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Boers and Bores: International Delegations and Internal Debates

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Abstract
While the Boer War has been much chronicled for its famous battlefields such as Spion Kop, for its besieged towns from Ladysmith to Kimberley and Mafeking, and for its battle tactics of conventional and guerrilla warfare, there is as well the rather less recounted story of the 'barbarities' practiced by the various parties to the conflict, and of the British anti-war movement that the contest inspired. The beginning of the fighting in October 1899 came but a few months following the signing of the Hague Conventions I and II on the 'conduct of war', documents which heralded the twentieth century's subsequent compendium of international law, and the latter part of this century's emphases on 'human rights' and 'humanitarian intervention' in the protection of those rights. Campaigners in England at the time, therefore, such as Emily Hobhouse and W.T. Stead, and delegates from South Africa to Britain following the war, such as Sol Plaatje, suggest historical models for later political organizing, from the sanctions campaign of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, or the work of Amnesty International, to Jubilee 2000 and the argument against debt extraction from impoverished 'Third World' countries.
Boers and Bores: International Delegations and Internal Debates

While the Boer War has been much chronicled for its famous battlefields such as Spion Kop, for its besieged towns from Ladysmith to Kimberley and Mafeking, and for its battle tactics of conventional and guerrilla warfare, there is as well the rather less recounted story of the 'barbarities' practiced by the various parties to the conflict, and of the British anti-war movement that the contest inspired. The beginning of the fighting in October 1899 came but a few months following the signing of the Hague Conventions I and II on the 'conduct of war', documents which heralded the twentieth century's subsequent compendium of international law, and the latter part of this century's emphases on 'human rights' and 'humanitarian intervention' in the protection of those rights. Campaigners in England at the time, therefore, such as Emily Hobhouse and W.T. Stead, and delegates from South Africa to Britain following the war, such as Sol Plaatje, suggest historical models for later political organizing, from the sanctions campaign of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, or the work of Amnesty International, to Jubilee 2000 and the argument against debt extraction from impoverished 'Third World' countries. The nineteenth-century reports provide, as well, a documentary legacy connecting the last of the nineteenth century's 'colonial wars' to the late twentieth century's truth commissions and global political realignments and reassessments. This paper sets out to examine a number of these parallels and connections through an interleaving of some of the different documentary resources of the time.

On the eve of her deportation from South Africa, on 29 October 1901, Emily Hobhouse wrote to her brother Leonard Hobhouse from on board the Avondale anchored in Table Bay just off the coast of Cape Town:

All night I lay awake shuddering from head to foot with the effects of the shock, for oddly enough it was a shock and unexpected in that form. Then I began to see my way and brace myself to the battle.

I shall be very polite, very dignified, but in every way I possibly can a thorn in the flesh to them. I see already many ways of being a thorn. For instance, they don't want it much talked of in Cape Town and I mean that it shall be. We are to move into dock as soon as the gale subsides and I shall at once demand a guard;
partly because it is extremely disagreeable for Captain Brown to be my gaoler, and partly that the guard is their witness that I keep the rules laid down. Most of all because I understand they don’t want to do it because of making it conspicuous. I know soldiers hate guarding women. I also mean to refuse to return to England until such time as I myself feel willing and able, unless of course they send me under force of arms. I shall not move a limb in that direction. If the Avondale unloads immediately she will be able to continue her voyage in ten days’ time and then they must find another prison for me ... Anyhow I think they will find me a bore, polite but a bore, before we have done.1

The conflicted deportation procedures – her ‘humanitarian’ work on behalf of Boer women and children held in British camps had been deemed ‘politically’ inappropriate by the authorities in the colony – did succeed in the end, and despite her recalcitrance, in aborting Emily Hobhouse’s second trip to South Africa. She had only recently been there, reporting to the Committee of the South African Distress Fund from the concentration camps that the British had established as part of their prosecution of the war in South Africa from 1900, and she had subsequently spent the summer campaigning throughout England in the name of that same Committee on behalf of the camps’ unwilling inhabitants. She had, that is, already become something of a ‘bore’ to her pro-war critics.

Emily Hobhouse’s Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies, delivered to the Committee of the South African Distress Fund, was published as a ‘penny pamphlet’ in London in June 1901. The document includes her accounts of visits to the camps in Bloemfontein, Norvals Pont, Aliwal North, Springfontein, Kimberley, and Mafeking, along with her recommendations for improvements to be made in the living conditions of the camps’ inhabitants, and is accompanied by an extensive set of appendices comprising first-person testimonies from women internees, their applications for release, and the personal records of many of the women and their children who had been detained with them.

Emily Hobhouse’s Report of a Visit was but one of many such accounts from delegations to war-torn South Africa at the time, identifying perhaps a generically proto-human rights narrative at the turn-of-the-century. There were, as well, other and various contributions – literary, economic, and political – to the debate in England that was taking place around the conflict in southern Africa, from the patriotic plaidoyers for continued expansion by the ‘jingoes’, to the no less patriotic pleas for restraint on the part of the ‘little Enganders’, from Olive Schreiner’s manifestos and W.T. Stead’s ‘reviews of reviews’, to Arthur Conan Doyle’s apologias, Rudyard Kipling’s poems and stories, and Cecil Rhodes’s shareholder speeches.

Following the Boer War, imperial skirmishes gave way to World Wars and the emergence of international law (such as the precedent-setting Hague Conventions of 1899) as a new prescription for containing narratives of violence, and indeed violence itself. Emily Hobhouse’s reports from South Africa – and the controversy that they elicited at home – are importantly
symptomatic of this transition from constructions of empire as ‘civilizing mission’ in the late nineteenth-century, to the justifications of world war, cold war, and global politics as ‘humanitarian intervention’ at the end of the twentieth century – from the ‘scramble for Africa’, in other words, to the ‘scramble for contracts’. If Emily Hobhouse insisted on her mission as a humanitarian one, one that eschewed politics in the name of humane treatment for the victims of war on either – or any – side, W.T. Stead’s pamphleteering and journalistic interventions against the war were presented explicitly in the interest of protesting England’s non-observance of its political responsibilities, particularly as a signatory to the Hague Conventions concerning the ‘rules of war’. Both Hobhouse and Stead were pilloried by many of their contemporaries as ‘pro-Boer’ and anti-patriotic; neither, however, for all their humanitarian sentiments and expressed commitments to international law, sought to represent the concerns of the ‘natives’ of southern Africa, the ‘kaffirs’ as they were called by many, or the ‘Cape bastards’, as Stead would refer to others of the non-white southern Africans. And when the war was over, and the Treaty of Vereeniging signed in 1902, an Act of Union federating the provinces of South Africa would be ratified in 1910, to be shortly thereafter followed by the Natives’ Land Act of 1913, an act which effectively dispossessed, disenfranchised, and dislocated those ‘natives’ from their native land. Sol Plaatje, in a series of articles addressed to British readers and policy-makers, and based on his visits to much of the same territory that had been covered by Hobhouse a decade or so earlier, argued that these newly-made fugitives provided for a most ‘distressing sight’. ‘We had never,’ Plaatje went on to write, seen the like of it since the outbreak of the Boer War, near the Transvaal border, immediately before the siege of Mafeking. Even that flight of 1899 had a buoyancy of its own, for the Boer War, unlike the present stealthy war of extermination (the law [Natives’ Land Act] which caused the flight), was preceded by an ultimatum.²

Emily Hobhouse’s Report, W.T. Stead’s pamphlets and journalism – from The Truth About the War (1900), How Not to Make Peace (1900), to Methods of Barbarism (1901), The Best or the Worst of Empires: Which? (1906), and his editorializing in the Review of Reviews – and the essays in Sol Plaatje’s Native Life in South Africa (1916), argue variously and vociferously still for new approaches and alternative strategies for contesting imperial designs and neo-imperial legacies as centenaries are commemorated and as still another century turns.

Emily Hobhouse died in England on 8 June 1926, almost twenty-six years to the day after the women’s meeting in the Queen’s Hall in London on 13 June 1900, convened to protest the treatment of Boer women and children held in South African concentration camps. Her ashes, however, were
ceremoniously interred in a niche in the Women's Memorial erected in Bloemfontein in what was then the Orange Free State and is now South Africa's Northern Cape Province. The Queen's Hall meeting had been organized because, as Hobhouse wrote in her diary, 'We longed to protest publicly and it occurred to me that women, at least, might make a public protest without arousing undue criticism'. Emily would indeed eventually arouse 'undue criticism', but on 13th June 1900 the women's meeting was duly held in a full hall, and four resolutions were passed by the women in attendance and published in the *Westminster Gazette* on the following day:

1. That this meeting of women brought together from all parts of the United Kingdom condemns the unhappy war now raging in South Africa as mainly due to the bad policy of the Government - a policy which has already cost in killed, wounded and missing over 20,000 of our bravest soldiers, and the expenditure of millions of money drawn from the savings and toil of our people, while to the two small States with whom we are at war, it is bringing utter ruin and desolation.

2. That this meeting protests against the attempts to silence, by disorder and violence, all freedom of speech, or criticism of Government policy.

3. That this meeting protests against any settlement which involves the extinction by force of two Republics whose inhabitants, allied to us by blood and religion, cling as passionately to their separate nationality and flag as we in this country do to ours.

4. That this meeting desires to express its sympathy with the women of the Transvaal and Orange Free State and begs them to remember that thousands of English women are filled with profound sorrow at the thought of their sufferings, and with deep regret for the action of their own Government.

God Save the Queen.

Despite Emily Hobhouse's own resolve — and the resolutions approved at the meeting — the course on which she had embarked was a precipitously uncertain one. As she wrote,

Many had criticized it [the idea of the meeting] on the score of its uselessness for practical results. I had put this point before Mr. Courtney [a Liberal Unionist Member of Parliament and a friend of Emily's uncle Arthur Hobhouse] who replied that even when nothing practical could result it was always well to register calm, combined protest against injustice. It is, I feel, also well that the two former Republics should know, as a matter of history, that we women did so.

Such resolution though was not to be without its costs, both personal and political, as Emily would tell of it later in her diary: 'I lost the majority of the friends of my girlhood and it was a great loss. There was a divergence of principle at that time which broke many a bond, and taking up the work publicly I could not escape painful severances of old ties.' (p. 45) Four months later, however, in October 1900, she went on to assist remaining friends and build new alliances in the establishment and organization of the South African Women and Children Distress Fund; and, in December of that year, she departed on its behalf for a tour of South Africa. *Report of a Visit* is
the result in writing of her nearly six months’ visiting, and attempting to bring relief in the way of clothing and food to, the Boer women and children held in several of the concentration camps of the Cape and Orange River Colonies. In a prefatory letter to the _Report_, she appealed to her readers:

Will you try, somehow, to make the British public understand the position, and force it to ask itself what is going to be done with these people? ... If only the English would try to exercise a little imagination – picture the whole miserable scene. Entire villages and districts rooted up and dumped in a strange, bare place.  

Hobhouse’s travels and visits through the several colonies of South Africa, from the Cape to the Orange River, were carefully circumscribed, indeed at times obstructed, by the necessary permissions that she was required to obtain from both Lord Milner and General Kitchener, each of whom found her relief efforts suspect if not altogether out of line – and she in turn found their administrations and military efforts too little and too often too late. As Major John Hamilton Goold-Adams, for example, wrote to Milner in February 1901 concerning Emily’s activities, ‘Miss Hobhouse has been playing the dickens with the women in the camps ... creating a great deal of unrest by impressing upon such people the hardships they are enduring’. But Milner and Kitchener had by then their own reputations to live up to – or down. As Nora Hobhouse, Leonard’s wife, had written to her sister-in-law just a few days earlier in that same month: ‘It must be a terrible time too, you must have wished often you were not an English woman. We wonder what you will do with Kitchener, I am told he is horrid and hates women, and is very rude to them’. Emily Hobhouse was not, it would seem, living up to her proper roles either as an English subject or as a dutifully disciplined English woman, crossing lines that served ritually to divide private and public, and rightfully to separate Briton and Boer. She was, in other words, becoming all too boring to the South African authorities, the representatives of British imperialism, and their supporters at home.

_Report of a Visit_ is a documentary story of both passion and impatience, a narrative which stirred tempers and tested allegiances on its publication in war-time England in June 1901. It relates travel by truck and train from Cape Town across the Karoo to Kimberley and back again, past burnt out farms and scorched earth, alighting at camps and taking down the stories of hunger, disease, and exposure told by the Boer women. It was demanding work, as Emily would write on 22 January: ‘I think the essence of delightful work is when you quite forget you have a body, but here the heat keeps you in constant recollection that you are still in the flesh, and it’s a great hindrance’ (p. 3). As for the camps themselves, she went on in the same prefatory letter, ‘I call this camp system a wholesale cruelty ... To keep these Camps going is murder to the children. Still, of course, by more judicious management they could be improved; but, do what you will, you can’t undo the thing itself’ (p. 4). In the Bloemfontein camp, for example, Emily met a
Mrs M and her six children, all ill, her husband deported to Ceylon. At Norvals Pont, another camp, this one with a population of approximately 1000, there was less overcrowding, but the need for clothing for the children was ‘very great’ (p. 6), as it was at Aliwal North as well. Among her recommendations, ‘in view of the hardening effect of imprisonment upon the hearts and resolution of the women – of the imperfect supply of tents or other shelter – of the scarcity of food – the difficulty of transport – and the appalling effect of camp life upon the life and health of the people’ (p. 14), was this one, that ‘all who still can, should be at once allowed to go’ (p. 14).

By April, however, it was clear that it was Emily herself who must decide whether to go, return home, that is:

There were two courses open to me. To stay among the people, doling out small gifts of clothes, which could only touch the surface of the need, or to return home with the hope of inducing both the Government and the public to give so promptly and abundantly that the lives of the people, or at least the children, might be saved.8

Emily Hobhouse thus decided to return home, where she began a public campaign, speaking out at meetings across the English countryside, in Oxford, Leeds, Manchester, Southport, Bristol, Birmingham, Halifax, fifty public meetings all told, but not in London, where she was denied a venue. ‘Efforts to nullify my story’, she later wrote,

lest public opinion should be aroused, took two forms, viz. criticism of myself, and justification of the camps. I was labelled a ‘political agitator’ and a ‘disseminator of inaccurate and blood-curdling stories’. A discredited South African wrote insinuating that my mission had been political propaganda. My Report was described as a ‘weapon’ used wherever ‘the name of England was hated’ ... Finally, I was hysterical and put ‘implicit belief’ in all that was told me.9

Emily Hobhouse’s decision to ‘return home’ turned out to be an even more fateful decision than she had at first imagined, however, for, following on from that very public speaking campaign across England, she would not be allowed to set foot again on war-time South African shores – and was deported in October 1901 – ‘polite but a bore’ – to continue her work in London, not least on this occasion in protest against the mistreatment she had received off the coast of Cape Town, forcibly transferred from the R.M.S. Avondale to the troop-ship Roslin Castle and deported back to England under martial law. As she, who had sought in her mission and ministrations the ‘delightful work ... when you quite forget you have a body’, wrote to her co-worker in the Distress Fund, Caroline Murray, on 4 December 1901:

People are much excited about it but for myself I am still suffering so much from the shock that I feel callous – only dimly conscious that my carcass is thrown into the public arena and all the legal and political carrion crows will tear and rend and devour me. They say anyhow that if I lose my case it will necessitate
the re-definition of English law and that is necessary and useful. I, being only a female, and not deeply interested in an abstruse legal point, feel much more strongly the personal-outrage side of the question – 1st. Having a strange doctor forced upon me – 2nd. Not being allowed a week’s rest if even in prison before forced on a voyage for which I was unfit. That appeals most strongly to me and would I think to the mass of unlearned folk.10

Hobhouse’s humanitarian work had, after all, turned out to be, even if ‘boring’, nonetheless all too political.

* * *

In her An English South African’s View of the Situation (1899), Olive Schreiner concluded that it was not England, nor Africa, nor ‘the great woman’ (Victoria) herself, and certainly not the ‘brave English soldier’, who gained by war, much less the African inhabitants.11 J.A. Hobson was just as adamant in his challenge to the policies of the ‘new Imperialism’: ‘Aggressive Imperialism’, he wrote,

which costs the taxpayer so dear, which is of so little value to the manufacturer and trader, which is fraught with such grave incalculable peril to the citizen, is a source of great gain to the investor who cannot find at home the profitable use he seeks for his capital, and insists that his Government should help him to profitable and secure investments abroad.12

The British war effort in southern African, that is, required support at home as well, both for the economic outlay that was required and for the soldiery that had to be recruited. Similar contests had long characterized the propagation of the imperial project – from debates over the East India Company’s role in the Indian subcontinent, to the proprieties and improprieties of the Crimean War (1854-56), the reports of atrocities in the Belgian Congo, and the vexed rescue mission to General Gordon beleaguered in Khartoum in 1884-85. The policy debates, expressions of public opinion, and the popular protest that marked these imperial crises provide important documentation of the complex of issues that accompanied the continuation of empire and its discontinuous departures. These debates also created prototypes of the ‘public intellectual’. The discussion was particularly vituperous in autumn 1899, with the build up to and outbreak of the war. ‘Shall We Let Hell Loose in South Africa?’ was the banner to the Review of Reviews ‘Topic of the Month’ in September 1899. The article questioned priorities: where did the question of the Transvaal stand relative to the Dreyfus trial in France, for example, or with respect to the overcrowded condition of London’s poor, to take another example closer to home? In other words, how were politicians to secure popular support for an imperial war? ‘Impressions and Opinions’, in the December 1899 issue of The Anglo-Saxon Review, compared the South African crisis with the debacles of the Crimea and the 1857 Mutiny in India, and reminded the policy makers of the disastrous consequences of their previous
miscalculations and the mistake of underrating the power of the 'enemy'.
Stephen Wheeler, in the same issue, drew an analogy with the Sikh War of
1845-46, specifying the 'bewilderment of the public mind, the dubious
wisdom of people in power, the equivocal victory of troops attacked or
attacking at a disadvantage'. Empire had now a history, one that posed as
much of a threat as it might be said to hold out promises. The author of the
essay a year later in the same Anglo-Saxon Review, on 'The Poetry of the
South African Campaign', identified – and castigated – what had become a
literary history as well. Pointing to the role of poetry in time of war, he
lamented the lost 'opportunities of the present campaign'. Where once
Tennyson had ennobled the Crimean War with Maud, Rudyard Kipling, the
critic complained, had commercialized the South African campaign with
'The Absent-Minded Beggar', a poem that had become popular from the
street corner to the music hall, and that had indeed served to collect the
pennies needed to support the families of the soldiers fighting the Boer.

Each of 'em doing his country's work
(and who's to look after their things?)
Pass the hat for your credit's sake,
  pay–pay–pay!

But what had become of 'his country's work'? And for whose country was
'Tom' fighting an imperial war? And was he 'Tom Brown'? or 'Tommy
Atkins'? or someone altogether other? To the hero of a Kipling story, an
Indian in colonial service in South Africa, it was a 'Sahibs' War': 'Do not ...
herd me with these black Kaffirs', 'I am a Sikh - a trooper of the State.' He
continues, 'It is for Hind that the Sahibs are fighting this war. Ye cannot in
one place rule and in another bear service. Either ye must everywhere rule
or everywhere obey. God does not make the nations ringstraked. True-true­
true!'14

Breaker Morant, of the Australian Bushveldt Carbineers assigned to South
Africa, would see it differently still, 'scapegoated' as he was by the Empire
he fought for. Morant and several of his fellow Australians were court-
marshalled for shooting prisoners - under orders, they claimed at their trial,
from above, from Kitchener himself. Morant was hung for his deeds, but
Lieutenant George Witton was released. His account, Scapegoats of the
Empire (1907), is a narrative of the progressive loss of faith in the imperial
mission expressed in the story's opening paragraph:

When war was declared between the British and Boers, I, like many of my
fellow-countrymen, became imbued with a warlike spirit, and when reverses had
occurred among the British troops, and volunteers for the front were called for in
Australia, I could not rest content until I had offered the assistance one man
could give to our beloved Queen and the great nation to which I belong.15

The issue of the treatment of the prisoners of war was also central to
public discussion of the war, and crucial in mobilizing domestic opposition
to its prosecution. Emily Hobhouse’s 1901 *Report on the Camps* was followed by an official Ladies’ Commission on the Concentration Camps, headed by Millicent Fawcett. Hobhouse’s pamphleteering and public speaking, it seems, had been so effective in enlisting outrage and indignation across England toward the atrocities committed in the name of war in South Africa, that Fawcett, best known for her suffragist activism, was sent with a women’s delegation to counter the charges that Hobhouse had levelled. For Fawcett, the assignment was an ‘interruption’ to her work for the enfranchisement of women, but she too had to acknowledge the abuses to the civilian population, especially the Boer women and children, carried out by her countrymen. Not that the Boer women were without their own share in the struggle, Fawcett argued nonetheless, indicating that the very goods with which they had been charitably supplied served the enemy in the strife: ‘We did hear, however, that the Boer women were very expert in using candles as a means of signalling to their friends on commando in the quiet hours of the night’. But, she goes on, ‘I for one could not blame them if they did; if we had been in their position, should we not have done the same thing?’

Arthur Conan Doyle, meanwhile, had come to the defence of the British military offensive – which included executions, train hijackings and hostage taking, farm burnings, and the use of expansive and explosive (dumdum) bullets (outlawed at the Hague). *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct* (1902) claimed to be a full-length representation of the British case: ‘In view of the persistent slanders to which our politicians and our soldiers have been equally exposed, it becomes a duty which we owe to our national honour to lay the facts before the world’. Conan Doyle’s research in this project was perhaps not without a certain resemblance to the detective work of his sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, in defence of ‘national honour’ and the protection of a particular rule of law and order – and against the human rights reporting of Emily Hobhouse and other members of her committees.

When the war ended, in 1902, the question still remained of whether South Africa would be joined by a ‘closer union’ – or bound together through federated allegiances. However, in as much as the war had divided opinion in Britain and South Africa, the history of the war would militate against the forging of such allegiances – in both the long and the short terms.

* * *

‘Methods of barbarism’ as a description of some of the most egregious features of British military policy in the Boer War was first used by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in a dinner speech given on 14 June 1901 at the National Reform Union. It would be cited again and again in criticisms of the prosecution of the war, and was used by W.T. Stead as the title of his 1901 booklet, *Methods of Barbarism*: *The Case for Intervention*. Here Stead
argued,

we may regard the definitions of the Hague Conference as a historical record of the successive steps by which the experience of the soldier and the wisdom of the statesman have found it not only possible, but necessary to restrain the beast and fiend in man.\(^{18}\)

Stead was particularly adamant in disavowing Mr Brodrick’s claim in the House of Commons that ‘war is war’, and that the Hague Convention’s preambulatory proviso to the effect that ‘so far as military necessities permit’, might be used to justify the ‘methods of barbarism’ that were seen to have been implemented against the Boers of South Africa. As anticipated earlier, ‘Methods of Barbarism’ was not Stead’s first, nor would it be his last, contribution to a strident critique of both the ends and the means of the British engagement in the Anglo-Boer War. As editor of the influential Review of Reviews, which he took over in 1890 following a ten-year period with John Morley at the no less influential Pall Mall Gazette, he adamantly, repeatedly, and fulsomely reviewed the terms of the Hague Convention and their abuse by one of the Convention’s most prominent signatories: Great Britain. In The Truth About the War (1900), he ‘appealed to honest men’ to revile the ‘hoarse cry of vengeance for Majuba and the cynical appeals to the coarsest instincts of Imperial ambition and national selfishness’.\(^{19}\) In How Not to Make Peace: Evidence as to Homestead Burning Collected and Examined, published in 1900 by his Stop the War Committee, Stead claimed to be ‘rendering a public service by collecting within the covers of this pamphlet all the available evidence’. Following a summary of the relevant articles of the Hague Convention, Stead provided evidence not just from the Boers, but from Lord Roberts himself, from a British officer-in-command (who preferred to remain anonymous), from additional testimony from soldiers in the field, and from the published reports of newspaper correspondents. Lord Roberts, for example, is cited as declaring in one proclamation of 16 June 1900 his intention to ‘make the principal residents severally and jointly responsible for all damage done to railways, telegraphs, and railway and public buildings in their districts’. And a soldier from the Warwickshire Regiment is cited at length from his letter on 22 June 1901 to The Warwickshire Advertiser:

‘Then why did you burn the farms?’ ‘By the General’s orders. We used to have plenty of fun. All the rooms were ransacked. You can’t imagine what beautiful things there were there – copper kettles, handsome chairs and couches, lovely chests of drawers, and all sorts of books. I’ve smashed dozens of pianos. Half a dozen of us would go up to as fine a grand piano as ever I’ve seen. Some would commence playing on the keys with the butts of their rifles. Others would smash off the legs and panels, and, finally, completely wreck it. Pictures would be turned into targets, and the piano panels would be taken outside and used as fuel to boil our tea or coffee. And then we could enjoy ourselves if it was cold; but,’ he added ruefully, ‘it was generally hot – boiling hot. After this we would set the building on fire, and as we left, riding together or detached over the
sandy waste, we would see the flames rising up, and soon there would be nothing left but black, smouldering embers. We would do the same with the next farm we came across.'

Farm burning was not, Stead emphatically reiterated, 'how to make peace'.

Much as had happened in the case of Olive Schreiner, Stead's aggressive critiques of the British war in South Africa led eventually to the end of his friendship with Cecil Rhodes, for whom he had been the executor of one of his earlier wills. Stead visited South Africa in 1904, some two years after Rhodes's death and the signing of the peace treaty. Two years later still, in 1906, he published his retrospective considerations of the significance of the Anglo-Boer War for the history of the British imperial project and the prospects for its future ambitions. It was, he wrote in the Preface to *The Best or the Worst of Empires: Which?*, an 'opportune moment for confronting the British people with this question, What kind of Empire do they want?'. The South African War, he insisted, had been and continued to be the 'touchstone and the test of the suicidal lunacy of the Jingo Imperialists' (p. xii). Looking back, Stead saw the anti-war movement in England as the hope for a better future on that other continent:

> If the British flag is flying in South Africa ten years hence, it will be not because of the war, but because of the strenuous unflinching opposition offered to the war by a minority of the British people. (p. 146)

But no less important was the singular difference made by international conferences and conventions agreeing to arbitration and the observance of the 'rules of war':

> It is a very extraordinary thing how everything in South Africa always seems to bring us back to the Hague Conference. That great gathering of the representatives of all the States of the civilised world represents the highest point yet gained in the evolution of the conscience of mankind. (pp. 157-8)

W.T. Stead was a passenger on the ill-fated maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, and died at sea in April 1912. The war he so obstinately and tenaciously opposed was perhaps the last of Victoria's 'little wars', but it was also the preparation for global engagement. In 1914, there would be instead a world war, and all the more imperative would be the need for international agreements and disengagements. In 1919, the parties to that global conflict—including such unlikely consorts on behalf of 'self-determination' as Woodrow Wilson and V.I. Lenin—gathered at Versailles in France to conclude the peace arrangements. Among the agreements that they reached was the Treaty of Versailles, with its concluding section outlining the establishment of the League of Nations and proclaiming the 'rights of small nations' (Article 22). Participating in those discussions, and a drafter of the League's covenant, was Jan Smuts, a Boer leader, imperial and Commonwealth 'fix-it' man, and then president of the new Union of South Africa.
In the same year that W.T. Stead perished in the foundering of the *Titanic*, there was born in South Africa the South African Native National Congress (which would later become the African National Congress), formed in part to protest against the segregationist laws of the new South African Union. In 1913, however, the Natives' Land Act was passed, an act which dispossessed the native population and would remain in effect for nearly 80 years, until it was removed from the statute books in 1991, a year after Nelson Mandela's release from apartheid prison. In 1914, Sol Plaatje had been part of a deputation to England with the brief to present the 'native case' to the government and public opinion, seeking redress for the wrongs written into the legislation. As we have seen, *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) is in large part the documentary history of those wrongs as observed and reported by Plaatje in his travels across the Orange 'Free' State and the Transvaal where the most egregious consequences of the Act were in all too brutal evidence. Resident at Mafeking throughout the siege of that city from October 1899 to May 1900, Plaatje went on to record the trammelling of the rights of black South Africans that came from the Treaty of Vereeniging. His story, as he tells of it in his prologue, is a 'sincere narrative of a melancholy situation'.

Although Emily Hobhouse's mission was that of 'woman to woman', even if Briton to Boer, she did nonetheless – albeit briefly – take note of the equally difficult position of the 'natives' in the 'white man's war': 'With regard to the vexed question,' she wrote in the *Report*, 'of different nationalities, is it generally known at home that there are many large native (coloured) Camps dotted about? In my opinion these need looking into badly. I understand the death-rate in the one at Bloemfontein to be very high, and so also in other places, but I cannot possibly pay any attention to them myself'. Stead was less – if at all – interested in the affairs of the 'kaffirs', except to insist that they should not be armed under any circumstances and thereby pose a threat to the captured Boer women and children.

With the passage of the Natives' Land Act in 1913, according to Plaatje, 'South Africa [had] by law ceased to be the home of any of her native children whose skins are dyed with a pigment that does not conform with the regulation hue'. The Act, designed perhaps to provide cheap labour for the diamond and gold mines for which, some argue, the Boer War had been waged, made it a criminal offence for any white farmer-landlords to provide tenancy on their land to native occupants. Only black servants were to be lawful, and these men must relinquish their livestock to the land's owners, while their wives would be required to carry passes if they were to leave the land for travel to towns or to other farms. If Emily Hobhouse took a certain chagrined pleasure in her role as 'polite but a bore', Plaatje was no less concerned lest his accounts of the 'experiences of the sufferers would make monotonous reading if given individually' (p. 25). Tell the stories, he does, however, and he provides the documentary evidence and passionate pleading that, like W.T. Stead's Stop the War movement and Emily
Hobhouse’s Committee of the South African Distress Fund a decade-and-a-half earlier, would anticipate the reviews of truth commissions and centenary commemorations at the end of the coming century.

Polite but boring? Or monotonous? Perhaps, but the histories need retelling. And the legacies must live before they can be laid again to rest.

NOTES