GENERAL "CHINESE" GORDON'S LAST STAND: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND HERO WORSHIP IN THE AGE OF IMPERIALISM

Braxton North

"Now mark this, if the expeditionary force - and I ask for no more than 200 men - does not come in ten days, the town may fall; and I have done my best for the honour of our country. Good-bye." -- C.G. Gordon, Extract from Diary, December 14th, 1884.[1]

On January 26, 1885 Charles George Gordon, on the steps of his palace in Khartoum, Sudan, made his last stand against an onslaught of Ansar Warriors determined to kill the man who had kept them at bay for 317 days.[2] Having survived the Crimean War and siege of Sevastopol and defeated the Tai-ping rebels in China, the "heroic Christian soldier and single-hearted English gentleman," was beheaded in "defence of England's honour" and

[1] Charles C. Gordon, *General Gordon's Khartoum Journal*, ed. Lord Elton (New York: Vanguard Press, n.d.), 220.

[2] "General Gordon," *Times*, February 12, 1885; See: Harold E. Raugh, *British Military Operations in Egypt and the Sudan: A Selected Bibliography* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2008). Raugh provides citations for the Anglo-Egyptian war, Gordon, Kitchener, and access to journals, letters and autobiographies.

presented to the Mahdi.[3] Dispatched by the British cabinet of W.E. Gladstone to relieve the Egyptian soldiers in Khartoum, under the nominal authority of Evelyn Baring in Cairo, he defended to the last his personal fate and imperial duty. The lone Englishman "against the tides of darkness," "our youngest saint fell dead, sword in one hand and axe in the other."[4]

Muhammad Ahmed ibn Abdullah Allah, Gordon's opponent, arose out of the mystical Sufi ascetic tradition and became known as a *mujaddid* (Mahdi) or, "renewer of the Muslim faith."[5] The young mystic slowly nurtured a Sudanese nationalist rebellion that targeted foreign garrisons and Anglo-Egyptian forces from 1881 to 1898. His followers sacked military barracks and towns, removed Egyptian administrators, and left British General Hicks dead in the desert along with ten thousand Egyptian soldiers. The Mahdi served the indigenous call for a separate course, a non-European nationalism born from a native response to foreign neglect and mismanagement. These two fatalistic and strident men will forever represent the nineteenth-century atmosphere of sensationalist literary imperialism.[6] Their lives progressed the narrative of heroes and villains within the British context of racial hierarchy and

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[3] Elizabeth Charles, *Three Martyrs of the Nineteenth Century: Studies from the Lives of Livingstone, Gordon, and Patteson* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 214; and W.T. Stead, "In Memoriam," *The Pall Mall Gazette,* February 11, 1885. Note: quotations will often apply original English spellings, in addition, the province Sudan is often spelled in its original French or Soudan by the British.

[4] Cynthia F. Behrman, "The After-Life of General Gordon," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 3 (Summer 1971): 50; and Lucas Malet, "The Youngest of the Saints" *Fortnightly Review* (Jul 1-Dec 1, 1885): 410.

[5] Robert O. Collins and Robert L. Tignor, *Egypt and the Sudan* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 76.

[6] Kate Campbell, "W.E. Gladstone, W.T. Stead, and Matthew Arnold and a New Journalism: Cultural Politics in the 1880s," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 36 (1880): 22.

"unequal relations of power."[7] Gordon's hero-martyr narrative and the Mahdi's role as the desert jihadist were initiated and cemented in the 1880s.

On that fateful day, a relief party of British soldiers led by Colonel Wilson cautiously approached Khartoum by steamer down the Nile. Their arrival two days late started a chain of communications covered by news wires within the week.[8] Speculation, "melodrama," symbolism and a treasure trove of sensationalist literature soon followed.[9] The previous success of Henry Morton Stanley's exploits to save the missionary explorer David Livingstone had awoken the British imperial public and publishers to the potential to narrate the symbolic meaning of their home-grown adventurers.[10] Historian David Spurr defines this relationship as an "ideological link between commercial exploitation and moral improvement among the races."[11] Gordon became the first British mercenary to find himself at the confluence of all these effects, making him a modern imperial hero of the people, press, and national imagination.

Once transmitted over the telegraph lines from Cairo to London, a cultural process of interpretation and integration led to Gordon's story becoming cemented in the myth of British cultural and racial superiority. The Mahdist uprising consumed and reformulated a racial hierarchy inherent in the contemporary source rhetoric. Through the "fantasy of dominance and appropriation" Gordon's story contributed to the "formation of a

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[7] Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

[8] Alan Moorehead, *The White Nile* (New York: Perennial, 2000), 260.

[9] Campbell, 25; and W.T. Stead "Government by Journalism," *The Contemporary Review* 49 (1886).

[10] Daniel Liebowitz and Charles Pearsons, *The Last Expedition: Stanley's Mad Journey through the Congo* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005). David Livingstone (d. 1873) was a British missionary and explorer of Africa seeking the source of the Nile. Henry Morton Stanley was hired to search for Livingstone and report his adventures to the *New York Herald*.

[11] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 33.

colonial actuality existing at the heart of British metropolitan life."[12] How did Gordon end up in this predicament? More importantly, how did Gordon come to represent the imperial culture of Britain? His status as a martyr for the imperial cause has endured. Understanding the historical debate surrounding the Mahdi and Gordon's legacy requires consideration of new interpretations while applying a cultural and post-imperial literary analysis of news articles, art, cartoons, popular literature, biographies, Parliamentary transcripts, and transnational news coverage.[13] Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose posed the question, how was imperialism understood at home, and did people think imperially?[14] This analysis of Gordon's history proposes to explore how the hero narrative contributed to the British public's imperial awareness of themselves and the "Other."

Adventurers, generals, or politicians alone do not create empires; they are formulated in the metropole and colonies with the populace supporting the structures, rhetoric, and racial ideals espoused by those with the power to imprint these principles. These facets create a self-sustaining loop of support that empowers imperial culture. The social and political influence of the press reached a willing and well-versed audience.[15] Government policies changed, crowds wept, telegraphs and accusations circumnavigated the globe, all eagerly read by consumers craving news of Africa and the unknown. Grasping the rhetoric of the era allows historians to witness the colonial discourse through imperial literary journalism and sensational hero-worship. The advantages to this approach include a more complete picture of the cultural atmosphere and a greater

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[12] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 60; and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 9. Imperialism is not a simple "act of accumulation and acquisition," it is supported by forms of knowledge and vocabularies that reinforces the greater imperial "struggle over geography." 9, 5.

[13] See: W.T. Stead, *Gladstone: Biographical and Pictorial 1809-1898*, (London: William Clowes, n.d.).

[14] Hall and Rose, 2.

[15] Ibid., 1.

imperial context for Gordon's hero status and the rise of an imperial identity.

In researching General Gordon, the British Government of Gladstone, "new journalism," and the projection of power in Sudan, a common narrative emerges concerning how the press and public worked in tandem to both promote imperialism and the public worship of martyrs for the empire.[16] General Gordon's death represents a moment in history when the telegraph line from Cairo to London stimulated the growth of British new journalism. Sensationalized articles written by W.T. Stead and Henry Morton Stanley allowed for the rise of the metropole's awareness of the empire. The British Imperial culture worked in tandem with these influential men to create the rhetoric of empire that was self-sustaining, self-justifiable and deeply embedded within the public's perceptions of how and why Britain needed to maintain prestige and power in the colonies.

For nearly a hundred years numerous historians have examined the death of Gordon with the intention of finding blame for the debacle. Many sources acknowledge the role the press and public played in endorsing Gordon's appointment to Khartoum. Theoretical works by Pratt, Said, Spurr, Anderson, and Hall examined the rhetoric of empire and its influence on the public, which made this imperial moment tangible. How did Gordon become and remain a national hero but also a fatalistic adventurer? Movies, art, statues, biographies and monographs depict a British hero created to serve the community.[17] General Gordon died at the hands of "savages" and "fanatics" who threatened to overthrow the British-Egyptian rule in the Sudan.[18] This perception threatened the entire British Imperial system. It is important to understand why and how these anxieties existed and to what extent they required a public hero to assure Britain of its privileged place in the imperial discourse.

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[16] Charles Williams, "Gordon: How we Lost Gordon," *Fortnightly Review* 43 (January 1885): 689.

[17] See: Bernard Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan (*London: MacMillan, 1931); and Mary Louise Pratt.

[18] Winston Churchill, *The River War: An Account of the Reconquest of the Sudan* (New York: Award Books, 1964), 30.

Egypt first came into contact with European ambitions in 1798 when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Mamluk Egypt with the intention of cutting off British access to the overland route to India.[19] His imperial retinue was composed of the finest French scholars of the age who sought to open Egypt to the European model of economic exploitation. These scholars included hydrologists, historians, linguists and engineers who planted the seeds of the "modern experience of the Orient as interpreted from within the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon."[20] This military projection of power allowed France to describe, define, create and disseminate the Orientalist imagery within the framework of an objective metropole-based scientific inquiry. All this data, deemed by Said to be the "great collective appropriation of one country by another," resulted in the twenty-three-volume *Description de l'Egypte*.[21] The powers inherent in the naturalization, description, classification, negation, and appropriation of the "Other" granted Europe the ability to displace Egyptian history and determine its future.

The departure of the French from Egypt under the guns of Admiral Nelson permitted the rise of Viceroy Muhammad Ali (1805-48), who led a significant project of modernization and military reform. Ali utilized a European industrialization template and economic models that propelled Egypt beyond the Ottomans in terms of strength. By 1821 his annexation of Sudan left him in control of the Nile into Equatoria. In 1840, Ali turned against the Ottomans, which resulted in European intervention and an imposed peace treaty stipulating Egyptian autonomy. Ali's efforts quickly diminished after his military reversals and under his predecessors, Abbas and Said.[22] In 1863, the

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[19] Collins, 50; and H.D. Traill, *England, Egypt, and the Sudan* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1900).

[20] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 87.

[21] Ibid., 84.

[22] Collins, 60: Abbas (1848-54), established Egypt's first railroad. Said (1854-63), provided Ferdinand de Lesseps with the Suez Canal project concessions. The concessions granted to de Lesseps stipulated that Egypt was to provide the labor and any lands that bordered the waterway. Ismail appealed to Napoleon III for these concessions to be rescinded; however,

European-educated Ismail Pasha resumed Ali's modernization drive claiming that, "Egypt was becoming an extension of European civilization."[23] Egyptian cotton exports to Europe during the American Civil War blockade of the South aided these efforts. In response, the Egyptian government borrowed at a rapid pace; unfortunately, depressed postwar cotton prices quickly ruined the economy.

Nineteenth-century Egypt and Sudan suffered from their close association with Britain's quest for imperial security and prosperity. In 1869, after ten years and 287 million gold francs, the Egyptian government completed the Suez Canal. By 1875, under pressure from European debt collectors Ismail sold the canal to the British for four million pounds. In 1876, the Debt Commission assumed control of Egypt's economic affairs and promoted Ismail's son Tewfik to replace his ineffectual father.[24] Under the frugal liberal government of William Gladstone, British colonial administrators flooded Cairo and established an empire on the cheap.[25] Britain now controlled of Sudanese affairs through their ownership of Egyptian debt and foreign policy. When nationalist military officer Ahmed Arabi rebelled in 1881, the British Parliament under Gladstone acted swiftly to put down the insurgency.[26] Simultaneously, the Mahdi's rebellion slowly peeled away territory from Egyptian control.

General Charles "Chinese" Gordon epitomized the heroic Christian saint martyred while defending the honor of country and humanity. Portrayed as a Lancelot figure or Herculean model, Gordon was earlier employed by Ismail Pasha

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in exchange Napoleon demanded 84 million francs, which put a heavy financial burden on Ismail's government. By 1875 Egypt was bankrupt.

[23] Ibid., 60.

[24] P.M. Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent: 1516-1922, A Political History* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966).

[25] See: Wilfred S. Blunt, *Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events (*New York: A.A. Knopf, 1922); and Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone's Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935).

[26] Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 271.

in 1874 to govern the Equatoria province, partially secured by the adventurer Samuel Baker in 1871.[27] His commission involved aiding Egypt in its duties to the Anglo-Egyptian Slave Trade Convention by thwarting slavery in the Bunyoro region of equatorial Africa.[28] By extension, Egypt sought to gain suzerainty over the province along the Nile. On the day Gordon left for his post, word of Britain's beloved David Livingstone's death surfaced in the news, which passed the adventurer torch to him.

Past historians viewed the Mahdist uprising as a response to corrupt foreign rule combined with localized religious zeal. Contemporary historians describe the "mysterious desert mullah's" "fanaticism," "intensity," or his "malignancy" as related to Islam.[29] Unfortunately, the debate over the Mahdi's actions often ignores nationalist impulses and his true motivations remains clouded under an imposed history. Gordon, Blunt and other anti-imperialist authors initially praised the uprising in Sudan.[30] The imperialist perspective ended up in the history books with the Mahdi's actions described as a jihad against the civilizing mission of both England and Egypt.

A critical history of General Gordon's demise has fascinated historians, biographers, and journalists for over a century. Nineteenth-century authors rushed to tap into the curiosity of the public and express the "spirit and patriotism of the country."[31] Other authors sought to tell an accurate version of

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[27] Achmed Abdullah and Compton T. Pakenham, *Dreamers of Empire* (London: George G. Harrap, 1930), 213; and *Archives of Empire Volume II: The Scramble for Africa* ed. Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile* (New York: Perennial, 1962).

[28] Moorehead, *The White Nile*, 178.

[29] Daniel Allen Butler, *The First Jihad: The Battle For Khartoum and the Dawn of Militant Islam* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2007), viii.

[30] Charles C. Coe, *General Gordon in a New Light: The Cause of War and the Advocate of Peace* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1885); and Charles, 215; "They [Ansar] are quite right to rebel."

[31] "The War in the Soudan," *Times*, February 10, 1885.

the events while often succumbing to tropes and egos inherent in the age of imperialism.[32] Unfortunately, authors and historians in the twentieth-century have relied on these writings in their analysis of Gordon while propelling the narrative of blame, heroism, and controversy in their search for the events that caused this national disaster. Historians grappled with his contradictory nature in an attempt to fault him or the British Ministers who sent him to achieve an Arthurian task in Khartoum.[33] To better understand the events of this era, a greater focus on the cultural atmosphere of imperialism is necessary. The national narrative that led to Gordon's death was determined in the era of imperialism when Europeans believed in divine providence, the White Man's Burden, and the inherent superiority of the European civilization over the barbarian past.

Most nineteenth-century authors viewed Gordon as a national hero who fought bravely for Great Britain. Sir William Butler proclaimed that he was "the picture of a wonderful life…made perfect by a heroic death."[34] Charles Coe stands out as one contemporary author who notes: "It is a curious moral phenomenon that this is the man whom the English nation hails as its typical hero."[35] By the turn of the century, and during the inter-war years, authors and historians began to examine Gordon as the cause of the disaster. In 1918, biographer Lytton Strachey described Gordon as an "Eminent Victorian," "a contradictious person-even a little off his head, perhaps, though a hero."[36] Some of his contemporaries critiqued this interpretation of the mission;

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[32] Slatin Pasha, *Sword in the Sudan: A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes: 1879-1895*, trans. Major F.R. Wingate (London: University Press 1896); and Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), *Modern Egypt: Volume 1* (London: Macmillan, 1908).

[33] W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, January 9, 1884.

[34] Lieut.-General Sir William F. Butler, *Charles George Gordon* (New York: MacMillan, 1893), 252.

[35] Coe, 21.

[36] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (New York: Modern Library, 1918), 341.

however, Strachey is often credited with first finding fault with Gordon's *raison d' entre*.

Unfortunately, authors promoting the Gordon versus Gladstone and British Government debate lacked insight into the literary rhetoric of the imperial culture. For example, Achmed Abdullah recalled the nineteenth-century hero worship that surrounded Gordon. Blaming the "rheumatic old generals and smooth talking Under-secretaries," he set out to praise the chivalry, honor, and humility of Gordon, lamenting his demise at the hands of the government.[37] Historians Bernard Allen (1931) and Lord Elton (1954) provided a modern scholarly approach to the subject and debate. Allen espoused the sober narrative based on extensive research and Elton showed a bias favoring the actions of Gordon over government policies. Elton portrays Gladstone's policy of non-intervention as the cause of failure in Khartoum.[38]

Post-imperial historians Anthony Nutting, Cynthia Behrman, Alan Moorehead and Gerald French offer critical insights into Gordon and the Anglo-Egyptian relationship. Nutting finds Gordon in a "selfish pursuit of his destiny," while French viewed him as having a complete "disdain for all earthly benefits or profit."[39] These authors chart new avenues of research while leaving the national context untouched. This perception of Gordon provides many clues into how his death found sanctuary in the public mind. Behrman deserves credit for first exploring the hero, public, and press dynamic. She carefully traverses the "nature of hero worship" and examines the public's "ethos" during the siege.[40] Consequently, recent scholars are critiquing past Gordon biographers and historians and are beginning to examine unique British, imperial, and rhetorical traits.

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[37] Abdullah, 261.

[38] Lord Elton, *General Gordon* (St. Jame's Place, London: Collins, 1954), 371.

[39] Anthony Nutting, *Gordon of Khartoum: Martyr and Misfit* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1966), 4; and Gerald French, *Gordon Pasha of the Sudan: The Life Story of an Ill-Requited Soldier* (Glasgow: McLellan, 1958), 15.

[40] Behrman, 47.

Historians Kate Campbell, Paul Auchterlonie, Lawrence James, and Daniel Butler brought Gordon's history into the post-modern era. Cultural and social history enlivened the discourse on the events in Khartoum. For example, Auchterlonie examines the formation of national opinion and notions of cultural superiority while Campbell analyzes new journalism and the "symbolic" and "social and political power of [the] press."[41] To aid the ongoing debate, the contributions of post-modern and cultural historians need to be applied to the imperial discourse, literary rhetoric, and hero-worship surrounding Gordon and Britain's involvement in Sudanese-Egyptian affairs.[42]

Edward Said's works provide the foundation to understanding how Gordon "contributed to the formation of a colonial actuality existing at the heart of metropolitan life."[43] Pratt describes the colonial contact zones and the subordination of marginal groups through transculturation.[44] While focused on travel writing and natural history, her analysis of how westerners minimize the "Other" and create systems of racial hierarchy reminds scholars that biases may arise from how the British viewed their role in saving the Sudan. Spurr coalesces these two seminal authors and traces how through binary and post-modern analysis rhetorical tropes defining the Other are regularly applied in literature.[45] His analysis relegates the Mahdi to the periphery while the European perspective assigns inherited rhetoric and knowledge to an Islamic-nationalist insurgency. Reading literature and newsprint concerning Gordon and Imperial Britain

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[41] Paul Auchterlonie, "From the Eastern Question to the Death of General Gordon: Representations of the Middle East in the Victorian Periodical Press, 1876-1885," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (May 2001): 11; and Campbell, 21.

[42] Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002).

[43] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 9.

[44] Pratt, 6.

[45] See: Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*.

requires a diverse, multinational, and cultural approach. Movies, paintings, statues, and political cartoons have enhanced his hero-status, compelling historians to examine nearly every angle.[46] This essay incorporates these past monographs into four themes: Gordon in the Imperial context; new journalism and public opinion; public and literary hero-worship; and imperial anxieties and the essentializing of the Sudanese and their aspirations for independence.

General Gordon, "The brave and noble man," succumbed to the siege of Muhammed Ahmed while under the watchful eye of the British public.[47] His view of Ahmed and the British motivations fluctuated during the siege. In September 1884, he wrote, "Note that I do not call our enemy rebels, but Arabs, for it is a vexed question whether we are not the rebels."[48] His observations as an evangelical Christian often tempered his views of humanity while his imperial methodology and identity forced both a diplomatic and military divide.[49] In the tone of debasement he wrote, "if it were not for the honour's sake of our nation, I would let these people slide," representing an appropriation of power and the removal of Sudanese national rights. His paramount authority arose within the context of British hegemony and from his past experiences leading indigenous armies. This discourse of power took hold in the rhetoric of the imperial publications that both strengthened and repeated this mantra. In Gordon's own words he exposed this sentiment when he stated, "I taught the natives that they had a right to exist…I had taught them something of the meaning of liberty and justice."[50]

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[46] Basil Deardon, dir., *Khartoum*, DVD (United Kingdom: Julian Blaustein Productions, United Artists Corporation, 1966); Merian C. Cooper and Lothar Mendes, dirs., *The Four Feathers*, DVD (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1929).

[47] "The War in the Soudan: Reported Death of General Gordon" *Times,* February 11, 1885.

[48] Gordon, 39.

[49] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 51.

[50] Stead, "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan," *The Century: A Popular Quarterly* 28, August, 1884.

Others had a more politically sympathetic ear to the Mahdi while holding onto cultural tropes. Blunt and Gordon agreed that his motivations were reasonable and during an interview for Stead, Gordon stated "that the people were justified in rebelling."[51] This nuanced perspective rarely reached the public. The everyday empire in the metropole felt itself impervious to cultural contact while constructing boundaries to remain separate from the colonized. Paternalism and opinion mattered in the London dailies. After Gordon's death the effort to minimize the nationalism inherent in the Mahdi's actions and the Sudanese right to sovereignty grew stronger. When portraying Gordon and Muhammad Ahmed's personalities, Winston Churchill declared that, "The Arab was an African reproduction of the Englishman; the Englishman a superior and civilized development of the Arab."[52] Churchill asserted that "European civilization can penetrate the inner darkness" of the African wilderness, which helps to explain his efforts to naturalize and essentialize the Sudanese.[53] These views prevailed during the twentieth-century assessment of the uprising. Gordon's personality overshadowed the imperialistic nature of his endeavors in Sudan. Primary sources illustrate how writers portrayed his civilizing mission in Sudan. Blake stated, "Empire follows Art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose," which an examination of General Gordon's admirers and critics show.[54] Rudyard Kipling wrote of the Ansar, "So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your 'ome in the Soudan; You're a pore benighted 'eathen but a first-class fightin' man."[55] The Sudanese voices are removed from the literature and physical, moral, and cultural attributes and are assigned to them by the authors.

Historian Jenny Lewis finds that "it was in the commercially attractive atmosphere of political controversy, moral indignation, fevered hero-worship, and banal sentiment of

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[51] W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan," and W.S. Blunt, *Gordon at Khartoum* (London: Stephen Swift and Co., 1911).
[52] Churchill, 26.
[53] Ibid., 15.
[54] Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 10.
[55] Rudyard Kipling, "Fuzzy-Wuzzy," in *The Works of Rudyard Kipling* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 622.

the years 1884-5 that the majority of books about Gordon were produced."[56] A crisis had shaken the empire "from the sphere of ideological hegemony into the openly negotiable realm of public opinion" with consequences for government policy and public responses.[57] Gordon's role in the civilizing mission was paramount to his audience back home. With the myth of his anti-slavery crusade supporting him, the public anticipated his victory over "savages" and his attempts to "open up a valuable country to civilization and commerce."[58] If Gordon could not achieve this victory then a British relief column must be sent to extricate the general and preserve British pride. The press and public led the charge and applied hero status before any climatic finale and before the politicians took notice.

The memory of African traveler Livingstone, the fate of the Mahdi's European prisoners, and Hick's death all weighed heavily on the British sense of self. The Mutiny in 1857, the loss of Afghanistan, and encroaching conflicts with Europe or Russia in the East became infused with an orchestrated response by the press, yet widely accepted by the people, the Queen, and the opposition in Parliament.[59] New journalism marked Gordon's rise and fall and firmly established the narrative and subsequent rhetoric for future historians. For example, artist George Joy wrote, "On they come, those white-clad, ragged Dervishes, who have swarmed across the river, filled the town, and are even now pouring into the courtyard of the Palace, surging up the steps and almost to the very feet of their victim."[60] Descriptions like these

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[56] Jenny Lewis, "The Gordon Papers," *The British Museum Quarterly* 28 Autumn, (1964): 75.

[57] Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, *Introduction*, 23.

[58] "The War in the Soudan," *Times*, February 10, 1885.

[59] Elton, 386 and 389.

[60] George William Joy, *General Gordon's Last Stand*, oil on canvas, 1893, Leed's Art Gallery, http://www.artmagick.com/pictures/picture.aspx?id (accessed May 17, 2011); "It is stated by eye-witnesses that, overawed by the calm dignity of his presence, they hesitated for a moment to approach nearer. It is this moment that is chosen for illustration--the pause between the mad rush of the fanatics, which overwhelmed the General and the two or three

display how England envisioned Gordon's predicament. The symbolism of animal behavior threatening Britain's heroes indicates the prejudice against indigenous Africans. Within this imperial culture, the sensational symbolism of new journalism added meaning to the status of the hero and imperial identity. Artists, authors, historians, and Gordon's superiors all subscribed to this essentializing narrative while elevating the hero to fit the public's ideals and morals. Descriptions of the Ansar as savage fanatics or Gordon as a stoic, honorable, and moral figure represents a preservation of the British sense of racial and cultural superiority and imperial identity.

The completion of the telegraph line in the 1870s contributed to the rise of new journalism and shaped the public's imagination of Britain's hero adventurers.[61] Journalists realized the power and profit in the adventure narrative and the role of the British hero in popular culture. This authority of print extended beyond the public to include influence over national governance. Gladstone's popularity depended on his liberal use of melodramatic public oration and manipulation of favorable press. Many historians acknowledge the role of newsprint in shaping the events surrounding Britain's involvement in Sudan. Journalists, artists, and authors played an important role in the power structure of empire and they proceeded to both create heroes and benefit financially from their stories or untimely deaths.

Was new journalism propaganda? Abdullah claimed that, "those were the days before propaganda became a fine art; the days before paragraphists, press agents, writers of social gossip, and similar specialists could make or mar a reputation."[62] Noteworthy news articles disagreed, noting "immense competition for news," and that Gordon's predicament was the "only topic discussed."[63] Lord Elton found that the press "poured

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trusty followers who were all he would allow himself from the outer defences of the city."

[61] Moorehead, *The White Nile*, 247.

[62] Abdullah, 249.

[63] Williams, 689; and "London Amazed and Mad: Gladstone Roundly Denounced Great Disasters Feared," *New York Times,*

out romantic accounts of Gordon's spectacular achievements," which progressed the imperial hero narrative.[64] News of his death "flashed to a world which for months had drawn its breath in suspense."[65] Individuals versed in imperial rhetoric, propaganda, and symbolism molded changes to the national-imperial identity.

"Feather-brained" new journalism provided a "social and political power" to the press."[66] Over the course of the 1880s these journalists gained traction through collusion with the politicians while simultaneously claiming solidarity with the masses and assuring their readers, "They are nearer the people…the wielders of real power will be those who are nearest the people."[67] Stead wrote of the power of this new journalism stating that, "For the purpose of moulding a constituency into his own way of thinking, the editor has every advantage on his side."[68] Concerning the professional quality of this form of reporting, he claimed that "Sensationalism in journalism is justifiable."[69] An article in London's *Times* exuded sensationalist rhetoric, urging readers to "think only of the grief of England, tortured by the fate of General Gordon."[70] Gordon epitomized the literary transference of the physical body into a representation of the national body.

Secondary sources often reverted to these inherited tropes noting the clash that came to define the cultural contact between a modern secular society and the presumed stagnant religious tradition of Islam.[71] This colonial discourse was not

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February 6, 1885; and "The Situation on the Nile," *Times*, February 6, 1885.

[64] Elton, 352.

[65] John Buchan, *Gordon at Khartoum*, (London: Peter Davies, 1934), in *Archives of Empire Volume II: The Scramble for Africa*, 616-621 (see note 27), 619.

[66] Campbell, 21.

[67] Stead, "Government by Journalism."

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "The Fall of Khartoum," *Times*, February 6, 1885.

[71] Afshin Matin-asgari, "Islamic Studies and the Spirit of Max Weber: A Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (Fall 2004): 293.

simply "transferred or imposed" on the next generation.[72] For example, Stead's efforts excited a populace who had become increasingly reliant on the immediate satisfaction provided by the telegraph and the popular dailies. Africa represented new opportunities for the ambitious men of empire. News from Africa both terrified and consumed Britain's young men. Gordon served as their proxy to the unknown. Soon after his return from the rebellion in China he found fame with Britain's abolitionists while employed by Egypt's free spending and expansionist pasha.[73] He served as an example of how to achieve greatness conquering Britain's enemies and those perceived as barbarous and un-civilized.

The hero-identity within the comparative contexts of race, empire, and the Other shows how the adventurous male solidified Britain's vision of racial superiority while exciting the reading public with frequent updates and tales of heroism. "England has not been made by her statesmen, Whig or Tory, but by her gentlemen adventurers," claimed Abdullah. [74] Consolidated in the arts and literature, Gordon became a household name for many generations of English students. Art in the form of political cartoons stood by the hero motif and denigrated the perceived government bumbling of the evacuation. Literature praised the motivations of the imperial expedition and civilizing mission while finding room to critique the finer arguments of policy, orders, and conflicting personalities. For example, *Times* journalists wrote that, "One heard only the name of the hero, devoted, simple, obeying without fear, without selfishness, sacrificing all to the cause of civilization and of his country-in short, to the cause of humanity."[75]

Art created to memorialize Gordon often showed the hero at the moment the Ansar warriors approached him. With steely determination and resolve he "fac[ed] alone the fanaticism of the Soudan."[76] These works of art and their depictions of the

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[72] Hall and Rose, 6.
[73] Moorehead, 199.
[74] Abdullah, 229.
[75] "The Fall of Khartoum," *Times*, February 6, 1885.
[76] Ibid.

Ansar or Sudanese expose the perception the British had of Africans in general. Often portrayed in less detail, their bodies blend together in a mob of color and shining steel with fanatical expressions on their faces. Compare this with the calm resolve of Gordon on the canvas and Britain's self-image and sense of superiority become evident.

Gordon's nihilistic belief in God's will led his biographers to note, "Fate, by token of his inheritance, willed that his trade should be the trade of the sword and the drums…and die with his boots on facing the foe."[77] His ability to push to the last breath in light of enormous odds and with "a smile on [his] lips" endeared him to the public.[78] "The age of Chivalry is not dead" claimed the London *Times*.[79] Others noted that he "embod[ied] in himself not the guilt but the highest aspirations of his society."[80] These sentiments provided a voice for the public's perceptions of themselves within the empire. Beyond the corrupting power of politics or privilege, and only ruled by his sense of duty to God and country, Gordon achieved heroic status. Britain's sense of spiritual and cultural superiority found expression in the news and print of 1885. The *Times* reported that "These nations, especially Oriental ones, have a hankering for idols," and that, "They had made of him a god" [81] Adulation and celebration with women seeking to kiss his feet met the returning imperial savior as he entered the city.[82] For Gordon to fit the imperial hero model he needed to manifest this Christian symbolism.

Journalists of the 1880s recognized Gordon as a "heroic soldier and Christian gentleman."[83] His Christian motivations to save the "stubborn race" of lazy, "weak," and feeble citizens of Khartoum drove him to defend them to the death.[84] Hall

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[77] Abdullah, 213.
[78] Ibid., 277.
[79] "General Gordon," *Times*, February 12, 1885.
[80] Julian Symons, *England's Pride: The Story of the Gordon Relief Expedition* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), 24.
[81] "Situation on the Nile," *Times*, February 7, 1885.
[82] Charles, 213.
[83] "The Fall of Khartoum," *Times*, February 6, 1885.
[84] Gordon, 121.

attributes this to his misguided Christian humanitarianism and liberal universalism, which shaped his perceptions of superiority and actions of appropriation.[85] Sacrificed for the honor of the country, his confinement in Khartoum resulted in the Archbishop of Canterbury asking for intercessory prayer.[86] Many British subjects heeded this call, and with the aid of the press pressured the government to take action.

England's journalists, both stoking and responding to the national outrage, called for action against the Mahdi.[87] Military retribution for the riots in Alexandria started the chain of revenge, which culminated in the post-Gordon crushing of the Sudanese independence movement. Military power, supported by the ethos of imperialism gave Gordon strength to impose his will on an entire city. Charles Gordon, the "Gallant general," "knew better how to defend Khartoum than any living man."[88] Even if foolhardy, he intended to follow his orders and honor the prestige of England by completing his civilizing mission even while under the constant barrage of the Mahdi's guns.

Through debasement, the social problems of the Other were portrayed as cultural barriers that were impenetrable without the aid of the colonizer and his cultural values. Negation served to create darkness, a nothingness that required the imagination and modernity of the European to fill in the blank spaces with light and civilization.[89] The military strength of the British in the contact zone of Sudan assured an unequal cultural exchange. Military and cultural power as embodied in the fateful hero of Gordon added to his status as a martyr of the British culture. "Gordon went alone" to his death in brave defense of

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[85] Cora Kaplan, "Imagining Empire: History, Fantasy and Literature," in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, 191-210 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191.

[86] "The War in the Soudan," *Times*, February 11, 1885.

[87] Victoria Schofield, *Afghan Frontiers: Feuding and Fighting in Central Asia* (New York: Tauris Parke, 2003).

[88] "The Mahdi in Khartoum," *New York Times,* February 6, 1885; and "The Fall of Khartoum, *Times,* February 6, 1885; and Stead, "Government by Journalism."

[89] See: David Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*.

civilization with many believing that only treachery explained his fall.[90] For all the peril that the news claimed Gordon faced, the press conversely stated that, "The Mahdi's forces seem quite incapable of taking any fortified place."[91] The British sense of superiority hampered their ability to acknowledge the military strength of the Ansar warriors, leaving them susceptible to drastic and unforeseen defeats.

Gordon appeared "almost superhuman in his efforts to keep up hope."[92] "Surrounded by hostile tribes and cut off from communication," he acted as the consummate British hero with determination and masculine qualities. [93] The role of the white masculine male in the history of imperial literature is well documented. Often alone and amongst lecherous natives seeking personal advantage, the adventurer hero must call on his superior cultural upbringing to see himself through danger. Gordon served as this archetype numerous times during his career. Depicted as only holding a cane in the heat of battle, he epitomized the British view of their men in uniform. A man of action and of clear vision he became the "most chivalric figure among Englishmen."[94]

Gordon personified the metropole's ideal sober male companion, the "popular hero" "sacrificed" by his superiors.[95] His true "kaleidoscope" nature tells a far more nuanced story.[96] A common trait of an imperial hero includes a shunning of status in seeking rewards for hard work over accolades. Conflicted, depressed, subject to outbursts of anger and frustration he suffered human weaknesses, which made him more acceptable to the public. More importantly, with a mystical fatalism and

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[90] Sir Francis Reginald Wingate, "Wingate of the Sudan" in *Archives of Empire Volume II: The Scramble for Africa*, 603-616 (see note 27), 607.

[91] "The Fall of Berber," *London Middlesex,* June 18, 1884.

[92] Wingate, "Wingate of the Sudan," 604.

[93] Churchill, 64.

[94] Blunt, "Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt," (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1922), in *Archives of Empire Volume II: The Scramble for Africa*, 591-596 (see note 27), 591.

[95] The Fall of Khartoum," *New York Times*, February 6, 1885.

[96] Nutting, 146.

acceptance of his role as martyr he "appealed strongly to the sentimentally minded Englishmen of the Victorian era."[97] In addition, "the very resistance to Christianity," as expressed by the Mahdists, "counted as evidence of intrinsic inferiorities which further justified conquest."[98]

The narrative of the humble, fatalistic, and conflicted hero established Gordon as a consummate British hero. Other unflattering aspects of his personality did not make the news. For example, his views on slavery had always remained fluid as demonstrated by his attempts to appoint the powerful slave-dealer, Zebehr, as governor despite objections from both Cairo and London.[99] He tolerated reputable and powerful slave owners who treated slaves well in his presence.[100] Paradoxically, Gordon, the abolitionist's poster boy, lobbied for the appointment of a slave-dealer as governor of Khartoum. Later historians attribute this to his deep knowledge of the people's desires and culture. Spurr argues that this is a form of classification with Gordon acting as the benevolent intermediary who assigns an imposed structure of order upon the blank slate of the Other. In his journals, Gordon wrote that he intended to allow those within besieged Khartoum who wished to go to the Mahdi to do so and lighten the strain on the cities supplies. Often conflicted, yet nearly always assuming cultural and racial superiority, the British Imperial hero supported the idealized and imagined notions of European civilization coming to the rescue of faceless, voiceless, and powerless indigenous clients.

European authors spoke for their subjects while seeking to replace the indigenous landscape with their own vision of modernity.[101] Gordon and the British represented this modernity and Sudan, the colonized, wanting to join this "homogenized community."[102] Transculturation, as described by Pratt, involves the "subordinated or marginal groups select[ing] and invent[ing]

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[97] Strachey, 252; and Knaplund, 220.
[98] Pratt, 49.
[99] Henry Russel, *The Ruin of the Sudan: Cause, Effect and Remedy: A Resume of Events* (London: S. Low, Marston, 1892).
[100] Coe, 10.
[101] Spurr, 28.
[102] Ibid., 31.

from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture," and consuming the foreigners representation.[103] Gordon and Gladstone could not envision a natural Sudanese progression towards nationhood. The press parroted this perspective by imposing an African history that began when European explorers and settlers arrived to apply ordered beauty.

Why had Britain become involved in Sudan? Gordon's orders were to abandon the city, remove the Egyptian presence, and report back to Cairo. However, as soon as word of the siege reached London the calls to relieve him multiplied. Of equal note were the many demands to relieve Britain of the mess she had inherited from Gordon's missteps. An empire "willy-nilly" was expanded on the heels of a fatalistic and mystical adventurer and supported by an imperially indoctrinated public and press.[104] Voices of reason tried to be heard amongst the din. General Wolseley believed the "war to be a hideous mistake, the outcome of Mr. Gladstone's foolish policy…." [105] Blunt and others criticized the imperial motivations of the nation and sought to extricate Gordon and the Cairo administrators from the continent. Unfortunately, the death of Gordon so shocked the nation that any attempts to justify the Mahdi's actions were deemed insensitive and contrary to Britain's civilizing duty.

November 1884, the Parliament discussed the reported fall of Khartoum and concluded that a *Times* report established "no foundation for the rumour." [106] Other dailies printed conjecture with treason by an Egyptian or native soldier, often finding traction with the public. By the first of February 1885 the true nature of Khartoum's fall flooded into the cities of Europe. William Gladstone proclaimed that he did not know the course of events until he received his daily newspaper.[107] Fluid reporting created rumors that flourished and the public grew

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[103] Pratt, 6.
[104] Moorehead, 161.
[105] Lord Wolseley, "In Relief of Gordon," in *Archives of Empire Volume II: The Scramble for Africa*, 603-616 (see note 27), 600.
[106] Hansards vol. 293, November 3, 1884.
[107] Knaplund, 179.

restless with anticipation of Gordon's assumed escape or capture. Echoing Gordon's sentiments, the public vacillated between leaving Sudan to the savages and sending in a superior force. Back in the metropole "the national colours were flown at half-mast. Nothing adulterates anger like tears, and politicians and clergymen set about canonizing Gordon."[108]

Anxiety over the strength of the Mahdi's call to jihad reverberated throughout the nation. In addition, how Britain's empire was viewed by the United States and European nations allows scholars to witness the language associated with empire and how power requires a sense of superiority, especially amongst one's neighbors and rivals. French journalists responded by noting that Gordon's "character [wa]s unanimously admired," while concurrently blaming England for "having more gluttony than stomach."[109] News of Italy's desire to contribute troops circulated across the globe.[110] The Irish press expressed no pity, noting England's "piratical career" and "dastardly conduct toward weaker peoples."[111] Competitors with Britain found reasons to rejoice in the death of Gordon while denigrating the British self-identity and imperial motivations. More sympathetic nations took the opportunity to express dismay at the failures of a civilized and modern nation. For the sake of humanity, they feared a Muslim awakening. On February 6, the *Times* reported that Paris had claimed, "It is a misfortune for Europe when one of the nation's representing her does not triumph over the barbarous hordes…who impede the march of true civilization."[112]

In America the *New York Times* noted "the peril now confronting the whole eastern empire of the English is

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[108] Symons, 248.
[109] "The Situation on the Nile," *Times,* February 7, 1885.
[110] "The Soudan Campaign," *Sydney Morning Herald,* February 9, 1885.
[111] "The Press Demanding Action: Angry Denunciations of the Ministry and Lord Wolseley's Methods," *New York Times*, February 7, 1885.
[112] "The Situation on the Nile," *Times*, February 7, 1885.

recognized." [113] "Islam is now victorious" they claimed, "England must fight down an immense Moslem outbreak."[114] These fears of a general Muslim conflagration of rebellion appeared in local and international newspapers. British prestige and honor had been dealt a blow and yet, the nation looked east towards India where a large Muslim population could easily threaten British hegemony. Oddly, the reports inflated the strength of the Mahdi in the weeks after the massacre, perhaps to placate the British sense of military superiority. Earlier claims stated "no more than two hundred men" could stop the siege and reverse the Mahdi's gains.[115]

Public and press indignation at the lax relief effort led by Lord Wolseley and Gladstone's liberal policies forced the government to act. *The Glasgow Herald* claimed "the opinion of all classes appeared to favour active operations against the Mahdi." [116] Said states that imperial nations sought to avoid "oppositional effort [from] becoming institutionalized, marginality turning into separatism and resistance hardening into dogma." [117] Any military or political success by the Other required a swift response in order to assure future acquiescence. This response, though contrary to the themes of appropriation, found application when the honor of Britain was threatened. The Mahdi's actions crippled the belief that the Sudanese would want and request British authority. British journalists blatantly portrayed the rebellion as a response to Otto-Egyptian mismanagement and not the actions of Gordon or the Anglo-Egyptian governance.

Chaos threatened the imagined unity of the colonizer and colonized. Spurr notes that, "the rhetorical economy of the media creates a demand for images of chaos in order that the principles of a governing ideology and the need for institutions of order

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[113] "London's Saturday Night: Khartoum the Topic That Absorbs and Oppresses All," *New York Times,* February 8, 1885.

[114] "The Mahdi in Khartoum," *New York Times*, February 6, 1885; and "London's Saturday Night," *New York Times*, February 8, 1885.

[115] Gordon, 220.

[116] "The Fall of Khartoum," *The Glasgow Herald*, February 7, 1885.

[117] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 54.

may be affirmed."[118] Influential historian Benedict Anderson finds that to further coalesce and establish national identity a vernacular history with an accessible shared narrative in print is essential. New journalism and the rhetoric and sensationalism emanating from London served this purpose.[119] "Gordon functioned as example and as symbol," of the traits held dear by the public, and in death he inspired them and was "universally admired" for his service to the British sense of self.[120]

One last page in Gordon's history appeared on the horizon. How would Britain narrate and conclude the story? Parliamentarian Randolph Churchill bemoaned Britain's predicament stating, "The fear to go to war in support of an envoy is a certain indication of a decaying empire."[121] A few contemporaries opposed attempting any vengeful military actions. Coe noted, "it is one thing to deplore his loss and another thing to demand vengeance for his death."[122] The British imperial public had every intention of avenging Gordon and in the process punishing all those who were involved.

After fourteen long years seeking Britain's revenge, General Kitchener's modernized army swiftly defeated the Mahdi's successor Abdallahi ibn Muhammed at the battle of Omdurman in 1898.[123] Ten thousand Ansar warriors died repaying the Mahdi's debts to Britain's philanthropic invaders. However, the Mahdi escaped punishment, as he had died of natural causes a short six months after Gordon. Julian Symons

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[118] Spurr, 109.

[119] See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[120] Behrman, 59.

[121] Randolph H.S. Churchill, "A Speech Delivered in the House of Commons, 13 May 1884. Speeches of the Right Honourable Lord Randolph Churchill, M.P. 1880-1886," (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), 420-26, in *Archives of Empire Volume II: The Scramble for Africa*, 596-600. (see note 27), 599-600. Churchill's speech to the House of Commons was in support of the relief expedition and contrary to Gladstone's policy of abandoning the Sudan.

[122] Coe, 50.

[123] Philip Magnus, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: J. Murray, 1958).

proclaimed that "the British did not free the Arabs from anarchy…they replaced the Mahdist state by Imperial rule."[124] The motivation for revenge finally reached its conclusion. The Mahdi and General Gordon were dead; however, their role in defining the imperial hero remains firm. The last pages of this conflict's heritage have yet to be written; but ironically, in 1967 "a grandson of the Mahdi rule[d] over the land of his grandfather."[125] In the spirit of victory, one newspaper reported that, "Gordon is not forgotten in the enthusiasm of the triumph of British arms. Several schemes are under consideration for erecting a suitable memorial to General Gordon at Khartoum."[126]

The story of Gordon and the Mahdi requires no placement of blame on any individual or system. However, to understand the dispute between two men and their nationalist motivations requires research beyond biographies, military and political histories, or popular literature. Behrman's notion that "there is nothing so heroic as a dead hero," certainly applies to Gordon. [127] His death, the public reaction and contemporary literature, news articles, and historical monographs left an imprint of how and why a man under great odds can come to represent the empire so thoroughly in a nation's consciousness. His own sentiment envisions a legacy of Britain's involvement in Africa that is best concluded in writing, "What have we done to make them like us? Not a single thing…I wish I was the Mahdi, and I would laugh at all Europe.[128]

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[124] Symons, 281.

[125] Byron Farwell, *The Story of the Mahdist Revolt which frustrated Queen Victoria's designs on the Sudan, humbled Egypt, and led to the fall of Khartoum, the death of Gordon, and Kitchener's victory at Omdurman fourteen years later* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 335.

[126] *Westminster Budget,* London Middlesex September 9, 1898.

[127] Behrman, 48.

[128] Gordon, 50.