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'I Came Up Here to Build a Bridge': Capitalism and the Representation of Military Leadership in *Zulu* (1964)

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ABSTRACT
This article will offer an examination of the link between cultural representations of military authority and capitalist ideology through a textual analysis of the British film Zulu (1964) and its narrative depiction of leadership during the Battle of Rorke's Drift – the most prominent action of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, and one which has accrued a certain mythic status in modern cultural history, becoming, for many, a 'synonym of British heroism.[1] *The central aim will be to interpret how this heroism is explained to the film audience and the political implications of the text's ability to communicate 'the ideology of leadership'.*[2]

Introduction

One of the most characteristic features shared by cultural representations of miliary conflict, and more explicitly economic activity, is a hierarchical conception of social organisation. Like the older feudal systems from which such values developed, abstract qualities of personal ability and charisma in modern cultural productions can often be read to mythologise a dynamic and distinct 'professional' class. *Zulu* provides a revealing case study to explore this issue, particularly since 'inspiration and dashing leadership' counted among the highest virtues of effective military organisation during

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[1]See Jan Morris, *Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress*, 1973, (London: The Folio Society, 1992), p. 364.

[2]For more on the methodology of 'audio-visual explanation' see Will Kitchen, *Romanticism and Film: Franz Liszt and Audio-Visual Explanation,* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

the nineteenth century, when a mythic class system was seen to provide a necessary and vital structure in social life.[3] In addition, qualities of military leadership often overlap with a civilian paradigm of entrepreneurial practice, as described by various economic sociologists.[4] Cultural texts will often present audiences with military figures, therefore, whose personal qualities of individual authority – proven, more often than not, in the heat of battle – are shown to be capable of integrating unproblematically into the capitalist economy and its supporting metaphysics of value. It is important, therefore, to look at cultural representations which contextualise leadership in reference to frameworks shared between military and corporate social systems and consider how this relationship is illuminated by the text's wider historical construction and reception.

Figure 1: Lieutenants Bromhead (Michael Caine) and Chard (Stanley Baker) and the defenders of Rorke's Drift. *Zulu* (1964) dir. Cy Endfield, Diamond Films / Paramount Pictures.

The Ideology of Leadership

In the following analysis, the 'ideology of leadership' will refer to the effect created by meaningful textual elements which encourage a judgement that personal qualities of hierarchical social responsibility, authority and distinction are necessary features of human social life – that institutions need particular individuals to lead, organise, and direct their members' behaviour, and that some people are 'naturally' better suited to certain roles and functions. The ideology is most clearly understood as an instance of

[3]Edward. M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army: 1868-1902,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 317 & p. 300.

[4]See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 1999, (London and New York: Verso, 2018), pp. 16-19; Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism,* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 15-38.

myth, as described by Roland Barthes; certain ideas, concepts, attitudes, and representational schemas are judged to be mythologised (rendered falsely 'natural' or 'good') by certain representations.[5] The ideology of leadership will be treated as a schematic construct – a certain idea or group of ideas which display recurrent themes and values, and which find multiple points of interpretation in texts and films such as *Zulu*. The ideology of leadership commonly operates in association with the 'hero type' – those unique individuals, or Romantic 'geniuses', who stand apart from society so as to shape it and orchestrate a better future. This sense of differentiation from the social totality – whether it frames the world as essentially 'wrong' or only in need of piecemeal readjustment, depending upon the perceived valuation of elements the society is shown to contain – functions as proof of the individual's 'superiority', or a need to positively distinguish them from the majority.

Due to its association with dynamic individualism, the ideology of leadership is extremely prevalent in modern capitalist society and has a tremendous impact upon the political significance of cultural products. Modern sociologists have reported that at least 70% of young Americans in high school, for example, believe that they have 'above-average' leadership skills – such statistics are hardly surprising in a global society which saturates its cultures with proactive and masterful character types, ranging from military heroes to civilian community leaders, superheroes to business entrepreneurs.[6] The mythologised idea of leadership is a highly malleable feature of modern cultural representation and has been one of narrative cinema's most resilient structuring tropes. Sometimes, as in *Zulu*, the political issues associated with such representations emerge most clearly in an explicitly military context, when characters facing death and destruction in violent and chaotic situations – and which, by extension, threaten the strength and coherence of the social fabric itself – expose and negotiate the need for order and authority. The significance of military representations is also demonstrated by noting the substantial influence that such texts can have on real world principles of leadership. A White House screening of *Patton* (1970), the Academy Award winning biopic of the famed Second World War US Army General George S. Patton (George C. Scott), has apocryphally been linked to US President Richard Nixon's decision to continue military intervention in South East Asia during the Vietnam War.[7] *Twelve O'clock High* (1949), the story of US Army Air Force General Savage (Gregory Peck)

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[5]See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* 1957, (London: Vintage, 2009), pp. 131-187.
[6]See Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*: *The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism,* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 90.
[7]Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film,* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 197.

and his efforts to raise the morale of an underperforming bomber squadron, was screened during officer training programs by the US Air Force.[8]

Due to the highly formalised systems of military social organisation, the ideology of leadership is a widespread convention throughout the catalogue of war themed media. The remarkable individual soldier who displays exceptional bravery, skill, charisma, tactical ability, or simple common-sense, is a stalwart of the combat genre in general. Many cultural products, ranging from TV shows to video games, will, despite any ideological nuance or complexity they may also contain, broadly celebrate feats of heroic leadership and impart the message: 'We couldn't win wars without men like this'. Examples of this type of mythologised individual leadership include Sgt Steiner (James Coburn) in *Cross of Iron* (1977), the Sergeant (Lee Marvin) in *The Big Red One* (1980), Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and Captain Price (Billy Murray/Barry Sloane) in the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series of video games (2007-). In each case, the mythologising of combat experience – which is sometimes in direct conflict with a meta-narrational critique regarding violence and arbitrary social power which organises the events in the narrative – is focused around the heroism of a particular individual who is humane, stoic and hardy. The films' rhetoric often situates them as a 'born', if sometimes reluctant, leader and an inspiration to those under their command. Yet this sense of value is often displaced throughout the social diegesis to emphasise a mythic validation of hierarchical structures. As the Old Man (Jürgen Prochnow) states in *Das Boot* (1982), in order to be a good leader 'you've got to have good men'.

Such representational tropes are, of course, typical of a significant proportion of cultural productions both ancient and modern, but they do demonstrate the prevalence of the ideology of leadership, as well as its potential to overstep critical perspectives on military activity and create positive valuations in favour of leadership in general – leadership with the potential to translate into the civilian world of capitalist economic activity, in the form of the business manager or entrepreneur. It was no coincidence that John Ruskin modelled his conception of political economy on the structures of military organisation.[9] Social relationships which extend beyond the bounds of economic rationality (a conception of objective standards interpreted according to self-interest) play a hugely important role in the organisation of modern capitalism as a system of cultural metaphysics, as Ruskin was among the first of his generation to realise. Duty, trust, charisma, and other forms of 'affection', comprise the roots of modern commerce and economic activity in addition to the structures

[8]John T. Correll, 'The Real Twelve O'Clock High', *Air Force Magazine*, 94, 1, (2011), https://www.airforcemag.com/article/0111high/. Accessed 30 July 2024.

[9]See John Ruskin, 'Unto This Last', 1862, in *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, Clive Wilmer (ed.), (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 172.

and behaviours characteristic of military institutions. If the labour practices of modern capitalism modelled themselves upon quasi-military schemas, therefore, it was not only in order to raise levels of production and logistical efficiency, but also the social status of commerce itself.[10]

The prevalence of the leader-hero type in politics, history and fiction demonstrates the significance of the concept of leadership and its malleable relationship with cultural production. Texts in which the ideology of leadership plays a critical role often display an intricate political negotiation between not only military and economic domains but also authoritarian and egalitarian perspectives in general. It is necessary to explore some of the ways in which this ideology of leadership mythologises social hierarchies, advocating the idea that certain people are better suited to lead than others, and, by implication, denigrates the notion of equality. Such a critique may help to remind us (as scholars such as Jo Littler, Michael J. Sandel and Adrian Wooldridge have done recently) that a meritocracy is not a democracy, no matter how compatible the ideas are suggested to be by cultural products which do not refute the power structures of the dominant social system.[11] In the following analysis of *Zulu*, I will examine this cultural transition between the military and the corporate mythologising of leadership in a specific historical context and illustrate how ideas of courage, authority, and ability 'under fire', can become a celebration of the spirit of capitalism, even in some of the most unlikely cultural products.[12]

Approaching *Zulu*

The Battle of Rorke's Drift on 22 January 1879 forms the dramatic central episode of a three-part campaign during the Anglo-Zulu War, between the crushing defeat of British forces at Isandhlwana and their decisive retaliation at Ulundi.[13] From a purely

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[10]In 1862, Ruskin writes of the inferior status of commercial activity as compared to military vocations; Ruskin, 'Unto This Last', p. 175. In the next twenty years, theorists and labour entrepreneurs such as Taylor, Ford and Escoffier would introduce quasi-military levels of organisation into the workplace, both at the level of primary and secondary sector factory production and the artisanal crafts.

[11]See Jo Littler, *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Michael J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?,* (London: Penguin Books, 2020); Adrian Wooldridge, *The Aristocracy of Talent: How Meritocracy Made the Modern World,* (London: Penguin Books, 2021).

[12]For more on film and its relationship with the spirit of capitalism see Will Kitchen, *Film, Negation and Freedom: Capitalism and Romantic Critique,* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

[13]For historical accounts of the battle itself, see Saul David, *Zulu: The Heroism and Tragedy of the Zulu War of 1879*, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 159-187; and Clammer, *The Zulu War*, pp. 90-108.

military perspective, the battle was rather insignificant, but in cultural terms it stands as one of the most enduring events in the global mythology of British imperialism, alongside General Charles Gordon's experiences in Khartoum. On the journey from England to assume command in Natal, Gordon's contemporary, then Lieutenant-General Garnet Wolseley, carried eleven Victoria Crosses for the soldiers who defended Rorke's Drift, the highest number awarded for any single action in British military history.[14] The successful defence of Rorke's Drift against several thousand Zulu warriors by a small group of British soldiers has not only become a grandiose symbol of national 'heroism', but also a staging ground for the complexification of British imperialism and its economic, colonial and political legacy. The famous 1964 film dramatisation directed by Cy Endfield and co-written by Endfield and John Prebble, although probably best remembered for containing the breakthrough performance of actor Michael Caine, offers a compelling representation of this contested fragment of the British imperial past (Figure 2). It maintains a complex representational field addressing issues of class, nationalism, race, masculinity and religion in reference to a deeply engaging and emotionally affective narrative structure.

Figure 2: Zulu warriors prior to the battle. *Zulu* (1964) dir. Cy Endfield, Diamond Films / Paramount Pictures.

Political readings of *Zulu* can easily adopt broadly post-colonialist methods and critique the film's representation of African characters – addressing, for example, the ambiguous depiction of the Zulu warriors as a formidable antagonistic force who display a profound respect for their weakened British enemies, and simultaneously lowering that same imposing force to the status of an unholy and 'inhuman' aberration.[15] The constructed opposition between the plucky British force and the

[14]Clammer, *The Zulu War*, p. 108.

[15]During the opening scene, images of a Zulu wedding ceremony are intercut with the disturbed and offended look of a young European woman (Ulla Jacobsson) who

overwhelming and Othered African warriors employs the structuralised encounter between nature and civilisation typical of the Hollywood western genre.[16] This combined empowerment and dehumanisation of the Zulus serves the film's overall mythologisation of British imperialism and military practice, as well as the broader glorification of the British national 'spirit' displayed by the film's central characters. In the twenty-first century, *Zulu* continues to be a controversial film due to interpretations which foreground the film's 'racist overtones', its tendency to fetishise violence, and its simplification of historical discourse.[17]

All forms of representation reduce the complexity of their subject to some degree or other, but the drastic simplification of history is commonly identified as one of the primary features of audio-visual media.[18] Such representations regularly demand that known historical facts be subsumed by a narrational focus on a small group of primary diegetic elements, constructing sympathetic or empathetic protagonists, if not always a clear-cut distinction between 'heroes' and 'villains', and framing the represented events as an engaging 'David and Goliath' story of courage and commitment against the odds.[19] For example, the film dispenses with contextualising the war in reference

complains to her father about the barbarity of the native customs. Throughout the film she is shown to be a kind-hearted and tolerant Christian, worthy of audience sympathies. Her father (Jack Hawkins) shows more respect for the native customs and culture, and is shown to be, later in the film, drunken, unstable, and a negative influence on the morale of the British soldiers. One sympathetic Welsh character, Neil McCarthy, a farmer shown to care about animals, also notes how the soil in Africa is unsuitable for life, too dry, and unable to sustain anything 'green' or healthy – a judgement with the potential to reflect negatively upon the Zulus themselves.

[16]See Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 74. James Chapman suggests that this inheritance is characteristic of the British Imperial adventure film in general; see James Chapman, 'Action, Spectacle, and the *Boys' Own* Tradition in British Cinema', in *The British Cinema Book*, Robert Murphy (ed.), pp. 85-95. 3rd edition, (London: BFI, 2009), p. 86.

[17]A 2018 charity screening of *Zulu* in Folkestone was protested for these reasons; see Sean Axtell, 'Calls to axe "racist" Zulu film from Folkestone's Silver Screen Cinema listings', *Kent Online*, 26th June 2018, https://www.kentonline.co.uk/folkestone/news/calls-to-axe-racist-zulu-film-from-cinema-185221/, Accessed 30 July 2024.

[18]Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defence of Hollywood,* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 17. For additional theoretical context on historical representation on film see also Robert A. Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words', in *The History on Film Reader*, Marnie Hughes-Warrington (ed.), (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 30-41,

[19]See Toplin, *Reel History*, pp. 17-57.

to the political and industrial developments which lay behind the invasion of Zulu territory, nor does it address the fact that the British were an invading force. It also omits the unknown injured Zulu who, at the time of the narrative commencement, was recovering in the hospital under the care of the British, and is reported to have been discovered and killed by his fellow warriors during the battle.[20] The deserting Natal sergeant who was shot in the back by a British soldier also didn't make it into the film.[21] Perhaps most significantly, historical sources also report that the majority of Zulus were killed by the British 'in cold blood': 'in the hours after the battle, hundreds of wounded Zulus left on the field of battle were bayonetted, hanged and buried alive in mass graves. More Zulus are estimated to have died in this way than in the battle itself, but the executions were covered up'.[22]

Although valuable, such historically inflected critical readings can neglect other significant political approaches.[23] It is important to remember that postcolonial interpretations which focus on racial topics must be conducted alongside methodologies which address the wider concept of capitalism and elements of its cultural ethos rooted in the individual and their relation to society. Indeed, it is the representation of those central 'heroic' characters – and their contribution to the overall narrative and diegetic representation of the social structure – which display elements equally significant for an understanding of the film as a political text. One of the most significant of such elements is, as suggested, the ideology of leadership.

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[20]Clammer, *The Zulu War*, p. 90.

[21]Ibid., p. 95, 102; David, *Zulu*, p. 169. Neither did the encouraging support and actions of chaplain George Smith; Clammer, *The Zulu War*, p. 99. As Saul David points out, as far as historical accuracy is concerned, the film also gives an inaccurate impression of the predominance of Welsh soldiers; only about 25% of those present at Rorke's Drift were born in Wales; David, *Zulu*, p. 162. In reality, Colour-Sgt Bourne was 5 foot 5 and a half inches tall and 'painfully thin'; Ibid. And the script also frames Private Hook as a more insolent and insubordinate character than he was in reality, in order to increase the drama and mythic appeal of his subsequent heroism; Ibid., p. 163. For further discussion of other historical inaccuracies, including the misrepresentation of the missionary Otto Witt, see Frederick Hale, 'The Defeat of History in the Film *Zulu*', in *Military History Journal*, 10, 4, (1996), http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol104fh.html. Accessed 30 July 2024.

[22]See David, *Zulu*, p. 184. The quotation is from Philip Dwyer and Amanda Nettelbeck, 'Savage Wars of Peace': Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World', in *Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World*, Philip Dwyer and Amanda Nettelbeck (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 6, pp. 1-23,

[23]For example, similar critical tendencies have influenced the reception of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; see Verlyn Klinkenborg, 'Introduction' in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. ix-xxi.

The Narrative Dynamics

The film's main characters are two British officers, Lieutenant Chard (Stanley Baker) and Lieutenant Bromhead (Michael Caine) (Figure 3). They are responsible for organising the defensive action which occupies the bulk of the narrative. Throughout the film we are shown how the officers take control of a dangerous and rapidly developing situation through ingenuity, tactical proficiency, and the ability to remain calm and display decisive and pragmatic behaviour under highly stressful conditions. Eventually, after surviving waves of attacks by Zulu warriors through the virtues of individual bravery, comradeship, and a firm commitment to a malleable yet distinctly hierarchical command structure, the British forces at Rorke's Drift win the day. In the final scene, the remaining African warriors depart the field with a gesture of respect for their adversaries.

Figure 3: Lieutenants Chard (Stanley Baker) and Bromhead (Michael Caine). *Zulu* (1964) dir. Cy Endfield, Diamond Films / Paramount Pictures.

Much of the film's content adheres to a 'problem and solution' system of narrative hermeneutics. A diegetic problem will often arise and present itself as an issue to be solved by the central characters. The Zulus mount a surprise attack against an underdefended part of the garrison, so an officer will order the redeployment of troops from a different section. One character's pacifism threatens to weaken the morale of the soldiers, so an officer has him isolated. The enemy breaks through the barricades, so an officer organises an attacking formation to secure the vulnerable section. Each 'problem' is represented as a significant diegetic element with the potential to impact negatively upon the fictional situation of the positively valued characters. The film audience are then shown how these problems are solved by efficient leadership and well-executed military tactics. For the viewing audience, there is a kind of aesthetic pleasure to be derived from this spectacle of characters efficiently

solving serious problems. The result of this narrative procedure is a positive valuation of the elements shown to be primarily responsible for these pleasurable solutions.

Fuelled by the motivational logic of self-preservation, every level of the represented social hierarchy takes part in this process. For example, the doctor Surgeon-Major Reynolds (Patrick Magee) will recognise a threat, such as a Zulu climbing through a nearby window, and take action to solve the problem in a way which is both favourable to his own situation and demonstrating a degree of organisational finesse (ordering a nearby solider to repel the attacker while continuing to operate on a patient). Throughout the battle, men fight whilst hobbling on crutches or dragging their injured bodies across the floor to feed ammunition to those still standing. At a later stage, even the malingering and insubordinate Private Hook (James Booth) is swept-up by the situation, displaying valour and bravery by returning through a burning building to save an injured man against whom he held previously held a grudge. After the battle is won, the film's voiceover narrator (Richard Burton) reverently lists the names of those represented soldiers who won the Victoria Cross, but the general effect is to endow every character with a share of the film's generalised atmosphere of purposeful and commonsensical activity. It spreads its glory to all, without prejudice. But the sense of equality thus created has a secondary political function which upholds the ideology of leadership.

The diegesis has presented a certain social order as a necessary condition of physical survival, and we are invited to conjecture that without a strong yet flexible hierarchical structure of military authority, the battle would have been lost and the sympathetic characters would have been killed. The officers stand at the apex of a necessary and 'good' system of social power. The film manages to fortify the value of this system by offering a particular combination of class mobility and class hypostatisation, since *Zulu* offers us the spectacle of some characters remoulding their social situation whilst others are held firmly in place. This is most clearly demonstrated in the contrast between the two officers placed at the centre of the narrative, Chard and Bromhead. The kind of purposeful activity and organisation displayed and valorised by the film situates the former as the representative of an emerging professional class which is ready and able to assume the responsibilities of social leadership from an anachronistic aristocracy.

Chard and the Professional Class

At the start of the film, the haughty Bromhead is in command of the outpost. He is introduced as an aristocratic officer who takes pride in his family's military history, despite the fact that he is personally inexperienced and seems more interested in hunting on the African veldt than demonstrating any outstanding aptitude for military command. As an officer of the Royal Engineers, Chard was initially sent to Rorke's Drift to build a bridge across a nearby river. During a construction accident, he is

shown to leap into the water himself to contain and rectify the situation – undaunted at the prospect of doing for himself what he asks of his subordinates. Chard's professionalism is reiterated throughout the film by repeated references to his commission as an officer in the Royal Engineers, in contrast to Bromhead's regular army heritage. Their first encounter frames Bromhead sitting high on a horse in immaculate dress whilst Chard is stripped to his shirt, getting his hands dirty during bridge construction. Chard's 'hands-on' professionalism is directly contrasted with Bromhead's anachronistic qualities – his emphasis on honorific military formality and leisure activities – hunting. Bromhead's aristocratic family background is not shown to render him any particular psychological or social advantage when commanding his men during the battle; and he at first grudgingly, later willingly, concedes ultimate responsibility to his fellow Lieutenant.

During the opening act of the film, Bromhead considers himself to be more of a 'real' soldier than Chard due to his family tradition in military service. But when the Royal Engineers officer voices this unspoken criticism – 'You're telling me that you're the professional and I am the amateur' – the narrative of the film will actually prove Bromhead mistaken in more ways than one. Not only is Chard given opportunity to reveal superior leadership skills in the heat of battle, demonstrating how the middle-class Chard has more professional 'ability' as a solider than the aristocratic Bromhead, but the film is also able to reframe and rehabilitate this professionalism by transcending its relationship with the sphere of military activity altogether. Chard's 'civilian' qualities, or those not directly associated with traditional military combat experience and ability, are shown to be partly responsible for his essential superiority as a military leader. The film explicitly displaces his military prowess into a more neutral context, open to interpretation as belonging to the economic rather than overtly military sphere. During his first scene, Chard laments that men are 'sitting around on their backsides, doing nothing' and imparts the universalising capitalistic ethic of labour: 'I can find work for baritones as well as tenors'. As Chard himself states, after the successful defence of the outpost: 'I came up here to build a bridge'. The disavowal of personal qualities of leadership serves to mythologise those very qualities themselves, as well as de-militarise their essential value into a civilian domain closer to the world of vocational capitalism. Yes, Chard is the real 'professional', but for precisely the reason that he is *not* initially contextualised by the film as a regular combatant. His professionalism finds its supporting value in the narrative's ability to reconfigure his status as 'just an engineer' – the idea that he might have come here 'to build a bridge', but fate led him to encounter another and momentarily more pressing use for his talents. In this way his value transcends military organisation and leadership and evokes the world of economic capitalism.

The kind of civil engineering which forms a key part of Chard's character also has its own ambiguous relationship with the colonial legacy. Despite their positive effects,

throughout the nineteenth century infrastructure and communication development strengthened social and racial divisions in and around the colonies. As C. A. Bayly notes: 'The steamship, telegraph, and leaps forward in medicine and techniques of war […] opened up an even wider gap in power and resources between European and African'.[24] The invasion of Zulu territories was orchestrated by British officials Henry Bartle Frere and Theophilus Shepstone, who exaggerated the military threat posed by the Zulus and interpreted the war as a means of securing sources of cheap labour for farms and mining companies in Natal, as well as consolidating British power around the Cape of Good Hope, and fortifying the southern passage to India.[25] Against this political and economic background, it was precisely the kind of engineering professionalism embodied by the figure of Chard which was responsible, in part, for the systematic exploitation of the African population. Laying railway tracks and building bridges generally were labour-intensive colonial projects which required 'a vast, unskilled workforce, which could only be found among the black population. If industrialisation was to proceed, the blacks of southern Africa had to be completely pacified and brought under white control'.[26]

The intimate connection between economic power and colonial exploitation was strengthened by the military, political and civil developments which followed the Zulu conflict, through the First Boer War and beyond. It was the urgent need for infrastructure and engineering works in the southern African colonies – 'no civil hospital, no bridges, no metalled roads' – which fed grievances against Britain during the 'scramble for Africa', and by 1914 'hundreds of thousands of southern Africans had become labourers in mines or on the estates of white owned-farms. Far from initiating a period of land reform, as some Africans had hoped, the war for control between the British and the descendants of Dutch settlers from 1899 to 1902 simply confirmed the racial division of labour'.[27] Needless to say, the film gives little opportunity to explore or negotiate the intimate connection between imperial exploitation and the kind of purposive leadership and organisational activity associated with its central characters. In the construction of an engaging narrative, the various forms of imperial exploitation are 'forgotten', and the remaining content performs a more decontextualised, but no less political, valuation of purposive activity and hierarchical organisation.

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[24]C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780-1914,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 442.
[25] Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of The British Empire*, 1994, (London: Abacus, 2000), pp. 256-257.
[26] Ibid., p. 256.
[27] See Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912,* (New York: Perennial/Harper Collins, 1992), p. 90. The quotation is from Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 442-443.

Bromhead's concession to Chard becomes a moment of 'passing the torch' from a problematic aristocratic past to a more pragmatic capitalist modernity. Although it was Michael Caine who would emerge as the rising star and eventually an icon of the 1960s, it is Stanley Baker's Chard who is more emblematic of contemporary Britain – a society striving to reimagine its imperial past after a painful yet glorious victory over the Third Reich, at a time of heightened social mobility, in the growing shadow of American cultural and economic dominance, and with a nostalgic desire for a liberal, respectable brand of economic professionalism. With the UK still reeling from the blow to national status dealt by the Suez crisis, the early 1960's witnessed a widespread desire for modernisation and economic growth. In a 1963 edition of *Encounter*, Arthur Koestler accused Britain of being 'backward': 'the cult of amateurishness, […] and the contempt in which proficiency and expertise are held, breed mediocrats by natural selection'.[28] As Dominic Sandbrook notes, 'there was a strong and justified sense that Britain was falling behind her competitors', illustrated by a decline in real national income between 1951 and 1964 compared to Germany, France and the Netherlands.[29] Britain was confused about its place on the world stage, and modernisation was seen to be the way forward – modernisation of its economic policy, labour relations and management practices. The redistribution of class relations in *Zulu* is symptomatic of a modern Britain which was being, in the words of Sandbrook, 'dragged kicking and screaming into the modern, scientific, classless world of the 1960s'.[30] Where cultural icons such as James Bond provided a fantastically reassuring and aspirational image of professionalism, mobile consumerism, and international significance, the heroism of the Rorke's Drift defenders is no less revealing for British culture in the post-Suez era. Indeed, it would be Michael Caine who would soon go on to solidify his stardom as an even more culturally potent example of the mannered professionalism which distinguishes Chard as the herald of a new era when he played Harry Palmer in *The Ipcress File* (1965).

[28]Cited in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, 2005, (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 542.
[29]Ibid., p. 521.
[30]Ibid., p. 541.

Figure 4: The 'professional' Chard leading Bromhead following the battle. *Zulu* (1964) dir. Cy Endfield, Diamond Films / Paramount Pictures.

According to this interpretation, Chard's ability to take command and successfully lead his men in the defence of Rorke's Drift (Figure 4) exemplifies the capacity of a new professional class to take the reins of leadership in a modern microcosm of British society. Throughout the film, the officers call on their sergeants to carry out orders. Audiences are encouraged to understand the need for an efficient and unimpeded chain-of-command by witnessing the successful execution of military strategy by the NCOs. Corporal Allen (Glynn Edwards) and Colour-Sergeant Bourne (Nigel Green) are emblematic figures of British working-class heroism. Their stalwart, straight-backed hardiness, emphasised through physical stature and air of paternal authority, are role models for the ordinary privates. Chard and Bromhead know they can rely on their NCOs to maintain morale and an effective chain-of-command. The image of traditional hierarchical class placement becomes a form of comfort which is intimately connected to the audiences' empathic desire to see the sympathetic British characters survive the battle. Again, the ideology of leadership ascribes ultimate value to those who stand at the top of the hierarchy, but also credits those leaders with the ability to magnanimously project that value downward to their subordinates – 'You've got to have good men'.

With a body of able soldiers under his command, Chard organises some impressive feats, and the affective power of *Zulu* is perhaps strongest at its most problematic political moments. Scenes in which disciplined ranks of riflemen fire bullets into scores of half-naked Africans return frequently at desperate moments of the narrative when the battle seems to be tipping in favour of a Zulu victory. When the Zulus breach the outer walls, Chard organises a last-minute counterattack by deploying a group of riflemen in a classical volley fire military formation (Figure 5). This moment is narratively constructed so as to be experienced by audiences as a pleasurable relief –

the affective 'solution' to a dangerous 'problem'. At such moments, the film seems to fetishise military action as the creation of a semi-human killing machine which symbolises more than British imperial power, but also an abstract conception of effective organised performance. It is also possible to critique such spectacles of violence in terms of capitalist metaphysics itself, or through the sublime merging of quantity and quality. What comes to the foreground in this moment is the underlying idea that the success or failure of the battle – the triumph of the positively valued diegetic elements – depends upon the immediate and formalised process of killing as many enemies as possible. If the audience experiences 'goosebumps' during this scene, as many viewers seem to, then it is a curious moment of conflation between the embodied pleasures of audio-visual spectatorship and the mythologisation of the doctrine of purposeful activity – an audio-visual paean to human agency, impactful cause and effect, which has, as its disavowed 'explanan', a naturalised and commonsensical conception of leadership and social organisation.[31]

Figure 5: Riflemen in a classical volley fire military formation repelling the Zulu breach of the outer walls. ***Zulu*** **(1964) dir. Cy Endfield, Diamond Films / Paramount Pictures.**

Having ventured such an interpretation, however, the interesting thing is that the film both allows the audience an opportunity for such pleasures and simultaneously denounces its own effect through the main characters' emotional and moral response to the battle. At the end of the film, Chard and Bromhead share a wounded confession. Despite the British victory, they abhor the violence which circumstances have forced

[31]In this context, 'explanans' are the various conjectured ideas, values judgments or other explanatory structures which it is necessary to take for granted in order to render any textual representation intelligible and relevant to a given interpretive situation; see Kitchen, *Romanticism and Film*, p. 9.

upon them. Delivered in an uncomfortable tone evocative of a sexual confession, Bromhead says,

> Does everyone feel like this afterwards? … Sick … I feel ashamed.
>
> Was that how it was for you, the first time?

Mixing shame with a vague sense of resentment, Chard's answer invites the audience to assume that both men are combat 'virgins':

> Do you think I could stand this butcher's yard more than once?

This reply distances the heightened value of Chard as a proactive and dynamic character from the audience's potential to condemn the represented killings, and also provides an opportunity for them to increase their respect for his abilities as a leader. His demonstrated professional capabilities – which have been put to the most severe test throughout the battle – are now worthy of redoubled respect now that we are led to understand that he lacked prior combat experience. The audience are also primed to applaud Chard for the hypothetical assumption that he will turn his talents back to 'building bridges', and other such ends, which are perhaps less 'military' in character and will take him into the vocational world of the civilian economy.

Conclusion

As a piece of narrative storytelling, *Zulu* constructs a coherent and polished diegetic world in which the need for clear, structured and effective leadership is indispensable. By offering a compelling and simplified dramatisation of the battle of Rorke's Drift, which makes use of a dynamic 'problem and solution' narrative structure, the film is able to articulate an ideology of leadership which finds heroes forged on the battlefield ready and willing to inspire the economic values of the contemporary British economy.

In order to understand the content of any text, it is often just as useful to consider those things that are excluded. The film's interpreted message about leadership might be very different, for example, if it did not cautiously dispense with all historical material which might be utilised to complicate this affirmative picture of social organisation. One individual who is conspicuously absent from the film's adaptation of historical events is the original commanding officer at Rorke's Drift, Major Henry Spalding of the 104th Regiment of Foot.[32] Historical scholarship has not looked kindly upon Spalding, who was absent at the time of the battle attempting to secure assistance from a British infantry company reported to be in nearby Helpmakaar. As Saul David writes: 'Why he chose to go himself, and not send a galloper, has never been

[32]David, *Zulu*, p. 160.

satisfactorily explained; nor has his failure to return with reinforcements. There is, in any case, no excuse for an officer abandoning his post when an attack is imminent'.[33] The shocking defeat of British forces at Isandhlwana – the event which sets the stakes for the drama at Rorke's Drift during the opening scene of *Zulu* (Figure 6) – was attributed, in part, to poor organisation of defences by the commanding officers, through a general 'failure to take precautionary measures at the camp […] No lookout was established on the top of Isandhlwana itself, and no pickets were posted to the west of the hill. In other words, the rear of the camp was quite unprovided for'.[34]

Figure 6: The aftermath of the British defeat at Isandhlwana. *Zulu* (1964) dir. Cy Endfield, Diamond Films / Paramount Pictures.

Lieutenant-General Garnet Wolseley and other British official were critical of Lord Chelmsford's conduct as commander of the expeditionary force into Zulu territory and blamed the disaster at Isandhlwana on a gross underestimation of the enemy's military strength.[35] Wolseley's subsequent appointment as High Commissioner and Commander in Chief of British forces in Natal was taken as an insult by Chelmsford and led indirectly to his later attack on the Zulu capital Ulundi.[36] The British deployed their formidable moving fortress, 'the British square', complete with Gatling guns capable of cutting through scores of charging African warriors and the square then parting to release mounted divisions to perform the *coup de grâce*.[37] It was a nearly

[33]Ibid., p. 164.
[34]Clammer, *The Zulu War*, pp. 47-48.
[35]Halik Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley: Victorian Hero,* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1999), p. 98.
[36]Clammer, *The Zulu War*, p. 205.
[37]Ibid., pp. 210-213. At Ulundi, this function was famously performed by the Duke of Cambridge's own 17th Lancers.

anachronistic military formation which was only viable for the British when used against comparatively underdeveloped native forces such as the Zulus. It recalled a style of fighting which the British had retained since the Napoleonic wars. In all, the casualties suffered at King Cetshwayo's stronghold numbered twelve killed and eighty eight wounded on the British side and an estimated Zulu loss of between 1,000 and 1,500 men.[38] Chelmsford's final assault on Ulundi was in direct contravention of Wolseley's orders, although the British reception of the action – which resulted in a resounding victory – was ultimately positive.[39] Seen in such terms, values associated with the ideology of leadership also led to a precipitous military action countenanced in terms which would allow an officer to 're-establish his military reputation'.[40] Leadership was also less than ideal on the Zulu side. Cetshwayo had forbidden any advance into Natal territory, so the attack on Rorke's Drift was an independent action on the part of his regiments – and Prince Dabulamanzi, Cetshwayo's brother, in particular – anxious to follow-up upon the advantage won at Isandhlwana and give their warriors another chance for winning valour in battle, regardless of the strategic irrelevance of Rorke's Drift itself.[41]

Ignoring the perhaps negative roles played by figures such as Spalding, Chelmsford and Dabulamanzi, therefore, and focusing instead on Chard and Bromhead, *Zulu* was able to maintain a more coherent interpretation of leadership as a positively valued concept. Moreover, in order to purify the film of its association with imperial exploitation and the affective spectacle of bloody violence, the narrative foregrounds the supposedly 'innocent' aspects of individual leadership and its role in the consolidation of a dynamic and effective social group consisting of sympathetic members. In pursuing its dramatic objectives, the film does not require any degree of historical fidelity which might find room for executions or mass graves. The audience are invited to take pleasure in seeing the plucky band of British soldiers stand their ground against an overwhelming horde of vaguely 'othered' antagonists, and recognise that their survival and ultimate triumph – on moral grounds, when Chard provides the necessary disavowal by comparing the battlefield to a butcher's yard – is dependent upon the mythologisation of a hierarchical system of social organisation and the pragmatic location of individuals at certain positions of authority and responsibility within that system.

[38]Ibid., p. 214.
[39]Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley*, pp. 99-100.
[40]Clammer, *The Zulu War*, p. 205; Chelmsford gave Cetshwayo reasonable time to surrender by meeting negotiated terms, although his troops continued to advance through the province until a confrontation became inevitable.
[41]Ibid., p. 97; David, *Zulu*, p. 167.

Chard, the fictional Chard created by the film, 'came up here to build a bridge'. Soldiering, he makes clear to us, is not in his blood. Yet coursing through his veins are the qualities of intuitive organisation and natural leadership which are prized by both military institutions of colonial governance and civilian capitalism alike. If he declares himself ready and willing to transcend the 'butcher's yard' of African soil and, by implication, leave the army for some other vocation or calling, then this movement between spaces is one which is also shared by the film audience when *Zulu* itself ends and cinema stalls or living room sofas are vacated. During the South African campaigns, Royal Engineers such as Chard undertook a variety of civil works involving railway repairs, water supplies, road construction, telecommunications, dynamos, traction engines, and pontoon bridges.[42] And although the expertise derived from such activities was typically directed inward, *Zulu* offers a representation which allows a British society, perhaps nostalgic for their recent past, the opportunity to rediscover the qualities of professional zeal which once laid the foundations of an empire. Whatever Chard's imagined career choice after Rorke's Drift, and whatever work audience members may return to when they find themselves back in reality – a post-imperial world which no longer shares much of the economic advantages provided by the colonial legacy – the lesson of the film remains. We will surely 'do well' with men like this around.

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[42]Lieutenant-Colonel C. K. Wood, 'The Work of the Royal Engineers in Natal', in *Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers*, *Royal Engineers Institute Occasional Papers*, XXVII, Captain R. F. Edwards (ed.), pp. 49-70, (Chatham: W. & J. Mackay & Co. Ltd, 1901), passim.