JINGOISM, PUBLIC OPINION, AND THE NEW IMPERIALISM
Newspapers and Imperial Rivalries at the *fin de siècle*

Simon J. Potter

This essay analyses late-Victorian understandings of the relationship between the press, imperial diplomacy, and popular enthusiasm for empire, and examines how newspapers explained their own role in the imperial rivalries of the 1890s. During imperial disputes between Britain and France (particularly the Fashoda crisis) and between Britain and the USA (the Venezuela boundary dispute) contemporaries claimed that self-interested 'jingo' elements of the political elite had sought to foment conflict by manipulating 'public opinion', but had been defeated by statesmen (who had used the press for legitimate diplomatic purposes) and by 'the people' (who were averse to war). This contrasted with contemporary comments about the role played by the press in provoking wars between the USA and Spain and between Britain and the Transvaal: both the press and the people seemed to succumb to an irrational popular 'jingoism', and to sweep statesmen along in their wake. However, this essay argues that these contemporary verdicts about the role of newspapers in focusing popular imperialism have been too easily accepted by historians. During the imperial rivalries of the 1890s the press played an important role as a medium of transnational communication, but did not push statesmen into expansionism.

KEYWORDS   Newspapers; empire; imperialism; jingo; jingoism; public opinion

Introduction

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the European powers jostled to assert ambitious and competing claims to dominate vast swathes of the world beyond Europe. This phase of unparalleled expansion is known as the New Imperialism. According to John M. MacKenzie, the pioneering historian of the popular culture of empire, support for the New Imperialism was broadly-based in many European countries. MacKenzie further argues that such popular enthusiasm was made possible, if not necessarily caused in any simple way, by the spread of education, literacy, the franchise, mass politics, organised entertainment, advertising aimed at mass markets, and (crucially for our purposes) popular newspapers and other forms of print culture.[1] The New Imperialism developed at the same time as the New Journalism, the late-nineteenth century's distinctive contribution to the traditions of the popular press, and on the back of the same technologies of industrialisation, transportation, and communication.[2] Thus, for MacKenzie, they must have been connected in some way.[3]

But in what way, exactly? Attempts to argue that statesmen were 'social imperialist puppet-masters', using press coverage of dazzling adventures overseas to distract the attention of the masses from domestic socio-economic inequalities, have now been more

or less discredited.[4] As both MacKenzie and Stephen Howe have acknowledged, there is little evidence for any such explicit motivation behind British imperial policy-making in the late-nineteenth century.[5] However, this does not mean that the press failed to provide statesmen with a valuable tool of imperial policy. As Andrew Porter's early work on the South African War (or Boer War) of 1899–1902 demonstrated, contemporary statesmen were well aware of the opportunities newspapers offered to present imperial policy aims and objectives to a wider audience. Joseph Chamberlain (British Colonial Secretary, 1895–1903) and Alfred Milner (British High Commissioner for Southern Africa, 1897–1905) together worked to harness the press to generate support for the crushing of the autonomy of the Transvaal, and to develop wider enthusiasm for British imperial consolidation.[6]

Media historians have meanwhile suggested that the press had reasons of its own for supporting and catalysing imperial expansion. It is perhaps conventional wisdom that the media are inevitably drawn to:

> conflict, violence, deviance and drama … spectacular scenes … strong human interest stories where journalists can seek and find pathos and tragedy, heroism and camaraderie, acts of selflessness and personalized experiences of suffering … national feelings of communal identity, pride and patriotism.[7]

Colonial warfare, and imperial expansion more generally, offered such material in abundance. Alan J. Lee argued that, by the end of the nineteenth century, empire acted as a key source of the exoticism and thrills that the New Journalism relied on to titillate readers: 'wars sufficiently distant as not to be too distressing, but successful enough to sustain confidence, with occasional setbacks to maintain tension'.[8] Similarly, Jean Chalaby has claimed that mass-circulation newspapers adopted coverage and advocacy of Britain's imperial role as a safe alternative to partisan comment on controversial domestic issues. Papers like the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* could not afford to alienate readers by expressing strong opinions on home affairs: someone would always be offended. Foreign affairs, and particularly imperial affairs relating to far-off lands of which readers knew little, were by contrast safely uncontroversial.[9] Martin Conboy suggests that the net result was to 'inflame chauvinistic sentiments', generating 'imperialistic and nationalistic discourses' and creating a vicarious 'sense of global triumph'.[10]

The roots of all these historical explanations lie in contemporary, late-Victorian understandings of the connections between the press, imperial diplomacy, and popular enthusiasm for empire. However, contemporaries recognised that these links were complex, variegated, and subtle, and that the press did not necessarily play the same role in each separate incidence of imperial rivalry and conflict. Contemporary commentators frequently worried that newspapers disseminated lies and misrepresentations, exacerbating conflict. This was not only the result of the acknowledged structural inadequacies of the press as a medium of transnational communication, but it was also believed to be the work of individuals or groups within the political elite, so-called 'jingoes', who wished to foment conflict for reasons of their own. More encouragingly, however, responsible statesmen often seemed able to use the press to their own legitimate ends, issuing and receiving messages that played a key role in the diplomatic process, and harnessing newspaper comment to support claims about the state of 'public opinion' that strengthened their position on the international stage. During the

antagonisms of the 1890s between Britain and France over competing claims in West Africa and along the Upper Nile, and in the clash of 1895 between Britain and the USA over the Venezuela boundary, jingoes appeared to be contained by the deft work of policy-makers and by the seemingly pacific inclinations of the wider public. However, this contrasted markedly with the crises that led up to the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the South African War of 1899–1902. In these two cases, a wider, popular 'jingoism' seemed to overtake both press and public and, according to some contemporary commentators, played a significant role in the outbreak of war.

Diplomacy and the Political Press

In September 1898 Reuter's correspondent in Cairo filed a despatch concerning recent events in Sudan: 'No news hitherto telegraphed to London concerning Major Marchand can possibly be correct, since all sources of news in Egypt have refused any information on this subject' (*Irish Times* [Dublin], October 1, 1898). This warning from the British empire's premier syndicated news agency was an example of a much broader late-nineteenth century phenomenon: contemporaries worried that while the telegraph had made it possible to despatch news quickly, it also made it easier to disseminate rumour and falsehood. In 1897 the *Pall Mall Gazette* (*PMG*) similarly highlighted 'a pretty piece of news'—'entirely imaginary'—from the Djibouti correspondent of the French news agency Havas. This report, the *PMG* maintained, had purposely misrepresented the outcome of British diplomacy in Abyssinia, another potential flash-point for imperial rivalries: 'the invention of the French Jingoes has got a good start, and will serve to create in certain French circles a comfortable conviction that the English have been satisfactorily bested' (*PMG* [London], July 6, 1897). The *PMG* was here drawing on another, related vein of late-Victorian anxiety: that the falsehoods now travelling by wire were not innocent, but rather reflected the conscious attempts of certain individuals and groups to set the agenda for public discussion and policy-making. These 'jingoes', it was alleged, were intent on pushing statesmen into aggressive imperial expansion, and were manipulating the press to manufacture public support for the seizure of colonial possessions.

Concern about the manipulation of the press by vested interests for political or commercial gain is of course a recurrent feature of modern discourses about the media. However, the peculiar circumstances of *fin de siècle* imperial rivalries in Africa lent these general concerns a particular urgency. In the 1890s the military expeditions sent into the African interior to establish European territorial claims were operating in areas beyond easy communication with home. Once, delays and silences had been taken for granted as an inevitable feature of imperial communication. However, by the end of the nineteenth century contemporaries had become accustomed to the rapid supply of news from all corners of the globe. The gap in communications between the metropole and the new frontiers of empire now seemed unusual and unsettling, creating opportunities for speculation and fuelling anxiety.

The limits imposed on diplomacy and public debate by the infrastructure of late-nineteenth century international communications are nicely illustrated by the climax of Anglo-French rivalries in Africa, the Fashoda crisis of 1898. The British and French both wished to assert control over the Sudanese Upper Nile, one of the last areas of Africa to be

left effectively unclaimed by a European power. In 1896, the French despatched a mission under the command of Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand to travel to and occupy Fashoda, a key strategic point on the Upper Nile. Britain meanwhile began the comprehensive military reconquest of Sudan, with a large and well-equipped force of Egyptian, Sudanese, and British troops, under the command of Herbert Kitchener. Securing Fashoda was also one of Kitchener's objectives. The story of Fashoda, and the way that the story was reported, were both influenced by the same problems of communication. People and news alike found it difficult to travel in tropical Africa. It took Marchand's small force of Frenchmen and Africans, supported by a vast logistical operation comprising a thousand or so African porters, two years to travel almost 4000 miles through central Africa, by boat and canoe and on foot. Marchand and his troops made their way through sparse and narrow river channels that were often rendered impassable by rapids, or disappeared into swampland, or were choked by floating islands of vegetation. The communications connections between Marchand and the outside world were similarly limited: sparse, slow, and liable to blockage. The British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, thought that in Europe it was 'as difficult to judge what is going on in the Upper Nile Valley as to judge what is going on on the other side of the moon'.[11]

However, Kitchener enjoyed better communications with the outside world. As he advanced from his base in Egypt, he built a railway and a telegraph line behind him, as far as Khartoum. At nearby Omdurman, on 1 September 1898, he inflicted a decisive and bloody defeat on his Sudanese opponents. At Khartoum, however, Kitchener's electric link with the outside work stopped. This meant that, after he travelled 400 miles upriver by steamer to confront Marchand at Fashoda, he faced a delay of around a week in getting news back to Britain. Rumours about the presence of a European force on the Upper Nile reached British newspapers via Cairo on or around 12 September, a week after news of Kitchener's victory at Omdurman. Reports then began to dribble in, confirming that the force was French, but it took another two weeks for the news to arrive in London that Kitchener had met Marchand at Fashoda (see, for example, *The Times* [London], September 12 and 26, 1898).

This delay in getting news from Fashoda 'put the British on tenter-hooks' (*New York Times*, September 18, 1898). Yet the communications gap between Fashoda and Cairo also gave Kitchener and the British Government a crucial advantage over the French. On meeting, Kitchener and Marchand agreed to await instructions from home as to which of them should withdraw, but Kitchener retained command of both the river and the telegraph line. He was thus able to exercise effective control over the flow of information back to Europe by denying Marchand and the various press correspondents the ability to communicate with home. It was more than a month before Kitchener allowed Marchand to cable even a brief report back to France, and it took more than two months for Marchand's full report to reach Paris. By that time, the French Government had already decided to back down and evacuate Fashoda.[12]

If communication was a problem for statesmen, it also posed difficulties for newspaper editors seeking to cover events at Fashoda. For the press, the crisis was mainly about uncertainty and anticipation. Rumours circulated, reports from Kitchener trickled in with agonising slowness, and British and French papers were reduced to reprinting and editorialising on lengthy synopses of each other's generally ill-informed

comment. Indeed, in the absence of hard news from the Upper Nile, a key part of the story of Fashoda became the reporting of what other newspapers had said. Newspapers began to blame their counterparts on the opposite side of the Channel for inflaming the crisis and rendering all-out war more likely. *Le Temps* accused the English press of conducting a 'campaign of menace and intimidation' (*Le Temps* [Paris], October 11, 1898). *The Times* retorted that inaccurate statements in the French press denying Egyptian sovereignty over the Sudan (and hence the legitimacy of the Anglo-Egyptian invasion) threatened to 'disturb and mislead public opinion, at a moment when it is most important to avoid everything of the kind' (*The Times* [London], October 12, 1898). *The Times* also translated the comments of *La Petite République*, which had condemned other French newspapers for producing:

> epileptic articles which, being quoted in the English jingo Press, accentuate the polemics of our neighbours and give a semblance of justification to the violence of the papers across the Channel. The danger which their eccentricities of language may cause to international peace are of no account, however, to our jingoes in comparison with the charm of flaring headlines. (*The Times* [London], November 9, 1898)

At times, the self-referential quality of press involvement with Fashoda bordered on parody, with *The Times* reporting how French papers were summarising British press comment (*The Times* [London], October 17, 1898).

The Times was not of course an 'ordinary' newspaper: it possessed a long-standing reputation for political influence and authoritativeness, reaching beyond Britain's shores; received confidential information from the Foreign Office; and maintained close links with the ruling Conservative Party.[13] Yet if *The Times* occupied a unique position in British journalism, this did not mean that it was isolated from its peers: indeed, it was a crucial element in a wider structure of transnational press interconnection. For the comments about Fashoda published by *The Times* and other elements of the elite 'political press' in Britain and France were intended for readers abroad as well as at home. Indeed, it could be argued that they were aimed primarily at foreign audiences. By the mid-nineteenth century, 'Newspapers thought to be linked with certain politicians or factions were read avidly in the capitals of Europe and served as unofficial channels of communication between foreign ministers'.[14] The press was a transnational as well as a national medium of political communication. Elite newspapers entered into a dialogue with their foreign counterparts, which became an integral part of the wider diplomatic process. Politicians could use the press to promote, test, or attack particular ideas, viewpoints, or policies, just as they were accustomed to when dealing with domestic affairs: Chandrika Kaul describes this as the 'politics-press nexus'.[15] Playing on the need of the newspapers for information, policy-makers could supply 'inspired paragraphs', or make speeches that they knew would be printed in the press and read at home and overseas.[16] They could make statements about the nature of 'public opinion', which would in turn signal the strength of their determination to secure particular diplomatic objectives. And they could gather feedback from domestic and foreign press responses to their pronouncements. Thus while Kitchener restricted the flow of information from Fashoda, Salisbury and his colleagues could take advantage of the situation and supply the news-starved press with the oxygen of publicity.

Earlier, commenting on European rivalries in Africa during a speech at the Guildhall on 9 November 1897, Lord Salisbury had drawn attention to the role of the press in contemporary diplomacy.

> I find that there would be considerable difficulty in entering upon the negotiations [among the rival powers] in your presence, for this reason—that there is now such an active communication between various parts of the world that all that I say to you is equally said to a number of very different audiences in very different parts of the world; and it is quite possible that I might not achieve that general conciliatory process which I desire if I went frankly into all these questions. In every country it is one of the very great difficulties of conducting foreign affairs in the present time that every Government possesses over against it [sic] a mass of critical public opinion which requires that in every negotiation its own country shall have unquestionably the superiority.

Nevertheless, Salisbury went on to send a clear message to audiences at home and abroad. He stated that while Britain did not 'desire any unjust or illegitimate achievements … [but only] to extend the commerce, the trade, the industry and the civilization of mankind', it would not accept the illegitimate claims of other powers: 'we cannot allow our plain rights to be overridden' (*The Times* [London], November 10, 1897). As he had predicted, Salisbury's words quickly crossed borders. The day after it published them, *The Times* was able to print reports from its correspondents in France and Germany summarising the reactions of European newspapers to the speech and to associated British press comment (*The Times* [London], November 11, 1897). The next day *The Times* claimed with satisfaction that Salisbury's speech had cleared the air, and made 'the public of both countries' understand that Britain would not bow to French 'pretensions' in Africa (*The Times* [London], November 12, 1897).

Similar arguments were rehearsed in March 1898, as Anglo-French rivalries intensified in West Africa. Lord Selborne (Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies) claimed in a speech at Bradford that there existed in Britain 'the nearest approach to unanimity on external politics which has ever prevailed since the development of the party system'. Editorialising on Selborne's speech, *The Times* surveyed French press responses and deplored the attitude of *Journal des Débats* and *Le Temps*, papers which 'from their official connexions [and] the judgment and information of those who conduct them, can reasonably claim to speak with authority'. According to *The Times*, by failing to acknowledge the uniformity with which British 'public opinion' supported the government's stance on West Africa, French newspapers made conflict more likely.

> They wilfully shut their eyes to the import of this unanimity, and to the utmost of their ability they encourage their countrymen to treat English resistance to the preposterous demands of France in that part of the world as a matter of no consequence. (*The Times* [London], March 3, 1898)

There is little evidence to suggest that Salisbury sought to play the role of social imperialist puppet-master during the Fashoda crisis, or during earlier episodes of Anglo-French imperial antagonism. Salisbury hardly believed in expansion for its own sake: he assessed the costs and benefits of imperial control with a cool appraising eye in each individual case.[17] He was deeply distrustful of the idea of popular government, and dreaded the prospect of having to 'run before the jingo hurricane with bare poles'.[18] As his

Guildhall speech implied, he believed that governments should suppress rather than pander to public manifestations of bellicose sentiment. Yet, like his contemporaries, Salisbury was willing to use the political press as a tool of diplomacy; and, when it came to Fashoda, he had little choice. During the crisis neither Salisbury nor Théophile Delcassé, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, wished to conduct diplomacy in public. However, seeking to force Delcassé into taking a tougher line with the British, the French Minister of Colonies Georges Trouillot leaked information about the diplomatic situation to the right-wing paper *Le Gaulois*. A strongly Anglophobic article in *Le Gaulois* published on 28 September 1898 provoked strident headlines in the British political press and articles demanding the clarification of both French and British policies. Both governments began to publish documents relating to the crisis, and politicians made speeches which they knew would be published by newspapers and communicated across the Channel.[19]

As during earlier clashes, as the Fashoda crisis developed politicians and journalists also made claims about the nature of 'public opinion' and its implications for diplomacy. Public opinion could be cited as the reason why a climb-down was unthinkable: just as plausibly, it could be used to explain why a government had decided to step back from the brink of confrontation. During the Fashoda crisis, Salisbury reportedly told the French Ambassador that 'the state of public opinion in England' made it impossible for the British Government to compromise: the Paris correspondent of *The Times* (the renowned Henri de Blowitz) claimed that, in contrast, French 'public opinion' was 'calm' and would not support a war with Britain over control of the Upper Nile (*The Times* [London], November 2, 1898).[20] Such claims about the state of public opinion were not simple, objective statements of fact. They were unverified and unverifiable. They represented attempts to influence the diplomatic process.

Public Opinion and the Jingoes

In making such claims about public opinion, politicians and pressmen were certainly appropriating the voices of people they had not been able to consult in any meaningful way.[21] Yet it is important to recognise that they were not necessarily claiming to speak for everybody in the country, or even for the majority of people. In Britain, and in France, contemporaries did not tend to define public opinion as we do today, to connote the prevailing or aggregated views of the entire population. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, they conceptualised public opinion in more exclusive terms. Thus, for example, one French Deputy was reported in 1890 as having claimed that France:

> does not want fresh territory, but she will not allow the territory she possesses to be menaced. And on this point public opinion, Parliament and the Government are at one to assert with energy the wishes of the nation. *Even among the people* there is a feeling that the cards must not be thrown up … (quoted in *The Times* [London], July 22, 1890, emphasis added)

The 'public' and 'the people' were not necessarily the same thing. Late-Victorian commentators had inherited a conception of public opinion based on older, narrower views about who was included in the political nation. Burke had famously argued that the public constituted a group of some 400,000 people in Britain, men of some substance.[22] Conceptions of the social boundaries of the public certainly widened during the

nineteenth century, and for some commentators the public came to encompass more people than did the electorate.[23] Nevertheless, membership of the public remained limited: according to Ross McKibbin, even during the 1920s and 1930s contemporaries understood 'the public' to mean 'what remained after the manual working class had been subtracted'.[24]

Contemporaries were thus able to use the concept of 'public opinion' in an exclusive, and sometimes extremely exclusive, fashion. A despatch from de Blowitz in 1894 stated that:

> the vigorous attitude of the German Emperor on the question of the treaty between England and the Congo Free State produced an excellent impression on public opinion in France—not, perhaps, on the mass of the people, who do not concern themselves with the Congo or treaties, but on that portion of the bustling Parliamentary world which considers colonial extension the Alpha and Omega of the future greatness of this country, and the ideas of which gradually penetrate and take root in the mind of the masses. (*The Times* [London], December 12, 1894)

Here, public opinion was equated with a very small section of the political class, the group within the French parliament that was most enthusiastic about imperial expansion.

British newspapers and politicians seldom explained exactly who constituted this faction, and rarely mentioned by name pressure groups such as the *Union Coloniale française* or the *Comité de l'Afrique française*. Instead, they tended to talk in general terms about 'French Jingoes', individuals or factions within the political elite who it was claimed wished to influence wider opinion in order to promote colonial expansion or provoke a war with Britain. During the Fashoda crisis the Cardiff *Western Mail* thus claimed that:

> It is difficult to say with exactness how far the Jingoes dominate French public opinion, but we may readily believe that, if they could, they would not hesitate to plunge their country into war if they thought they stood any chance of scoring a victory. Happily, they do not represent French feeling in general. The greater number and the best men in France, as in our own country, are for peace, realising what a terrible thing war between two of the greatest Powers of Europe would be. (October 24, 1898)

Similarly, in a speech at Bradford shortly after the crisis, the Liberal politician Sir Edward Grey argued that:

> It was for Governments and peoples to be on their guard, not to allow themselves to be committed by these reckless sections that were always intent on scoring a point at the expense of another nation. All nations had these sections. Here we called them 'Jingoes'. The French had such a class. He thought it was not owing to any antipathy between the peoples, but owing to the activity of certain sections amongst them, that this controversy had arisen between France and England at all. (*Daily News* [London], December 3, 1898)

In both these examples, the bellicose influence of the jingoes was contrasted with the pacific attitudes of the wider population, 'the people'.

Newspapers had commented in much the same terms in 1895 on Britain's clash with the USA over the disputed boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana. Indeed, the label 'jingo' seems to have been applied more frequently to Americans than to Frenchmen, and Americans used it themselves to describe home-grown advocates of

imperial expansion. W. T. Stead reported at the time of the Venezuela dispute how the former governor of Ohio, James E. Campbell, addressing the Tammany Society of New York, had told his audience that:

> The meaning of the Monroe doctrine was, that we should extend our territory in the western hemisphere whenever the opportunity was presented, and confine the nations of Europe to the possessions on this continent which they already hold … Any attempt to seize a foot of soil on this continent should be treated by the United States as a declaration of war. It has become fashionable of late to 'cough' at those who advocate such measures, and derisively call them 'jingoes', but there was a time coming when 'jingo' would cease to be a term of opprobrium, but would become the emblem of those men who loved their country and flag.[25]

Stead also noted how Senator Henry Cabot Lodge had called for the annexation of Canada, Newfoundland, Cuba, and Hawaii, and how ex-Senator John J. Ingalls, while opposed to US annexation of Hawaii, had spoken out in favour of the absorption of Canada and of all territory from the US border south to the planned Central American isthmian canal (ultimately constructed in Panama). Stead argued that such politicians were 'playing to the gallery', appealing to the populace's bellicose national sentiment in order to generate political capital, which they would then use for other purposes. Campbell's jingoism was, for example, a means to support Tammany Hall's continuing attempts to dominate the 'non-American population' of New York and divert popular attention away from 'the humdrum but necessary task of civic reform'. 'It is a familiar trick in the old world to make war abroad to retard reform at home. The corrupter elements in American democracy are not above taking a hint from the effete empires and monarchies of Europe.'[26]

The *Times* New York correspondent, George Smalley, an American with a long career in journalism in the USA behind him, was similarly explicit in his discussion of 'American Jingoes', and noted the role of newspapers in stoking up antagonism against Britain during the Venezuela dispute: he labelled Charles Dana, editor of the New York *Sun*, 'the high priest of the great god Jingo' (*The Times* [London], December 20, 1895). The *Derby Mercury* similarly remarked on the role of newspapers in the crisis: 'The Venezuelanders, or the Yankee speculators behind them, have managed to work the anti-English journals until a good deal of ill-feeling was aroused' (March 11, 1896).

However, as in the case of Anglo-French rivalries, contemporaries argued that 'the people' had ultimately acted to restrain the jingoes. When the Venezuelan dispute was resolved without recourse to war, it was widely argued in the press that the American jingoes had failed, and that the population had remained well-disposed to the British. The *Glasgow Herald* thus quoted a contemporary verdict that:

> there are jingoes in the United Kingdom as there are in the United States; but the people, as a whole, of both countries, admire and love each other, and they will not permit any Government to plunge them into a fratricidal war. (December 26, 1895)

The *Bristol Mercury* similarly concluded that 'the Jingoes, both American and English' had 'quieted down … under the more sensible views of the majority' (December 15, 1896). 'The people' were presented as an uncorrupted force in British and American politics, immune to the blandishments of those who sought to manipulate them into conflict.

Jingoism and War

However, 'the people' did not always seem to play such a pacific role. British newspapers told a very different story about the contemporary clash between the USA and Spain, suggesting that a rather different set of relationships between statesmen, jingoes, public opinion, and the people was possible.

As early as 1896 the *Daily News* reported that 'The Spanish and American Jingoes are already in a state of war', and had successfully mobilised the mob: the windows of American consulates in Spain had been smashed; the infant King Alfonso had been hanged in effigy by children in Chicago; and students at North-Western University had torn up the Spanish flag (*Daily News* [London], March 10, 1896). British newspapers also blamed the Spanish and American press for heightening antagonism. The *Bristol Mercury* noted the turmoil caused by Madrid newspapers that 'screech[ed] of the necessity of equipping a fleet' (March 14, 1896), while *The Times* believed that 'the American jingoes' were trying to bring about war by 'provoking the Spanish Press to enter upon a war of words, and thus furnish them with material for incendiary appeals' (*The Times* [London], December 15, 1896). After the sinking of the *USS Maine* in Havana harbour in February 1898, the American jingoes finally seemed to succeed. *The Times* argued that the American 'yellow Press', in its sensationalist coverage of the *Maine* disaster (accompanied by headlines 'in black type an inch high across the breadth of the first page'), was aiming to 'exasperate American public opinion against Spain and Spanish public opinion against America' and bring about war (*The Times* [London], February 19, 1898). It is unlikely that the outcry in the American popular press was really responsible for the outbreak of the Spanish-American War that April: yet contemporaries certainly perceived, and deplored, a causal connection.[27]

Less than two years later, some British commentators were accusing British newspapers and the British public of similar failings. At this point it is worth recalling how the word 'jingo' acquired its contemporary meaning. The phrase 'By Jingo!' had long been used in semi-polite company as an alternative to an expletive. However, it gained a new association with aggressive nationalism during the popular demonstrations against Russia that accompanied the diplomatic crisis of 1877–1878. In London and some other English cities, large crowds had protested against Russian expansion into Ottoman territory. These protests, which according to one contemporary represented a 'stirring-up of all the foul dregs of the coarsest and rankest material among us', had deteriorated into rowdyism and violence.[28] The music halls meanwhile echoed to the strains of 'By Jingo!', a hugely successful song written during the crisis that included the famous lines:

> We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do,
> We've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too.
> We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true,
> The Russians shall not have Constantinople.[29]

Those demonstrating against Russian expansion were thus labelled 'jingoes': the term could be used to describe not only members of the political elite seeking to steer government policy towards imperial expansion, but also a more demotic element, agitating outside parliament and through violent protest. This jingo 'mob' or 'crowd' took to Britain's streets once again during the South African War.

The South African War has been called Britain's first 'media war', partly due to the contemporary belief that the press had played a key role in stimulating popular enthusiasm for the conflict.[30] The most systematic proponent of this view was the Radical Liberal economist and journalist John. A. Hobson, who spent several months in southern Africa in 1899, reporting on the developing crisis for the *Manchester Guardian*. Hobson believed that the conflict had been engineered by Cecil Rhodes and other rich and influential mining capitalists in southern Africa, who wished to break the power of the Boer government in the Transvaal (the independent republic in which the gold mines were located) and install a regime more favourable to their own commercial interests. Hobson argued that in order to 'apply an adequate motive-power to the minds of the British Government and the British people' and thus bring about imperial intervention, the mining capitalists had not only financed political agitation against the Transvaal government, but had also purchased the South African press and used it to feed British newspapers with propaganda.[31] Interlocking ownership of newspapers, still rare in Britain at the time, but an established feature of the South African newspaper industry, meant that a single piece of propaganda could easily be distributed and reprinted across the region, acquiring the appearance of authoritativeness before being transmitted onwards and reprinted in newspapers in Britain. Thus 'by combination and reiteration' the press 'had fastened a misjudgement, an exaggeration, or too frequently a falsehood, upon the public mind'.[32]

As we have seen, arguments about manipulation and falsehood were rehearsed throughout the 1890s during debates about jingo influence. What for Hobson was unusual about the South African War was the extent to which the mining capitalists were able to control the press, and the near-unanimity with which the public followed their lead. Hobson thought this was partly the result of the emergence of a new form of popular newspaper, capable of reaching, and presumably influencing, massive audiences composed of readers drawn from relatively lowly strata of society. Alfred Harmsworth's halfpenny *Daily Mail* ('written by office-boys for office-boys', according to Lord Salisbury), was established in 1896, and had developed a circulation of almost a million by 1900.[33]

Hobson also believed that industrialisation had, by the turn of the century, created a suggestible urban crowd which lacked either 'independence of character' or 'sound, rational sociality'.

> The neurotic temperament generated by town life seeks natural relief in stormy sensational appeals, and the crowded life of the streets, or other public gatherings, gives the best medium for communicating them. This is the very atmosphere of Jingoism. A coarse patriotism, fed by the wildest rumours and the most violent appeals to hate and the animal lust of blood, passes by quick contagion through the crowded life of cities, and recommends itself everywhere by the satisfaction it affords to sensational cravings.[34]

The popular press had helped unleash 'the savage passion of the mob-mind':

> that English men and women should of a sudden exhibit a fanatical desire to pierce and tear and hack the bodies of men whom they had never seen, and whose very name they hardly knew a year ago, is indeed an experience calculated to stagger any confidence one might have held in man as a rational and moral being.[35]

Several venerable strands of Radical Liberal thought came together in Hobson's wartime writings: ambivalence towards empire; doubts regarding the capacity of the masses to play a constructive role in the political life of the nation; and a fear that the press was not up to its self-appointed task of educating the working classes and turning them into reliable, rational citizens.[36] Hobson's references to the 'sensational cravings' of the jingo crowd, and to the willingness of journalists to pander to those cravings, echoed Matthew Arnold's earlier anxieties about the combined political effects of the widening franchise and the New Journalism. Famously, Arnold argued that 'the new voters, the *democracy*' were not generally rational or serious thinkers, and that the New Journalism, rather than seeking to correct this failing, exacerbated its effects. The press no longer attempted to educate the working classes out of their irrationality, but instead played to and profited from it. The New Journalism was 'feather-brained', flighty, superficial, irrational, and unconcerned with the truth, because 'the democracy, with abundance of life, movement, sympathy, good instincts, is disposed to be, like this journalism, *feather-brained*; just as the upper class is disposed to be selfish in its politics, and the middle class narrow.'[37]

Hobson was not the only contemporary to blame the press for stimulating popular jingoism before and during the South African War. Ramsay MacDonald argued that the *Daily Mail* had whipped up enthusiasm for aggression 'by telling lies about the flogging of British women and children', while James Bryce blamed jingoism on 'perverted news'.[38] The clergyman J. Guinness Rogers similarly claimed that the war was a 'journalists' war' as much as a 'capitalists' war'. Newspapers had:

> lent themselves to the creation and fostering of passions masked under the attractive garb of patriotism, but which have tended only to set up the rule of prejudice and hate … The effect undoubtedly has been to inflame, and that to an utterly absurd degree, the passions of the people.[39]

For such critics, jingoism ultimately reflected the irrationality of the people and the cynical commercialism of the papers that they read.

Conclusions

As the above analysis has demonstrated, in discussing the connections between the press and the New Imperialism media historians and imperial historians have echoed many of the theories and explanations first voiced by contemporaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, claims that the New Imperialism and the New Journalism were rooted in the same underlying developments in communications technologies and urban living were a common feature of Liberal critiques of the popular press. Contemporaries had also come to deplore the influence exerted over the press by powerful vested economic interests, manipulative politicians, and commercially minded newspaper proprietors. All seemingly had something to gain from the promotion of popular enthusiasm for imperial expansion.

This short essay cannot offer a definitive verdict on the accuracy of these contemporary and historiographical theories about the connections between the press and the New Imperialism. However, a survey of digital newspaper archives does reveal a

belief, shared by journalists and politicians, that the press had an important and legitimate role to play in imperial rivalries and diplomacy. The political press acted as a medium of transnational communication, projecting statements about a government's stance on specific imperial issues, and providing feedback from a range of sources at home and abroad. During this process, journalists and politicians often made claims about the role of 'public opinion' in shaping diplomacy. However, contemporaries did not necessarily believe that the population in general had a legitimate role to play in making foreign policy, or that statesmen were being driven to act by irresistible popular enthusiasms. Public opinion was seen as a more exclusive category than this, a representation of what the politically aware and influential thought about the affairs of the day.

According to this view, 'jingo' elements in the political system might try to push governments into a confrontation, using the press to whip up at least the semblance of a popular storm of bellicosity. However, in the Anglo-French rivalries of the 1890s, the jingoes always failed. The press was not deemed to have stimulated sufficient popular enthusiasm for imperial expansion to make war inevitable. On the contrary, 'the people' had remained immune to the blandishments of 'the jingoes', and statesmen had been able to resolve imperial rivalries in a rational, peaceful fashion. It is worth remembering that, for all that contemporaries and historians emphasised the role of popular imperialism in exacerbating imperial rivalries:

> the advance of the West into the non-Western world in the 'age of imperialism' between 1880 and 1914 was a curiously tepid affair in which no blood was spilt between the European powers (they made up the deficit with that of Asians and Africans).[40]

Thus although the arguments of Hobson and others regarding the popular jingoism of the *fin de siècle* have exerted a powerful influence over subsequent historical writing, the crises that prompted those laments were by no means representative of the wider experience of the New Imperialism during the 1890s. Popular enthusiasm for imperial expansion seemed to break into the world of statecraft only on exceptional occasions, most notably in America in the run-up to war with Spain, and in Britain before and during the South African War. In these cases, the 'jingo crowd' seemed to rule, popular jingoism hijacking the policy-making process. However, even then, appearances could be deceptive: as subsequent historical research has made clear, it is doubtful whether policy-makers were much influenced by popular pressure in either of these cases. In the USA, the machinations of the 'yellow press' were hardly required to encourage the McKinley administration to go to war with Spain.[41] In Britain, policy-making during the South African crisis was shaped primarily by the desire of Chamberlain and Milner to overcome the challenge that Boer autonomy posed to British interests in the region, and to lay the foundations for broader policies of imperial integration. Chamberlain wished to bring the public along with him on this journey, but in no way felt that he was being driven towards conflict by popular imperial sentiment: if anything Chamberlain thought there was too little, rather than too much, popular enthusiasm for empire.[42]

When contemporary commentators like Hobson ascribed a key role in promoting aggression to newspapers and the jingo crowd, it was not because they had unique insight into the realities of imperial diplomacy, but rather because they nursed a

long-standing and general set of doubts about popular participation in politics, and about the ability or willingness of the press to discipline democracy. As this essay has sought to show, the press discharged a significant function in the imperial rivalries of the *fin de siècle* as a means of elite transnational communication, as a tool of diplomacy. However, on the basis of the evidence that is now available to us, it seems highly unlikely that newspapers pushed statesmen into expansionism by focusing popular enthusiasm for empire.

Notes

1. MacKenzie, "Introduction," 1–2.
2. For the New Journalism see Wiener, *Americanization of the British Press*.
3. MacKenzie, "The Press and the Dominant Ideology of Empire," 26.
4. See, for example, Harcourt, "Disraeli's Imperialism".
5. Mackenzie, "Introduction," 4–5; and Howe, "Empire and Ideology," 172.
6. Porter, "Sir Alfred Milner and the Press"; and Porter, *Origins of the South African War*.
7. Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, 76–77.
8. Lee, *Origins of the Popular Press*, 161.
9. Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, 144–177.
10. Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture*, 58–59, 107–108; see also Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 4; and Griffiths, "The Wildest Oriental Romance," 12.
11. Quoted in Bates, *The Fashoda Incident*, 72.
12. Ibid., 155, 186.
13. Brown, *Victorian News*, 182–183; and Koss, *Rise and Fall of the Political Press*, vol. 1, 376.
14. Fenton, "Origins of Animosity," 368.
15. Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 13; see also Koss, *Rise and Fall of the Political Press*, vol. 1, 1–3; and Brown, *Victorian News*, 170–209.
16. Soulié, "Is the Free Press Free?," 102.
17. Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World*, 227.
18. Salisbury quoted in Darwin, "Nationalism and Imperialism," 9.
19. Brown, *Fashoda Reconsidered*, 97–99.
20. See Soulié, "Is the Free Press Free?," 77–102, for more on French public opinion and the Fashoda crisis.
21. Chaney, "A Symbolic Mirror of Ourselves," 249.
22. See Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property*, 73–4 and 260–315 for early British thinking about the public.
23. Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, 21–25, 29–36, 53–60; and Thompson, *British Political Culture*, 4.
24. McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, 284.
25. Quoted in Stead, "Jingoism in America," 334.
26. Ibid., 335, 341.
27. Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture*, 56.
28. Quoted in Cunningham, "Jingoism in 1877–78," 430.
29. Quoted in Summerfield, "Patriotism and Empire," 25.

30. See Morgan, "The Boer War and the Media," for a summary of some of the relevant literature.
31. Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, 206–207.
32. Ibid., 215.
33. Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, 28, 88.
34. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, 6–8.
35. Ibid., 33, 40.
36. Price, *An Imperial War*, 175–6; Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire* 1999, 27; and Hampton, "The Press, Patriotism, and Public Discussion".
37. Arnold, "Up To Easter," 638–639.
38. Thompson, *British Political Culture*, 114.
39. Rogers, "Liberal Imperialism and the Transvaal," 905–906.
40. Darwin, "Nationalism and Imperialism," 5.
41. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*.
42. Porter, *Origins of the South African War*.

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Simon J. Potter (author to whom correspondence should be addressed), Department of History, School of Humanities, University of Bristol, 11 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB, UK. Tel: +44 (0)117 9288117; Fax: +44 (0)117 3317933; E-mail: Simon.Potter@bristol.ac.uk