

*A Colonial Celebrity in the New Attention Economy: Cecil Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo Telegraph and Railway Negotiations in 1899**

‘Among the most picturesque incidents of an age of intercommunication must be reckoned the visit of Mr. Rhodes to Berlin.’¹

In 1899, few events seemed less likely than a meeting between the British colonialist Cecil Rhodes and the German emperor Wilhelm II. Rhodes had the image of a self-made man from a modest background, whose ill health had taken him to Africa, where he made a fortune in diamond and gold mining. Wilhelm II had been born into privilege and had been famous since birth as heir to the Prussian, and after 1871 the German, throne. More importantly, three years earlier, the two had stood at opposite ends of an international scandal. Rhodes was held responsible for the disastrous Jameson Raid into the small Boer Republic of Transvaal, which had led to indignation in the international press and the end of his premiership of Cape Colony. Wilhelm II called him a ‘monstrous villain’.² Upon the failure of the raid, Wilhelm II had sent a telegram to the president of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, complimenting him on having managed to repel Jameson’s forces without appealing to foreign intervention—presumably from the German Empire—which in turn had led to a media outcry in the British Empire against the German monarch. Yet, in March 1899, Rhodes met Wilhelm II in Berlin to discuss the idea of creating a trans-African telegraph and railway that would pass through both British and German colonial territories. The new mass press revelled in the spectacular encounter between these idiosyncratic empire builders, and hailed it as an event of great political importance. Why did newspapers across different countries give so much attention, and consequently legitimacy, to Rhodes, who with the raid had embarrassed the British government and angered the international public, and who no longer occupied any official position?

* The author wishes to thank the following people for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this article: Martin Kohlrausch, Eva Giloi, Arjun Sharma, Timo McGregor, Isabel Casteels, the participants in the ‘Repertoires of Representation’ seminar at Radboud University and the ‘Ruler Visibility, Modernity, and the Ethnonational Mindset’ workshop at the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies, and the editors and the anonymous reviewers at the *English Historical Review*.

1. *The Times*, 11 Mar. 1899, p. 11.

2. Quoted in J.C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888–1900* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 784.

While there is a vast literature on Rhodes, this meeting is often mentioned merely in passing, if at all.³ This neglect is striking, given that the press heralded it as the political rehabilitation of Rhodes, an improvement in the troubled Anglo-German relationship, and a general transformation in international relations.⁴ Wilhelm II's reception of Rhodes was interpreted by both British conservative newspapers and the Transvaal press as signalling the end of Germany's support for the Boers—with whom the British subsequently went to war later in 1899.⁵ Even a decade later, German commentators still viewed this reception as a turning point in German diplomacy.⁶ Moreover, the meeting had a long-term influence on strengthening Anglo-German ties, as it was most likely the reason why Rhodes selected Germany to be the third power, alongside Britain and the United States, whose nationals would be eligible for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarships at the University of Oxford.⁷ However, even more significant than these concrete outcomes is what Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo negotiations reveal about how politics operated within a new transnational public sphere in the closing decade of the nineteenth century.⁸ Paul Maylam has analysed the 'cult of Rhodes' that developed over the century after Rhodes's death, through hagiographies, monuments, memorials, universities, novels and films—the precondition for the international 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement against racism of recent decades.⁹ Yet we are still left with questions about how the public image of Rhodes initially emerged and functioned during his lifetime, and what the role of the expanding mass press was in shaping that image.

To understand the formation of Rhodes's public image during these negotiations, it helps to view the situation through the prism of 'celebrity politics'. Celebrity culture emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century, but achieved an 'industrial' scale a century later with the increase in press circulation, as well as in the leisure time and disposable income

3. Notably J.G. Lockhart and C.M. Woodhouse, *Cecil Rhodes: The Colossus of Southern Africa* (New York, 1963); J.E. Flint, *Cecil Rhodes* (London, 1976); R.I. Rotberg, *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power* (New York, 1989). For a useful overview, see also R. McFarlane, 'Historiography of Selected Works on Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902)', *History in Africa*, xxxiv (2007), pp. 437–46.

4. E.g. *Berliner Zeitung*, 11 Mar. 1899, 'Deutsches Reich', evening, p. 1.

5. *Vingtième Siècle*, 11 May 1899, 'Etat d'Orange', p. 1; L. Reinermann, *Der Kaiser in England: Wilhelm II. und sein Bild in der britischen Öffentlichkeit* (Paderborn, 2001), pp. 185–6.

6. *Vorwärts*, 3 Nov. 1908, 'Dokumente der Unfähigkeit', pp. 1–2.

7. P. Jourdan, *Cecil Rhodes: His Private Life by his Private Secretary* (London, 1910), p. 77. Wilhelm II was honoured that he was allowed to choose the fifteen German scholars himself; see *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914: The End of British Isolation*, ed. G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley (11 vols, London, 1927), i, p. 274 (Sir F. Plunkett to the Marquess of Lansdowne, 11 Apr. 1902).

8. On this new transnational public sphere, see also B. van Waarden, 'Demands of a Transnational Public Sphere: The Diplomatic Conflict between Joseph Chamberlain and Bernhard von Bülow and how the Mass Press Shaped Expectations for Mediatized Politics around the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, xxvi (2019), pp. 476–504.

9. P. Maylam, *The Cult of Rhodes: Remembering an Imperialist in Africa* (Cape Town, 2005).

of a growing urban mass public. It manifested itself particularly in the 'Americanised' popular press in Britain, but followed suit in Continental Europe, especially through high-circulation illustrated magazines such as the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* in Germany and the *Petit Journal* in France. While this culture centred on entertainment celebrities such as Sarah Bernhardt and Cléo de Mérode, it also provided a new public stage for political figures.¹⁰ Political celebrities constitute focal points of attention, which reduce political complexity, give structure to political reality, and make politics meaningful to a broad public.¹¹ The idea of informal power and imperialism as a means of analysis goes back to the 1950s, but a sub-field studying 'celebrity colonialism' only emerged in twenty-first century scholarship.¹² This notion of celebrity colonialism suggests that colonial adventures and wars provided the public with stories that were exotic, but distant enough not to be threatening. Colonialism was generally above partisan politics (except for socialist critiques) and therefore appealing to the commercial mass press, which sought to sell 'neutral' stories to a broader audience than the partisan press of the earlier nineteenth century. The stories of colonial explorers and administrators were closely followed in newspapers, and the mediated construction of these protagonists turned men such as Henry Morton Stanley and Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza into international celebrities. This 'celebritisation' in turn fuelled a colonial imagination among the public, which pressured policymakers into further colonial exploits.¹³ It has also been shown that colonialism, the press and fiction reinforced each other.¹⁴ But this colonial dimension still does not fully explain the press attention that Rhodes received during his telegraph and railway talks. Here, royal celebrity, which also largely superseded partisanship, comes into play. Monarchs enjoyed 'ascribed celebrity' by

10. E. Berenson and E. Giloi, eds, *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 2010); R. van Krieken, *Celebrity Society* (London, 2012), in particular pp. 98–118; A. Lilti, *The Invention of Celebrity, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 2017); M.D. Garval, *Cléo de Mérode and the Rise of Modern Celebrity Culture* (New York, 2017); B. van Waarden, 'Appearance over Substance? Mediatized Celebrity Politics through Time', *Contemporanea*, xxviii, no. 3 (2018), pp. 1–5.

11. Notably P.D. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, MN, 2014). See also D.M. West and J.M. Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 2003); M. Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics: Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications* (Cambridge, 2013); D. Marsh, P. t Hart and K. Tindall, 'Celebrity Politics: The Politics of the Late Modernity?', *Political Studies Review*, viii (2010), pp. 322–40.

12. J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, vi (1953), pp. 1–15; J. Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *English Historical Review*, cxii (1997), pp. 614–42.

13. E. Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 2011); B. Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester, 2013); S.J. Potter, 'Jingoism, Public Opinion, and the New Imperialism: Newspapers and Imperial Rivalries at the Fin de Siècle', *Media History*, xx (2014), pp. 34–50; R. Clarke, ed., *Celebrity Colonialism: Fame, Power and Representation in Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009).

14. A. Griffiths, *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870–1900* (Basingstoke, 2015).

lineage rather than relying on ‘achieved celebrity’ as colonialists did.¹⁵ Moreover, their ‘hereditary charisma’ was complemented by what the contemporary sociologist Max Weber called ‘charisma of office’.¹⁶ However, increasing constitutional constraints in the nineteenth century forced monarchs to reinvent themselves as charismatic media figures.¹⁷ The striking character and hyperactive public performances of the German Kaiser had made him the foremost ‘media monarch’—and one of the first international ‘film stars’—by the century’s end, and so his reception of Rhodes reinforced the celebrity attraction of the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations.¹⁸ Finally, it is useful to understand the appeal of making sense of politics through analogies with the world of business, with political figures acting as ‘executives’, ‘selling’ policies, negotiating, making deals, and ‘getting things done’. While connecting these celebrity and business ideas, John Street, however, argues that politics functions in the same way as show business (rather than conventional business), that political figures are celebrity stars, and that to understand these stars we should not only understand the system of celebrity, but the agency of particular stars.¹⁹

This article will argue that the widespread international press attention that Rhodes received in 1899 resulted from a mix of these elements: political influencing and the system of celebrity, as well as the fusion of the fields of colonialism, diplomacy, literature, business and show business. It will do so by analysing a combination of Rhodes’s papers, British, German and Belgian official documents, and a wide range of international newspapers, which will offer a new media-based perspective on the political history of Rhodes and imperialism

15. C. Rojek, ‘Courting Fame: The Monarchy and Celebrity Culture’, in T. Bentley and J. Wilsdon, eds, *Monarchies: What are Kings and Queens For?* (London, 2002), pp. 105–6.

16. An individual benefits from hereditary charisma or *Erbscharisma* by being born into a family of status, in this case the monarchy. He or she derives charisma of office or *Amtscharisma* from occupying a position within an institution of status. While the latter is usually applied to religious offices, it also pertains to other institutions, such as the monarchy, and their occupants: M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (2 vols, Berkeley, CA, 1968), esp. i, p. 248, and ii, p. 1140.

17. J. Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford, 2003); F.L. Müller, *Our Fritz: Emperor Frederick III and the Political Culture of Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 105–17; M.M. Schneider, *The ‘Sailor Prince’ in the Age of Empire: Creating a Monarchical Brand in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cham, 2017).

18. Notably M. Kohlrausch, *Der Monarch im Skandal: Die Logik der Massenmedien und die Transformation der wilhelminischen Monarchie* (Berlin, 2005); M. Kohlrausch, ‘The Workings of Royal Celebrity: Wilhelm II as Media Emperor’, in Berenson and Giloi, eds, *Constructing Charisma*, pp. 52–68; see also C. Clark, *William II: The Last Kaiser* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 160–85; B. van Waarden, ‘Public Politics: The Coming of Age of the Media Politician in a Transnational Communicative Space, 1880s–1910s’ (KU Leuven Ph.D. thesis, 2019); M. Loiperdinger, ‘Kaiser Wilhelm II: Der erste deutsche Filmstar’, in T. Koebner, ed., *Idole des deutschen Films: Eine Galerie von Schlüsselfiguren* (Munich, 1997), pp. 41–53; D. Petzold, *Der Kaiser und das Kino: Herrschaftsinszenierung, Populärkultur und Filmpropaganda im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter* (Paderborn, 2012).

19. J. Street, ‘The Celebrity Politician: Political Style and Popular Culture’, in J. Corner and D. Pels, eds, *The Media and the Restyling of Politics: Consumerism, Celebrity and Cynicism* (London, 2003), pp. 85–98.

more generally. Viewpoints of individual newspapers will also be used throughout to show the political reality that they constructed for contemporary audiences. After describing Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo negotiations and how they provided him with a prominent place in an international 'attention economy', the article will argue that the attention lavished on Rhodes was the result of three interconnected logics: a political logic of agenda-setting and ideological loyalties, a journalistic logic in which scarce access to Rhodes fostered his mythologising, and a new mass media logic that increasingly superseded ideological divides. This mass media logic centred around infusing Rhodes's personal narratives with literary and colonial themes, as well as the attraction of personifying politics. Moreover, the press embraced the 'business-like' conduct of politics by Rhodes and Wilhelm II, which it praised as inaugurating a new style of diplomacy. Finally, the article will demonstrate how press attention translated into personal support and informal power for Rhodes: we cannot understand this empire builder without comprehending his role in the media, which enabled him to bypass traditional politics. Overall, the dramatic encounter between the idiosyncratic personalities of Rhodes and Wilhelm II, and the story about international relations that could be attached to it, show how the new mass press sought to simplify and sensationalise politics in an age of increasing political complexity and decreasing attention spans.

I

During the period of 'New Imperialism' in the late nineteenth century, Britain and Germany needed each other in their mutual desire to exploit further their colonial possessions in Africa. This was the context in which Rhodes came to Berlin to discuss ideas for a telegraph and railway across Africa—his personal 'Cape-to-Cairo' dream. For a long time, Rhodes had cherished this vision of a railway extending the length of Africa through British territory. In 1898, Britain had managed to secure its position on the Upper Nile during the Fashoda Crisis, an essential step in connecting British territories from north to south, and preventing the French from creating an empire stretching from west to east across Africa. However, the imperialist 'Scramble for Africa' that had picked up speed since the 1880s had already led the new colonisers, Germany and Leopold II, king of the Belgians, to extend their territories into central Africa, thereby blocking the idea of a British north–south territorial corridor and railway. But this did not deter Rhodes. He sent his agents ahead of him to Europe to prepare negotiations about a railway that might pass through foreign territory,²⁰ and then visited

20. *Daily Mail*, 9 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes and Germany. Negotiations about the Cape to Cairo railway', p. 5.

both Leopold II and Wilhelm II to discuss the possibility of a British line passing through either Leopold's Congo Free State or German East Africa.

Despite Rhodes developing a personal dislike of Leopold II, he allegedly received consent to build the railway under the condition that Belgian industry would benefit.²¹ He was less certain, however, that the Belgian monarch would agree to the telegraph line.²² Rhodes then travelled via Rome to Berlin, and met first Chancellor Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Secretary of State Bernhard von Bülow, and Under-Secretary Oswald von Richthofen to lay out his plans.²³ He also met German financiers and visited sites of the German electro-technical industry in Berlin, including factories of the large *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* (AEG), one of the leading companies in this field worldwide.²⁴ On 11 March, he was received by the Emperor, who still believed this reception ran against the pro-Boer sentiment in Germany and would thus cause public outcries against Rhodes.²⁵

21. *Nieuws van den Dag*, 21 Mar. 1899, 'De transafrikaansche spoorweg', p. 1; *Daily Mail*, 21 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes's Success', p. 5; *Gazette de Charleroi*, 17 Mar. 1899, 'M. Cecil Rhodes à Berlin', p. 1. However, a Belgian diplomat believed that Rhodes incorrectly alleged that he already had an arrangement with the Congo Free State 'in his pocket' to strengthen his negotiating position in Berlin; see Brussels, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Direction des Archives [hereafter MAEDA], Grande Bretagne, 'Correspondence politique—légations', 1899, vol. 63, doc. 64, Edouard Whettnell, ambassador to Britain, to Foreign Minister Paul de Favereau, 17 Mar. 1899. For Rhodes's dislike of Leopold, see B. Williams, *Cecil Rhodes* (London, 1921), pp. 309–12; L.H. Gann and P. Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884–1914* (Princeton, NJ, 1979), p. 29; J. Willequet, *Le Congo belge et la Weltpolitiek, 1894–1914* (Brussels, 1962), pp. 36–7; Rhodes also found Leopold II to be the toughest person he ever negotiated with, in contrast to the subsequent meeting with Wilhelm II: see *Review of Reviews*, June 1903, 'Character Sketch. Leopold, Emperor of the Congo', p. 570.

22. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries [hereafter OBL], MSS Afr. s. 227 (Box 1), Rhodes Papers, Out-letters and telegrams, 1893–1903: Letter books 1–3, July 1897–March 1902, Rhodes to E.L. Bertie, 21 Mar. 1899.

23. *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Mar. 1899, 'From the Cape to Cairo. Mr. Cecil Rhodes in Berlin. Important visit to the Kaiser', p. 9; see also Berlin, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes [hereafter PA AA], R 14712, Afrika Generalia, 13 Nr. 1, 'Verbindung zwischen Süd- und Nordafrika (Eisenbahn, Telegraph pp. vom Kap nach Kairo)', letter to Richthofen, 21 Jan. 1899. Following Rhodes's meetings, Bülow informed him that if German financiers could not meet the demands for the railway construction, the German government might be able to help: OBL, MSS Afr. t. 5, Rhodes Papers, Miscellaneous papers, including holograph letters, 1869–1955, p. 374, Bülow to Rhodes, 15 Mar. 1899; for a typed copy of this letter, see OBL, MSS Afr. s. 228, Rhodes Papers, In-letters, telegrams and related papers, 1875–1908, p. 191.

24. *Daily Mail*, 13 Mar. 1899, 'Imperialists Both. Mr. Rhodes received in audience by the emperor. Berlin welcome truly "colossal"', p. 5; *Daily Telegraph*, 21 Mar. 1899, 'Empire Builders', p. 10; H. Pogge von Strandmann, 'Rathenau, Wilhelm II, and the Perception of Wilhelmism', in A. Mombauer and W. Deist, eds, *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 259, 265.

25. In response to Bülow's advice to receive Rhodes, Wilhelm II had scribbled on Bülow's report of 23 Feb. 1899 that 'it will create a splendid scandal among my dim-witted subjects, but I don't care. If I could I would hang Cecil Rh., but as that isn't possible I shall make use of him. But it will cause a great sensation!': PA AA, 'Asservat No. 4', p. 199, marginal comments on Bülow to Wilhelm II, 23 Feb. 1899; also quoted in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, pp. 987–8; later comments also show that Wilhelm II had actively reflected on public opinion here. On 27 May 1899, he wrote to Queen Victoria that 'with utter disregard for public opinion—which was very sore about this—& in the teeth of a most violent opposition from all ranks of society in Germany I received Sir [sic] Cecil Rhodes', quoted in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, pp. 995–6.

However, during their forty-minute meeting, the two imperialists took an immediate liking to each other and revelled in colonial dreams together.²⁶ When Wilhelm II remarked that Germany had entered the colonial race too late, Rhodes responded that Germany could still colonise what had once been Nebuchadnezzar's Mesopotamia, and mesmerised the Emperor with visions of incorporating the ancient sites of Nineveh and Babylon into the German empire. Wilhelm II listened in amazement, and later made the controversial comment that he wished he had had a minister like Rhodes.²⁷ Two days later, the two had another amicable meeting at a dinner hosted by the British Ambassador Frank Lascelles, after which Rhodes returned to London via Amsterdam.²⁸

During Rhodes's stay in Berlin, newspapers in Europe produced conflicting accounts of the outcomes of the negotiations, with some claiming that agreements on both the railway and the telegraph had been reached immediately and others cautioning that final agreements were not yet in sight. In the Reichstag, Bülow finally confirmed on 21 March that a deal had been reached with the Trans-African Telegraph Company.²⁹ However, speculation about the details of the railway

26. O.J. Hale, *Publicity and Diplomacy: With Special Reference to England and Germany, 1890–1914* (New York, 1940), pp. 190–92. That the affection between the two imperialist leaders was genuine is suggested most persuasively by a private letter sent by Rhodes to Wilhelm II several months later in which he explicitly mentioned this. Rhodes wrote that 'I hope you will excuse my taking this liberty but I felt drawn to your majesty as a man and hope you will accept the gift [two of Rhodes's favourite books] and this communication as sacred. The ambassador knows nothing'. At the top he added a note: 'I think Sir that I feel though your Majesty has fifty millions of subjects you are alone they do not understand your big ideas I am the same Sir though a small man I am alone': Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz [hereafter GStA PK], BPH Rep 53 J Lit R Nr 12, Rhodes to Wilhelm II, 26 June 1899; a copy of this letter also exists in PA AA, R 14712. In addition, a letter from Ambassador Hatzfeldt to Chancellor Hohenlohe on 15 Apr. 1899 included the following comment that Rhodes allegedly made: 'I wish I had only to do with people like your Emperor and business-like people like Herr von Bülow, Baron von Richtofen and Herr von Buchka': PA AA, R 14712. Such comments might have just been diplomatic etiquette, but overall it did seem as though Rhodes enjoyed his interactions with Wilhelm II; the British poet Rudyard Kipling later even commented that Rhodes had been 'overfascinated by the Kaiser': OBL, MSS Afr. s. 8, Rhodes Papers, Miscellaneous papers, 1890–1969, p. 39, Kipling to Baker, 13 Jan. 1934. Conversely, for Wilhelm II's fascination with Rhodes, see Wilhelm II, *Ereignisse und Gestalten, 1878–1918* (Berlin, 1922), pp. 72–3.

27. J.L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, III: 1895–1900: Empire and World Policy* (London, 1934), pp. 329–31; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, p. 1,051.

28. OBL, MSS Afr. s. 8, pp. 64–7, description by Lascelles; MSS Afr. t. 11, Rhodes Papers, Material received in response to press appeals, 1955; pp. 157–9, Richard Seymour (third secretary of the British embassy in Berlin in 1899) to Lord Elton of The Rhodes Trust, 10 Sept. 1955; MSS Afr. s. 134, Williams 5; Cecil Rhodes materials (notebook 1), pp. 160–63, Basil Williams's notes of what Lascelles told him on 6 May 1914 and 3 July 1919 about the dinner.

29. *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags*, Reichstagsprotokolle, 1898/1900, 2, 61. Sitzung, Dienstag den 21. März 1899, p. 1,645, available online at https://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt_kuo_bsbooooo2778_00703.html (accessed 5 Nov. 2021); *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes' Visit to Berlin. Official statement', p. 9; see also T.E. Fuller, *The Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes: A Monograph and a Reminiscence* (London, 1910), pp. 216–17; Kew, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], FO 800/6, pp. 72–3, Rhodes to Lascelles, most likely 13 Mar. 1899; OBL, MSS Afr. s. 228, pp. 155–6, 238–40; OBL, MSS Afr. s. 134, pp. 160–63.

proposal continued, as well as rumours that Rhodes and German officials were discussing another railway through German Southwest Africa, that Britain would also make concessions to German Southwest Africa, and that Rhodes had stated that the Portuguese colony of Mozambique would be divided between Britain and Germany in the future.³⁰ In the following weeks, newspapers reported on the ongoing negotiations over whether German financiers and the British government would provide guarantees for the railway. At a meeting of the British South Africa Company (BSAC), of which he had been re-elected as director despite the Jameson Raid, Rhodes had to conclude that neither government would provide the needed guarantee, but at the same meeting he raised the necessary capital from shareholders. Upon his return to South Africa on 20 July, he received a hero's welcome; but, in the end, little came of the proposed projects.³¹

Throughout the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations, newspapers updated their readers on the latest developments. Papers across Europe also reflected explicitly on how the negotiations were the talk of the day and received extensive press coverage.³² However, more than in the content of the negotiations, the press displayed an obsessive interest in Rhodes himself.

II

'Mr. Cecil Rhodes's visit forms the topic of conversation in the Reichstag, on the Bourse, and in all the clubs, and it occupies, moreover, a broad space in the columns of the newspapers', observed the progressive *Manchester Guardian* on 13 March.³³ The result of the extensive reporting on Rhodes was that he occupied a prominent place in the increasingly competitive 'attention economy' of the mass press, which had expanded globally from 3,168 newspapers in 1828 to 31,026 newspapers by 1900—with most growth coming at the century's close.³⁴ Scholars have recently conceptualised this 'economy of attention', and

30. *Vingtième Siècle*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'Cecil Rhodes à Berlin', p. 2; *Daily Mail*, 14 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes' Business', p. 5; *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Mar. 1899, 'Cape to Cairo. Some further details', p. 9.

31. On Rhodes receiving an unprecedented public welcome back to South Africa, which allegedly was largely due to his meeting with Wilhelm II; see PA AA, R 14712, Adalbert Louis M. Bonn to Wilhelm II, 25 July 1899. Initially there was agreement on the telegraph but, according to the former German Foreign Office press chief, it ultimately failed because the Ottomans objected to running the line through Constantinople; see O. Hammann, *Deutsche Weltpolitik, 1890–1912* (Berlin, 1925), p. 69; even though the railway was also never completed, newspapers continued to publish maps with updates on the completed parts over the next decade, which shows the ongoing popularity of this political project—e.g. in the *Daily Telegraph*, 25 Mar. 1910, 'Cape to Cairo Railway. The completed portions'.

32. E.g. *Vingtième Siècle*, 16 Mar. 1899.

33. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 Mar. 1899, 'What Mr. Cecil Rhodes did in Berlin', p. 6; *Daily News*, 13 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes in Berlin'.

34. C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, 2004), p. 19; also T. Luyckx, *Evolutie van de communicatiemedië* (Brussels, 1978), pp. 275–316; A.J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855–1914* (London, 1976).

suggested that the most important resource in a society increasingly flooded with information by mass media is the attention needed to consume all that information.³⁵ The many newspapers were able to shed light on an unprecedented number of political figures and issues, but space in newspaper columns and in readers' attention spans was limited. Thus, political actors essentially 'competed' for the available attention, and Rhodes was particularly successful in this competition: he drowned out news about politicians and policy discussions. Press commentators and journalists protested against this monopolising of attention and the irrational colonial policies to which it would lead, and reflected on the way this press attention led to Rhodes being seen to represent the British Empire without actually occupying any official position.

At first, it may seem to be a tautological argument that publicity leads to attention. However, the crucial element is that attention is limited, and thus the visibility of particular figures came at the expense of the visibility of other topics. Rhodes's performance at the BSAC meeting, at which he described his successful visit to Wilhelm II and asked shareholders for support in light of the government's refusal to provide the requested guarantee for the railway, provides a relevant example. Newspapers described Rhodes's presence as drowning out the simultaneous budget discussion in the British parliament. 'The huge figure of Cecil Rhodes has during the past week somewhat overshadowed the figures of the people who—to use his own half-contemptuous phrase—"live in the House of Commons." The budget of the Chartered Company of South Africa has touched the imaginations of people far more than the Budget of the Chancellor of the Exchequer'.³⁶ Another journal commented:

It was rather unfortunate for Sir William Harcourt that the day for his great speech on his return to the familiar arena of St. Stephen's should have been the same as that on which Mr. Rhodes addressed the shareholders at Cannon Street. Although Sir William Harcourt spoke with much fire and eloquence, the British public, which is only capable of absorbing one idea at a time, read Mr. Rhodes's speech and let Sir William Harcourt's go by.³⁷

More generally, it was commented that Rhodes 'is much more widely known by repute to Americans than the Premier'.³⁸ The comment about the British public being 'only capable of absorbing one idea at a time' reinforces the idea that people's attention was limited and that

35. While this concept is usually applied to the internet age, it is also crucial for understanding the late nineteenth-century period in which media became a 'mass' phenomenon; see, notably, *Wired*, 12 Jan. 1997, 'Attention Shoppers!'; G. Franck, *Mentaler Kapitalismus: Eine politische Ökonomie des Geistes* (Munich, 2005); R. Lanham, *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (Chicago, IL, 2006).

36. *Daily Mail*, 7 May 1899, 'Heard at St. Stephens', p. 4.

37. *Review of Reviews*, May 1899, 'The Progress of the World', pp. 415–16.

38. *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1899, 'Colossus of the Cape', p. 7.

competition for this attention in mass media politics therefore became a zero-sum game. The second comment, in turn, suggests that in this new mass press environment political standing was determined by media visibility rather than by traditional political ranks.

The next important speech in which Rhodes mentioned his Berlin experience, given upon his return to South Africa in July, showed that his media presence not only overshadowed other politicians, but that the press even made exceptions for him. The *Daily Mail* here reflected on its own policy: 'it is on very rare occasions indeed that the "Daily Mail" prints speeches, having found by experience that there are not more than half a dozen public men whose utterances are perused by any considerable section of the public. One of the most interesting speeches of recent times was delivered by Mr. Rhodes at Claremont, Cape Colony, on July 18'.³⁹ The comment was characteristic of the new tabloid mentality of the recently established *Daily Mail*, which was more modern in terms of thinking of readers' needs and attention span than many contemporary newspapers. It shows that, within this logic, Rhodes's position became even more competitive compared to politicians whose speeches did not excite the masses.

The press hype about Rhodes and how it was believed to overshadow rational reflections on the Cape-to-Cairo plans became the subject of criticism. One commentator protested against the 'superfluity of heroes', noting that 'in these days' many figures such as Rhodes 'are all heroes, and do heroic things', and arguing that this constituted an unmerited inflation of the idea of heroism.⁴⁰ The London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* complained that 'the glamour which surrounds the personality of Mr. Cecil Rhodes' and his 'dramatic visit to Berlin' made people simply accept his idea of running a Cape-to-Cairo railway through German territory, whereas Africa experts indicated that such a line would actually hurt British interests. The original strategic value of a railway across Africa through British territory was lost by going through German East Africa. The idea of commercial value was also misplaced, given that shipping would remain more advantageous. There would be commercial value in creating short railways within British territory that connected inland areas exploited for resources with the coasts, for example the Uganda railway, but the Cape-to-Cairo idea would only incentivise the Germans to build their envisioned Dar es Salaam-to-Tabora line, which would compete with the Uganda line.⁴¹ Similar complaints that hype was trumping reason were voiced on the German side. The *Berliner Zeitung* reflected on how Rhodes's staunch critics in Germany suddenly hailed him as a type of 'magician' who could help turn German colonial possessions into gold, and then

39. *Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 1899, 'Some Rhodes Reminiscences', p. 4.

40. *Daily Mail*, 18 May 1899, 'A Superfluity of Heroes', p. 4.

41. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Mar. 1899, 'The "Cape to Cairo" Railway Scheme', p. 12.

warned about the enormous amounts of time and money that would actually be involved in the construction of this railway.⁴² The Belgian press observed these debates from a distance, with the socialist *Peuple* referencing a report from the quality *Berliner Tageblatt* that the Colonial Society in Wiesbaden was protesting against Rhodes's project, because it believed it to be contrary to German interests.⁴³ A Berlin letter to another Belgian paper was blunter in its effort to debunk the mediated Rhodes hype: it alleged that Rhodes was nothing but a charlatan who showed up in Berlin with great but completely unrealistic promises of a fantastical railway across Africa.⁴⁴

Most striking in the affair was that the widespread attention to Rhodes in the press caused him to appear as the representative of the British Empire. Commentators ran wild about what Rhodes's visit meant for co-operation between the German and British governments, and about British policy regarding South Africa, but in truth Rhodes occupied no official position. He was a British privy councillor, but this was mostly a symbolic function. When Rhodes came to Berlin, the German government consulted internally about his position. The director of the political section in the Foreign Office, Fritz von Holstein, asked the ambassador to Britain, Paul von Hatzfeldt-Wildenburg, whether Rhodes represented the British government, and whether a territorial deal about Samoa might be concluded with him, to which Hatzfeldt replied that Rhodes might be able to influence the colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, but not the prime minister, Lord Salisbury. Rhodes had no official standing.⁴⁵ However, the hyped press coverage of Rhodes created the impression that he was a British minister. The impact of this confusion over Rhodes's role was illustrated by the fact that, three weeks after the negotiations, a British MP found himself forced to check with the under-secretary of state for foreign affairs in parliament 'whether Mr. Cecil Rhodes, in his recent visit to Berlin and reported negotiations with the German Government, acted under any previous arrangement or authority, either explicit or implied, with or from any Minister of the Crown of this country'.⁴⁶ The response was that Rhodes 'acted entirely on his own initiative'.⁴⁷

Rhodes's unwarranted influence was not lost on commentators. The *Western Daily Press* stressed how 'the way to this welcome result has been opened mainly by a man who possesses no political status

42. *Berliner Zeitung*, 20 Mar. 1899, 'Afrikanische Bahnen', evening, p. 1.

43. *Peuple*, 12 Apr. 1899, 'Le chemin de fer du Cap au Caire', p. 2.

44. *Gazette*, 14 Apr. 1899, 'Lettre de Berlin. Le Charlatanisme de Cecil Rhodes'.

45. PA AA, R 5769, England 78 secretissima, 'Politische Beziehungen Englands zu Deutschland', pp. 132–9; Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, pp. 329–31; PA AA, 'Asservat No. 4', p. 199, Bülow to Wilhelm II, 23 Feb. 1899. Salisbury specifically let it be known that Rhodes could ask Wilhelm II about the telegraph and railway, but that it would be better to do so as a private person than as a government representative; see TNA, FO 800/6, pp. 63–6, Bertie to Lascelles, 1 Mar. 1899.

46. *The Times*, 12 Apr. 1899, 'House of Parliament', p. 7.

47. *Ibid.*

whatever in Great Britain. Mr. Rhodes is not even in office in Cape Colony'.⁴⁸ It continued that 'it is true that he is a Privy Councillor; but, in the international sense, that does not confer upon him any special qualification. It may be assumed that the English people will not allow themselves to be dazzled by Mr. Rhodes's achievements in the international arena'.⁴⁹ Similar comments came from *War Against War!*, though this newspaper—operated by the famous editor and investigative journalist William Thomas Stead, who was acquainted with Rhodes—suggested that Rhodes was rightfully dazzling people:

It is quite a new departure for British citizens to deal with crowned heads almost as if they were themselves potentates. Mr. Rhodes has no official position beyond being Privy Councillor—an honour which he shares with some hundred persons, many of whom have much less influence in political affairs than the manager of a London music-hall ... people are beginning to recognise that, after Lord Salisbury, Mr. Rhodes is the greatest subject of the Queen.⁵⁰

Rhodes had no official political role in his dealings with the German emperor, but in the public perception his role and efforts were accorded great political significance, a perception that was at least in part created and sustained by the international mass press.

Thus, within the economy of attention, Rhodes's visibility overshadowed both regular politicians—who, unlike him, should have benefited from the charisma of office—as well as 'rational' policy discussions. Moreover, protests against the disproportionate attention he received as an 'illegitimate' representative of the British Empire, and the 'irrational' policy-making it might lead to, only increased this press attention. Why Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo negotiations featured so prominently in the new attention economy of the late nineteenth-century mass press will be the subject of the following sections.

III

The widespread media attention on Rhodes resulted, first, from the 'political logic' of political actors and newspapers. Both Rhodes and the German government had connections with newspapers that could produce favourable reporting of Rhodes and his Cape-to-Cairo plans. Moreover, the conservative press of the British establishment supported Rhodes's imperialism of its own volition. However, even newspapers that ideologically opposed Rhodes, as well as revelations about pro-Rhodes efforts to influence the press, further increased the attention he received.

48. *Western Daily Press*, 18 Mar. 1899, 'The Victory of Mr Rhodes', p. 5.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *War Against War!*, 31 Mar. 1899, p. 179.

Ideologically slanted publicity was not merely the by-product but arguably the main purpose of Rhodes's visit to Berlin. Rather than instigating the meeting to negotiate about a railway, the German government allegedly wanted to do something about Rhodes's control of the South African press, which obstructed the pursuit of German interests in Southern Africa. The historical record shows conflicting accounts of who initiated the meeting between Rhodes and Wilhelm II and why. Explanations put forward include the views that Rhodes himself organised the audience to further his Cape-to-Cairo ideas, that it was a British government idea, and that the German government wanted to use Rhodes and the Cape-to-Cairo plans as part of a larger and geopolitically more important negotiation with the British government to secure German interests in Samoa.⁵¹ This Pacific island group had been a focus of controversy between Germany, Britain and the USA since the 1880s. However, a different account is offered by the former first secretary of the German embassy in London, Baron Hermann von Eckardstein.⁵² In his memoirs he described how, despite having resigned as prime minister of the Cape after the Jameson Raid, Rhodes remained influential in South African politics and 'his relations with the Press gave him considerable control of public opinion, of which he made full use to prevent further German intervention in South African affairs'.⁵³ Consequently, the director of the colonial section of the German Foreign Office, Gerhard von Buchka, arranged for Rhodes to come to Berlin in an effort to improve relations with him and thus indirectly with the British Empire.

Whether this account is accurate is not clear, but it appears to be true that Rhodes and his BSAC exercised great control over the South African press, to a degree that was unimaginable in the colonial metropolises themselves.⁵⁴ Moreover, Rhodes enjoyed the active

51. Rhodes allegedly asked the Kaiser to meet him on his way back from Egypt: Rhodes to Wilhelm II, 26 Feb. 1899, cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, pp. 987–8; PA AA, 'Asservat No. 4', p. 199, Bülow to Wilhelm II, 23 Feb. 1899. See also PA AA, R 14712, Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 12 Apr. 1899. For the British initiative, see *Daily Telegraph*, 21 Mar. 1899, and for the German initiative, Hale, *Publicity and Diplomacy*, pp. 190–92; Hammann, *Deutsche Weltpolitik*, p. 69.

52. First secretaries at German embassies were assigned to deal with press affairs.

53. H. von Eckardstein, *Ten Years at the Court of St. James: 1895–1905* (London, 1921). Eckardstein served under the German Ambassador Paul von Hatzfeldt-Wildenburg from 1891 to 1901. He began as attaché and in December 1899 was appointed first secretary, after which he played an important role in embassy affairs, owing to the illness and old age of the ambassador. It seems that during the Rhodes–Wilhelm II episode, Eckardstein temporarily functioned as an independent legation councillor, but he still seemed to be involved closely enough in German foreign policy to have a good understanding of ongoing events. He was a successful socialite who later also befriended both Rhodes and the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain in London. However, in the immediate years after leaving the embassy, he remained in London and began pursuing his own political course, and his views and historical descriptions are somewhat controversial.

54. E.g. Potter, 'Jingoism, Public Opinion, and the New Imperialism', p. 44; Eckardstein, *Ten Years at the Court of St. James*, pp. 102–3; R.I. Rotberg, 'Did Cecil Rhodes Really Try to Control the World?', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xlii (2014), p. 559; McFarlane, 'Historiography of Selected Works on Cecil John Rhodes', pp. 437–8; *Laatste Nieuws*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'De Napoleon der Kaap', p. 1; A. Porter, 'Sir Alfred Milner and the Press, 1897–1899', *Historical Journal*, xvi (1973), pp. 323–39.

support of the internationally influential *Times*. Rhodes allegedly also used British correspondents in Berlin to communicate to the British public that if their government would agree to the railway guarantee the German government would follow.⁵⁵ A few weeks later, it was even intimated that he was using publicity as a threat. Rhodes wanted a final decision from the British and German governments about the guarantee, and, according to the *Daily Mail*, Rhodes's friends indicated that 'he intends if necessary to place before the British public the story of the correspondence as to the railway'.⁵⁶ If this was true, it reinforces the notion that publicity was an important political tool for Rhodes. Comments from contemporary observers support this idea. For example, on 14 April, Hatzfeldt reported to Hohenlohe that Rhodes was in London still trying to obtain a railway guarantee, and that Rhodes 'has complained about the government here and described members of the cabinet as pedantics and bureaucrats. Only through a continued pressure from public opinion can Rhodes still succeed in forcing these gentlemen to a decision'.⁵⁷ 'Public opinion' was thus already recognised as a political force, and a political logic dictated that this opinion be influenced as favourably as possible through newspapers.

The positive portrayal of the negotiations was also stimulated by the German Foreign Office, which made full use of its limited means for trying to influence press coverage.⁵⁸ In the eyes of most Germans, the Rhodes of the Jameson Raid was like the devil himself; to court his friendship, something needed to be done to contain and reverse the anti-Rhodes press agitation that the meeting would ignite. Through the semi-official newspapers *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Kölnische Zeitung* and *National-Zeitung*, the Foreign Office tried to put the media focus on the benefits of Rhodes's schemes for German interests, and indeed many high-circulation newspapers like the *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, *Vossische Zeitung* and *Kölnische Volkszeitung* stepped into this frame of judging the meeting based on its merits.⁵⁹ The Foreign Office also carefully monitored press reactions to Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo plans through its missions in, among other locations, Britain, the Netherlands, Egypt, Cape Colony, Russia and Portugal.⁶⁰ Wilhelm II's marginal comments on foreign newspaper articles that these missions sent show that he read these himself. For example, he wrote 'hope so!' in response to a *Daily Telegraph* article that stated that his meeting with Rhodes would 'mark the commencement of a new era'.⁶¹ Moreover, he wanted certain articles, such as a *Times*

55. *Berliner Tageblatt*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'London', evening, p. 2.

56. *Daily Mail*, 9 Apr. 1899, 'Emperor's Plan', p. 5.

57. PA AA, R 14712, Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 15 Apr. 1899.

58. Hale, *Publicity and Diplomacy*, pp. 190–91.

59. *Ibid.*

60. PA AA, R 14712.

61. *Ibid.*, Wilhelm II's marginal comments on 'Across Africa. Kaiser and Mr. Rhodes', 15 Mar. 1899.

piece on the characters of Rhodes and himself and a *Neue Freie Presse* text on how the railway would be good for German interests, to be respectively translated and recycled in 'our press'.⁶² Nevertheless, the neo-Bismarckian and staunchest pro-Boer newspapers did attack Rhodes vehemently. In his memoirs, Bülow concluded that 'it was not so easy to calm German public opinion, on which Cecil Rhodes, like Chamberlain later, had the effect of a red rag on a bull'.⁶³ Yet even this negative news further increased the overall attention that Rhodes received in the press, which suggests that 'there was no such thing as bad publicity' when it came to Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo scheme.

What ultimately became visible in the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations were not only the content and actors involved, but also these efforts to influence the public perception of the negotiations. Newspapers reflected explicitly on how the press was being 'inspired', and arguably this detracted from its impact.⁶⁴ This aspect of politics, which was supposed to remain invisible to the public, was in fact clearly visible to readers. Some papers even complimented the apparent success of the attempts to influence the press with respect to Rhodes's visit. For example, on 13 March, the *Daily Mail* correspondent in Berlin concluded that 'the most significant feature of the present position is the entirely changed attitude of the German Press, and indeed the semi-official apparatus has been set in motion with an ability and works with an exactness which are simply marvellous'.⁶⁵ Of course, even such comments that applauded an apparent rapprochement between the German and British press might have been influenced by elite desires for such rapprochement. Thus, in reality not all influencing attempts might have been as successful as such commentators liked to believe. However, not just positive but also negative framing attempts could be unsuccessful, something commented on explicitly a week later. The *Standard* correspondent reported that the attempt of several German papers, acting on behalf of 'certain financial groups', to frame 'Mr. Rhodes as having failed in the purpose which took him to Berlin' had not succeeded.⁶⁶

Finally, news commentary showed criticism of government methods of seeking publicity within the context of the negotiations. In its effort

62. PA AA, R 19827, Büroakten Nr. 15 secr., 'Zeitungsartikel mit Randbemerkungen S. M. - Zeitungsausschnitte', Wilhelm II's marginal comments on *The Times*, 16 Mar. 1899, and *Neue Freie Presse*, 25 Mar. 1899.

63. P. von Bülow, *Memoirs: From Appointment as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Morocco Crisis, 1897-1903* (4 vols, London, 1931), i, pp. 288-9.

64. E.g. *Laatste Nieuws*, 14 Mar. 1899, 'Nieuws uit Zuid-Afrika', p. 1. Semi-official press influencing was presumably more effective when readers remained unaware that particular views originated with the government; see e.g. U. Daniel, 'Die Politik der Propaganda: Zur Praxis gouvernementaler Selbstrepräsentation vom Kaiserreich bis zur Bundesrepublik', in U. Daniel and W. Siemann, eds, *Propaganda: Meinungskampf, Verführung und politische Sinnstiftung, 1789-1989* (Frankfurt, 1994), pp. 44-82, 54.

65. *Daily News*, 13 Mar. 1899.

66. *The Standard*, 22 Mar. 1899.

to gain favourable coverage of its proposal for a railway guarantee to Rhodes following the Berlin negotiations, the British government only supplied information to its loyal newspaper *The Times*. This caused the indignation of *The Times's* new competitor, the *Daily Mail*. The latter stated:

We think it a mistake that Her Majesty's Government should have published these important items of information in only one journal, even though that be the leading journal, for the Government must be aware by this time that there is no surer method of depriving news of its proper publicity than this antiquated system of attempting to purchase the support of a particular journal by handing over to that journal, for exclusive publication, an important item of news.⁶⁷

The new tabloid thus publicly criticised the government's 'antiquated' system of press relations, in which it still sought to control press coverage by working exclusively through the traditional elite paper (*The Times*). The comment shows that the mass newspaper considered itself to have a more modern understanding of how politics could gain favourable press coverage, namely by distributing news widely rather than by restricting its distribution. In a sense, the *Daily Mail* used the Rhodes–Wilhelm II negotiations to make two demands: firstly, with its 'proper publicity' comment it voiced a normative expectation that political developments be visible through publicity in the press; secondly, it demanded that political news reporting should be democratised, in that all newspapers should have the same access to this government news.

Newspaper loyalties to Rhodes and government efforts to steer press commentary provide part of the answer to why he received so much attention. However, only a fraction of the newspapers that constituted the new 'mass' press was influenced through official channels, and, partly due to the visibility of this influencing, its impact in shaping coverage remained limited. That said, even newspaper articles that criticised Rhodes constituted additional stories about the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations that reinforced Rhodes's visibility in the international press. The political logic of promoting or criticising Rhodes's colonial scheme thus constituted the first reason why he became a 'celebrity politician'. However, questions remain. Why, if the German Foreign Office implored papers to focus on the merits of the railway and telegraph rather than on Rhodes and his controversial Jameson Raid background, was there still such a focus on Rhodes personally in the reporting? And why was there so much reporting about Rhodes in general, given the relatively small geopolitical relevance of the railway compared to other developments in international relations, as well as the negotiations' limited success? What made Rhodes's negotiations so newsworthy?

67. *Daily Mail*, 28 Apr. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes and the Treasury', p. 4.

IV

Besides 'political logic', a second reason for the widespread press attention for Rhodes was the presence of a structural 'journalistic logic'. This logic was constituted by the (limited) access of journalists to politics. As journalists could not be present at the actual Cape-to-Cairo negotiations, and thus obtained little information about the content of the proposed agreements, they were left with reporting on the personalities of the negotiators, Rhodes and Wilhelm II. While Rhodes's general avoidance of journalists meant that they also obtained little personal information, it was precisely this avoidance that sparked their curiosity, strengthened their pursuit of him, and made them project a mythical status onto him. However, this mythologising went hand in hand with a seemingly contradictory trivialisation of Rhodes, coalescing in stories in which journalists' pursuit of Rhodes itself became the subject.

Even if readers allegedly wanted more details of Rhodes's plans, newspapers could not simply provide them. In an article on Rhodes and the press, the Catholic *Journal de Bruxelles* highlighted a recent speech by Lord Rosebery at the Newsvendors' Benevolent and Provident Institution anniversary dinner, in which he had argued that modern readers demanded 'abundance of information' rather than opinion.⁶⁸ However, the public was receiving almost no information about the content of the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations,⁶⁹ but mostly opinions about Rhodes, Wilhelm II and the greater significance of their meeting. Even German members of parliament only received rumours about the contents of the talks that had been circulating in a 'sensational manner', which led one of them to demand explanations from Bülow in a plenary session on 21 March.⁷⁰ When information about content did surface, such as the revelation that the future of the Portuguese East African colonies had also been discussed, it was immediately denied.⁷¹

Journalists were scarcely more successful in their efforts to obtain personal interviews with Rhodes, which only increased their curiosity. Rhodes 'made it a rule neither to see nor to communicate with any representative of the Press, German or foreign, and to this rule he has not made a single exception', wrote *The Times* on 17 March, with some exaggeration.⁷² Some press commentators suggested that this refusal to receive journalists contributed to the anger against him in the Bismarckian press, which itself claimed that Rhodes had a bad

68. *Journal de Bruxelles*, 6 May 1899, 'Lettre de Londres', p. 1.

69. *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Mar. 1899, 'From the Cape to Cairo. Mr. Rhodes and the Kaiser. Complete agreement on principles', p. 9.

70. *Fürst Bülow's Reden: Nebst urkundlichen Beiträgen zu seiner Politik*, ed. J. Penzler (3 vols, Berlin, 1907), i, pp. 61–3 (Richter intervention, Reichstag, 21 Mar. 1899).

71. *The Times*, 21 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes's Negotiations', p. 7.

72. *The Times*, 17 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes's Negotiations', p. 5.

relationship with the newspapers.⁷³ Commentaries give the impression of paparazzi-like journalists hunting for Rhodes. A Belgian paper reported that, during his brief stop in Amsterdam on returning from Berlin, Rhodes indicated to the ‘overly demanding’ journalists that he was ‘not available’.⁷⁴ Three years later, the *Vorwärts* mentioned a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent who, looking back at 1899, described how Rhodes had actually received him two days after the meeting with Wilhelm II, but had asked him not to use any of his comments in the press.⁷⁵ Thus, Rhodes did meet certain journalists, but such encounters did not necessarily translate into publicity. Yet by ‘playing hard to get’ in this manner, Rhodes merely stimulated the desire of journalists to write about him. People are inherently curious about ‘secrets’, and a journalist is by profession even more curious than the average person. The rarity of personal interviews made journalists write about Rhodes as a distant, unreachable figure, and ‘forced’ them to project their own image of who they thought or wanted Rhodes to be. Consequently, Rhodes was often described as a ‘mythical’ leader.

However, Rhodes’s general avoidance of the press simultaneously seemed to have had an opposite effect. ‘In all that has been written about Mr. Cecil Rhodes—column upon column, page upon page, in the last ten years—one finds nothing worth mentioning, that gives any idea of the man himself’, wrote the *Daily Mail*. It then explained that ‘he has always so severely discouraged the interviewer and the personal paragraphist that only the most uninspiring trifles—such as he lunched on beef sandwiches and bottled stout at the South Africa Committee—have found their way into print’.⁷⁶ The comment suggests that the limited journalistic access to Rhodes led journalists to focus on the few mundane bits of personal information they could obtain, rather than fill in with their own imagination the large volume of personal information they could not obtain. In other words, information scarcity here fostered trivialisation rather than mythologising.

Trivialisation and mythologising were not, however, necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, in the light of a political figure’s restricted accessibility, journalists could shape the image of a celebrity politician in different ways. The construction of this image through conflicting perspectives is illustrated by an article in the *Berliner Morgenpost*, which, moreover, shows how the search for the politician’s identity itself became the subject of news stories. Starved for content and interviews, one journalist of this German popular newspaper made his own quest to interview Rhodes into the topic of an article. This

73. *The Standard*, 13 Mar. 1899, ‘Mr. Rhodes in Berlin’, p. 7; *The Standard*, 22 Mar. 1899, ‘Mr. Rhodes’ Visit to Berlin’, p. 7.

74. *Laatste Nieuws*, 26 Mar. 1899, ‘Nieuws uit Noord-Nederland’, p. 7.

75. *Vorwärts*, 4 Apr. 1902, ‘Cecil Rhodes und Wilhelm II’.

76. *Daily Mail*, 30 Apr. 1899, ‘A Busy Day with Mr. Cecil Rhodes’, p. 13.

extensive article even appeared on the front page and contained both an image of Rhodes and a sign saying 'entry forbidden for journalists'. By using a first-person narrative, the reporter took the reader along on his mission to interview Rhodes. He described how Rhodes had settled into his Berlin hotel and had taken measures against journalists, with special orders to the hotel manager that his room number and those of his associates not be given to anyone. However, the journalist proudly wrote that he found out anyway, and that despite not having been granted permission for an interview, he simply waited for Rhodes and appealed to him on the spot. Rhodes replied that 'I don't let myself be interviewed', but invited the journalist into his room anyway. The journalist then described how the 'Napoleon of Africa' did not physically look like Napoleon at all, that he had no 'Roman' features and that even his nose was too big to be Roman. He concluded that 'the great African conqueror goes through life with inwardly turned feet'. But he then suddenly witnessed Rhodes's greatness when he started talking enthusiastically and grabbing his map to show the Cape-to-Cairo plan. However, when the journalist inquired about the cost, Rhodes started to answer but then hesitated and repeated that he did not give interviews before retreating into another room.⁷⁷ On the one hand, the described evasiveness of Rhodes reinforced a mythical image, while on the other the mundaneness of his real features simultaneously satirised that image. Moreover, this reporting was no longer merely political. Rather, Rhodes became an object of curiosity that in itself merited press attention.

In sum, as journalists structurally lacked access to policy details, they turned their attention to aspects of politics that were visible: the main negotiators Rhodes and Wilhelm II. Rhodes's tendency to hide from journalists merely increased their eagerness to cover him, and the distance he kept contributed to his image as a mythical figure. The trivialisation and satirising to which this structural journalistic inaccessibility also led show how fluid the celebrity politician's image in the press was, and further increased the attention that Rhodes received. However, this journalistic logic still fails to explain why other political negotiators, whose policy details remained similarly hidden, did not receive as much personalised coverage as Rhodes in the new attention economy of the mass press.

V

In addition to 'political logic' and 'journalistic logic', a third reason for the attention to Rhodes in the press was an increasingly important overarching 'mass media logic'. The competitive commercial press in

77. *Berliner Morgenpost*, 14 Mar. 1899, 'Expresß-Interview mit Mr. Cecil Rhodes', p. 1.

the late nineteenth century sought attractive content that would sell to mass audiences, and an already well known figure such as Rhodes constituted this kind of 'content'. Rhodes differed from regular political negotiators because he carried the self-reinforcing label of a 'great figure', which justified dedicating newspaper columns to him. Moreover, the stories of his personal life, the Jameson Raid and his subsequent 'comeback', and his 'civilising mission' in Africa enabled newspapers successfully to merge politics with popular literary and colonial themes. Even trivial news about his appearance gave him an air of authenticity that fitted with the new mass media logic.

As readers are more interested in reading about a figure they already know, there was a threshold in political reporting: newspapers naturally focused on recognisable political persons. Moreover, they justified their editorial choices by constantly re-emphasising the importance of the figures they wrote about. In this context, a central theme in the Cape-to-Cairo reporting was the 'greatness' of Rhodes, and newspapers across Europe used superlatives to describe his leadership qualities.⁷⁸ To symbolise his alleged greatness, Rhodes was often called the 'Napoleon of Africa'.⁷⁹ It was said that even his enemies would have to acknowledge his genius.⁸⁰ Papers often did not even focus on what Rhodes was doing in Berlin, but simply commented on his importance in history. He satisfied a broader contemporary press interest in 'great figures'. The *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, the first mass newspaper in Germany, featured Rhodes on 19 March in its series 'Portraits of the Day'.⁸¹ Similarly, the *Daily Mail* published a series called 'XXth Century Men: Some peeps at futurity', in which it dedicated an article to Rhodes just after his Berlin visit, commenting that he was not only 'a Man of the Time' but 'a man for all time'.⁸² The press also reflected on how Rhodes was a 'celebrated man' and 'celebrity'.⁸³ The idea was reinforced by describing all the mail he received from admirers.⁸⁴ In addition, newspapers noted how Rhodes had a type of magical influence on people that made them follow him.⁸⁵ The conservative *Standard* reflected that the 'interview between the German Emperor and Mr. Cecil Rhodes' was '*picturesque* ... beyond all question' and that

78. E.g. *Daily Telegraph*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'Cape to Cairo. Mr. Rhodes's success in Berlin. Germany and the Boers', p. 9; *The Times*, 16 Mar. 1899, p. 9.

79. *Journal de Bruxelles*, 13 Mar. 1899, 'A propos de la visite de M. Cecil Rhodes à Berlin', p. 1; *Daily Mail*, 22 Mar. 1899, 'A Mighty Enterprise', p. 4.

80. *Handelsblad*, 18 Mar. 1899, 'Cecil Rhodes te Berlijn', p. 5.

81. 'Porträts vom Tage', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, viii, no. 12 (1899), pp. 2–3.

82. *Daily Mail*, 29 Mar. 1899, 'XXth Century Men. Some peeps at futurity. XI.—The Rt. Hon. Cecil Rhodes', p. 4.

83. *National-Zeitung*, 10 Mar. 1899, quoted in *The Times*, 11 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes in Berlin', p. 7; *Indépendance Belge*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'Guillaume II et Cecil Rhodes', p. 1; *Meuse*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'Guillaume II et Cecil Rhodes', p. 1.

84. *Daily Mail*, 30 Apr. 1899.

85. *Saturday Review*, 6 May 1899, 'Notes', p. 545; *Review of Reviews*, May 1899, 'The Progress of the World', pp. 415–16.

'nothing could be better calculated to *appeal to the imagination* than the meeting between these two men' (emphasis added).⁸⁶ These writings all suggest that journalists were not merely looking for political content or analysis, but an aesthetic quality in politics. They sought to make politics attractive to readers, and a celebrity personality such as Rhodes helped them do so. This dynamic was self-reinforcing, in that the more newspapers lauded Rhodes's celebrity, the more attractive a news item he became for subsequent stories.

Yet it was not Rhodes's celebrity status alone that made him so useful from the perspective of a mass media logic; it was also that his politics could be described within the popular format of a literary narrative. Rhodes's ascent to power spoke to the imagination: a young British man sent to Africa to recover from illness, he discovered diamonds and became the 'conqueror' of Southern Africa. Even the serious political paper *Berliner Tageblatt* could not resist recounting this story of the 'self-made man'.⁸⁷ Still more hyped was the plotline of 'Rhodes's rehabilitation': after his dramatic downfall from the heights of international power politics following the Jameson Raid, the former Cape premier was now re-entering the world stage in Berlin, stronger than ever. It almost seemed like a gift to journalists that, right after the Raid in 1896, Rhodes had said publicly that his career had not ended but was only beginning. Now newspapers could exclaim that Rhodes had been right all along, and indeed had skilfully engineered his great comeback.⁸⁸ The correspondent of *The Times* in New York argued that, even among the American public, 'his reappearance as a builder of Empire is hailed as of good omen for his country'.⁸⁹ The story was made complete by the fact that Wilhelm II had been the main protagonist on the German side during the Jameson Raid, due to the controversial congratulatory telegram he had sent President Kruger after the latter put down the incursion. According to *The Times*, Wilhelm II's reception of Rhodes now finally redeemed the Emperor as well.⁹⁰ The Cape-to-Cairo negotiations in 1899 were thus where the two former antagonists of the Jameson Raid met face to face to build a new African future together—a perfect plot device.

Some commentaries even connected the Berlin encounter and Jameson Raid to a broader storyline of Rhodes's entire career, and used the former to foreshadow greater things to come. For instance, the *Review of Reviews*, edited by Rhodes's acquaintance Stead, went so

86. *The Standard*, 13 Mar. 1899.

87. *Berliner Tageblatt*, 14 Mar. 1899, 'Cecil Rhodes', evening, pp. 1–2.

88. E.g. *Journal de Bruxelles*, 15 Mar. 1899, 'Lettre de Londres', p. 2; *Journal de Bruxelles*, 15 Mar. 1899, 'Échos et Nouvelles', p. 1; *Daily Mail*, 29 Mar. 1899.

89. *The Times*, 20 Mar. 1899, 'The Central African Railway', p. 7.

90. Quoted in Reinermann, *Der Kaiser in England*, p. 186; in a different manner, Wilhelm II also saw his meeting with Rhodes as avenging himself in light of the European obsession with his telegram to Kruger over the past years: see PA AA, R 19827, Wilhelm II's marginal comments on *Le Temps*, 18 Mar. 1899.

far as to proclaim that these new developments proved that the raid failure had only benefited Rhodes in the end. A month after the Berlin meeting, it declared:

The visit which Mr. Rhodes paid last month to Berlin, and the reception accorded him by the author of the famous telegram to President Kruger, have sufficed to convince every one that, after Lord Salisbury, Mr. Rhodes bulks greatest in the Empire. His sun, so far from having gone out in thick darkness, climbs ever higher towards the zenith. And when the final account comes to be written, it will probably be found that Mr. Rhodes benefitted more by the blunder which for the moment cost him so dear, than by many of the brilliant achievements which made him famous.⁹¹

In the same month, the *Daily Mail* concluded that ‘Mr. Rhodes’s career ... has been romantic enough to excite the deepest interest in him’, another comment which placed Rhodes’s meeting with Wilhelm II in a broader personal narrative, and which even infused his politics with the literary language of romanticism.⁹²

In addition, newspapers could exploit the enticing storyline of the role that Rhodes played in Europe’s ‘civilising mission’. The telegraph and railway could be presented as monumental steps in bringing civilisation to Africa, especially because they would be a transnational rather than merely a national effort.⁹³ Rhodes could be heralded as having succeeded in this unlikely and almost fantastical endeavour. When the telegraph agreement was reached, the *Daily Mail* announced that Rhodes ‘has achieved a great Imperial victory over physical and political difficulties which at one time appeared to be impossibilities. Once telegraphic communication is opened, Central Africa will be a new land’.⁹⁴ Thus, as with the stories about his early career and resurrection after the raid, there was the theme of Rhodes having overcome incredible difficulties. For the press, this theme of ‘civilising Africa’ fitted within the broader colonial narrative, which was particularly popular among readers. According to Chamberlain, the Cape-to-Cairo plan even carried ‘sentimental’ meaning for the British public, just as Samoa did for the German one.⁹⁵ Rhodes and the journalists benefited from each other: for the journalists, Rhodes provided a way to link the popular colonial theme to power politics, and Rhodes in turn benefited from being placed in this popular colonial narrative. For instance, the conservative *Vingtième Siècle* published comments from H.M. Stanley and the French explorer Jean Baptiste

91. *Review of Reviews*, Apr. 1899, ‘The Progress of the World’, p. 312.

92. *Daily Mail*, 30 Apr. 1899.

93. In response to Rhodes’s request for a railway to cross German East Africa, an article (that Wilhelm II also read) argued that Germany would not shy away from taking its responsibility in civilising Africa: ‘Die auswärtige Politik der Woche’, *Dresdner Journal*, 25 Mar. 1899, in PA AA, R 19827.

94. *Daily Mail*, 21 Mar. 1899.

95. PA AA, R 14712, Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 14 Oct. 1899.

Marchand, with Stanley saying that he thought that in six to seven years Rhodes's railway plans would be a reality.⁹⁶ In a similar manner to how he gained additional publicity from his association with the celebrity Kaiser and the latter's charisma of office, Rhodes was here 'endorsed' by another famous media figure.⁹⁷ Overall, the storyline of Rhodes and Wilhelm II 'connecting Enlightened Europe to the Dark Continent' via a transnational railway and telegraph spoke to the imagination of both journalists and newspaper readers.

Finally, even seemingly superficial descriptions of Rhodes do not necessarily signify a trivialisation of Rhodes's politics, but show how human interest became a constitutive part of political reporting, and how a mass media logic dictated a new focus on authenticity. Immediately after the Rhodes–Wilhelm II meeting, a rumour circulated in newspapers including the *Vorwärts*, *Berliner Morgenpost*, and *Berliner Zeitung* that Rhodes had shown up to the imperial audience in a shooting jacket, tan trousers and a bright little hat, rather than in 'full dress', which was said to have caused great indignation in court and parliamentary circles.⁹⁸ The foreign press quickly picked up on this storm of indignation, as demonstrated by the *Journal de Charleroi* writing on its front page that 'this entirely British shamelessness is commented upon in a lively manner in Berlin'.⁹⁹ A comment from the *Berliner Zeitung* shows how such human interest reporting came at the expense of political content. In an article that also appeared on the front page, it stated: 'This little story concerns not the content of the conversation, but an external aspect'.¹⁰⁰ Supposedly the rumour was started by Friedrich Lange, the editor of the *Deutsche Zeitung*, as part of the neo-Bismarckian press attacks on Rhodes.¹⁰¹ This paper thus succeeded in getting the broader press temporarily to focus its attention on a triviality rather than on substantive reporting on the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations. Even after Rhodes's death in 1902, the satirical *Simplicissimus* commented that his colonial transgressions could be forgiven but that he would always carry the shame of having come to an audience at Wilhelm II's Berlin palace in an informal outfit and with hands in his pockets.¹⁰² These commentaries show the attraction of a 'scandal' for mass media, but also signal how newspapers attempted to infuse their political reporting with human interest—which arguably reinforced rather than diluted attention for the politics of the Cape-to-Cairo scheme. Moreover, while these newspapers portrayed Rhodes's unconventional dress and etiquette negatively, their comments implicitly showed Rhodes as 'authentic', in a rather positive manner. He himself later responded that his behaviour in

96. *Vingtième Siècle*, 8 June 1899, 'Marchand et Stanley', p. 2.

97. For the argument that politicians can enhance their own popularity by being associated with celebrities, see Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*.

98. *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 Mar. 1899, 'Deutsches Reich', evening, p. 1.

99. *Journal de Charleroi*, 19 Mar. 1899, 'Sans gêne britannique', p. 1.

100. *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 Mar. 1899.

101. Hale, *Publicity and Diplomacy*, pp. 190–91.

102. 'Die größte Gemeinheit', *Simplicissimus*, vii, no. 4 (1902), p. 28.

Berlin had not been disrespectful because he had not intended it to be so, and that it would have been stranger had he dressed up unlike himself for the German emperor.¹⁰³ Thus, while the reporting on Rhodes's dress had allegedly been intended to undermine Rhodes, it actually gave him an opportunity to portray himself as authentic. This authenticity, in turn, met the interests of a new mass audience—and therefore the mass press—that was increasingly focused on the self and that around 1900 was looking for antidotes to the superficiality of the new urban culture.

A mass media logic thus constitutes the third explanation for the widespread press attention to Rhodes. Newspapers across ideological lines sought content that would attract readers, which they found in a celebrity politician such as Rhodes. They could use Rhodes as the protagonist of narratives that merged the personal and the political, and that built on popular pre-existing literary and colonial themes. Even seemingly trivial articles that criticised Rhodes's simple behaviour and dress had an extra implicit appeal to an audience and press that sought authenticity in the face of a superficial modernity. Of course, Rhodes's characteristics had partly been constructed by the press itself, but it then continued to build on these successful constructions. However, this focus on personal stories still only constitutes a partial explanation of the mass media logic that was at work.

VI

'A meeting between the German Emperor and Mr. Cecil Rhodes has its picturesque as well as its political interest', the liberal *Daily Telegraph* opined on 13 March 1899.¹⁰⁴ What made the Cape-to-Cairo negotiations so powerfully attractive according to a mass media logic was not only the aesthetic side of Rhodes's story, but also how it could be used to tell readers a broader tale about international relations. Moreover, this broader story could be told in the form of a new type of exciting, 'business-like' diplomacy, which, some newspapers argued, even enabled Rhodes to bypass traditional politics.

Many newspapers heralded Rhodes and Wilhelm II as embodying the British and German Empires. Their meeting was described as a great move towards peaceful relations between these empires, and an important indication that Germany no longer supported the South African Boer Republics in their ongoing disagreements with Britain, which only several months later would lead to the South African War.¹⁰⁵

103. *St. Petersburg Herald*, 19 Mar. 1902, 'Der kranke Diamantenkönig'.

104. *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Mar. 1899, p. 8.

105. Hale, *Publicity and Diplomacy*, pp. 190–91; *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Mar. 1899, 'England and Germany', p. 10; *Berliner Zeitung*, 11 Mar. 1899; *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Mar. 1899; *The Times*, 18 Mar. 1899, p. 7; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 21 Mar. 1899, 'London', evening, p. 1; *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Mar. 1899; *Vingtième Siècle*, 11 May 1899; *The Times*, 20 Mar. 1899; *Outlook*, 25 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Kruger's Changed Mood', p. 244.

'The German Emperor and Mr. Rhodes may be regarded as representing on this occasion something more than two very interesting personalities. They embodied each on his own side the interests of Germany and Great Britain', wrote *The Times* in late March.¹⁰⁶ Conversely, a brief article on how Queen Wilhelmina did not receive Rhodes when he passed through the Netherlands on his way back to Britain served to show readers the continued support of her country for the Boer Republics.¹⁰⁷ Rhodes never seemed to have requested such an audience with the Dutch queen—presumably because he did not need the Netherlands in Africa—but the Belgian *Handelsblad* nevertheless centred its article on Wilhelmina to stay within the narrative of explaining international relations by referring to the (lack of) interactions between famous leaders. In some commentaries, it appeared as though international relations were not even about countries any more, but were conducted simply between individuals, as illustrated by a *Daily Mail* comment that 'England and France have shaken hands across the Nile, and the Kaiser and Cecil Rhodes across Africa'.¹⁰⁸ The *Daily Telegraph* argued that as 'deeply interesting as a complete record would be of the interview between the Kaiser and the founder of Rhodesia, the very fact that it has taken place is of the highest political importance'.¹⁰⁹ Thus, for the press, the railway meeting primarily served to gauge and describe the state of international affairs to readers. Rhodes and Wilhelm II were useful proxies to explain the complex international situation. Of course, a press focus on presenting international politics as interactions between leaders was not new, but in an age of increasingly complex global politics and demands for newspaper articles to be ever briefer and catchier, this focus on individuals gained a new pertinence for the press.¹¹⁰

In addition to the fact that Rhodes and Wilhelm II personified international relations in the press, their particular style of doing so offered something new, and thus newsworthy. Many papers commented enthusiastically about the fast, exciting and supposedly visible (compared to traditional diplomacy) way in which the two performed politics—though, as we have seen, details about Rhodes remained rather invisible in reality. A comment in the *Journal de Bruxelles* was representative: 'The "Kaiser" is expeditious in affairs, just like Mr. Cecil Rhodes'.¹¹¹ The great impression that this style made is illustrated by a *Vorwärts*

106. *The Times*, 27 Mar. 1899, 'The Colonies. German and British co-operation in Africa', p. 12.

107. *Handelsblad*, 20 Apr. 1899, 'Rhodes in Nederland', p. 1.

108. *Daily Mail*, 11 Apr. 1899, 'Peace after Partition', p. 4.

109. *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Mar. 1899.

110. This point fits with the idea that the emergence of the mass press led to a return of the focus on individual political figures that had existed before the advent of strong political parties in the mid-nineteenth century. See D. Pels and H. te Velde, 'Politieke Stijl in Perspectief', in D. Pels and H. te Velde, eds, *Politieke Stijl: Over presentatie en optreden in de politiek* (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 1–14.

111. *Journal de Bruxelles*, 13 Mar. 1899.

commentary three years later, which emphasised that ‘the abnormal speed with which Rhodes achieved his objectives is just as much the result of his energy as of the impulsive style with which Wilhelm II loves to execute important affairs of foreign politics’.¹¹² There was praise for the quick results that this assertive style was (believed to be) yielding: ‘The Emperor, as we know, is nothing if not a man of prompt action, and the result of his interview with another man of action not less prompt than himself, is in every way satisfactory’.¹¹³ The *Western Daily Press* even wondered whether the meeting signified ‘the foundation of a new school of diplomacy’, that could replace the ‘tortuous and dilatory’ old diplomacy.¹¹⁴

This fast-paced style of negotiating was primarily seen as ‘business-like’. Rhodes and Wilhelm II were constantly described as ‘men of business’, who were ‘frank’, ‘straightforward’ and liked to ‘take the bull by the horns’.¹¹⁵ Of course, Rhodes was primarily a businessman, and in the narrow sense the Cape-to-Cairo projects were business ventures, but newspapers saw the negotiations within a broader political context and judged them by diplomatic standards, thereby identifying a novel approach in how a business style was applied to politics. Even in describing Rhodes’s dealings with governments, the language of business was employed: ‘Having got his terms from the King of the Belgians, he *sets Berlin in competition* with Brussels for his favours. He is received not merely as Sovereigns and statesmen receive an English Privy Councillor, but *as a mercantile firm receives a new correspondent* with whom profitable business may be done’ (emphasis added).¹¹⁶ After the negotiations, *The Times* contrasted this business style favourably to regular diplomacy: ‘When two such clever men as the German Emperor and Mr. Rhodes meet with their minds made up to do business, the business is generally done with a rapidity and a smoothness not a little surprising to the common run of negotiators ... How long, it may be wondered, would the regular diplomatists have taken to accomplish so much practical work?’¹¹⁷ The French *Le Temps* agreed that it had been ‘nothing like ordinary diplomacy’.¹¹⁸

The focus on business could partly be explained by the attempt of the German semi-official papers to direct attention towards the merits of the Cape-to-Cairo ideas rather than towards Rhodes’s role in the Jameson Raid. This focus was partially copied by international papers, as illustrated by a Mozambican newspaper that even ran the sub-heading ‘Germany Ready to Help Rhodes: Business before sentiment!’¹¹⁹ In Britain, the

112. *Vorwärts*, 4 Apr. 1902.

113. *York Herald*, 7 Apr. 1899, ‘Summary’, p. 4.

114. *Western Daily Press*, 18 Mar. 1899.

115. E.g. *Daily Telegraph*, 21 Mar. 1899; *Review of Reviews*, Apr. 1899, p. 312.

116. *The Speaker*, 18 Mar. 1899, ‘Mr. Rhodes at Berlin’, p. 307.

117. *The Times*, 16 Mar. 1899.

118. *Le Temps*, 18 Mar. 1899, ‘M. Cecil Rhodes à Berlin’.

119. *Beira Post*, 21 Mar. 1899, ‘Mr. Rhodes’ Railway Schemes’, p. 3.

Manchester Guardian referenced the Berlin correspondent of the *Daily News*, who reported that the 'colonial Jingo' in Berlin seemed to 'have become astonishingly tame' and that "'business knows no enmity" appears now to be the maxim in political quarters generally'.¹²⁰ However, most coverage did not concentrate on the business merits of the railway, but rather on how the overall politics of the negotiation were conducted in a business-like manner. The enthusiasm about running politics in a business-like fashion went so far that, just before Rhodes's appearance before the BSAC shareholders in May 1899, the conservative *Saturday Review* suggested that Rhodes and Wilhelm II could just bypass government. Rhodes had not received the British government guarantee he requested, which led the paper to exclaim that 'the Kaiser will see that in England for projects of imperial significance money can be obtained without the aid of Government'.¹²¹ Already during the negotiations, the *National-Zeitung* had similarly suggested that the solution to German colonialists' objections to Rhodes's proposal was to make the railway through German East Africa a private undertaking by Rhodes under German supervision rather than a British government project.¹²² These comments suggest that the new diplomacy of Rhodes and Wilhelm II was so fast and practical that governments could not keep up and would be bypassed.

Thus, in addition to the personal stories about Rhodes that already incorporated broader literary and colonial themes, Rhodes's encounter with Wilhelm II was appealing from the perspective of a mass media logic because it helped newspapers to make politics understandable and entertaining for a mass readership. In addition, the novelty of performing these politics—in particular the traditionally slow and secretive process of international diplomacy—in a fast, business-like manner attracted the attention of newspapers. The speed and comparative visibility of this business-like diplomacy also met the practical demand of the mass press for a constant supply of news, created an important role for this press itself in politics, and matched the growing pace of 'modern' times. Finally, this business style complemented the commercial logic of freelance journalists and press barons themselves, who operated in an increasingly competitive capitalist press market, as well as of their expanding readership among the entrepreneurial middle classes.

VII

Rhodes thus received widespread press attention because of interconnected political, journalistic and mass media logics, but what was the impact of this publicity? As we have seen, it temporarily improved the Anglo-German relationship and reconfigured the politics

120. *Manchester Guardian*, 13 Mar. 1899.

121. *Saturday Review*, 29 Apr. 1899, 'Notes', p. 513.

122. *National-Zeitung*, 10 Mar. 1899, described in *The Times*, 11 Mar. 1899.

of Southern Africa, even if merely in public perception. On the other hand, the trans-African railway and telegraph were never completed, Rhodes had no impact on the Samoa question, Rhodes's party lost the Cape elections, and the ties between Germany and Britain deteriorated again in the lead-up to the First World War. However, rather than in particular outcomes, it is in Rhodes's standing that the impact of press attention can best be observed. Rhodes gained broad public support, which in turn aided the financing of his political projects and provided him with informal political capital.

The extensive coverage of the Berlin meeting secured Rhodes widespread support among an international audience. The *Journal de Bruxelles* made this explicit, writing that Rhodes enjoyed rehabilitation in part thanks to 'the press and its laudatory articles'.¹²³ Though it is notoriously difficult to gauge audience reception of media content, the large crowds that turned up to see Rhodes after weeks of reporting on the Cape-to-Cairo scheme suggest that many people were enthused by what they had read. Both at the BSAC meeting and upon his arrival back in Cape Colony, Rhodes was greeted by massive groups of supporters. Articles described how the rush to hear Rhodes speak at the BSAC about his negotiations with the German emperor was 'unprecedented' with 'substantial bids being made to shareholders for their invitations', that it was believed to be a 'record meeting', and that 'a large force of the City police' was stationed around the venue.¹²⁴ Similarly, the 'royal welcome' at the Cape was already announced beforehand as becoming a 'gigantic meeting', and indeed it became 'the object of an immense popular demonstration'.¹²⁵ Newspapers, especially the popular *Daily Mail*, had a tendency towards hyperbole, but the reports clearly indicated that the crowds supporting Rhodes were unusually large, which suggests that Rhodes's visibility in the press during the Berlin negotiations increased the popular support he received.

This popular support was subsequently believed to aid Rhodes with financing the Cape-to-Cairo scheme, and thereby with bypassing official channels. The *York Herald* reported that the government would allegedly not provide the interest guarantee, at least not for the stretch between Bulawayo and the Zambesi, but the paper suggested that Rhodes's popularity might provide him with the finances anyway. Rhodes 'has a great name with the public, and all the influence which it exercises will be necessary, we believe, to secure the capital required for the Bulawayo–Zambesi section'.¹²⁶ The *Manchester Guardian* also reported that the government would not offer the guarantee, and

123. *Journal de Bruxelles*, 6 May 1899.

124. *Daily Mail*, 28 Apr. 1899, 'Rush to Hear Mr. Rhodes', p. 5; *Daily Mail*, 29 Apr. 1899, 'When Mr. Rhodes Speaks', p. 3; *The Times*, 3 May 1899, 'British South Africa Company. Speech by Mr. Rhodes', p. 4.

125. *Daily Mail*, 12 Apr. 1899, 'Royal Welcome for Mr Rhodes', p. 5; *Daily Mail*, 19 July 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes at Home'.

126. *York Herald*, 7 Apr. 1899.

similarly stated that 'if the British public think otherwise they will provide the capital for Mr. Rhodes'.¹²⁷ Thus, the paper took an active approach by suggesting an alternative in the form of a type of 'crowd funding' for the popular Rhodes, though it is unclear whether the idea was merely rhetorical. However, this crowd funding worked. In early May, Rhodes said that he believed his 'scheme had the support of the people', and in July he claimed that he had obtained 'four millions from the people'.¹²⁸ There was amazement in the press. 'It is truly to be believed that the founder of empire has a magic wand to make so much money depart from the pockets of his admirers', commented a Belgian paper.¹²⁹ Employing similar language, the *Review of Reviews* reflected with wonder on how the supporters of 'the Great Wizard of Empire' were so eager to give him money despite his bringing bad financial news to the BSAC meeting.¹³⁰ The celebrity status that Rhodes obtained in the press turned investors into loyal fans rather than critical shareholders, which enabled him to bypass regular politics, and further improved his financial means and status.

Finally, besides increasing Rhodes's financial capital, his media presence gained him informal political capital. The very fact that he was allowed to engage with European monarchs on equal terms boosted his standing. A Belgian pro-Boer newspaper sneered at the way Rhodes allegedly tried to show off in the Anglophile press in South Africa about his reception at Leopold II's palace in Brussels, and a liberal German paper described how Rhodes's reception by the German emperor had increased his 'authority and power' both in Africa and Britain.¹³¹ Shortly after the Berlin event, Rhodes was also elected unanimously to the presidency of the South African League.¹³² Though it is impossible to prove a causal relation here, this election fitted within the imagined narrative of his 'great comeback' and hyped press momentum. However, more significant is the informal power that Rhodes was seen to have. His omnipresence made it difficult for politicians to ignore or dismiss him. One of his critics tried to get Rhodes removed from the list of privy councillors, but a newspaper judged that this would not be successful. Yet it noted that the people 'cannot give a man of even Mr. Rhodes's capacity anything like a free hand ... he may be kept well in hand. There is always the right of Imperial veto, and the power of Parliament should be quite sufficient to impose such a measure of control as may be necessary'.¹³³ The fact that the newspaper had to

127. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Apr. 1899, 'Our London Correspondence', p. 5.

128. *The Speaker*, 6 May 1899, 'The Week', p. 507; *The Times*, 19 July 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes', p. 7; C. Nuys, *Cecil Rhodes* (Haarlem, 1903), p. 288.

129. *Journal de Bruxelles*, 6 May 1899.

130. *Review of Reviews*, May 1899.

131. *Laatste Nieuws*, 16 Mar. 1899; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 16 Mar. 1899, 'Cecil Rhodes in Berlin', evening, p. 2.

132. *Daily Mail*, 12 May 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes Accepts', p. 5.

133. *Western Daily Press*, 18 Mar. 1899.

speculate about how the government might contain Rhodes indicates the informal power that this non-official was believed to exercise, in large part through his public presence in the press. The image of Rhodes as a mythical and untouchable power was created and maintained in the press. It was noted that 'he remained equally popular' during both adversity and success, that 'his personal influence [in Cape Colony] is enormous', and that despite occupying 'no official position' he was the 'most conspicuous figure on the South African stage'.¹³⁴

The disproportionate attention that Rhodes received in the press thus fostered widespread public support for his projects. This support sometimes translated into concrete results, such as the private financing that he received for his railway scheme, but generally it sustained a type of informal power that those who held formal political positions could not ignore. Rhodes loomed large in the public imagination, and he skilfully attempted to leverage his celebrity capital for political purposes.

On 21 March 1899, following the trans-African telegraph and railway negotiations between Rhodes and Wilhelm II in Berlin, the *Nottingham Evening Post* concluded that 'the wire has but to be run up as quickly as circumstances will permit in order for Darkest Africa to be in closest touch with London'.¹³⁵ However, what became visible to the world through modern communication by the end of the negotiations was not 'Darkest' Africa, but Rhodes. Rhodes's starring role in the increasingly competitive attention economy of the mass media resulted from three interacting logics. First, a political logic meant that Rhodes, as well as other political and press actors, tried to use newspapers to shape the political agenda and framing of the negotiations. Secondly, a journalistic logic underpinned how journalists' limited access to the negotiations made them pursue stories about Rhodes himself, and how his evasiveness only fed their curiosity and mythologising of him. Thirdly, a mass media logic caused newspapers increasingly to transcend partisan commentaries and focus on Rhodes's attractive personal story, which they infused with popular literary and colonial themes. Moreover, Rhodes's personification of the British Empire enabled journalists to explain complex international relations to a mass audience, an effort aided by the novel 'business-like' style with which he and Wilhelm II (whose celebrity was built on different foundations) conducted diplomacy. Whereas John Street has distinguished between understanding politics as show business rather than as business, the mass media logic here displays the appeal of showing politics as business performed by show-business-type figures. All this press

134. *Indépendance Belge*, 7 May 1899, 'Cecil Rhodes', p. 6; *The Times*, 12 June 1899, 'The Transvaal Crisis. To the Editor of The Times', p. 12; *Review of Reviews*, Nov. 1899, 'Character Sketch. Cecil Rhodes of Africa', p. 451.

135. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21 Mar. 1899, 'Mr. Rhodes's Success', p. 4.

attention, in turn, provided Rhodes with widespread public support and informal power. More generally, this press treatment of a colonial celebrity demonstrates how mass media structurally exaggerated the discretionary power of individual political figures, and how politics came to function in a new transnational public sphere at the dawn of the twentieth century. It also constituted the precondition for the growing cult of Rhodes in that century, and the consequent criticism of this cult and its broader representation of racism in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

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