

THESES OF THE DOCTORAL (Ph.D.) DISSERTATION

**TENDENCIES AND CHANGES OF
GREAT BRITAIN'S SOUTH AFRICAN
COLONIAL POLICY (1846–1881)**

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I. Objectives and Theme of the Dissertation

“So newspapers and politicians said five-and-twenty years ago, so they repeated seven years ago; yet here we are just emerging from the worst affair that we ever were engaged in there. Our ‘shalls’ and ‘musts’ are as ineffectual as the ‘shalls’ and ‘musts’ of children. As sure as the leaves come when summer comes, fresh troubles of the same kind will continue to return upon us, unless we – the British people – set ourselves to understand how they are brought about.”

The quoted lines written by James Anthony (historian, the right hand of the Fourth Earl of Carnarvon [Secretary of State for Colonies, 1874–1878] regarding Southern Africa during the mid 1870s) in 1880 describe perfectly the issues standing at the centre of the present dissertation. The Ph. D. theses focuses on the said *“troubles of the same kind”* and the tendencies, trends of Great Britain’s South African colonial policy in the second half of the 19th century.

Southern Africa during the examined period (1846–1881) and the whole so called long 19th century was tremendously heterogeneous and divided by numerous barriers and borderlines. Furthermore, the processes, alterations took place during the said four decades, such as the great trek (exodus of the Dutch speaking settlers of Cape Colony), emerge of the Boer republics in the 1850s, the discovery of the diamond fields in the end of the 1860s, moreover the economic and social changes resulted by the mining for example the erosion of the traditional tribe structure made the existed cleavages deeper and created new ones. The paramount power in the region, Great Britain’s South African colonial policy was influenced crucially by the listed factors, while the British presence in itself contributed enormously the emergence and consolidation of the said fragmentation.

The main aim of the dissertation is to describe roots of the tendencies characterized Great Britain’s South African colonial policy in the second half of the 19th century through the analysis of the possible widest range of the sources.

Regarding the historiography of this theme several trends and schools can be highlighted. One of the major ones, called by some of the related researchers liberal, represents a London centric approach emphasized the role of the imperial will. For instance, Eric Anderson Walker preferred to approach that period from the aspect of the conflict between the Europeans and the natives, moreover he underlined the warlike characteristic of the African communities. Cornelis de Kiewiet South African historian who belonged to the said school highlighted the importance of the so called *“imperial factor”*. He was convinced

that the mother country sustained control over the colonies in order to protect the Africans from the abuse committed by the settlers. That emphasis of the role of the British was a reflection of the historian for the strengthening of the Afrikaner nationalism.

Representatives of the other main trend such as Clement Francis Goodfellow highlighted in the first place the strategic importance of Cape of Good Hope among the factors stood in the background of Great Britain's South African colonial policy. That geopolitical approach was elaborated by Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Alice Denny. The listed historians stated that Cape of Good Hope as another Gibraltar located in midway between the mother country and India had an unquestionable priority in Great Britain's colonial policy.

In comparison with the liberal and geopolitical schools Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore focused on quite different aspects. Marks and Atmore concentrated on the economic and social development and transformation induced by discovery of the diamond fields instead of the strategic concerning and issues of the imperial defence. One of their most influential and outstanding followers namely Norman A. Etherington indicates the role of the colonial lobby as well as consequence of the demolition of traditional tribal structure generated by migration of the natives towards to the mines and plantations.

Research of the South African history was determined by three elements. The first is the researchers' own conception and hypothesis about the British colonialism and imperialism. The second one is the range of the involved sources. Bulk of the historians concentrated only on official documents created by the political sphere, thus the scope of the research was limited to the field of politics. At last but not at least the third factor is the ideological background of the researchers or their political affiliations (liberalism, Afrikaner nationalism), especially their relations with the given South African political relations. In addition, a constant change has taken place in the historiography. The dominant position of the London centric approach which highlighted the role and impact of the Colonial Office has been taken by the so called socio-economic trend.

II. Methodology of the Dissertation

My hypothesis was that Great Britain's South African colonial policy in the second half of the 19th century can be characterized by the relation between different tendencies and changes. Collecting methodological materials meant a huge challenge especially regarding the fact that the history of Southern Africa has not been examined from the said aspect yet. According my

hypothesis Great Britain's South African colonial policy was less static as it was stated by Robinson and Gallagher. Nevertheless it was not only a line of ad hoc decisions as John S. Galbraith concluded. Thus the British colonial policy pursued in Southern Africa can not be described as a lineal process and neither as a policy without strategic planning.

During the research the focus was turned to the "*troubles of same kind*" occurred as tendencies just like it was underlined by Froude. Furthermore other factors benefitted the examination in order to categorize the tendencies, events, processes and separate them from each other. Several motives, typical characteristics and political tools and implements were highlighted by this the trends of the British colonial policy could be followed.

Numerous tendencies played crucial role in Great Britain's South African colonial policy. One of the most influential among them was the tendency of the South African unity and the active colonial presence. Aspirations, endeavours belong to that category which aimed the unification of the fragmented subcontinent under the union jack in order to transform it into a unified dominion loyal to the mother country and regarding the population dominated by whites mostly by British. The British politicians who urged the South African unity found the enhancement, increase of the British colonial activity the most effective way of realizing their schemes.

Apart from the said trend other tendencies are examined in the dissertation. For example the British colonial policy of the researched era was characterized by reluctance and intention for abandonment. Opposite to the supporters of the active colonial presence of the mother country, there were in considerable number of those within the British political elite who urged the decrease of Great Britain's role in Southern Africa. They referred to the heavy burden what the colonial expenditures meant for the British taxpayers. Some of these politicians proposed the total abandonment.

Tendencies can be described regarding the most vital dimension of the British colonial policy, namely relations with the natives. For instance the work and the civilization are the most characteristic elements of the conceptions elaborated to settle the conflicts between the Europeans and the natives.

The temporal borders of the research were set in line with tendencies. The first landmark of the examined period is the year 1846, when the 3rd Earl Grey became Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (1846–1852). The idea of the South African unity revealed first time in the level of the leaders of the official British colonial policy during that administration. The end of the examined period was 1881. That was the year of the downfall, fail of Lord Carnarvon's (1874–1878) scheme of the unification which was the first attempt

for the South African unity carried out by the Colonial Office. 1881 meant a return to former tendencies such as the trend of reluctance and abandonment.

Collection, categorization and study of the large quantity of the sources meant a huge challenge. The main purpose of the first phase of research was to collect four types, groups of documents (public and non-public as well): official ones (created by the Government, the Colonial Office), parliamentary papers, contemporary press, private papers. The most crucial in the first category is the correspondence of the leaders of the British colonial policy (Colonial Office) and the men on the spot, colonial officials responsible for the execution such as Governors, High Commissioners and Lieutenant Governors. The other group of public documents contains acts, proposals, orders, constitutions concerned with Southern Africa. Furthermore, the Colonial Office Lists, annually published by the Colonial Office are although important sources remained out of the scope of the former research. Similar to these lists statistical information is provided by the Blue Books. At last but not at least the Hansard's Parliamentary Debates belong to the official documents as well.

The group of non-public documents is formed by contemporary newspapers, dailies, weeklies, columns and articles. Apart from the periodicals, pamphlets and biographies of the politicians widen the range of the said class. The fourth category of the sources consists of the private papers written by British politicians involved in the South African colonial policy, for instance their journals, reminiscences and personal correspondence.

Bulk of the official documents was found in The National Archives. Considerable part of the Colonial Office's correspondence is available on the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online database. Some of the orders and acts can be found in published collections of sources. The <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/> online database benefitted tremendously the study of the Hansard's Parliamentary Debates. The periodicals and most of the unpublished private papers were attained in The National Archives and the British Library.

Beside the listed tendencies the dissertation attempts to provide answers for the following questions:

- 1., Did continuity ever exist in Great Britain's South African colonial policy?
- 2., What sort of factors stood behind the continuity, tendencies, changes and discontinuity of the British colonial policy?

As far as I know the said issues haven't been examined by Hungarian scholars yet. The present dissertation based on a wide range of sources puts Great Britain's South African colonial policy to a context different from the former approaches.

III. Results

The listed tendencies were examined regarding three periods. Phenomena recurred as trends can be identified concerning all of these courses, eras. The first one is the Earl Grey's term of office as a Secretary of State for War and Colonies (1846–1852). The second is the governorship of Sir George Grey in Cape Colony (1854–1859, 1860–1861) while the third one is the Lord Carnarvon's second term of office as a Secretary of State for the Colonies (1874–1881). Apart from the trends found in the first stage of the research other tendencies were described as well.

According to the studied processes and periods one can conclude that the British South African colonial policy was always guided back to the same path by several factors. These elements can be traced back to South Africa: 1, the fact that the Europeans were highly outnumbered by the African population; 2, heterogeneous state of the European population; 3, the strategic value of the Cape of Good Hope. The simultaneous presence of the said elements fundamentally influenced the aims and directions of Great Britain's colonial policy related to Southern Africa.

The first one, namely the dominant position of the natives in the population of the region had constant impact on the British (and European) colonial presence. Opposite to the other settler colonies of Britain such as Canada, Australia or New Zealand the South African colonies (Cape Colony and especially Natal) did not "whiten". Africans successively outnumbered the Europeans from the start to the end of the examined period.

The second factor similar to the last one is a local cleavage. Not only the number of Africans, but the heterogeneity of the Europeans was a fundamental challenge. Regarding the origins, culture, economic and political structures the Europeans can be divided into two main groups: English and Dutch speaking class.

Moreover both of these acute problems took place in the neighbourhood of Cape of Good Hope (as a second Gibraltar) which was essential from an imperial point of view. The constant presence of the said issues next to Simon's Bay, the British naval base in the Cape Peninsula continuously jeopardized the British interests in the region and induced the Colonial Office to take steps in order to secure Southern Africa. Following this the CO took

seriously every conflict emerged between the Europeans and the Africans, irrespectively that the given clash happened within or out of the borders of the territories controlled by Britain.

Opposite to the former approaches and results which tended to emphasize one factor over the others, the constant existence of the listed three factors stood behind the tendencies of the British colonial policy. The events and processes such as discovery of the diamond fields made sense within the triangle of the three elements: the fact that the African population heavily outnumbered the Europeans, the heterogeneity of the Europeans, and the strategic position of the Cape of Good Hope.

One of the most characteristic tendencies can be detected in the attempts made to solve the problems caused by the local cleavages. All of the conceptions elaborated for the unification of the subcontinent from Earl Grey's scheme to Carnarvon's design reflected for the ethnical, political, economic and cultural fragmentation of the region and sought to find the best solution for that issue. These conceptions aimed to cure the confrontation of Eastern and Western provinces of Cape Colony. Cape was unquestionably the paramount British colony in the region which advantageous position derived from the colony's economic potential, developed political structure and ethnical relations. From that point of view the leaders of the British colonial policy were anxious about the acute conflict of the wealthy British dominated Eastern provinces and the heterogeneous Western provinces. The main political aim of the Eastern separatists was the secession and the foundation of a new colony totally independent from Cape Town. All of the studied conceptions reflected for that idea and endeavour, namely all of them proposed the separation of Eastern Cape from the Western part of the colony.

The confrontation within Cape Colony was not the most vital problem which the Colonial Office had to face with as a tendency. Two of the local cleavages continuously meant a serious challenge for the Colonial Office from the start to end of the examined period: fear of the Africans and the Boers.

Earl Grey approached the rate of the African and the European population from humanitarian aspect. He was convinced that it would be very harmful, if the Colonial Office and the Imperial Government entrusted the Africans to the colonists because the latter would rule despotic the former. Opposite to that he would increase the role of the mother country in the colonies and proposed the establishment of a "native confederation". Through that Britain could fulfil her mission, the civilization of the Africans. The way to achieve the said aim from Earl Grey's point of view (in line with the principles of Livingstone) was paved by the Christianity and commerce with European traders. According to Earl Grey those two factors

combined with the increased control of the mother country and the activity of the missionaries could lift the Africans and settle the conflict between them and the colonists.

Sir George Grey in the mid 1850s found well grounded the hypothesis that the probable anti-European (and anti-British) alliance of the African people would result a general war between the natives and the colonists and would expulse the British and Boers from Southern Africa. In order to prevent that the Governor offered the federal unification of the British colonies and Orange Free State in other worlds the establishment of the South African union and he proposed the continue of the colonization. Apart from these Sir George did not spare energy to improve the colonies and destruct the traditional (social, economic) systems of the Africans which steps could be traced back to the fear of the natives.

The said approach did not fade away in the 1850s and the 1860s; moreover it had impact on the policy pursued by Lord Carnarvon. Carnarvon similar to Sir George Grey found the probable general native war very dangerous especially for the European African relations. He was convinced that the “native question” is the most pressing task. For instance in 1877 when the British annexed the Transvaal the most common (real) argument what CO referred for the failed Boer campaign drove against the Pedis that could destabilize the region. Furthermore, central element of Carnarvon’s scheme was to harmonize the “native policies” of the Boer republics and the British colonies. Lord Carnarvon would increase the control of the mother country in that field.

Likewise for the fear of the Africans, fear of the Boers appeared as a tendency in the British colonial policy. The Dutch speaking colonists challenged first the British by the great trek. The Colonial Office was anxious about the “emigrant” Boers would cause further conflicts, clashes and wars between the Africans and the Europeans. All of the examined British conceptions and politicians dealt with the said issue in first place. For instance Earl Grey anticipated the prevention of the Boer’s migration from the confederation of the African people lived around the Lake Ngami. Moreover, the liberal and philanthropic Secretary worried that the Europeans could exterminate the “native tribes”.

The British colonial policy saw a great danger in the possible unity of the independent Boer communities. Following the fact that the British were outnumbered by the Boers in the European population of Southern Africa, the Colonial Office paid special attention to the Dutch speaking communities. Similar to the problems occurred with reference to the Africans, the leaders of the CO saw a potential source of danger in a Boer confederation (unity of the Dutch speaking groups of Cape Colony, Natal and the Boer republics) which would threaten Britain’s interests and status in the region. The fears of the British were not groundless. The

idea of the unity rose several times among the political leaders of the Boers, but Great Britain succeeded to divide the parties, mainly the leaders of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The total isolation of the Boer communities was the second aim of the CO.

Another source of problem linked tightly to the latter purpose, which occurred as a tendency, namely the fear from increase of influence of a foreign power (or powers) in the region which could expulse the British from Southern Africa. That threat perceived in three dimensions: in case of the territories located out of range of the colonization, regarding the Boer republics and the African groups. The first one became actual especially from the mid 1870s, the increase of the scramble for the uncolonized regions. While concerning the second and the third one the Colonial Office was constantly anxious about the appearance of the foreign power.

Regarding the Boer republics Germany was categorized as a potential partner by the CO. However the German Boer relations stayed in a symbolic level and did not improve.

In case of the African communities the either real or imagined activity of Russia threatened several times the British. The leaders of the British colonial policy feared from the Russian interference especially during the Crimean War (1853–1856). They considered two options: probable Russian support behind the suspected anti-European and anti-British “native confederation”; Russia would interfere in the anticipated general war between the Africans and the colonists.

The constant presence of the said challenges had twofold impact on the direction of the British colonial policy. On the one hand the men on the spot had to be always ready to give adequate and immediate answers for the occurring challenges resulted by the permanent presence of the said sources of problems. On the other hand some part of the British political elite tended to attempt to settle the acute problems through great schemes and designs. Several similarities can be found between the plans examined in the dissertation. The first is that all of the concepts offered cure for the chronic and current problems of Southern Africa. The second crossing point is that those who elaborated the plans found the realization of the South African unity the most effective solution and answer for these issues. The third parallel was the efforts made for the cost effectiveness. In case of the realization of the plans, the proposers prognosticated the decrease of the British colonial expenditures. At last but not at least the role of the work is emphasized in every scheme regarding the solution of the “native question” (civilization).

The realization of the plans was stopped by obstacles from and out of the British World System. The execution met strong resistance of the region’s different political entities

such as the Boer republics and Cape Colony which wanted to defend the obtained political autonomy. Beside these, one part of the British political elite opposed to the listed schemes because they feared of increase of the colonial expenditures. The attempts made for the execution of the designs resulted the strengthening of former tendencies and led the British colonial policy back to the original state.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

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