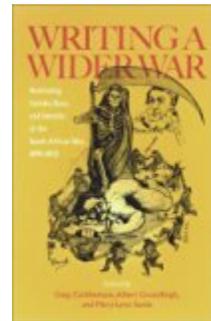




Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, Mary-Lynn Suttie, eds. *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002. xix + 345 pp. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1463-7; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-1462-0.

Donal Lowry. *The South African War Reappraised (Studies in Imperialism)*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000. xii + 258 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-5258-3; \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7190-5825-7.

David Omissi, Andrew Thompson, eds. *The Impact of the South African War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. xvi + 312 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-77699-5.



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Rewriting the South African War

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After a century of racial oppression and apartheid in South Africa, there are few, as Donal Lowry has remarked, who can “remember a time when entire continents seemed to be moved by the Boer ‘heroes of liberty.’”[1] Nevertheless, the anniversary of the South African, or Anglo-Boer, war of 1899-1902 has witnessed visits to its historiographical as well as to its physical battlegrounds. A slew of books have marked the centenary, including the three collections reviewed here, while it has also evoked a good deal of discussion in South Africa about the nature and nomenclature as well as the place in the new South Africa of what was purported by the major belligerents at the time to be “a white man’s war.”

It says much for the lure of centenaries and the continued appetite for histories of the war that, at a time when we are told publishers are chary of edited collections, these three sets of essays should all have seen the light of day. Broadly speaking, all three volumes deal with very similar questions, many of them derived from the salient issues of the time: was this a capitalist

war? Was this a white man’s war? Who were the participants, and why did they fight? What were the war’s global ramifications? What did it mean for South Africa, Britain, and the Empire/Commonwealth—at the time and subsequently? And how and why has the war been remembered?

Given their overlapping concerns and the fact that seven authors have essays in more than one volume, often developing different strands of the same argument, it makes sense to deal with these issues thematically rather than by volume, although it should perhaps be noted at the outset that of the three, *Writing a Wider War* (WWW) is perhaps richest in “showcasing” recent South African research on the war, while *The South African War Reappraised* (SAWR) and *The Impact of the South African War* (ISAW) give more space to imperial and Commonwealth researchers, and this has implications for the themes covered, though not—I hasten to add—their quality.

I. A White Man’s War?

The shift in the nomenclature from the “Boer War” to the “South African” war is perhaps a pointer to the

most important change in our understanding of the South African War over the past two decades. Quite simply it is no longer possible to conceive of it as a “white man’s war.” It was neither white (as we shall see) nor—as Helen Bradford shows in dazzling fashion—solely male.[2] If, in fact, rather more papers illuminate the black experience of the war—the product of some twenty years’ endeavor—Bradford’s is one of the very few paradigm-shifting contributions in these collections. By adopting a gendered approach to the war she is able not only to re-contextualize the struggle as an archetype of colonial warfare, carrying destruction into the heart of the homestead, but she is also able to show the very different responses adopted by men and women that result, and the profound impact this had on the course of the war itself.

Anyone who has even dipped into the primary sources on the war will be aware of the bitter hostility of Afrikaner women to the British forces, looting and burning their homes, even as their husbands, sons, and brothers deserted the front, anxious to secure their “male patrimony.” Conventional wisdom argues that until the Boers adopted guerrilla warfare, this was a “gentlemen’s war”; Bradford shows otherwise. From the outset, the destruction of homesteads and the looting of crops and cattle accompanied the British advance. The result was that after the battle of Paardeberg in February 1900, some four months into the war, Boer desertions escalated. Conventional wisdom also asserts that it was the great Boer leaders who succeeded in stopping this early haemorrhage of the men. Again, Bradford challenges this easy assumption, maintaining that as the men “peeled away,” so women “took the lead in facing British aggression” (p. 48). Supporting her argument with a broader analysis of the gender roles of men and women in Afrikaner society more generally, and in their gendered experience of the war more specifically, Bradford argues that with the outbreak of war, Boer women, unlike the majority of Boer men, came to espouse an explicitly nationalist and republican rhetoric. Men placing farm and families above the state were now “met by women opposed to exchanging their country for a patriarch at home” (p. 50). “Tales circulated about wives’ injunctions,” she writes. “Go and fight. I can get another husband, but not another Free State.” “Remain and do your duty ... I can always find another husband, but not another Transvaal.” Moreover, predictably, the official scorched-earth policy and the concentration camps, which provided women with alternative if highly dubious shelter, gave the men few options. As Bradford remarks acerbically, “the homeless could not flee home” (p. 55). Laying waste to the coun-

tryside, “by eroding the rural base of patriarchy,” transformed deserting patriarchs into “a volk of broeders,” imbued with “greater nationalist consciousness, greater discipline, greater lust for revenge” (p. 56). “The gender gap ... began to close” (p. 58).

It was not only Boer women who revealed a passion to participate in the war; my own paper on British nurses in the war, which is heavily dependent on Anne Summers’s pioneering work, discusses the overwhelming desire of many British nurses to join in the war effort. For nursing leaders, nurses’ participation in the defense of the realm was part of a strategy of asserting woman’s right to citizenship and the franchise on an equal basis with men, but there were real tensions in their universalist aspirations and their profoundly gendered, racial, and class-bound pro-imperial discourse.[3]

Dorothy O. Helly and Helen Callaway’s paper on the journalism of Flora Shaw in *The Times* reveals yet another side to female imperialism, as we shall see.[4] These were pro-imperial women, but, on the other side, one should not forget the passion of female anti-war lobbyists like Olive Schreiner and Emily Hobhouse. Perhaps because she has received so much notice elsewhere, Hobhouse receives only indirect attention in these volumes.[5] Nor is there an account of any other female peace campaigner, although Paul Laity provides a valuable context in which to see their anti-war activities over the long term: as both the product of a far longer tradition of peace protest in the nineteenth century and as contributors to the peace movements of the twentieth century.[6]

Nevertheless, Hobhouse does appear on the margins in several of these papers, including in Jacqueline Beaumont’s account of *The Times*’s coverage of British atrocities in which pro-Boers, like Emily Hobhouse, were blamed for prolonging the war.[7] For the most part, *The Times* ignored Hobhouse’s reports on the mortality and suffering in the concentration camps. Lionel James, its main war correspondent, like Flora Shaw, painted “a picture of order, even of comfort in the camps,” and blamed Boer women for the high mortality because of their lack of domestic skills (pp. 69-70). Hobhouse also makes a brief appearance in Elizabeth van Heyningen’s moving and insightful piece on the “clash of medical cultures in the concentration camps”—as does her pro-imperial counterpart, Millicent Fawcett, who produced her own whitewash of the camps. As van Heyningen shows, this simply reflected the views of the majority of English-speaking doctors in the camps.[8] Perhaps Hobhouse’s

finest moment, however, was at the unveiling of the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein in 1913, dedicated to the women and children who died in the South African War, which she did so much to inspire and promote: this forms part of the subject of Albert Grundlingh's paper in *Writing a Wider War*.^[9] Although unable to be present at its unveiling, her speech was read in absentia, calling on all South Africans to:

"Be merciful towards the weak, the down-trodden, the stranger. Do not open your gates to those worst foes of freedom—tyranny and selfishness. Are not these the withholding from others in your control, the very liberties and rights which you have valued and won for yourselves? "

Even more explicitly Hobhouse recalled "the many thousands of the dark race [who] perished also in the Concentration Camps" and exhorted women to remember Lincoln's words for "the black" [sic]—"They will probably help you in some trying time to keep the jewel of liberty in the family of freedom."^[10]

Although he does not quote her memorable words, Grundlingh's rethink of the iconography and changing meaning of the Vrouemonument is written with his characteristic thoughtfulness and verve. Thankfully, he is not beguiled by the attempts of modern critics to see the statue as a "Transcendental signifier of phallogocentric volks-metaphysic" (p. 21), and attempts instead to see what it represented in gender terms both at the time and in subsequent nationalist memory.

II. A White Man's War?

If the South African War was not a purely man's war, it was not simply a white war either. Since Donald Denoon, Peter Warwick, and Bill Nasson's pioneering work on black participation in the South African war, historians, if not the general (white) public, have been aware that the "white man's war" was never as wholly white as was imagined at the time.^[11] As Nasson remarks in his overview of the impact of the war on black communities, "Given the historical scrutiny to which [this has] been increasingly subjected, impassioned revisionism on this front is much less path-breaking or fashionable than it might have been ten or even twenty years ago.... The task is not to reinvent the wheel but to keep giving it a turn so as to place black participation in a meaningful perspective and to try to illuminate the specific extent and degree of carried collective and individual experience during ...1899-1902" (*ISAW*, p. 38). And Nasson does this admirably in a chapter that provides the reader

with a valuable framework for the remaining six essays dealing with black (including Indian) participation in the war in the other two volumes.^[12] How far do the others succeed in meeting Nasson's prescriptions? If together they give texture and regional specificity to the story, it must be said they are uneven in coverage, and of varying originality.

Thus, in a short piece, Chris Saunders looks at African attitudes to empire before and after the war and concludes that "It was from Britain, the main source of their ideas about racial equality, and not from America, that they expected help to come to improve their lot" (*SAWR*, p. 140). Using the moral standards Britain herself proclaimed, the African elite appealed against those who ruled them—whether colonial, republican, or Union government—to a higher, imperial authority. By counterposing imperial ideals to local racial power, they demonstrated the injustices of colonial rule. "In that sense," Saunders concludes, "African pro-imperialism was a kind of anti-colonialism" (p. 145). Neither the argument nor the material is particularly original, though the paper serves to highlight the limited strategy open to Africans after their massive disarmament by the British after the war.

One of the few exceptions to African support for the pro-British view of the war came from John Tengo Jabavu, as Saunders points out. Perhaps the "single most prominent member of the educated elite" before the war, Jabavu continued to profess his loyalty to the British empire, while criticizing the war policies of Milner and Chamberlain, to the extent that his newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, was shut down in August 1901 (p. 143). Jabavu also receives attention from Greg Cuthbertson, who observes that while he did not protest against the Wesleyan resolutions and only criticized those who actively promoted the war in the interests of capitalism, Jabavu was progressively alienated from Wesleyanism during the war, in part because he could not carry "African ministers and laymen with him into opposition to the way the war was being fought," and in part because of the blindness of Methodist Christians "to the carnage in the concentration camps," and "their ignorance of conditions in African camps." This was ultimately to lead Jabavu and his son, D. D. T. Jabavu, to join the Quaker Society of Friends (pp. 163-164).^[13]

The subject of African involvement in the war—on both sides—is also dealt with by Fransjohan Pretorius, who has written extensively on the commando life during the war. His chapter on "Boer Attitudes to Africans in

War-Time"[14] is drawn from his book on commando life during the war, first published in Afrikaans in 1991 and in English in 1999.[15] Although it does not add much of substance to what he has already written, it is a useful reprise of his main findings. Thus while it is hardly a surprise to find that Afrikaner attitudes towards Africans were "decidedly racist," and that this was exacerbated by the war, or that Boers felt "a degree of benevolence" for those Africans who had rendered them good service, general readers may not have been aware of the extent to which the Boer commandos were threatened by African politics and armed combatants on the imperial side in the last couple of years of the war. Not only did Africans claim large "unpopulated areas of the Transvaal" and render them "inaccessible to the Boer commandos," but, according to Pretorius, by the end of the war there were more armed Africans fighting with the British than there were Boers left on commando. His findings reinforce the view that the Afrikaners were forced to make peace in May 1902 as a result at least as much of the black challenge to their authority as of British arms (SAWR, p. 110), as does Mbenga's research on the Kgatla of the western Transvaal, discussed below.

Perhaps Pretorius's most original finding is his estimate of the extent to which Africans assisted on the Boer side, whether commandeered to render labor or military service or to provide food for the Boer commandos, or as servants accompanying the Boers to the front. He estimates they provided some 20 to 25 percent of total Boer manpower. After the war, he concludes, their services were largely forgotten "and the arming of Africans was regarded as a nefarious and wholly British operation which had added to the near annihilation of the Boers. Within a generation even that prejudiced memory seemed to be sacrificed in the interests of Anglo-Afrikaner unity and the South African War was recreated as a 'white man's war'" (SAWR, p. 118).

That the process of recovery is well underway in the "new" South Africa is clear from the excellent chapters by Bernard Mbenga, John Lambert, and Manelisi Genge. Mbenga deals with the Bakgatla in the Pilanesberg in the western Transvaal, showing how their particular experience of Boer oppression led to their armed intervention on the imperial side in the critical battles at the outset of the war and lay behind Boer fears of a widespread jacquerie in 1902. Lambert explores the attitudes of the hitherto "loyal" amakholwa to participation in the war, suggesting that the failure of either the imperial or the colonial authorities to recognize their services led to their alienation and their ambivalence about serving on the

colonial side in the Bambatha rebellion of 1906, if not outright refusal to doing so.[16] Manelisi Genge provides yet another revealing account of the ways in which Africans attempted to use the war for their own ends, and explores its impact on Swazi identity. These three authors all provide the contexts within which we need to understand the war. These are carefully researched and well written chapters which will prove invaluable to specialists, underpinning and modifying the more general accounts with their regional specificity.

These nuanced and scrupulous pieces are a long way from Nasson's fear that in post-1994 South Africa there is a danger that a new version will be written of the South African war, which will become "everyone's war against some military maypole," and in which the concentration camps act "as a leveller for Afrikaner and Africans." As he wryly warns, such ready recasting of the history of the war into the "broader new South Africanism," which coincided with its centenary, could become "a model illustration of how a populist public agenda may seek to recreate or reinvent the place of armed conflict in modern nationalist identity" (WWW, p. 10).[17]

III. The Antinomies of Empire Loyalty

The participation of women and Africans was not the only way in which the war was "widened." Nor were British women and Africans the only participants anxious to assert their loyalty to the empire: Anglo-Jewry,[18] Indians both in South Africa and the subcontinent,[19] and the "white Dominions"[20] were also all eager to do so.

Like the majority of Africans in South Africa, Indians, in both South Africa and the subcontinent, responded positively to a war that, as both David Omissi and Balasubramanyam Chandramohan observe, provided them with an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the Raj. "With loyalty," says Chandramohan, "came the expectation ... that success in battle would lead to justice for all in the Empire..." an expectation grounded in Britain's use of the Indian position in the Transvaal as a political tool against the Boers (SAWR, p. 151). According to Chandramohan, this led many Indians to regard the struggle in South Africa as a "Sahib's War" and "blurred the notions of imperial principles of justice and equality" (SAWR, p. 151). Thus, these authors agree, while "heightening the sense of imperial citizenship and demands for the privileges of that citizenship, the war also helped to radicalise Indian nationalism when these expectations were dashed" (Chandramohan, SAWR, p. 161). Not only were their offers to fight alongside the British

“ruled out for racial reasons” (Omissi, ISAW, p. 216), after the war their expectations of improvement were even more decisively disappointed.

Both Omissi and Chandramohan see the war as a “test of empire” (Omissi, ISAW, p. 220) for Indian nationalists and their sympathizers, who believed that “rival conceptions of Empire” were at stake in South Africa: “On the one hand, there was the notion of a racially-based empire of ‘Greater Britain’ in which Indians could never expect equal treatment. On the other, there was a potentially more inclusive empire in which educated Indians might have meaningful rights, in South Africa and in India, and in which India would be more of an equal partner” (Omissi, ISAW, pp. 219-220).

And both see Gandhi’s decision to organize Indian stretcher-bearers for the imperial troops as emerging from his belief in this more inclusive empire. Chandramohan, indeed, contends that the war’s “most significant legacy” was the development of Gandhi’s “religio-political philosophy.” Not only did it help Gandhi’s emergence as a leader in South Africa, and later in India, but it also “influenced his ideas and strategies” in later political campaigns. Thus, although the war brought together different parts of the empire “in a demonstration of commitment to an imperial cause,” in the end, he argues, “it also highlighted the racial faultlines of the Empire,” as Britain failed to enforce its “stated creed of non-discrimination between ‘children of the Empire’” and gave in to the racial fears of the Cape and Natal colonists over the use of Indian troops. Had it not been simply a “Sahibs’ War,” Chandramohan believes, the peace settlement, and the unification of South Africa which followed shortly afterwards, could have been very different (SAWR, p. 165).

For Omissi, “the South African War had implications for India that went beyond the rising prominence of M. K. Gandhi as a social and political activist” (ISAW, p. 227), not least in its impact on the growing challenge to Congress’s “moderate” strategy from radicals such as Tilak, “who wanted to build a mass base” and “thought that appealing to the British conscience was demeaning and futile.” The treatment of Indians in the aftermath of the war, in particular, “provided ammunition” for those who were highly critical of imperial rule in India “and of the situation of Indians within the empire” (ISAW, p. 226).

In the “white” Dominions, too, there were those anxious to assert their loyalty and right to citizenship through the bearing of arms, and, despite a latter-day historiography which tends to suggest otherwise, there

were those who responded enthusiastically to the call to fight on the imperial side, as Luke Trainor and Phillip Buckner show. In Canada, the almost uniformly pro-imperial Anglophone response was matched, however, by increasing support for the Boers on the part of French Canadians. In all three dominions, moreover, as in India, there was a tension between a nascent colonial nationalism—spurred to some extent by the trial by fire on the veld—and a lingering empire loyalty. In Canada, as in Australia and New Zealand, the experience of the South African war helped “build a nation.”

For the Irish, like the French Canadians, the war with its anti-imperialist remit was of particular significance, as Lowry shows in a wide-ranging account of the ways in which the lessons of the Boer War were read by different sides in the Irish imbroglio. According to Lowry, the South African War and the creation of the Union “can thus be said to have helped to shape the parameters of Anglo-Irish relations for at least a generation, and the association was enduring” (SAWR, pp. 234-235).[21]

As Lowry concludes in one of three pieces in these volumes, the role of international combatants as well as the global nature of the more general involvement on either side of the war was astonishing.[22] Passions were engaged, not simply because of transformations in communications which made international involvement possible, but also because, as he observes, the battle seemed to encapsulate for contemporaries “a struggle between two conflicting global ideologies: British imperialism and capitalism versus anti-imperialism and nationalism” (ISAW, p. 270).

IV. What Was It All About?

Perhaps no issue in the history of the war has been more hotly contested than its causes, doubtless because of the influence of J. A. Hobson’s *The War in South Africa and his Imperialism: A Study*, the most influential study of the impact of capitalists and financiers on the war—although Peter Cain, who establishes “the context in which the theory of financial capitalism ... emerged,” following on Norman Etherington’s pioneering study on Hobson’s understanding of the financial press of the day, makes clear that Hobson was not the first to do so.[23] As Paul Laity remarks, “The most striking development within the radical critique of war during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the targeting of financiers and ‘capitalists’” (p. 152).

In the three collections under review, for the most part, the causes of the war have taken a second place to

issues of identity, nationalism, gender, and race, a reflection of more general historiographical trends. Indeed, Cuthbertson et al., following David Cannadine's view of imperialism as "an imaginative construct, existing as much (or more) inside the minds of men and women as it existed on the ground and on the map," quite explicitly "de-emphasize" political economy (WWW, p. ix). Despite their professed intention, however, the continued relevance and strength of political economy occurs in their volume in Bradford's account of what might loosely be termed the gendered "Boer mode of production," in which she adopts a genuinely dialectical approach showing the connections between a changing material reality, culture, and consciousness.[24]

Despite the general trend, two chapters by Iain Smith,[25] essays on Hobson by Peter Cain and Alan Jeeves,[26] and the papers by John Benyon and Mordechai Tamarkin on Milner,[27] all deal either directly or tangentially with the controversies over Hobson's view of the war as a "capitalist war." And while all are agreed that aspects of Hobson's account are anti-Semitic and others have not been borne out by the evidence, the issues are far from resolved. At the risk of a tedious rehearsal of an already well-worn debate, it is necessary to confront these head-on in this review, not least because of the contradictory opinions of the essayists themselves.

Here and elsewhere, Iain Smith has set himself the task of overturning the Hobsonian "conventional wisdom" that the mine-owners played a major role in the run-up to the war.[28] In SAWR, he reviews the many explanations offered for the origins of the war, from the first account from an Afrikaner republican point of view, published in 1899 in Dutch as *Eene Eeuw van Onreg*, through Leo Amery's pro-imperial *The Times History of the War* and Hobson's contemporary analyses of the relationship of capitalism and imperialism. As Smith notes, the early works were essentially tracts for their time; nevertheless, despite the increasing sophistication of historical analysis, the benefit of access to an increasing number of both official and unofficial documents—and of hindsight—he believes that these early polemics have unduly influenced subsequent interpretations. By looking at unpublished documents in the archives, Smith purports to move beyond these earlier versions. What does he have to offer?

Smith does not go so far as Andrew Porter, who has advised historians to "drop their preoccupation with gold," and look instead at the specific workings of the po-

litical process and political institutions as well as the "calculations of political ambition." [29] Yet Smith's account is essentially a restatement of the position argued by Robinson and Gallagher in 1961:

"What the British government feared was the political consequences of the growing economic power and importance of the Transvaal for the rest of South Africa and for British paramountcy there, not the present or future security of the British economic stake there per se." (SAWR, p. 42)

In "Capitalism and the War," Smith continues the battle against Hobson, or, more accurately, against those—such as the present reviewer and Stanley Trapido[30]—who, Smith alleges, transferred Hobson's ideas from the pre-war to the post-war period, and continue to argue that the Transvaal government was dominated by the demands of the gold-mining industry. Smith will have none of this. While he concedes that gold-mining was central to the Transvaal state, he believes that since Hobson accounts of the war and its aftermath have been too "heavily burdened by the ideological and theoretical constructions which historians have imposed on the subject"; they have allegedly equated the "interests of individuals with their economic interests to the exclusion of more important concerns" and have been flawed by an instrumentalist view of the state which somewhat oddly he seems to think "often ... has too readily been assumed [by radical historians] to have been 'at odds or even at war' with capital" (ISAW, p. 60). (Yet surely radical historiography is more usually guilty of envisaging the state as the mere tool of capital, in the Transvaal as elsewhere, and this is the burden of Smith's own riposte to "Lord Milner and the South African State"?)

Equally problematic is Smith's statement that "The fact that the Jameson Raid involved a conspiracy, in which some of the leading mine-magnates in a far from united mining industry were involved, does not, of course, mean that the economic interests of the mining industry predominated in 1895, or that there was a capitalist conspiracy behind the resort to war in 1899 as well" (SAWR, p. 33). One does not need to believe in a "united mining industry," however, when the three leading figures behind the Raid (Rhodes, Farrar, and Beit) between them controlled some 75 percent of the gold produced on the Rand; Wernher-Beit and Company alone controlled more than 50 percent.[31] Nor can one so easily dissociate the Raiders from the capitalist agitation in the run-up to the war: Rhodes was manifestly stirring the pot in 1899, while Fitzpatrick was the crucial intermediary be-

tween Milner and the industry.[32] Often disdained as a “maverick,” a pro-imperial romantic, and totally out of tune with his more cautious principals, Fitzpatrick cannot be dismissed so easily. He was a partner in the most powerful mining house in the Transvaal, Wernher-Beit and Company (“Corner House”), and, as their chief intelligence officer and political adviser in South Africa, did not act without their tacit support, despite their occasional differences of opinion.[33]

Nor does one have to believe that Rhodes, Fitzpatrick, and their ilk were solely motivated by the profit motive: they were complex human beings with complex motives. Indeed, it was precisely Rhodes and Fitzpatrick’s skill at weaving together an imperial vision with colonial nationalism that made them the indispensable link between Milner, the mine magnates, and a wider constituency. To ignore the importance of their mining interests in fuelling their dissatisfaction with the Kruger regime, however, would seem equally myopic. In 1914 the writer and public figure Rider Haggard recorded the response of the mine magnate Abe Bailey to his remark that the Raid had been a “wretched failure”: “on the contrary,” Bailey retorted, “it was a splendid success since it had ‘led to the war which was its whole object’ and all that has followed.”[34]

In what is perhaps the most notable clash in interpretation in the three volumes under review, Smith’s attack on Hobson as well as his more general assertions in “Capitalism and the War” are directly countered in Alan Jeeves’s reassessment of Hobson’s analysis of the South African situation. While conceding that Hobson’s view of the South African League and Uitlander Council as pawns of the mining industry was simplistic, Jeeves supports Hobson in believing that much of the English language press in South Africa was financed by Rhodes and Wernher-Beit and Company, and that it was responsible for fomenting a largely phoney crisis in the Transvaal and Britain. Moreover, in appointing Monypenny as editor of *The Star*, Jeeves argues, “the partners knew what they were getting,” while they “also authorised the heavy expenditure needed to set up the *Transvaal Leader* which became a more outspoken critic of Kruger’s republic and more jingoistic even than the *Star*” (WWW, p. 239).

More importantly, while granting the inadequacy of Hobson’s evidence for his assertion that the war was being waged to secure cheap mine labor, Jeeves backs Hobson’s prescience in emphasizing the “essential modernity and economic rationality of white domination” and in his prediction that after the war there would be “an inten-

sification of inequality and even more oppressive labor policies.” According to Jeeves, “In insisting that the industry’s overriding need for cheap labor was the primary motive of the capitalist in fomenting the war, Hobson was thinking less of the immediate situation in the post-Jameson Raid period and more of what he knew about the mining companies’ future intentions” (WWW, pp. 236-237). Like Smith, Jeeves has been through the correspondence and letter-books of Wernher Beit and Company, and has co-published the letters of Lionel Phillips, a partner and South African Director of the Company.[35] Jeeves’s conclusions are so strikingly different that it would be tempting to quote them in full.

Here it must suffice to say that they support the Marks-Trapido thesis that the war was essentially about the nature of the state. Contrary to Smith’s assertion that the Wernher-Beit archives reveal “how little time or space is devoted to politics,” Jeeves finds ample evidence there of the industry’s involvement in the pre-war political campaigns. Through 1899, the Corner House principals remained convinced that the South African Republic was not doing enough to lower labor costs whether through the efficient enforcement of its pass and liquor laws, to control “rogue recruiters and mine managers” or to negotiate with the Portuguese for Mozambican workers. Their letter-books reveal the Company’s concern that “governmental structures and priorities” both in the Transvaal and in the subcontinent were “incapable of serving the long-term needs of a modern mining industry” (WWW, pp. 239-242). They may well have been wrong in these beliefs, but the important point is that they acted on them.

Here and elsewhere, I believe that Smith takes too narrow a view of his sources, misconstrues the revisionist historiography on the state, and simplifies the always-contested nature of hegemony. Of course, there were differences of view, as in all human institutions, within and between the mining houses. Given the huge preponderance of Wernher-Beit and Eckstein, together with Rhodes and the Farrar Group, who generally—although not always—sang from the same hymn book, this is less important than it may seem. Nor is it necessary to assert that the interests of the mining industry and the state were always identical: manifestly, they were not. None of this undermines the central propositions of those historians who continue to see the link between the interests of the mining industry and those of the British state, at that time “the greatest commercial power and the greatest source of loan capital” in the world, a position based upon its unique financial institutions and the power of

sterling based on a gold standard.[36] If Eric Hobsbawm's view that the war was about gold is too crude, the centrality of gold to the British state, especially in the increasingly turbulent 1890s, at a time when a number of countries were moving over to a gold standard, seems inescapable.[37] This does not mean they were intent on seizing the gold mines—which were effectively under the control of British mine-owners in any case. What was crucial was control over the conditions under which gold was produced in the Transvaal—a matter of importance to the British government and indeed to the leading European powers. Of course, this does not mean that war was inevitable: if the British government and the mine magnates could have had what they wanted without war, they would certainly have settled without one. If they could not, it is clear that from the time of the Raid, and perhaps before, they were prepared to wage war to achieve their goals.

This is not deny the importance of a range of broader strategic objectives in the British determination to maintain its control over the region—in Lord Salisbury's words "to show the Boers who is Boss." As Thompson suggests, there were a variety of pro-imperial pressure groups in late-nineteenth-century Britain concerned to promote the empire, though it is difficult to see them having much influence with the government—except in the case of South Africa.[38] Nor is this to ignore individual agency in triggering the war. The more cautious of the mine magnates hoped that force could be avoided, as did more cautious politicians. A more tolerant man than Milner may have tried longer to achieve a new form of state in the Transvaal without force; a more circumspect man than Chamberlain may have advised Salisbury to restrain or even recall their man on the spot: as it was, the anti-war Butler was the one recalled and not the pro-war Milner. It was the combined effect on the British cabinet of Milner and Chamberlain, both immensely powerful political actors, that lies at the heart of John Benyon's paper. He argues that to understand the escalation of a mid-level crisis into a major war, we need to understand the close ideological affinity of Chamberlain and Milner—both Liberal Unionists with a penchant for state intervention, derived from their views on Ireland—and the power which the unique position of High Commissioner gave Milner to act unilaterally.

Mordechai Tamarkin also stresses the culpability of Milner in bringing about war, in an essay largely derived from his major study of Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners. According to Tamarkin, it was Milner's appointment as Governor of the Cape and High Commissioner, and

not the Jameson Raid, that was the point of no return for Cape Afrikaners: Milner, a powerful and intolerant "radical" was "impatient with complex situations and tough realities and intolerant of conflicting points of view" (p. 121). (This view of an inflexible Milner—in contrast with a more politically astute and flexible Kitchener—is, incidentally, also borne out in Keith Surridge's revisionist account of the confrontations between the General and the High Commissioner in the peace negotiations, abortive and actual, at Middleburg and Vereeniging.)[39]

According to Tamarkin, initially Milner tried to gain Afrikaner support in the Cape, which he believed was the key to the situation in South Africa; with the re-election of Kruger as president of the SAR in February 1898, however, his attitude was transformed as he:

"faced ... two contradictions which could not be resolved peacefully ... the desire to maintain peace and the attainment of imperial supremacy through radical political reform in the Transvaal; [and] ... the goal of maintaining the support of Cape Afrikaners and pushing for a head-on collision with Kruger. For Milner ... contradictions would only be resolved by a war.... (p. 124)

Interesting though they are, these essays fail to answer the crucial question Benyon himself poses: why was there insufficient "anticipation and restraint, both at the centre and on the periphery, to prevent what were really only medium-level challenges becoming an unavoidable and ultimate 'test' of ruinous consequences to the Empire" (p. 85)? If, as Benyon assures us, "Ireland lay at the very centre of Milner's belief in Empire" and "Chamberlain had similarly committed himself to imperial integrity upon the Irish issue," then what were they doing working up to war in South Africa (p. 87)? Why was a cautious cabinet, led by members of the landed aristocracy for whom "Ireland was the true test of Empire," prepared to go to war with a people they professed to despise and a republic they held in contempt? After all, as Porter has shown elsewhere, Chamberlain acted with the full backing of the cabinet, and on occasion Salisbury favored even stronger action against South Africa than his colonial secretary.[40]

The matter becomes more perplexing when one throws in for good measure Keith Jeffery's observations, in a splendidly titled essay,[41] that for Balfour and others in the British government the real danger point for the empire in 1899 was Afghanistan and not the Transvaal. The war, he suggests, "was more the last act in the 'partition of Africa,' a sort of imperial tidying-up, than some carefully thought-out scheme finally to secure

the Cape route.” Britain’s paramountcy was not really under threat in the region, merely its extent; “the result of the war ... was, if anything, to overinsure Britain’s regional position” (p. 191). In terms of the empire’s strategic security, Jeffery maintains that the war probably made very little difference (SAWR, p. 192).

These observations surely strengthen rather than diminish the case for the importance of gold in the story. By the late nineteenth century, gold was a strategic issue. It was believed to be crucial for military defense by the major European powers, which all—other than Britain—held substantial war chests in gold. The importance of a friendly power in South Africa is seen in 1914, when the Bank of England arranged to take over “the entire gold output of South Africa on behalf of the British government.”[42] While one cannot argue from consequences to causes, there is little doubt that the British government, like the Bank of England, was fully aware of the significance of gold in time of war in the 1890s, as in the 1910s. Curiously there is no discussion of the special position of gold as the international medium of exchange in any of these pages. We are asked to believe, with the *Bankers’ Magazine*, that it was “a truly fortuitous circumstance” that Britain, “the leading monetary power in the world,” was at war with the SAR, “a country producing the greater proportion of the world’s gold supply.”[43]

V. The Press and Popular Opinion

If the Hobson thesis on the role of capitalists has provided fertile ground for historical controversy, his view that the press “deliberately inflamed imperialist passions” has also stimulated much debate in these collections and elsewhere.[44] Like Hobson’s anti-capitalist ideas, his notion that the press “was controlled by financial interests” was neither new nor unique. However, as Peter Cain points out in an incisive account, Hobson “took this argument much further in a detailed study of the South African press which concluded that it was controlled by the great mining interests. [Hobson] believed that they then fed the same information to the newspapers in Britain and, through the latter encouraged jingoism and militarism in order to incite the British taxpayer to finance a war from which the capitalists would be the only gainers.” According to Paul Laity, “The real lesson, for him, was its ’revelation of the methods by which a knot of men, financiers and politicians, can ... impose a policy’ ” (ISAW, pp. 153-154).

As a journalist in South Africa, Hobson was observing a real phenomenon, if perhaps exaggerating its impact in the metropole. While there can be no doubt

the major newspapers in South Africa were financed by mine magnates and generally espoused their views, and that large sections of the British press followed the South African English-language press in demonizing the Kruger republic, this is manifestly not the whole story. Moreover, as Andrew Thompson shows in his wide-ranging and subtle essays in these volumes, popular support for the war was highly contingent and shifted as a result of the actual course of the war. Pro-war propagandists could not simply regard the British public “as a blank page upon which they could write at will.” As Thompson notes, “Their appeals had to be adapted to fit perceptions of existing attitudes and perhaps prejudices,” hence the importance of the Uitlander grievances, and especially the franchise issue, as a propaganda tool (WWW, p. 315).

Nevertheless, it is probably true to say that mass-circulation newspapers played an unprecedented role in fomenting and then reporting the South African War. Of these, none was more influential than *The Times* of London—“a paper of record designed to be read by gentlemen,” the choice of politicians, bankers, and professionals (at least until it was taken over by Rupert Murdoch). The role of its war journalists is examined by Dorothy O’Helly and Helen Callaway, and in two essays by Jacqueline Beaumont.[45] O’Helly and Callaway look at the way Flora Shaw, the most highly paid and influential woman journalist in London at the time, used her position at *The Times* to sway public opinion on the eve of the war, through her spirited defense of Rhodes and Jameson and the uitlanders, as well as in her denunciations of the corruption of the Kruger regime. Following the failure of the Jameson Raid, she was left to limit the damage to imperial policy and to *The Times*, which she did with aplomb. From this she went on, in 1901, to defend the concentration camps in an early version of the myth of the “happy native”: “No one can pass through the camps and see the happy faces of thousands of children who cluster round the schools and soup kitchens ... without realizing the state of harmony which exists between them and the English authorities who are governing them” (cited in SWAR, pp. 60-61). Yet despite her usefulness to the imperial cause and her international reputation, Shaw received no pay raises during the decade—unlike her male colleagues. “She may have been considered an ’honorary male’ during her decade with *The Times*, but she was never a full member of the male regime...” (SAWR, pp. 62-63).

Of Beaumont’s companion essays, the first looks at the way the newspaper responded to the outbreak of war,

and the role of its major correspondents in South Africa, Leopold Amery and Lionel James (a professional newsman), while the second traces James's career in greater detail. Beaumont reminds us that the newspaper relied on local stringers, although these receive little attention here. Despite some criticism of the government's lack of preparedness after the British disasters at the end of 1899, *The Times* justified the war, and supported Milner's policies.

It is perhaps not surprising that *The Times* should have attracted so much attention in these collections. As Benyon shows, Milner was "a master of propaganda" and "a well-known and established London journalist himself," so he was able to "win the trust of both Moberly Bell and Buckle," manager and editor respectively. It is nonetheless salutary to be reminded by Thompson of the ideological labor among the lower middle class performed by that stalwart of the bellicose, the *Daily Mail*. We should also remember that, as Benyon notes, Milner's "long reach into the very heart of the English establishment" went well beyond *The Times*. This enabled him to recruit W. F. Monypenny for the *Johannesburg Star* (financed by Wernher, Beit and Company) and to attract Edmund Garrett, "an old contact from his days at the *Pall Mall Gazette*" to edit the *Cape Times* (financed by Rhodes). It is thus a pity that there is, to my knowledge, no recent extended account of the role of the South African English-language press, which Sir William Butler, Acting High Commissioner during Milner's absence from the Cape in late 1898, described as "that systematic syndicate of misrepresentation," "wholly under the influence of Mr Rhodes."^[46]

Moreover, for all the importance of the national newspapers, it is also clear from the essays in these collections that the war penetrated the columns of a far wider range of the press, far beyond the knowledge and grasp of the most ambitious Randlord. Thus, as many of these essays make clear, a host of more specialist periodicals such as the *Nursing Record*, the *Methodist Weekly*, and the *Jewish Chronicle* all kept their readers abreast of the progress of the war from a pro-imperial point of view, while there was an equally lively response from a range of radical and positivist journals, as David Nash shows in his fascinating essay on the secular critique of the war.^[47]

The press was not the only source of pro- and anti-war opinion. As Thompson shows, the war led "directly to the formation of a clutch of new nationalist and imperialist pressure groups" and "gave a fresh lease of life to

many existing extraparliamentary movements," of which the most important—but hitherto largely ignored—was the Imperial South Africa Association (ISAA) (*WWW*, pp. 303-304). Although the ISAA was closely involved with South African pro-imperial pressure groups, it presented the crisis as "part of a bigger political project aimed at transforming the English-speaking empire into a more consolidated and cohesive unit." Not only did it provide speakers for constituency associations and arrange open-air meetings, it was also—more significantly—"closely involved with the two ministries responsible for imperial policy making, the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, and with Milner in South Africa" (p. 304). In fact, Thompson argues, in the ISAA "official diplomacy and private propaganda were closely entwined" and "Chamberlain, Milner and Salisbury all made use of its propaganda machinery before, during and after the war" (p. 305).

Equally important in a still largely church-going society, however, were the views of ministers of religion, and here Greg Cuthbertson's valuable contributions counter the over-simple elision of religious non-conformity and pro-Boer politics.^[48] He has no doubt that, despite the religious origin of much anti-war opinion, its exponents were not in the mainstream of nonconformist opinion. "There can be little doubt that non-conformity sanctified military involvement in the war.... Any pacifism which might have been present in dissenting Christianity was systematically eroded by the militarisation of British society and widely held notions about the God-given role of Britain to subjugate colonial peoples" (*SAWR*, p. 169).

This was especially true of Wesleyan Methodism, where three-quarters of the rank and file supported the war, following prominent leaders and ministers, as well as the editor of the *Methodist Times*, who "robustly" defended it. Influential Methodist missionaries believed that "British hegemony was a prerequisite for the smooth and effective expansion of Christianity in southern Africa" and that a British victory would redress the grievances of Uitlanders and Africans. They "legitimized the war by providing it with a strong religious sanction," and "contributed to the imperialism of metropolitan Methodism." Missionaries also contributed to African pro-imperialism and helped maintain African suspicion of Afrikaners. Many became army chaplains during the war, while more generally the military imagery exploited by Wesleyan evangelism "reinforced the popular notion that war against the Boers was 'the Lord's battle' in which a British victory would bring 'glory to His name'" (*ISAW*, pp. 159-165).

Given this, and the “special relationship” between the Tory government and Anglican Church, the only anti-war opinion came from rare individuals, like the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England, John Watson (soon to change his mind), and Silvester Horne, Chairman of the Congregation Union, in Britain, or the Unitarian Minister Rev. Ransden Balmforth and the Presbyterian Rev. John T. Lloyd (influenced by Olive Schreiner) in South Africa. A small handful of Baptists, Unitarians, and Congregationalists opposed the war but the “anti-war faction” was unable to attract a mass following partly due to the declining influence of non-conformism among workers by the end of the century (SAWR, p. 170).

Anglo-Jewry was no more susceptible to the anti-war appeal, as Richard Mendelsohn shows.[49] In part because of the anti-Semitic accusations of radicals (from Hobson down) who elided a capitalist with a Jewish conspiracy behind the war, the Jewish establishment was anxious to assert its loyalty. Like their non-conformist counterparts, Jewish ministers were virtually unanimous in condemning the Boers and asserting “the wisdom and justice of British policy in the Transvaal” (WWW, p. 250). One of the few exceptions was Dr. Solomon Schechter, a “brilliant German-Jewish scholar” and friend of Olive Schreiner, who was heard to remark as he walked out of a service in Cambridge when a War Prayer was read, “The less the Almighty knows about this dirty business, the better for all of us” (p. 251).

Despite the rising tide of xenophobia that accompanied the wave of East European Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth century, newcomers were nonetheless thankful to a country which offered them sanctuary and a degree of tolerance. “Anglo Jewry demonstrated its gratitude and intense patriotism—its Jewish jingoism—in a variety of ways,” all of which were assiduously recorded and applauded by the Jewish Chronicle. Wealthier Jews contributed generously to various war funds, while lower-middle-class Jews joined the forces. Anglo-Jewry’s war, “unlike Hobson’s,” was “glorious, self-sacrificing, and patriotic, not mercenary and meanly conspiratorial” (WWW, p. 261).

If the religious leaders in Britain for the most part supported the war, David Nash quotes Olive Schreiner’s view that the Secularists were the pro-Boers’ “most consistent supporters,” though he also points out it “would be a mistake to see the operation of this ‘liberal conscience’ as completely consistent, coherent, or in any way homogenous” (WWW, p. 266). In his luminous paper, Nash traces the complex differences of opinion among individ-

ual secularists and free-thinkers who objected to the war. Their common ground was “a fundamental distrust of imperial motives that appeared to flout openly abroad rights that were only grudgingly accepted at home.” They believed that “imperial adventures and expansionist policies were not simply wrong: they carried within them the justification of war—for conquest and subjugation of infidel peoples” (p. 267). If this—and “condemnation of the role played by religion in the conflict”—was common ground (p. 280), then Nash goes on to unravel the different motives of individuals, Secularists, Freethinkers, and Positivists over time. He draws the analogy between the escalation of religious and moral rearmament, which “stoked the jingoism that had led to infringements of civil rights that those opposed to the war had to endure,” and the gathering gloom that enveloped peace campaigners of the 1980s. Like Laity, who writes of the nineteenth-century roots of the peace movement, and especially of its anti-capitalist focus, Nash signals its positive inheritance to the peace campaigners against World War One, and “the absorption into Western democracy of Secularist and pacifist attitudes toward war during the course of the twentieth century” (pp. 281-283). If Tony Blair wants to find the antecedents of contemporary British anti-war activism, then this might be one place to start.

VI. A Question of Significance?

What then was the significance of this costly and bitter war? To some extent, as John Darwin remarks in his afterword in Omissi and Thompson, the impact of any war depends upon choice of criteria, location, and perspective. The question is addressed most directly in five essays dealing with the war’s impact on Britain[50] and in Saul Dubow’s excellent paper on the ideological construction of a white South African identity in the reconstruction period, though most of the essays in the three books under review have some bearing on the topic, whether in terms of the war’s impact on popular imagination in Britain, as in Thompson’s account of memorials and war relief, or in Laity and Nash’s account of the peace movement and radical thought in the case of the United Kingdom, or in Grundlingh’s revisionist account of the impact of the war on the rise of Afrikaner nationalism.

Four areas in particular concern British imperial historians concerning the impact of the war: imperial defense, social reform and “national efficiency,” the fiscal crisis between 1900 and 1903, and British politics. For Porter, and to a lesser degree for Darwin, Searle, and Jeffery, in all these areas the war’s significance has been much overrated: “for all the passion it generated,” writes

Porter, “at the time, the impact of the war on Britain and South African matters on Britain and the wide empire before 1914 was less far-reaching or singular and far less direct than has often been imagined” (WWW, p. 289). This assertion may be a useful corrective to the more inflated claims about the war’s impact, but may itself be somewhat exaggerated. Searle agrees that most of the issues subjected to a post-mortem after the war would have been of concern in any case and many of the reforms had been in the pipeline in the decade before the war. Nevertheless, he concludes, the war was “a powerful catalyst” so that the slogan “national efficiency” now “managed to fuse a range of concerns that previously had never quite coalesced.” This, in turn, led to “the creation of something ... distinctively new” (ISAW, p. 196).

While the authors agree that in the case of imperial defecse many of the military and naval reforms had more to do with fears of growing German power and European war than defeats in South Africa, again Searle warns this should not be taken too far. “The war created a mood in which it seemed politically imperative that something be ‘done’ about the Army” (p. 200). Although the South African war did not necessitate the formation of a coalition government, Searle points out that the unity of the Liberal Party was shattered by it, while Chamberlain’s departure from the Tory government in pursuit of tariff reform was also in part a product of a fiscal crisis accelerated by the huge cost of the war, and the consequent delay in the implementation of social reform.

In the final analysis, Searle’s answer to his own question (“Suppose that the Bloemfontein negotiations of 1899 had succeeded in fending off hostilities between the British Empire and the two Afrikaner Republics—would Edwardian public life then have taken a very different course? ”) is equivocal. Many of the debates stimulated by the war may have had prior origins, but “that is not to say that the War’s alleged impact on British public life is a myth” (p. 195).

The answer to Searle’s question has much to do with perspective—by comparison with the two world wars that follow, the significance of the South African War inevitably diminishes—and the choice of criteria. If one’s concern is with high politics and international relations, the impact of the war may well have been exaggerated (although I continue to find it surprising that the need for a war chest is not so much as mentioned in the seven hundred or so pages in these volumes). If, however, one’s interest is in popular consciousness and memory of empire, the answer is somewhat different. Thus Thompson’s

account of the proliferation of memorials in the wake of the war, or Laity and Nash’s accounts of its impact on the development of peace movements and conscientious objection, or my own account of the establishment of military nursing, surely tip the balance sheet in another direction.

The range of papers on the Dominions also shifts the balance: here participation in the war “stimulated local patriotism as well as a sense of collective imperial service” (Jeffery, SAWR, pp. 192-193). This was as true in India as it was in New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. In Ireland, too, where prominent intellectuals and political figures supported the Boer cause, the war helped reunify the Irish parliamentary party and reinvigorate Irish cultural nationalism (Lowry, SAWR, p. 224). For James Joyce, “The Boers were the beginning of the end” of British might (Lowry, SAWR, p. 225, citing “Skin-the-Goat” in *Ulysses*). To Lowry, the war’s impact and the formation of the Union of South Africa endured in Ireland for over a generation as key actors on all sides reworked their understandings of the lessons of the war (Lowry, SAWR, pp. 234-235).

In South Africa, not surprisingly, the changes were most far-reaching. Despite John Darwin’s reminder that the war “ended with a truce rather than a victory” and “an incomplete resolution of political and racial conflict” (ISAW, p. 291), it remains true that it created the foundations of the modern segregationist state in South Africa. Within a remarkably short time, the former enemies joined hands to shore up white supremacy and to defend white property rights in the face of what amounted to a widespread black jacquerie in the Transvaal. Africans were disarmed, and the pass laws re-imposed and far more efficiently policed than they had been in the ramshackle South African Republic. The urban geography of Johannesburg was transformed as whites and Indians were moved out of the slums they had shared with poor black migrants from the countryside. Most importantly, at the peace negotiations at Vereeniging both sides agreed there would be no question of a vote for black men—or indeed for women of whatever hue. Despite—or perhaps because of—their role in the war, Afrikaner women were returned to the domestic sphere, whence they were to emerge as ardent exponents of Afrikaner nationalism over the next decade. Pace Darwin, the absence of an historiography of the war pointed to by Grundlingh does not mean it did not powerfully influence the consciousness of the victims of a war in which some 15 percent of the total population of the Republics lost their lives.