awareness of the symbolic effect of his overstatement that highlights the shift between the authoritative editorial stance of William Dunkley and his alter-ego. Even so, what was the function of his hyperbolic claim that: “No grander incident in its way has occurred in the long annals of England”? At one level the answer lay in the need for a radical break with an angst-ridden history, to assert the encouraging novelty of the colonies and the

126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid. For similar historical claims see London Daily Telegraph, 5 March, 1885, 5.
129 Ibid.
distinctive emotive connections of Greater Britain. “Verax” here captured the ambiguous nature of British and the Australian press responses to the contingent. That is, the bind between the validation offered by history, and the apprehensions engendered by it which were to be assuaged by breaking with the past.

Yet the following sentence offered another explanation: “It pictures to the imagination, and almost to the eye, our vast extent of empire.”130 “Verax” saw the NSW contingent as signalling such a momentous event not because of the military aid it offered, nor any tangible consequences, but the effect it had on the imperial “imagination.” It enabled a vision of Empire more powerful than any view to the “eye,” and precisely because its composition was psychical rather than physical, its potential meaning was unlimited.

**The South African War: Colonial Consolations**

No detail of their doings goes unrecorded by the big dailies whose wrappers you have never opened, or by the little cheap newspapers with the patent insides. Move a mixed colonial contingent fifty miles here across country and, Winnipeg, Quebec, Vancouver, Canterbury, Wellington and Brisbane are also moved. Over and above that they will write to their papers; these men’s letters will be read and re-read at cross-road stores, in railroad and round-houses, in wayside dossers’ camps, at up-country race meetings, little masonic lodges, the wharves of big exporting houses, and the clubs of all the White Man’s world.


If the 1885 New South Wales offer of martial aid in the Sudan was ideally timed to boost the confidence of British readers shaken by General Gordon’s death among other distresses, by the century’s end circumstances at the southern end of the continent saw renewed British attention to the white colonies. As the South African Boers demonstrated to the world the limits of both Britain’s strength and its rectitude, British newspapers invoked the white colonies to provide a measure of comfort. Yet just as the communicative channels of the “White Man’s world,” to borrow Kipling’s phrase, could be accessed to promote mutual affection throughout the Empire, these same networks of paper could also be used to challenge this affection.

In November 1899 the *Times*, following a shock reversal in Ladysmith in the British colony of Natal, recognised the benefit of turning to the white settler colonies. “At a

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130 Ibid.
moment when the whole nation is lamenting a serious reverse in the field,” wrote the *Times*, “it is consoling to turn to the action of our colonies and to dwell upon the enthusiastic loyalty with which they are sending contingents to fight side by side with the Imperial troops.”  As in 1885, the importance of these troops, at least initially, lay less in their military performance than in redirecting the reader’s attention to this enthusiastic loyalty at a particular historical juncture. This was no time for uncertainty. The *Times* had to control the direction of its commentary. Hence, the near-injunction in speaking on behalf of its readers, and indeed, the nation: “It is consoling to dwell” on the colonies. Perturbing as this setback was, however, it was the succession of routs during Black Week six weeks later that would leave a more enduring impression on imperial confidence.

Throughout the era of “high imperialism,” British forces had become accustomed to easy victories over foreign peoples with lesser military means. More to the point, the British public had become accustomed to reading about these victories.  Black Week ruptured this complacency. Though different publications covered it in differing ways and with blame accorded to a variety of actors and causes, British newspapers could not ignore these defeats. They could, however, attempt to ameliorate the emotions accompanying them. To this project the white colonies were indispensable.

More than a silver lining on an ominous cloud, contemporary editorials positioned the white colonies as arguably the essential meaning to be drawn from Black Week. For the recently established *Daily Mail*, whose opportunistic and jingoistic reporting of the war would see it become the most popular paper in the country, the “national outlook” in the early months of the war was “darker and more threatening than any within the memory of living man,” and was “brightened only by the loyalty of our colonies” and characteristic British tenacity.  In this way military losses could be framed as a temporary setback while colonial unity was the story that could screen the trauma of defeat. Through the recurrent “colonies as consolation” theme a disturbing event could be tolerated and even incorporated within a revised imperial story.

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131 *Times*, 1 November, 1899, 9.
133 *Daily Mail*, 30 January, 1900, 4.
134 See for example “Diary of the War,” *Standard*, 18 December, 1899, 5.
In editorial attention paid to the colonies, the rhetorical register could shift to a level of abstraction beyond day-to-day events. The war commanded reflection on the evolution of the white colonies, both in and of themselves, and in relation to the Empire. This evolution could be measured in demography and wealth, as the colonies reaffirmed belief in a provision of fresh blood to regenerate a Britain tiring in South Africa, strained by continuing troubles over Indian and Irish nationalisms, and internally beleaguered by social division and economic decline. Yet press narratives also saw in colonial progress the potential to tap patriotic sentiment in future wars, a recognition which doubled as a warning to aspiring imperial contenders. The Welsh *Western Mail* recognised that the power the Empire did have depended upon its colonies:

Great Britain stands alone as a Colonial Empire, and stands alone also as the one Power, either in ancient or modern times, which has lived in the affections of its Colonies. This, really, is the source of our strength, and it is unnecessary to add that to the extent we are strong we are envied by our jealous neighbours.

Duncan Bell has argued that in the late-nineteenth century it was increasingly important for Britons to look to the future rather than the past because, as was known to every classicist (as most imperial elites were), empires invariably declined and fell. By proclaiming the singularity of Britain’s Empire this fate might be avoided—past patterns need not hold true for phenomena without precedent.

However, while a cause of unparalleled strength and thus of envy for rival powers, the white colonies equally placed Britain in a precarious position. Though a measure of governmental autonomy might guarantee necessary colonial “affections,” this carried the risk of their not being automatically available for future conflicts. The lessons of history taught the peril of allowing an excess of colonial sovereignty. This potential independence had to be textually contained, most often by reiterating its subservience to imperial passion. The *Daily Mail* offered a useful reminder of this passion in reporting on the reception of its late-1899 publication of Kipling’s “Absent-Minded Beggar.” Written to encourage fundraising for British troops, the verse was said to have aroused “wild frenzied

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136 “Rising to the Occasion,” *Western Mail*, 20 December, 1899, 4. See also *Daily Mail*, 20 March, 1900, 4.
138 *Daily Mail*, 26 April, 1900, 4.
enthusiasm” in the colonies, “ringing from end to end of the island-continent as never a war-song rang in the ears of Australia before.”

Primarily, though, the key motif was the importance to the Mother Country of, as the Standard put it, the “virile young Colonies which have voluntarily sent their sons to fight beside the troops of the Mother Country.” The weight of the adjectives describing the colonies was at least as great as their military role. The virility and youth of the colonies, and the receptiveness of readers to this, was their function. Whatever this communal “virility” actually meant was not the point. Rather for British newspapers this was a performative statement about the narrative role of the colonies. Black Week losses required a declaration of virility to offset the evident impotency of British forces. It was just such a demonstration that was superfluous during the Waikato War but had come to be increasingly essential. Unsurprisingly, parallel Australian accounts were likely to endorse this impression.

Other accounts were more circumspect. The Morning Post, perhaps conceding the incredulity of readers receiving too positive an account, dealt with Black Week by granting its worst effects before offering a palliative. Upon sketching a sober assessment of the war and predicting a prolonged struggle, it wrote: “we have drawn the picture thus blackly with the conscious desire of leaving no feature untold which could invalidate our next remarks.” With full plausibility, the Morning Post then stated its case. Though it did not deny the “gloom” of recent events there remained cause for optimism: “We see the country’s response to her call; we see the Empire knit together by the eager loyalty of its Colonies.” Military setbacks, moreover, were not merely mitigated through colonial devotion. The losses were framed as necessary, a catalyst for the “nation to change its mood.” “An easy victory,” the editorial continued, “would have spared many husbands and many widows’ sons. It would not have strengthened the sense of patriotism, nor have touched the soul of the Empire, nor yet have brought home to a prosperous people the duty of holding their own.”

The Morning Post thus reconfigured battlefield defeat as central to the very fibre of imperial and national patriotism. Blood was spilled for the greater good in an act

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139 “In Australia,” Daily Mail, 31 January, 1900, 3.
140 Standard, 16 November, 1899, 6.
141 See also “Britain of the Future,” Western Mail, 22 December, 1899, 4.
142 Morning Post, 19 December, 1899, 4.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
confirming British supremacy. More insidiously, the reminder of Britain’s “duty” and “prosperity” also contained an implicit instruction for the Morning Post’s readers to be grateful for the wealth they had, resting as it did on contested imperial possessions. An unspoken message underscored the text: if you enjoy your prosperity, do not complain if blood is spilt to defend it. Or, perhaps, to atone for it.

For the Standard, Australia and its fellow white colonies provided an imaginative relocation of idealism away from the waning exuberance in the imperial metropole. “In the Mother Country itself . . . there is no slackening in the resolute intention to achieve success, there is some rebound from the jubilant enthusiasm with which the campaign opened.” “But,” the Standard continued, “the Colonies are young peoples, with all the elastic spring of youth, and they are still in the buoyant stage with which they first welcomed the opportunity of fighting side by side with the Imperial troops.

By positively conflating enthusiasm for war with the innocence of youth, the Standard not only repositioned imperial passion, but spoke for the white colonies for the benefit of British readers. This editorial colonisation, so to speak, was necessary to fix in place a consistent account which could weave together loose ideological strands. With Orwellian logic, the Standard redrew unintended British losses as a source of strength. This meant stressing the portable attributes of Britishness. The white colonies could thereby exist as the best of both worlds; exiled in paradise, unaffected by the troubles plaguing Europe, apparently free from war, and preserving a pure British essence to be called upon when needed.¹⁴⁵

This in turn required balancing consolation for imperial losses with future hopes for the mother country itself. The Standard noted that the South African War was actually “England’s war” (or “Britain’s” as the two were used interchangeably), not the colonies’ war, thus oscillating between conceptions of the imperial relationship as one of unity and one of distinction. Hinting at the angst of metropolitan weakness, the Standard warned that “it would scarcely restore British prestige in South Africa, if it could be said that we had to get our Colonists to beat the Boers for us.”¹⁴⁶ A contradiction here appears in the symbolic function of the colonies. Where Britain was felt to be weak the colonies offered consolation and diversion, yet

¹⁴⁶ Standard, 29 December, 1899, 4 (original emphasis). Kipling later suggested a similar idea in his poem “The Islanders,” published in the Times at the beginning of 1902 in which he accused the British of having “fawned on the Younger Nations for the men who could shoot and ride!” “The Islanders,” Times, 4 January, 1902, 9. This letter unsurprisingly generated rebuttals during the following week. See for example Times, 15 January, 1902, 12.
through this same consolation British weakness was accentuated. Wavering
between assurance and anxiety, the settler colonies were a pivot around which
conflicting imperial rhetoric turned.

Elsewhere, the *Morning Post* turned to the past to view the colonial contributions
to South Africa as part of a continuum, beginning with the NSW contingent to the
Sudan which had displayed the progression of “feeling” that had the likelihood of
accumulating.\(^{147}\) The NSW contingent, for the *Morning Post*, “was the first
expression of a growing feeling, which has gradually swollen to gigantic
proportions, is now big with the fortunes of Empire.” And this feeling had “found its
finest exposition in the amazing response of the Colonies to the call of the Mother
Country.”\(^{148}\) Indeed such a position appeared to vindicate claims made in 1885 of
the historical significance of the NSW contingent. This gesture had clearly retained
rhetorical purchase for British commentators monitoring colonial development.

The editorial then shifted from military to political matters so as to more closely
review local affairs. Drawing a direct line from the NSW contingent to national
Federation, the *Morning Post* claimed: “It may almost be said that the federation
movement in Australia took its first practical impulse from that patriotic
outburst.”\(^{149}\) In the context of the Commonwealth Bill, of which the *Morning Post*
approved, Australian federal ambitions were contrasted with the Canadian
example. To the *Morning Post*, Australia’s stated lack of internal social division
gave it one decisive advantage over the Canadians: racial unity. “For,” the *Morning
Post* reminded its readers, “there is no racial problem in Australia.” This statement
was clarified for the reader: the “[Australian] continent is British—peopled by men
of English, Scottish, and Irish blood—and there is no difficulty of language or
religion. Shall we give to Canada a high trust, and deny it to a nation wholly of our
blood?”\(^{150}\) That is to say, by contrast to Canadian antagonisms between its British
and French populations, Australia had no other non-British white population of
any consequence, though Irish Catholics continued to problematise this
assessment.\(^{151}\) By this same rationale Australia’s Aboriginal population at the
century’s end appeared to pose no sustained threat to colonial rule. Marilyn Lake

\(^{147}\) For links between colonial support for Empire in 1885 and 1899 see “The War and the

\(^{148}\) *Morning Post*, 14 May, 1900, 4.

\(^{149}\) Ibid.

\(^{150}\) Ibid. See also “The Bushmen’s Contingent,” *The Graphic*, 21 April, 1900, 582.

\(^{151}\) Miriam Dixson sees in Irish-British animosities “a bitter original ethnic divide . . . scored into
the Australian national imaginary.” Miriam Dixson, *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts
and Identity - 1788 to the Present.* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), 94.
has observed that these racial qualifications of who was capable and worthy of self-government characterised late-nineteenth-century colonial discourse. The point of these proprietorial claims was, however, as Lake points out, their assertion at the very moment they were thought to be most threatened.152

Admiration for the white colonies blended easily with rhetoric flattering the unique physicality and unsophisticated masculinity of colonial troops.153 And it was the perception of Britain's physical “decay” that necessitated the focus on Australian bodily traits. British fears were seemingly borne out by scientific evidence. In 1900 medical reports appeared to show that military recruits had literally shrunk in average height from fifty years prior, giving proof of British deterioration.154 By contrast, the Daily News observed: “A fine, stalwart set of men are these Australian soldiers . . . They want more drill, more experience, but their physique is magnificent.”155 The general mood animating the colonies even traversed gender boundaries as the article praised Australians for their “warlike spirit” which had “laid hold even of the women.” These characteristics had peculiarly Antipodean origins: “Bronzed by the sun until their faces shine a dull red, they swing along with an easy independence that speaks of bush life.”156 The climate and rural habitation of the colonies thus conditioned their distorted whiteness.157

A broader category of Britishness again accommodated declarations of difference.158 According to the Morning Post Australians had demonstrated through their fighting in South Africa that they were “men of our own blood,” and so positioned Australians, rather than contemporary Britons, as inheritors of the tradition of heroism and adventure, where mythical notions of soldierly virtue lived on. It continued:

We have lately seen in South Africa that the Australians have the same fighting qualities with which we proudly credit ourselves; they have great physical strength, and wonderful powers of endurance; they love danger for

153 See “Sons of the Empire': Why our Colonial Troops are so Well Qualified to Meet the Boers,” Daily Mail, 30 December, 1899, 7.
156 For a summary report that perversely juxtaposes praise of Australian colonial physicality and “bush experience,” with the imminent “extinction” of South Australia’s “aborigines,” see “Our Australasian Colonies,” Morning Post, 11 November, 1899, 6.
158 Thus colonial loyalty had “shown that the Empire is no mere fortuitous concourse of political atoms, but a vital organism in which we are all members one of another.” Daily News, 26 October, 1899, 4.
the very pleasure of it, and adventure to them, as it was to our forefathers and their descendants, is the very breath of their nostrils.\textsuperscript{159}

It was these intangible qualities, then, rather than the mechanics of Imperial Federation that were to the \textit{Morning Post} the authentic signs of the Empire’s unity.\textsuperscript{160} Yet these, too, were based on racial exclusion. “The Empire is consolidated,” it pronounced, “not by hard and fast laws which can be broken as easily as they are made, but by a community of interests and sympathy and the sentiment of brotherhood which is possible alone to men of the same blood.”\textsuperscript{161} In their ostensibly “progressive” impulses the settler colonies were to have an edifying effect on the mother country. The \textit{Daily Mail}, reflecting on the losses of Black Week, avowed that Britain “must catch something more of the progressive spirit of communities which our fathers planted overseas, if these communities are not to be ashamed of us.”\textsuperscript{162} In a seeming inversion, it was imperial Britain that was here eager to receive colonial endorsement. Crucially, the progressive feeling attributed to the colonies was rooted not simply in political ideology, but in emotional and historical ties.

Moreover, if need be, the Australian troops could perform a more localised symbolic function by educating and unifying an internally divided London. Some months earlier, the same paper reported on the departure from London of the New South Wales Lancers to South Africa. “The occasion,” wrote the \textit{Daily Mail}, “was an epoch-making one, and the scene itself gave English men something larger to think about than the mere spectacle of troops bound for the scene of imminent war.”\textsuperscript{163} Rather, “the history of it will awake in England’s children overseas a feeling of kinship such as no diplomacy could evoke.”\textsuperscript{164} For the \textit{Daily Mail} the celebration of the Australian troops crossed class and gender lines to fashion a harmonious London: “Working men, ladies, and silk-hatted City people clustered shoulder to shoulder and joined in the . . . chorus of welcome.”\textsuperscript{165} One particularly overcome woman, representing the “enthusiasm” of the crowds, was said to be “almost blinded by tears, and with her bonnet awry, thrust tiny bunches of flowers into the

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\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Morning Post}, 4 October, 1900, 4.
\textsuperscript{160} See also the apparent world-historical uniqueness of the “real organic unity” of Empire evidenced by Australian and Canadian participation in South Africa. \textit{Daily News}, 23 April, 1900, 4.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Morning Post}, 4 October, 1900, 4.
\textsuperscript{163} ”For Empire and Liberty,” \textit{Daily Mail}, 11 October, 1899, 3.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
men’s hands.” In such ways the Australian troops offered one rhetorical solution (there were of course others) to the domestic and imperial problems faced by Britain. It was in this anticipatory vision of “something larger” that the colonies could plaster over the divisions rending British society, a vision which could then be extrapolated to bind together those other British societies across the seas. Though their role differed in this context, the colonies nonetheless fulfilled the task of allowing British readers to identify themselves as a cohesive whole.

“The colonial troops amuse us most of all”

The gratifying constructions of an idealised Australia certainly did not go unchallenged. Though the bulk of major British newspapers were faithfully pro-imperial and pro-war, dissent could be located easily enough and in fact more easily than in their Australian counterparts. One particularly cutting letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, edited by the vocally anti-war W. T. Stead, had a different take on imperial unity, charging Australian and Canadian troops with assisting the British army in carrying out what would now be termed genocide, that is, “exterminating” and “slaughtering a small nation of husbandmen and shepherds, who never did them, nor anyone else, any harm.” Even more disconcertingly for readers back in the colonies, the same letter mocked Britain’s supposed civilising mission by pointing to the drastically reduced number of Aboriginal people inhabiting Australia.

Tellingly, however, an editorial annotation attached to the bottom of this letter labelled it a sample of the “rabid rubbish which passes as a truthful statement of the facts” among certain groups. The letter was apparently a step too even for Stead, whose anti-war campaigning sat uneasily with his imperial patriotism and belief in British racial supremacy, and it would seem it was published with the proviso that it be simultaneously discredited. Even so, this letter represented a powerful critique of the war, indicative of the changing mood within Britain and anticipating the

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166 Ibid.
168 “Correspondence,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 April, 1900, 3.
169 Ibid.
furore initiated by Emily Hobhouse’s report to the British Government describing the appalling conditions in the camps for displaced Boer families.\textsuperscript{171}

War critics could find greater latitude in working-class papers. Reynolds’s Weekly, for one, saw Australians both as a population duped by a malign jingoism and as cynical opportunist:

The colonial troops amuse us most of all. In our Colonies there is a fearful want of employment. These Australian ‘bushmen,’ that is, cattle drovers, are generally the ne’er-do-wells of this kingdom. They have been starving on about 15s in the Colonies. It was a perfect God-send to them to get engagements in South Africa at the fancy price of about five times as much as is being paid to Tommy Atkins.\textsuperscript{172}

The feted imperial “bushmen” were here de-mythologised and recast as ordinary members of an exploited working class, their patriotism mere economic pragmatism. The following month another Reynolds’s article addressed the perceived decline of the British race itself, comparing it unfavourably with the Boers whose “race is not deteriorating like our own.”\textsuperscript{173} Reynolds’s thus subverted the ideological reasoning of mainstream papers, substituting class priorities for those of race and reversing the preferential allocation of whiteness to the British in favour of the Boers. Economic and racial exploitation, the submerged drivers of British imperialism, here surface on the pages of the radical press. In their connection to the Australian colonies, these critiques diminished joyful claims of imperial harmony and race patriotism so prominent elsewhere.

That Australia’s own press gatekeepers seldom countenanced such attitudes was suggested by a correspondence to Reynolds’s from Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, by “Cas-Hamba,” the pen name of Mrs A E McDonald, herself the owner and editor of a local mining newspaper.\textsuperscript{174} In a salient instance of a colonial reader writing back to the British press, “Cas-Hamba” refuted the praise given to the colonies. She complained: “the average Colonial newspapers absolutely refuse to open their columns to a word in opposition to the war. They have run mad, in a measure, over enthusiastic demonstrations about what they call ‘patriotism’.”\textsuperscript{175} Hence she felt obliged to write to a British paper to be heard at all. “Cas-Hamba” went on to

\textsuperscript{171} Paula M. Krebs, Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55–79.

\textsuperscript{172} “The Slump in Jingoism,” Reynolds’s Newspaper, 26 August, 1900, 1.

\textsuperscript{173} “The Handwriting on the Wall,” Reynolds’s Newspaper, 13 May, 1900, 1.

\textsuperscript{174} AustLit, “Cas-Hamba,” in (www.austlit.edu.au) (2002–).

\textsuperscript{175} “Correspondence,” Reynolds’s Newspaper, 22 April, 1900, 5.
underline the truth of colonial “patriotism” as she saw it, namely, the class issues and dire economic circumstances that compelled Australians to offer themselves as soldiers in a foreign land. In a strained analogy between Australian citizens and Uitlanders, and apparently alluding to women’s suffrage, she suggested:

the world at large thinks the Colonists are staunch patriots, never dreaming of their personal, selfish feelings to get out of a country where they are treated worse than the Outlanders, and where taxes are higher and no voice [sic] through votes in the colony, though they are British subjects. 176

As indicative of how press discourse was open to (narrow) negotiation by its readers, the above polemic (at least to “Cas-Hamba”) lay outside the bounds of acceptable thought in the mainstream Australian press. For this expansion of the imperial public sphere, a reading of Australian letters and contributions to the British press enriches the analysis of Australian feeling toward the war.

Clearly, then, the imperial press system was too porous to confine challenges to imperial unity within national boundaries. The same circulation that animated expressions of worldwide patriotism equally permitted the transnational negotiation of its terms. The above Kipling epigraph, in which the supreme imperial poet wrote in a newspaper of the importance of newspapers to imagining the settler colonies, aptly illustrated the press system’s facilitation of the physical movement of knowledge throughout the British World. “If community of sentiment is not enough to make a nation without consciousness of that community,” wrote Leo Amery in his 1905 *Times* history of the war, “then indeed the electric telegraph and the Press have been no small factors in revealing the British Empire as a living whole to the consciousness of the individuals that compose it.”177 Yet Amery also knew that imperial sentiment co-existed with a burgeoning colonial nationalism.

The mediation of this balance is evident in an exchange in the Welsh *Western Mail* which evinces the varying levels of “press encounters” between newspapers and their readers.178 In a July 1900 letter to the *Western Mail* an Australian correspondent told of how his friends in Cardiff had sent him an article from May of the same year discussing, in the form of a conversation between a Canadian and an “Australian-Scot,” England and Australia’s relationship vis-à-vis the South African War. This initial article thus featured men from two British settler colonies and was intended primarily for Welsh readers interested in Australia’s relationship with England. Adding to these textual connections, two Welsh readers then physically

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176 Ibid.
transported this article to an Australian acquaintance who, in turn, wrote back to
the Welsh newspaper. This type of exchange demonstrated the potential range of
publics entering into a participatory press conversation well beyond its original
jurisdiction.

As to the original article referred to in the letter, we can identify in its content ideas
that ostensibly challenged the ties that the physical circulation of the text
embodied. In this article an “Australian-Scot” explained to the Canadian why he
voted for the Australian Commonwealth Bill:

It’s the objection of a grown man against outside interference. Why should
England want a finger in our pie when we can make it and bake it and eat it
ourselves . . . She is at the Boers now; it may be our turn next. For we are only
Boers in a way . . . An Australian is a better man than an Englishman . . . We
are federating so that we can become independent of England.179

With some irony this Australian resentful plea for independence and recognition
was made available to a British audience through the interrelatedness of the British
World. The “Australian-Scot,” meanwhile, through his self-identification as a Boer,
situated himself in an indeterminate position of inferiority and superiority to
England. His Canadian companion responded by arguing that this was surely not
the representative view in Australia. The reply of the “Australian-Scot” to this
rebuttal was sharp: “don’t you make the biggest mistake of your life, my friend.
Australia is against this war.”180

Returning to the later letter, the contributor disputed the “Australian-Scot’s” claims
that Australians largely opposed the war. “I assert,” he wrote, “Australia is at one
with the Motherland on the war, and very much so.”181 In support of this he asked
his readers to “[w]itness the eight thousand troops she has sent, and the only
difficulty we have met with has been in restraining the ardour of those who wanted
to take a hand in it, and the rejoicing over every victory.”182 Though it was not
unusual for the South African War to be considered as a moment when Australian
identity was debated, this being enacted in a Welsh newspaper highlighted its
transnational scope.

Prominent among this correspondent’s concerns was the potentially negative
impression of Australians open to other members of the imperial family if the
wrong message was transmitted. After noting the “Australian-Scot’s” plea for

179 “Will England Go Right?,” Western Mail, 2 May, 1900, 4.
180 Ibid.
181 “Correspondence,” Western Mail, 19 July, 1900, 3.
182 Ibid.
independence, the correspondent worried that, “if this is published in the Canadian papers what will our brother Canadian think of us?” before declaring that Australia’s loyalty to the Empire surpassed even that of the British themselves. The clear concern was that the Australia circulating in print would ultimately become the Australia imagined throughout the British World. As if to force the point, the correspondent concluded by requesting that the *Western Mail* publish a corroborating speech by a New South Wales colonial secretary printed in the *Star*, “a respectable paper.” In other words, only by disseminating the right messages in the right papers could Australia hope to shore up gaps in the narrative of imperial unity. In negotiating Australia’s role in the Empire, the subject may have been war in South Africa, but its final meaning was fought on the battleground of the newspaper press.

The mediation of British and Australian affinities is evident also in a *Daily News* interview with famed Australian correspondent A. G. Hales upon his return from South Africa. The Adelaide-born Hales was a prominent journalist and popular novelist whose experiences as a war reporter were to inspire his later fictional work. Of Hales’ nationalist credentials one (in)famous couplet will suffice:

> A nation is never a nation  
> Worthy of pride or place  
> Till the mothers have sent their firstborn  
> To look death in the field in the face.

Hales’ writings, often critical of British military conduct, were unsurprisingly the subject of debate. In prefacing the discussion, the *Daily News*’ interviewer described Hales’ controversial output as “quoted far and wide; they have furnished the text for more than one angry half-hour in the House.” Hales’ criticism of the British army even earned him the rebuke of Winston Churchill, himself gaining prominence as a reporter in South Africa for London’s *Morning Post*. Hales’ texts, moreover, seemed to have possessed for his readers a quality of realism that could substitute for the experience of war itself, hailing readers as vicarious actors in the events themselves. One letter commenting on Churchill’s defence of British

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183 Ibid.  
184 Ibid.  
186 “Back From the Wars,” *Daily News*, 8 October, 1900, 3.  
officers against Hales’ critique praised the corporeal quality of the Australian’s reports: “They palpitate with life, they are alive. To have read them is to have been to battle . . . to have smelt the hot blood, the dust, and the sweat of the poor horses.” Hales’ very act of writing here became what Donald Matheson has called “a self-contained language event,” with heroism attributed not to martial actions per se, but rather to their recording of their representation.

Trading on the dichotomy of Australian and Briton, the Daily News portrayed Hales as “born Australian, bred Australian, Australian to the core, with speech full of the racy vernacular of the bush and the goldfields, which so tickles the ear of the poor played-out, anaemic, town-bred Britisher.” Whereas the otherness of the Dutch language was “hateful” to the ears of the colonial letter-writer we encountered in chapter five, the dialect of the rural Australian is here emphasised as a pleasant counterpoint to the weak, urbanised Briton. The interview proceeded with Hales ridiculing British officers and praising Australian soldiers. When asked of Australian attitudes to the war, Hales challenged stories of imperial affection by recounting the disdain felt by the British toward colonial Australians. The interviewer found Hales’ critique of the colonial-British relationship to be “disillusioning,” thinking that “the war was going to weld us closer than ever.” Hales responded:

If you want to know the truth, I’ll tell you my opinion. The Britisher told the Australian that he could play cricket very well - for a Colonial. And he could scull very well – for an Australian. When the war broke out, they thought they would like to show the Britisher that they could fight very well - for Australians. I think they showed that they could. Eh?

Still disenchanted, the interviewer inquired of Hales whether perhaps, “it was more in the spirit of emulation and the love of a row, and the desire to be in it, rather than the love of the Old Country, that gave us the splendid Australian arm?” Hales replied: “if there was one British institution your Colonial believed in more than another, it was the British Army. The idol is broken.” The idea that colonial aid in South Africa was motivated by a spontaneous passion for the mother country is supplanted by something of an inferiority complex, with an embittered Australia attempting to prove itself to Britain. Hales’ view was a powerful and influential one.

190 “Back from the Wars,” Daily News, 8 October, 1900, 3.
191 Ibid.
192 Ibid.
Yet there existed contrasting accounts that complicated Hales’ interpretation and it is well to compare their points-of-view.

It was perhaps an awareness of breaches in mainstream colonial narratives that saw press reports endeavouring to better apprehend them. We can thus read another *Daily News* interview the following month entitled “The Colonies through English Eyes,” where the British interviewee, Liberal temperance champion Arthur Sherwell, told of his recent travels in Australia and New Zealand. Speaking of nineteenth-century British travel texts, Anna Johnston suggests that “the addressee of most travel writing texts is the home reader whose experience of colonial difference is comfortably mediated by print.”\(^{193}\) We can witness something to this effect in reading Sherwell. The interviewer first validated Sherwell’s authority as the author of a popular book and as a student of social questions in the colonies. He then described Sherwell as having discussed colonial and imperial issues with “leading men of Australia,” and as having returned with “very definite impressions” of life in the colonies and the potential colonial contribution to the Empire’s future.\(^{194}\) More than simply affirming the normality of British global expansion, the value of Sherwell’s study had been to collect information from Australasia to manage colonial government. Yet in order for these colonies to assist the future of the Empire they had to be seen “through English eyes.” The implication was that Sherwell’s selective gaze would stand in for that of the readers of the *Daily News*. Just as Sherwell’s eye became England’s eye, so too would Sherwell’s knowledge become England’s knowledge.

The interviewer formulated the relationship of Sherwell’s gaze to his colonial object in his opening question: “For some months you must have been looking at the Empire through a Colonial atmosphere and at Colonial life through English eyes. Has this double vision made you more hopeful or more despondent about the future of the Empire?”\(^{195}\) In this aspect at least Sherwell was reportedly pleased with his visit, upholding his belief “in the English-speaking race.”\(^{196}\) Sherwell was explicit in his reason for the necessity of those wielding power to visit the colonies: “Men who have to govern an Empire should at least have a practical knowledge of the subjects with which they must deal.”\(^{197}\) Given the widespread British ignorance of colonial life, Sherwell also saw the comprehensive understanding of the colonies

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\(^{193}\) Johnston, "‘Greater Britain’," 33.


\(^{195}\) Ibid.

\(^{196}\) Ibid.

\(^{197}\) Ibid.
as the key to maintaining their strength. In Sherwell’s estimation, to know the colonies was to see the future of the Empire.

The Antipodean response to the South African War had revealed to Sherwell their promise as an untapped imperial resource. Asked of his greatest impression of Australasia he responded: “The great latent possibilities which lie buried in the Colonies . . . the future belongs to these great undeveloped countries.” As if to counter the suggestions of Hales, Sherwell declared: “You can have no idea in England of the intensity of the enthusiasm for the Empire which is everywhere prevalent in Australia and New Zealand. The Transvaal War has been an opportunity of expressing that feeling.” Sherwell then affirmed that although in their domestic politics the colonies “are a great reservoir of Liberal principles,” in imperial policy colonial sympathies lay steadfastly with British conservatism.

For Sherwell, the Empire had proven to be the paramount fact of colonial social life: “In Australia,” he asserted, “you feel that the Empire is a reality. You are conscious that it is one of the great forces of the world’s life. You completely lose the impression, the result of academic discussion in the Old Country, that the Empire is merely an idea.” Herein lay an important irony. Sherwell and the Daily News unfolded for their readers the notion that the colonies represented imperial feeling in practice, existing beyond intellectual conceptions. Yet Australia had also to remain an ideal. This was not merely because most Daily News readers would never get beyond textual descriptions of Australia and so would have to take Sherwell’s (among others) word for it. Rather, as with “Verax” in 1885, for Sherwell, Australia was of imaginative value because it existed also as a fantasy where the realities of Empire could be positively displaced and transformed.

Sherwell’s “double vision” appeared to permit his presence in two places at once, both as the empathetic visitor viewing the Empire from a colonial perspective, and as an Englishman dutifully examining the colonies in the manner of an imperial ethnographer. In fact, Sherwell’s perspective constituted a single imperial vision. And it is in this vision that the differing subject positions, and identifications, of the Australian Hales and British Sherwell are most pointed. Whereas the eminently colonial Hales spoke irately of Australia’s external perception, Sherwell’s panoptical

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198 Ibid.
199 On the “latent resources” the settler colonies offered the Empire see also “The Colonial Contingents at the Cape,” Daily News, 7 December, 1899, 6.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid.
view was concerned with understanding Australia in order to best manage its role within the Empire. Though Hales may have been disparaging toward the British view of the colonies, the implicit question—what do they think of us?—nonetheless informed and animated his thinking. Sherwell’s inquiry, by contrast, concerned the efficacy of Empire.

“Her name is the signal throughout the Empire”

To conclude I briefly turn to a passage that illustrates the themes of this chapter. In May 1900, the *Morning Post* published an editorial devoted to Queen Victoria’s birthday and which attempted to anchor a plurality of meaning in this matriarchal metonym of the British Empire. The experience of reading about the monarchy had become a routine part of imagining community identification throughout Britain’s dispersed territories. And it is around the central image of the Queen that the scattered components of Empire revolved and cohered. The “Queen-Mother” was thus not only a sovereign but a maternal figure extending care and blessings to her family. Moreover, she acted as the mirror in which this family could recognise itself as such. The *Morning Post* perceived that:

Such a personality as the great Queen-Mother is required to draw distant Colonies nearer to the heart of the Empire, and those who have conversed with Canadians and Australians know full well that the QUEEN in her long and glorious reign has been slowly and surely building up the great fabric of a united British Empire.

This appears as a rote recitation of platitudes. But we can dismiss this pervasive language of affect only by discounting its popular appeal to newspaper readers. The choice of familial metaphors between the colonies and England was an attempt to inscribe a particularly emotive and reciprocal relationship. This was a far cry, it would seem, from certain perceptions of the colonies in 1863-64. Now, just as the white colonies identified themselves with the figure of the Queen and all that she represented, so too were the colonies crucial for British readers in imagining the global scale of the Empire.

The *Morning Post* celebrated the loyal manner in which colonial “men fling down the tools of their trade, part from their wives and children, and go gladly forth to

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204 *Morning Post*, 24 May, 1900, 6.
meet the QUEEN’s enemies with a courage unsurpassed in the ages of romance and chivalry.” The exaggeration here reaches the point of mythic self-gratification as the *Morning Post* acted out a fantasised view on behalf of the colonies, and one that Australian contributors could themselves complicate, as we have seen. The passage drew upon the mediaeval past to paint a picture for British readers of compliant soldiers, united in their patriotism, willingly ready to sacrifice themselves for their Queen.

What image of the colonial relationship to the Queen does this editorial then present to its readers? “Her picture,” it observed, “hangs on the timber walls of the shearer’s shed and in the rancher’s homestead at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. Her name is the signal throughout the Empire for men to spring to their feet and invoke GOD’s blessing on her days.” The Queen’s gaze thus overlooks and monitors the labour of settlers as they go about the business of making productive the lands they inhabit. And for her these settlers unite as the “great fabric” of Empire (a literal fabric, given the nod to Australian wool production), to defend it from those who would dispute this same global project. The symbolic reference points of “ranch” and “shed,” signalling specific environments and forms of labour, are significant. The taming of nature is, after all, what the colonies do. As Patrick Wolfe notes, agriculture, “with its life-sustaining connectedness to land, is a potent symbol of settler-colonial identity.” Yet it is the very easiness of the colonies ostensibly natural place within the Empire by reference to these idioms that require attention. They offer just enough detail to hail readers as partaking of their common imperial community while dodging any referent of its violent foundations. Both “shed” and “ranch” are simply there.

So where is the “native” in all of this? Nowhere and everywhere. Settler colonists, in an important sense, defined themselves in opposition to the Indigenous population. Yet the very permanence accompanying ideas of the homestead and the shearer’s shed evoked notions of private property guaranteed by the same legal

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205 Ibid.
206 See also *Daily Mail*, 9 March, 1900, 4.
207 *Morning Post*, 24 May, 1900, 6.
208 On British views of Australia as imperial “partners” and the interconnected concerns of the “Australian sheep farmer” and global imperial defence see also “The Imperial Idea,” *The Yorkshire Herald, and The York Herald*, 10 October, 1899, 4.
210 Bain Attwood, “Introduction,” in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, ed. Bain Attwood and John Arnold (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press in association with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992), iii.
order that denied sovereignty to Indigenous peoples. The presentation of property ownership as natural and “ethically neutral” worked, in Mark Rifkin’s words, to “reconcile conflicts over land tenure, access to political and economic resources, personal identity, and membership in the polis.”

Broadly inscribed in each idealised image of the “shed” and the “ranch” was a discourse typifying the global structure of settler colonialism: the unquestioned ownership claims to the land, Indigenous displacement and replacement, and the territorial expansion of settlers to supply the Empire with its raw produce and materials, and, finally, with a market for the return reception of its final product, all while soaking up the excess metropolitan population. The *Morning Post* thereby acknowledged that the economic utility of the colonies was exceeded only by actions inspired by imperial emotion.

For the *Morning Post*, these matters of global political economy were manifested in individual colonist’s child-like affection for their “Queen-Mother.” Yet, crucially, this affection, and the loyalty that came with it, was no longer a matter of conjecture. Rather, the “war in South Africa attests to it.” We have in a sense come full cycle. Australia, as an apparently matured settler colony, was no longer a disputed drain on resources. Rather, the investment in Australia had seemingly paid off, as the *Standard* had implied it would in the 1860s. Not only had the productive venture of settler pastoralism endured, but the colonies could now repay Britain the favour of military protection. Resistance to acts of British expansion in South Africa had now offered, in a cyclical fashion, the very opportunity for the Australian colonies to further showcase imperial unity. Structure and affect were entwined.

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212 *Morning Post*, 24 May, 1900, 6.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

I have offered a reading of Australian and British news commentary on a sequence of wars of Empire with an aim to draw out the textual expressions of certain social and historical anxieties. These anxieties, I have argued, can be discerned in the dissonances, elisions and anomalies characterising press narratives of the British Empire in general, and Australian settler colonialism in particular. In this sense, I have understood newspapers as a kind of cultural palimpsest with traces of history and memory perceptible in the representations of three prominent moments. I have also stressed the ways that knowledge of these representations was facilitated by the materiality of the newspaper form, with both paper and telegraph communications enabling the circulation and contestation of the messages they carried.

This approach has required a conceptual balance between an analysis of, on the one hand, discursive contradictions and their attempted resolutions, and, on the other, attention to the historical circumstances which compelled this process. The Waikato War of 1863-64, as we have seen, occurred in a moment of relative imperial confidence that gave leading British newspapers little incentive to pander to settler complaints about a lack of imperial protection from “natives.” Other British papers, by contrast, sided with the settler view, seeing the long-term economic gains of the colonies, and their shared Britishness, as outweighing any immediate costs. The Australian press, for their part, spoke on behalf of settler colonies across the Tasman that were embroiled in the costly and fretful process of consolidating territorial gains, often in the face of Indigenous resistance. They saw in contemporaneous events in New Zealand a chance to uphold Australian colonial interests. They did this not only as British per se, but as diasporic British settlers, and against those seen to threaten their distinct “way of life” far from the mother country. The press conversation between those representing settler, British Government, and “humanitarian” interests highlighted the multifarious nature of the British Empire, and indicated the scope of debate acceptable within it.

The cases of the Sudan and South Africa shared closer similarities, roughly bookending the era of high imperialism in Africa. British concerns, and the need to
manage them, rose in proportion to awareness of emerging imperial competitors, internal social troubles, and fears for their racial composition. During the Sudan crisis of 1885, tensions between British strategic imperatives and Australian sub-colonial ambitions in the South Pacific coincided with the imperial spectacle of General Gordon’s misadventure in Khartoum. This timely conjuncture spurred fervent, if conflicted, claims of national and imperial “unity” embodied in the offer of a New South Wales military force. The political, racial and historical ambiguities so characteristic of imperial and colonial discourse, however, subverted these claims even as the NSW contingent pointed toward the future for the Empire.

The years 1899-1902 witnessed arguably the climax of racial rhetoric at a time of pessimism for many in Britain. At the very moment when British readers required assurance of imperial progress they could seek solace in the evidence of colonial camaraderie in South Africa. This consolatory gesture was itself problematised by a complex of Australian identifications resting on often inconsistent racial and historical assumptions. As such, the idea of British imperial harmony being realised through the maturing settler colonies was both adopted and contested in newspapers exchanged between Britain and the colonies.

In sum, in 1863-64 Australians could read British newspaper debates of the worth of the settler colonial project. Often, at best, this worth was said to be primarily material. In 1885, colonial onlookers could recognise their new standing in British eyes. Yet the concurrent dismay over their apparent subordination in British strategic calculations tainted even this value. By 1899, colonists could see themselves and their emergent nation repositioned not only as a necessary cog in the imperial machine, but as the incarnation of the Empire’s ideals. Colonial rehabilitation in imperial eyes, was, it would seem, complete. Throughout, the British press variously positioned the Australian colonies as pragmatic settlers of Greater Britain, as quarrelling colonies, as filial members of the imperial family, and as a separate nation on the verge of federation. In each moment, too, we can read a tension between the outward rationalising imperatives of Empire and the powerful affective currents that underwrote these political and racial sympathies. Viewed as constitutive of this process, metropolitan and colonial newspapers can shed new light on the role of language, narrative and material circulation in consolidating and disrupting these identifications.

From an Australian standpoint the focus on martial themes is an apt, if obvious, choice. At the risk of further fortifying the idea, it remains a truism that war holds a
“sacred” place in Australian society. Well before 1915, it was during foreign conflict that colonial and imperial identifications could find their fullest expression. At these times Australian and British newspapers could exert a measure of control over a deeply compromised history. We can thus read the commentary on troops in overseas wars as displacing the war within, and over, the Australian continent. I have drawn some connections between the two.

Writing this one year before the centenary of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign, I have to agree with Raymond Evans’ assessment that Aboriginal dispossession, unlike convictism, stubbornly resists incorporation into stories of Australian origins. This makes sense. Convictism now belongs to a strange and curious past. The circumstances of settler-Indigenous relations offer Australian historiography no such closure. Subsequently, Evans writes, “Australia’s substitute founding myth, the Anzac legend sees public service, to a marked degree, in diverting attention from the country’s ‘darkling plains’ to the grim cliffs and beach-heads of Gallipoli.”

We can see something similar occurring in the foregoing chapters, albeit in a minor key. Yet whereas Australian Anzac mythology is invariably nation-centred (oddly so given the bi-nationality of the acronym), it is important to remember its basis, as with the Victorian-era wars, lay in global imperial processes.

With a focus on identification also comes an emphasis on positionalities, or with articulations made and comprehended from certain points of view. I have therefore been mindful of the position from where I have read and understood these moments. As a privileged white man paid to read historical documents at an elite Australian university, I see these things with my own distortions. I only note this to recognise that my own critical feelings toward settler colonialism have done little to affect my acceptance of its generational bequest. In 2014, focussing on the easy discursive target of Victorian jingoism might seem to convey a too-tidy temporality, as if the structural character of Australian settler colonisation were not still in place. It is clear to me that it is in place and, furthermore, that it is difficult to see it ending anytime soon. Australia is in this sense deeply colonised.

What requires further consideration is the resilience of this structure to individual volition. Much as can I critique the rhetoric of the settlers in 1863, 1885 or 1899, many of whom may have deplored the consequences of their “settlement,” a nagging thought

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persists. I am no more prepared to renounce the homes of myself and my family in Australia or New Zealand than past settlers likely would have been. Like those whom I read of in nineteenth-century newspapers, I too can offer socially-sanctioned justifications for my presence on land never ceded.

My hope, however optimistic, is that a sharp focus on the past might train the eye on the present. The reader might well recognise in the newspapers of 2014 echoes of past settler ways of talking. The idea that I have found so captivating is that although the processes of settler colonialism are beyond the scope of any individual, its manifestations can be poignantly captured in turns of phrase, metaphors and manners of argumentation within everyday speech. It has been my supposition that in this speech we can glimpse the kind of apprehensions and logics that attended, sustained and occasionally challenged these broader processes. The corollary being that by pointing to these logics and submitting them to critique we might be better placed to stare down their persistence. In a contemplative analysis Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch have questioned the motivation of recent theorists of settler colonialism, themselves included, for their tone of resignation. They ask whether their attraction to this model is that it offers “a sense of being intellectually committed to the end of colonialism while simultaneously unable to act against our own privilege?” I trust it is more than this, but it is up to future research, including my own, to prove it.

There is plenty of scope for this. Among the more pressing projects is the continuance of comparative studies to fathom how, why and under what circumstances settler discourses operated, succeeded and broke down both within and between settler societies over time. Recent scholarship has posited likenesses between them which can only be enriched by greater attentiveness to their singularities. One line of inquiry well worth extending is the comparison of Australia and New Zealand to understand how their historical variances and parallels have contributed not only to their respective ways of dealing with Indigenous grievances, but how these have historically been framed and received in the press.4

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Aided by recent theoretical insights, a historical tracing of the affective character of settler colonial language can clarify both the continuity and the contingency of its various defences. This should also incorporate the extent to which these defences were assisted or hindered by the physical circulation of this language in print and on paper. This demands understanding further the routine emotional investments made in narratives that rendered opaque individual settler relationships to colonial structures. I am ill-equipped to speak for Indigenous perspectives though any critique of settler rhetoric serving only to drown out the wide variety of Indigenous voices is ironic in the most damaging way. What reflexive settler self-critique can hope to do, by showing up the limitations of settler discourse through “mutually unsettling exchanges of diverse histories,” is to help to wedge open spaces for new possibilities to be considered.


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*The Star*
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*The Argus*
*The Mercury*
*Empire*
*Australasian*
*Evening News*
*The Age*
*Australian Town and Country Journal*
*The Echo*
*Launceston Examiner*
*The Bulletin*
*The West Australian*
*The Dawn*
*The Daily Telegraph (Sydney)*
*Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate*
*The Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser*
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*Bendigo Advertiser*

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