

**Transcontinentalism:
Technology, geopolitics, and the Baghdad
and Cape-Cairo Railway projects, c. 1880-
1930**

Matthew Scott

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Abstract

This thesis identifies and analyses what it terms the doctrine of transcontinentalism, a geopolitical and technological vision for the projection and territorialisation of state power across continental space between c. 1880 and 1930. At this time many transcontinental railways were either fully or partly constructed across the American, Asian, and African continents. Transcontinentalism was a doctrine based upon the recursive relationship that developed between civilised and naturalised geopolitical imaginations of space and the spread of railway technology in the late nineteenth century. The thesis argues that the construction of transcontinental railways should be conceptualised in terms of the extension and territorialisation of state power and civilisation across continental space in an increasingly closed world political map, where European states were imagined as the pinnacle of civilisational development while nonetheless existing in constant, naturalised competition with one another. The entwining of this naturalised geopolitical imagination with a notion of railways as circulatory systems enabling the movement of labour and resources across space produced the imperative to insert railway systems into the supposedly inert, lifeless, and unconscious expanses of non-European continental space, reawakening and revitalising the continents and connecting them to wider global circulations. Concomitantly, this was variously equated to the ascension of whichever state could construct transcontinental railways to the status of global hegemon. After detailing the historical and conceptual roots of transcontinentalism in Part One, Parts Two and Three of the thesis conduct empirical analyses, based on extensive archival research in Britain, into the Baghdad and Cape-Cairo Railways. In doing so the thesis demonstrates the development of transcontinentalism in two British examples, while drawing out the wider contributions to the fields of critical geopolitics, British diplomatic and imperial history, and wider histories of the expansion of imperial powers across continental space.

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The part that probably says more about you than the thesis itself...

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List of Abbreviations

ARC – Anatolian Railway Company

BL – British Library

BOT – Board of Trade

BRC – Baghdad Railway Company

BSAC – British South Africa Company

CAB – Cabinet Office

CID – Committee of Imperial Defence

CO – Colonial Office

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

FO – Foreign Office

IOR – India Office Records

PID – Political Intelligence Department

RGS – Royal Geographical Society

RIM – Papers of R.I. Money

TNA – The National Archives

WL – Weston Library

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Note on Referencing and Place Names

In this thesis I have adopted the reference style of the journals *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* and *The Geographical Journal*. All published sources are cited in text utilising Harvard, while all archival sources are cited in footnotes. The exception to this is Leo Weinthal's *The story of the Cape to Cairo railway & river route from 1887 to 1922, five volumes*, which for convenience has been cited in footnotes under the abbreviation SCCR followed by I, II, III, IV, or V to indicate volume.

Throughout this thesis many renderings of place names have changed from the period under consideration to the time of writing. When a place name has been quoted I have retained the usage that was originally utilised, while in my own prose I have used modern renderings. For example, in Chapter Four I render the common late nineteenth century spelling 'Koweit' as Kuwait in my own prose but leave it unaltered in direct quotations from archival material.

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1. 'An uncontrollable passion to bring together the uttermost ends of a continent'

"A generation ago steam and the Suez canal appeared to have increased the mobility of sea-power relatively to land-power. Railways acted chiefly as feeders to ocean-going commerce. But trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land-power, and nowhere can they have such effect as in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia, in vast areas of which neither timber nor accessible stone was available for road-making" (Mackinder, 1904: 434).

At first glance, opening a thesis that analyses the relationship between geopolitics and transcontinental railways with this quote might seem like a bit of an unimaginative choice. These words, spoken in January 1904 by the man many consider to be the founding father of geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, are some of the most frequently cited from the considerable catalogue of soundbites bestowed upon us by the classical canon of geopolitical theorists. Yet it is my contention in this thesis that the emphasis on this particular soundbite has obscured the wider connections that can be traced between geopolitics and transcontinental railways between c. 1880 and 1930. Mackinder was not the only one to discuss the rapid impact of transcontinental railway technology on the international political system. For instance, in 1912 the geographer and African administrator Harry Hamilton Johnston (1912: 558) noted that

"[s]everal railway projects of importance have recently been placed before the public for consideration in England, France, Germany, and Russia, projects which are intended to attain two chief purposes: unbroken railway communication (1) between Calais and India, and (2) between Capetown and the Mediterranean. The construction of these great trunk lines for the last ten years has depended less on the amount of money they would cost than on the assuagement of international jealousies, rivalries, and fears. If these last could be allayed by some happy solvent of the ambitions of the four greatest Powers in the Old World - Britain, France, Austro-Germany, and Russia - not many years would elapse before we might be able to travel from London to Capetown, or London to the chief cities of India, with no more sea passage involved than the crossing from Dover to Calais, from Tarifa to Tangier, or Constantinople to Scutari."

Johnston was speaking not of the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia like Mackinder was, but rather two other transcontinental routes – the first between Europe and India, which at the time he was writing was being constructed jointly by Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The second he mentioned was the Cape-Cairo Railway, which

in 1912 was creeping slowly through the Belgian Congo in Central Africa under the auspices of the engineer and capitalist Robert Williams. Evidently Johnston considered both railways a universal good; projects that would increase the intercourse and cross-fertilisation of human ideas, commodities, and peoples. Yet as he rightly recognised, both were embroiled in the deep geopolitical contestations of the Great Powers, the ‘assuagement of international jealousies, rivalries, and fears’ that characterised the years leading up to the First World War. If these rivalries could be put aside, Johnston believed, a ‘happy solvent’ applied to them, both railways could be completed and the traveller could move between continents as quickly and comfortably as they could move between proximate cities.

Yet it was not only among servants of the British Empire that such fantasies abounded. As Mackinder (e.g. [1911] 1921: 197-203; 1912: 258-259) knew well, by the turn of the twentieth century railways had been completed across the North American continent in both the United States and Canada. Here too, the construction of transcontinental railways was seen as an extraordinary thing. Decades earlier, during the construction of the transcontinental Pacific Railroad in the US, a local magazine in Denver had apparently “spoke[n] for nearly all of America” when it declared that “[t]he one moral, the one remedy for every evil, social, political, financial, and industrial, the one immediate vital need of the entire Republic, is the Pacific Railroad” (quoted in Ambrose, 2002: 144). Here the Pacific Railroad represented the unrolling of the blossoming American state westwards, orientating it away from Europe and towards its own unique future on the west coast of the continent and beyond (Cumings, 2009: 109). When completed it would apparently negate all of the evils – social, political, financial, and industrial – faced by the American state.

In 1890 a Colorado governor called William Gilpin (1890: iii) took this to its most eccentric length when he proposed a plan for a ‘Cosmopolitan Railway’, which “should not only traverse the [North American] continent from sea to sea, but should continue its course north and west across the strait of Bering; and across Siberia, to connect with the railways of Europe, and of all the world.” For the progress of humankind, Gilpin (1890: 108) reasoned, the railway “ha[d] become almost as much a necessity as is the circulation of the blood to the individual.” He confidently predicted it would “obliterate

race distinctions”, “discourage war”, and “bring about a universal brotherhood of man” (Gilpin, 1890: 48). It would enable “a wider intercourse of human ideas,” open up “new agricultural regions, coal-fields, mines, and manufacturing sites”, and facilitate the emergence of a “world currency, world weights and measures, and [a] world language and literature” (Gilpin, 1890: 56). Its ultimate outcome would be nothing less than “intellectual elevation, material development, and a higher scale of civilisation” (Gilpin, 1890: 48). And if these benefits were not enough, Gilpin (1890: 45) believed that the project harboured “no serious obstacles [...] from an engineering point of view”. “The more I investigated,” he wrote, “the more practicable the plan appeared, until the certainty of its consummation at no far distant day became with me a settled conviction” (Gilpin, 1890: iii).

Meanwhile, across the Bering Straits, the Trans-Siberian Railway that so troubled Mackinder in 1904 was simultaneously being talked up as the cure for the various ills of Russia. In 1881 the famed Russian essayist and philosopher Feodor Dostoevsky (quoted in Hauner, 2013: 1) contemplated the necessity of the “future seizure of Asia” by the Russian state. In a block of text that would have chilled the blood of Mackinder, he argued that Russia’s “coming destiny” could only be achieved in Asia:

“In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, whereas to Asia we shall go as masters. In Europe we were Asiatics, whereas in Asia we, too, are Europeans. Our civilising mission in Asia will bribe our spirit and drive us thither. It is only necessary that the movement should start. Build two railroads: begin with the one to Siberia, and then to Central Asia, and at once you will see the consequences.” (quoted in Hauner, 2013: 1).

The nature of these statements by Dostoevsky, Gilpin, Johnston, and Mackinder lead one to agree with the shrewd observation of the one-time Russian finance attaché in Berlin Herr Adolf Rothstein. In 1898, the British investigative journalist W.T. Stead (1899: 363) had travelled to St. Petersburg, and, reflecting upon a chance meeting he had with Rothstein, wrote that he was “hardly prepared for the philosophical observation which fell from his lips on the subject of the great transcontinental line which Russia is building across northern Asia.” This shrewd observation went as follows:

“This railway, [...] like many others of the same nature, is being built under the compulsion of an impulse or instinct which it is impossible to justify on financial, political, or military grounds. The sacrifices which their construction entails will never be

repaid, at least, to the men who make them. From a financial point of view I could name a score of other methods of investing money within the Empire that would pay handsomely, pay far better than this transcontinental railway can ever hope to do. But nations appear to be sometimes possessed by an uncontrollable passion to bring together the uttermost ends of a continent, quite irrespective of rational motives. It is a kind of demon which drives them: and I can only suppose that the impulsion is intended to promote the general good of mankind" (quoted in Stead, 1899: 363-364).

This thesis aims to explain what Rothstein called "the uncontrollable passion to bring together the uttermost ends of a continent, quite irrespective of rational motives." To do so the thesis introduces a new and original conceptualisation of the relationship between transcontinental railways and geopolitics which it terms *transcontinentalism*. This is not a new word, but the term itself has, with one exception discussed below, never been formalised, theorised, or discussed in any detail or depth. This thesis proposes transcontinentalism as a way of understanding the construction of transcontinental railways across the world's continental landmasses. It proposes that transcontinentalism can be used as a framework for making sense of transcontinental railway construction, what it meant, what it was believed to accomplish, and why it grasped the attention of so many between c. 1880 and 1930. To do this, the thesis focuses on two empirical examples: the German/Ottoman Baghdad Railway and the British Cape-Cairo Railway. It examines both railways from a British perspective, utilising archival research methods to do so.

The remainder of this introduction does four things. Firstly, it defines and explains what is meant by the term transcontinentalism, and discusses its emergence in the nineteenth century. Secondly, it shows how transcontinentalism contributes to three different fields of academic study. Thirdly, it discusses the archival methods used in Parts Two and Three of the thesis. Finally, it gives a breakdown of the thesis structure in its entirety.

1.2. Transcontinentalism

Transcontinentalism is defined in this thesis as *a geopolitical and technological doctrine with three interconnected components; 1) the projection and territorialisation of state power across continental space, 2) the spread of civilisation across continental space, and 3) the extension, reproduction, and transformation of the state and its spaces*

of circulation across continental space; through the construction of transcontinental railways. As this definition reveals, it was a doctrine that embodied three essential features, all of which I will fully explain and substantiate in Chapter Two. Firstly, it embodied the projection and territorialisation of state power (Williams, 2005; 2010) across continental space through the construction of transcontinental railways, and the concomitant shifting of the global balance of power away from the sea-power of the British Empire towards the land-power of Germany, Russia, and the US. Secondly, it embodied the related geopolitical fantasy of the European and American civilising missions (Agnew, 2003: 86-93; Duara, 2001; 2004; Gong, 1984; Robertson, 2006), and was a doctrine that denoted the spread of civilisation across entire continental landmasses that were overwhelmingly imagined as desolate, empty, and uncivilised spaces. Thirdly, it was a doctrine conceptualising states as organisms struggling for survival in an increasingly closed and colonised world (Agnew, 2003: 93-101; Murphy, 1997; Wolkersdorfer, 1999). Transcontinentalism consequently signified the extension, reproduction, and transformation of the biological state across continental space, enabled by an implicit imaginary of railways as extensions of the circulatory apparatus that increasingly sustained the 'life' of the state (Kapp, 1877). Non-European continental space was concurrently imagined as dormant, unconscious, and slumbering, and thus requiring railway technology to be brought back to corporeal, breathing, life. The concept of circulation is crucial to this, holding together biological and naturalised understandings of the state and of railway technology (Kapp, 1877; Schivelbusch, 1986). Transcontinentalism was therefore equated to the production of transcontinental spaces of circulation, enabling the movement of natural resources, manufactured goods, other objects, and people across continental space and connecting them for the first time with wider global and transnational economies and flows. This was, in turn, equated to the invigoration of continental landmasses out of their state of pure nature, lifting them for the first time into the modern, civilised world.

Transcontinentalism emerged from the entwining of geopolitical and technological discourses in the mid-nineteenth century. Geopolitically, transcontinentalism was connected to what Agnew (2003: 2-7) has termed the modern geopolitical imagination, a spatial ontology that developed at the beginning of the

nineteenth century in civilisational and later naturalised geopolitical modes. The modern geopolitical imagination was defined by Cartesian Perspectivalism, or the belief that the world could be examined and classified by an objective observer; the turning of time into space, whereby Europe was imagined as atop a 'stream of Time' with the rest of the world further downstream and striving to 'catch up'; and by a broadly realist view of international relations whereby states were assumed to exist in an ungoverned anarchical system, exercising their power over blocks of space and increasingly falling into frictitious conflict at the margins of their respective empires (Agnew, 2003). Transcontinentalism emerged from this as a way of enabling the rest of the world to 'catch up' through the diffusion of civilisation across the world, and as a way of maximising and securing the status of one state to the detriment of others through the political and economic benefits that would accrue through the domination of entire continental landmasses.

Technologically, transcontinentalism was inseparable from the advent and spread of railway technology from the 1820s. By the 1880s, railway technology was imagined as having two inherent characteristics – it was firstly a means through which state power was projected across space and secondly how civilisation was diffused into the backwards, uncivilised expanses of the world. By the beginning of the First World War it had accrued a third, as a natural, biological extension and augmentation of the state, both inside and outside territorial boundaries. I argue that this little noted but important understanding of railway technology entwined with the naturalised geopolitics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to give transcontinentalism its most salient feature. The era of naturalised geopolitics was defined by an imagination of the state as a living, breathing biological organism, requiring a specific amalgamation of land, people, and resources to persist in a world where the survival of the fittest had become the implicit norm in international relations (Wolkersdorfer, 1999). The biologisation of geopolitical and technological discourse thus folded together, producing transcontinental railways as the 'spine', 'backbone', or 'trunk line' that would fuse together transcontinental landmasses under the flag of one particular state, thus ensuring that a state had all the necessary resources, peoples, and land to survive. I conceptualise this in terms of circulation (Schivelbusch, 1986), with the

transcontinental empire a great body and the railway securing and directing the continual flow of people, resources, and other objects that ensured the continuing welfare and prosperity of that empire. In an era of relative ascent and decline, this was inevitably associated with the ascension (or maintenance) of one European power to the status of global hegemony, to the detriment and decline of the others.

Finally, my use of the word 'doctrine' in describing transcontinentalism is deliberate. I prefer this word to other candidates such as theory, ideology, idea, or philosophy for a reason connected to Rothstein's bewilderment at the demon driving the construction of transcontinental railways. Namely, the imagined benefits a transcontinental railway would bring upon completion were entirely divorced from any material function it could conceivably perform, a point stressed most emphatically by Den Otter (1997) in his study of the American Pacific Railroad. This was a product of the well-noted nineteenth century *faith* in the powers of modern technology; what Lehmann (2016: 98; see also Müller and Tworek, 2016) refers to as the "limitless belief in the capacity of technology to solve all social, political, and environmental problems." For example, for the geographer Alderman Isaac Bowes (1899: 193), the triumph and possibilities enabled by transportation technologies were found in their "overcoming [of] the natural barriers that separate man from man and [in] promoting the kind of intercourse which is so beneficial to all the best interests of mankind." Yet the construction of transcontinental railways, as some of the protagonists in this thesis painfully learned, were often prevented by a range of strategic, financial, and political obstacles. The use of the word doctrine, with its connotations of theological and religious faith and belief, is therefore explicitly utilised to gesture towards this aspect of transcontinentalism. The two railways studied in this thesis were not completed as planned, and both were left abandoned immediately after the First World War. Efforts to complete them thus relied more on the faith-like belief that "in light of the past (and current) state of technological development and the laws of nature, there [was] only one possible future cause of social change" (Bimber, 1994: 83). My stating of transcontinentalism as a doctrine is deliberately intended to reflect this.

1.3. Contributions to knowledge

In identifying, explaining, and analysing the doctrine of transcontinentalism, this thesis contributes more widely to three different fields of academic study. First and foremost, this thesis is a contribution to the field of critical geopolitics. As Chapter Two will explain fully, critical geopolitics emerged in the late 1980s as a reaction to the appropriation of classical geopolitics by Cold War strategists and the bipolar balance of international power between the US and the USSR. It has since flourished as a vibrant and eclectic field of study, defined primarily by its theoretical, conceptual, and methodological plurality and loose concern for the spatialisation of politics. However, critical geopolitics has been neglectful of the place of technology in histories of geopolitical thought, and in the ways geopolitical space is divided, ordered, and experienced at a number of different scales. This is an argument that I develop in Chapter Two, and transcontinentalism – with its entwined geopolitical and technological foundations – is consequently a contribution to what Butler (2001) first called technogeopolitics, a branch of critical geopolitics that

“calls upon geopolitical thinkers to reconsider the place of technology within geopolitics and to critique the agency within technology to shape and be shaped by geopolitics rather than seeing technologies as the outcomes of geopolitical positioning” (Williams, 2007: 508).

In foregrounding the place of technology in geopolitical thought and practice, the thesis aims to contribute to a gradually growing offshoot of critical geopolitics that emphasises “the roles of global geopolitics in identifying regions and resources suitable for programs of technological intervention” (Sneddon and Fox, 2011: 452). My analysis of the relationship between railways and geopolitics is a pertinent one, given that technogeopolitical analyses have been conducted into technologies such as aviation (Williams, 2005; 2007; 2010; 2011; 2013), aircraft carriers (Williams, 2017), river dams (Sneddon and Fox, 2011; 2012; Sneddon, 2012), radio (Pinkerton, 2008; Pinkerton and Dodds, 2008; Weir, 2014), geoengineering (Dalby, 2015), and spacefaring technologies (Duvall and Havercroft, 2008), but not railways. It is also pertinent because wider studies on the relationship between technology and geopolitics, most prominently those by Hugill (1995; 1999), do not help us bridge the gap between technology and *critical* geopolitics, as I will argue in Chapter Two.

Secondly, the thesis is a contribution to, and a partial generalisation of, the work of historians into the continental expansion of imperial states in the mid-late nineteenth century, particularly Britain, Germany, Russia, the US, and Canada. The doctrine of transcontinentalism as I define it relates to and partially subsumes different ideas concerning the expansion of these states, specifically accounts of American 'continentalism' (Ambrose, 2002; Bain, 2000; Cumings, 2009; den Otter, 1997; Vevier, 1960), Russian 'Eurasianism' (Bassin, 1999; Hauner, 2013), Germany's 'Drang nach Osten' (McMurray, 2001; McMeekin, 2011), and Britain's Cape-Cairo 'idea' or 'imaginary' (Merrington, 2001; 2002; Raphael, 1936). For example, Vevier (1960) first used the word 'continentalism' to refer to America's westward colonisation and expansion under the banner of 'Manifest Destiny' in the nineteenth century, and more recently others have directly related this expansion to the construction of the Pacific Railroad (Bain, 2000; Cumings, 2009; 108-110). In these accounts, America's blossoming civilisation is conceptualised as riding in the carriages of the Pacific Railroad, unfolding the American nation across space as it did so. In a 2010 PhD thesis, Eigen uses the word transcontinentalism to refer to a similar process, the creation of the US and Canada as 'transcontinental nations'. As she puts it, "the transcontinental national form was not only geographically determined, but was also fuelled by the nationalistic desire for territorial expansion and international influence that could be gained by settling lands on the Pacific Coast" (Eigen, 2010: 1). However, she only obliquely relates this conceptualisation to the Pacific Railroad (Eigen, 2010: 73-80) and does not connect it to geopolitics at all.

In a different example, Bassin (1999) has analysed how Russia's desire for eastward expansion reflected a similar but nationally, culturally, and politically specific form, portraying Russia as a state whose grand destiny could only be achieved through the territorialisation of Russian power from the furthest north-west of Murmansk to the eastern tip of Vladivostok. However, although he occasionally weaves railways and specifically the Trans-Siberian Railway through his account, it is not the primary object of his study and is therefore not foregrounded in his analysis. The works of Bassin (1999) and Eigen (2010), along with McMeekin's (2011) account of Germany's expansion towards the Ottoman Empire and Raphael's (1936) detailed analysis of British Cape-

Cairo imperialism, share this basic limitation – they marginalise the role of the railway in the stories that they tell. Herwig's (2012: 190) comment on McMeekin (2011) is in other words broadly relatable to other examples:

“[w]ith the exception of, at best, two chapters, it has little to do with the Berlin-Baghdad [Railway], using the ‘railroad to nowhere’ mainly as a backdrop for ‘Hajji’ Wilhelm II’s ‘Great Game’ to unseat British and French power in the Middle East and beyond”

A prominent exception to this trend is Meinig's grand history of America, where he narrates from an explicitly geographical and geopolitical perspective the development of America from its eastern, ‘Atlantic’ settler origins to the continental and then transcontinental power it became in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the second of these volumes, Meinig (1993: 158-164) pinpoints the 1840s as the decade that witnessed the end of a specifically Atlantic geopolitical imagination, one that believed the Union of individual states must shatter if stretched between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. In its place came an imagination of an America which “spanned the continent” (Meinig, 1993: 159). Furthermore, and most importantly, Meinig (1993: 163) highlights the beginning of plans to construct some kind of transcontinental railway in December 1844 as a pivotal moment in this transformation, simply because it shaped a wider, and explicitly *geopolitical*, vision “that neither the Continental Divide¹ nor any other massive physical feature would interfere with the reality of a transcontinental state.” Put differently, Meinig (1993) acknowledges the centrality of railway technology in the shaping of a geopolitical vision of westward transcontinental expansion, a vision that he subsequently argues American statesman began to make a reality from 1850 onwards.

It is in the following, third volume that Meinig (1998) articulates how exactly the transcontinental railway was envisioned to do this. Firstly, it was to be a national trunk line, “the essential ‘chain of union’ ensuring ‘the integrity’ of the whole” (Meinig, 1998: 6). This integrity was imagined to be twofold; the securing of the west coast of the United States against potential attack from the British or Spanish navies through the

¹ The Continental Divide describes an imaginative longitudinal line cleaving North and South America into two. All precipitation falling west of the line flows into the Pacific Ocean, while all precipitation falling east of the line flows into the Atlantic.

streamlining and quickening of communication, government, and administration, and the bonding together of all the peoples of America into a coherent society or nation. Secondly, Meinig (1998: 6) shows how all advocates of the transcontinental railway stressed its power as a developmental project. Quoting a United States Congressman, he narrates how

“[w]hereas the ‘law of nature’ kept population and the commercial economy bound to the riverbanks, ‘the railroad operates as the river did in olden time...The railroad is the river produced by modern science [...] From this great stream rivulets will flow, so that...American civilization will spring up, and the land will teem with life’” (Meinig, 1998: 6).

The railway, in other words, would revolutionise the formerly arid unproductive spaces of ‘the plains’, encouraging the construction of workshops, the working of mines, and the extension of arable land (Meinig, 1998: 158-159). Thirdly and finally, Meinig stresses how the railway was imagined as a national symbol of American character and supremacy. Quoting a different Congressman, he shows how it was “‘necessary to the highest destiny of the [American] nation,’ it would ‘elevate our national pride, stimulate our national energies and consolidate our national character’” (Meinig, 1998: 8). Although he goes into great detail over the different proposed routes the railway could have taken (Meinig, 1998: 8-28), Meinig’s point is that regardless of where it was to actually run, when completed the railway would accomplish the extension and consolidation of the American state into a virtuous, integrated geopolitical state entity. It was the railway alone, in other words, that produced what some Americans referred to as the “magnificent parallelogram” of the American state (Meinig, 1998: 28).

At the end of this book, the timeline having finally reached 1914 and the beginning of the First World War, Meinig (1998: 391-393) contrasts this transcontinental vision with that of Mackinder. The distinction he draws is that, for Mackinder, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway had global consequences; it could inaugurate the rise of a power that could dominate the entire world. For most Americans, Meinig suggests, the Pacific Railroad was imagined solely in transcontinental or hemispheric terms – it was to enable the domination and territorialisation of a continent, but without

the wider planetary consequences that so concerned Mackinder. The analysis offered throughout this thesis is in kind with Meinig's, but I will argue throughout that transcontinentalism can act as a new lens that can deepen our understanding of the continental territorial expansion not only of Germany and Britain, but of America and other imperial powers between c. 1870 and 1930. This is because it foregrounds a new conceptualisation of transcontinentalism as jointly geopolitical and technological in a way that has not been done before, and could fruitfully be related to examples outside of the British involvement with the Baghdad and Cape-Cairo Railways.

Finally, this thesis is a contribution to British imperial, geopolitical, and diplomatic history. When related to the doctrine of transcontinentalism, I argue throughout this thesis that new light is thrown on several important aspects of British history, some of which have been fiercely debated by historians in the past few decades. To take but three examples, Part Three of this thesis can be seen as the first critical history of the envisaging, planning, and construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway. For a railway that has been much mythologised, the alliterative allure of the term 'Cape-Cairo' producing a range of cultural and colonial tropes, there has been no attempt to properly examine the construction of the railway and place it within its proper colonial, geopolitical, and imperial context. Some scattered considerations of it exist, and the one book that does profess to analyse the story of the railway is deeply problematic, as I will outline in the next section. This thesis thus contributes to the history of a transcontinental railway that is paradoxically well-known yet little understood. A second example is the history of Britain's diplomatic reaction to the Baghdad Railway, which has been the subject of numerous yet now quite outdated diplomatic histories. Placed in the perspective of transcontinentalism, new light is thrown on this history, placing it in longer historical perspective and relating it to Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism in Africa. A final example is Cecil Rhodes, who remains a figure of great ire for historians of British imperialism in Africa. My perspective on Rhodes, developed in Chapters Six and Seven, provides an alternative way of understanding his life, his ideas, and some of the contradictions about him that have provoked debate among historians in recent years.

This thesis consequently straddles several different fields of inquiry and draws on literatures from a range of disciplines and currents of thought. It contributes to debates

in geography and history, broadly defined. The next section explains and justifies the methods used to research the Baghdad and Cape-Cairo Railways, and details how this project changed from its initial conception.

1.4. Methods and methodological considerations

“[I]n the writing of historical geography there is no such thing as success, only degrees of unsuccess.” (Darby, 1960: 155)

In writing this thesis, I have reflected much on Darby’s words concerning the unsuccess of historical geographical work. This is because this thesis has changed profoundly from its original conception – as most do, but not for the reasons most do. In the original proposal that I submitted to the ESRC in early 2013, I sketched out a plan for a bilingual study of the Baghdad Railway using both British and German sources based on Butler (2001) and Williams’ (2005) concept of technogeopolitics. My initial impetus for this was threefold. Firstly, on an analytical level I believed that a detailed bilingual study of the Baghdad Railway would be the most appropriate for analysing the geopolitical rivalry between Britain and Germany over the railway. Secondly, I harboured the acorn of an ambition to potentially undertake future work on German geopolitical thought, for which my experience in Germany and language training would be invaluable. Thirdly, I was taken by Sauer’s (and Leighly, 1963: 401) adage that “[a] monolingual Ph.D. is a contradiction of terms”, and that “[c]omplacency as to our own language means the exclusion of a great, probably the greater, part of what has been well learned and well thought about.” Consequently, I decided I would undertake archival research in Britain and Germany, investigating how the railway was envisioned as a means of projecting German power across space in both countries.

Archival methods are indispensable for any geographical project whose subjects of research are no longer alive, principally because other methods such as interviews, focus groups, oral histories, or questionnaires are evidently impossible to undertake. Archival research in geography is therefore based on the premise that organisations and persons leave evidence of their activities behind – usually as text but also in the form of photographs (Rose, 2000), objects (DeSilvey 2006), maps (Holdsworth, 2003), and so forth – and that these traces come to be stored in such a way that they are accessible to

researchers in the present. Of course, the practices of collection and storage that determine the contents and organisation of archival repositories are distinctly inexact and conditioned along national, political, cultural, and institutional axes (Craggs, 2008; Lester, 2006; Mills, 2013; Moore, 2010). Consequently, these practices and the resultant archives they continually assemble are always partial and limited; unwittingly silencing some voices while accentuating others. No archive contains a *complete* record of a person, government, or organisation, and “[e]ven a collection that may be a complete ‘set’ chronologically is still essentially one version of the past” (Mills, 2013: 703). Archives are never apolitical storehouses of documents that the researcher enters and extracts objective knowledge from; they instead embody “the power of the present to control what is, and will be, known about the past” (Schwartz and Cook, 2002: 3). However, at its simplest, “in any given archive informed searches of sources are undertaken and, as a result, data about the past is uncovered” (Lorimer, 2009: 250). Such searches are typically guided by the research topic, timeframe, aims, and questions; the conceptual and theoretical position of the researcher; and through engagements with secondary literatures to determine what has already been written about the particular period or place at hand (Baker, 1997: 234; Harris, 2001).

Between September and December 2014 I undertook archival research at the National Archives (TNA), British Library (BL), and Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in London. These archives were chosen to enable a wide range of practical, formal, and popular geopolitical data to be collected.² TNA and BL hold the papers of the British and Indian Governments respectively on the Baghdad Railway, while the BL’s status as a legal deposit library enabled access to a diverse ensemble of historical documents such as maps, newspapers, books, and magazines. At the RGS I accessed the papers of the railway engineer R.I. Money. Together, these sources enabled a wide range of data to be collected on the diverse responses by British actors to the construction of the Baghdad Railway. For the German side, I planned to travel to Berlin for an intensive language course between January and May 2015, before spending the rest of 2015 undertaking archival research at archives in Berlin, Munich, and Koblenz. However, in London I developed severe health problems, which ultimately resulted, in conversation with

² See Chapter Two, Section 2.2.1. for the definitions of practical, formal, and popular geopolitics.

family, supervisors, and doctors, in the postponement of the German half of my thesis. As a result of these problems I took a two-month interruption of studies between January and March 2015. Upon my return a decision was jointly taken that the German leg of my doctorate would be cancelled completely, which left me with inadequate empirical material to fulfil the requirements of a thesis. I consequently decided to choose a second transcontinental railway as a comparative example to the Baghdad Railway.

I chose the Cape-Cairo Railway as the most appropriate replacement for four reasons. Firstly, like the Baghdad Railway it was never completed as intended. Although a railway finally trundled into Baghdad in 1941 to minimal fanfare, the Cape-Cairo Railway still stands uncompleted today. Because of this, both cases were judged to be pertinent to compare. As Heffernan (2011: 618) writes with regards to the Trans-Saharan Railway,

“unrealized engineering projects are in many respects more revealing and important than projects conceived, executed, and successfully implemented with minimum fuss. Unsuccessful initiatives, especially controversial and long-running ones, tend to leave an archival legacy that is more complex and extensive than realised projects. Failures allow the historian to chart the limits of our faith in science and technology.”

Secondly, like the Baghdad Railway, the Cape-Cairo Railway was a project largely devised within the epistemological networks of European geopolitics, and which transverses what was imagined as fundamentally non-European continental space. This meant that both railways were relatable to the modern geopolitical imagination espoused by Agnew (2003), and able to be placed within broader experiences of European geopolitics. Thirdly, as mentioned in the previous section I quickly realised that the Cape-Cairo Railway has been oft mythologised but very rarely analysed critically. The book described by Wolmar (2009: 336) as the sole attempt “to give coherence to the highly complex story of the Cape to Cairo” is an exercise in the Orientalisation and infantilisation of Africa at its worst, brashly stating on the first page that

“to those who have never visited Africa and whose knowledge is gleamed entirely from the half-baked articles and programmes put out by people suffering from Post Colonial Guilt, with the simplistic notion that everything Black was good and everything White was wicked, then this book may be an irritation [...] [Britain] ensured that scores of antagonistic races, tribes and religions lived in peace and harmony, with minimum control” (Tabor, 2003: iii).

Moreover, on reading Tabor's book it becomes clear that it is not really about the Cape-Cairo Railway at all, but rather about the various peculiarities (to the Westerner, at least) that following its route into the 'heart' of Africa supposedly reveals. Because of this and the lack of adequate citations throughout his work, Tabor's (2003) history of the Cape-Cairo Railway must be discounted as unreliable. My point is that bringing the Cape-Cairo Railway into my thesis offered an opportunity to contribute to an element of British history that is paradoxically well-known yet little-understood. Fourthly and finally, the fact the Cape-Cairo Railway was predominantly associated with Britain made the task of archival research more achievable within the limits I had.

However, on searching for relevant archival materials I quickly became cognisant of Merrington's (2002: 155) observation that "[i]t is difficult to trace any literature on the topic of the 'Cape-to-Cairo' idea that is not strictly first-hand travel narratives", and in particular its salience to the Cape-Cairo Railway. The railway was never explicitly discussed by the Colonial Office or the British Government (Raphael, 1936). This is indicative of the difference between Britain and Germany's approach to foreign infrastructural investment. While Germany's Deutsche Bank guaranteed and helped to fund the Baghdad Railway, it was the caution and conservativeness of the British Government that stopped British financiers getting involved in the Euphrates Valley Railway in the nineteenth century and the Baghdad Railway in 1903, and which denied Cecil Rhodes a guarantee for his continuation of the Cape-Cairo Railway in 1899. This necessitated a different approach to the Cape-Cairo Railway. The numerous travel narratives mentioned by Merrington were deemed unsuitable for comparison with the data I had collected on the Baghdad Railway, given their vastly different genre. As a result, I opted for a different approach, what historical geographers and historians have referred to as a structural biography of the figure that did more than anyone to attempt to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway, Cecil John Rhodes.

At its simplest, structural biography is an approach that uses individual lives as "windows onto the complicated trends, events, [and] crises of their time, providing an entry point for a deeper understanding of a particular historical era" (Kent, 2015: 2). It has become popular in historical geography as a way of comprehending and complicating the intersection of core historical and geographical themes and processes

(Hodder, 2017a). Smith (2003), for example, used the life and work of the geographer Isaiah Bowman to examine the geographical vision at the heart of the development of America's globalised economic empire in the twentieth century, and Forsyth (2016a; 2016b) has explored the entanglement of nature, technology, and militarisation through a series of biographical vignettes. In such cases, geographers have enlisted the individual life "as a relationally dense node at which to tie together and render coherent a much wider set of logics, circumstances, and political dynamics" (Hannah, 2005: 240). Importantly, the structural biography is a way of negotiating between wider historical processes and dynamics and the agency of individuals to shape, even as they are shaped by, these processes and dynamics.

What I mean by this is that it is tempting, although erroneous, to see the geopolitical and technological features identified as crucial to transcontinentalism as things injected from an exterior into the minds of the individuals discussed throughout this thesis. This would be a form of structural determinism, and a disavowal of much historical geographical work that has unsettled and invalidated the uniformity of ideas across time and space. For example, historical geographers have emphasised how diverse and transnational experiences of space and place formatively and heterogeneously impact upon the careers, identities, ideas, and subjectivities of individuals (Craggs and Neate, 2017; Lambert and Lester, 2006). Put differently, ideas are not "conjured out of thin air" (Livingstone, 2014: 15) but shaped by social, spatial, and intellectual contexts (Ferretti, 2017a). Accordingly, historical geographers have also stressed the importance of paying attention to the relational and often mundane sites and spaces of geographical knowledge production that are usually underappreciated in more standard scholarship on geopolitics (Daniels and Nash, 2004; Livingstone, 2014; McGeachan, 2013; 2016; but see Smith, 2003; Kearns, 2009, for prominent exceptions). Finally, they have emphasised the importance of contextualisation, or what Kearns (in Agnew et al, 2011: 55) defines as "relat[ing] geographical ideas to the political, moral, economic, and other circumstances that explain the demand for certain perspectives, [and] why they achieve salience in particular periods." By taking methodological lessons from historical geography, it is consequently possible to use structural biography as an approach that illuminates wider themes and processes (such as transcontinentalism),

whilst remaining sensitive to how such themes and processes emerge and are reworked and contested across time, space, and social/intellectual/cultural contexts.

Relatedly, structural biography offers a way to meet other methodological problems in geopolitical research. As Ó Tuathail (2002: 605) has pointed out, practical geopolitical research in particular “is a difficult challenge for it requires near total immersion in the everyday world of foreign policy discourse and practice.” Researchers need to be embedded to the greatest degree possible in the micro-world of diplomacy in order to comprehend the production and contestation of geopolitics. In recent years, scholars associated with what has been termed the ‘practice turn’ in diplomatic and geopolitical scholarship have attempted to achieve this (Dittmer and McConnell, 2015; Kuus, 2013; Neumann, 2012). They have used a mixture of qualitative methods to attempt to get inside the ‘black box’ (Müller, 2012) of geopolitics and its typically prosaic, day-to-day operations. Despite the fact that this endeavour is often stunted by issues of access and secrecy, such research demonstrates the importance of the non-textual and non-documentable (conversations in corridors, non-verbal body language, and so on) to diplomatic relations and the (re)production of geopolitical meaning. The problem, as Baker (1997) put it, is that the dead do not answer questionnaires. Nor can one conduct an ethnography in the Foreign Office in 1905 to understand how meaning was ascribed to the Baghdad Railway. The records stored at TNA and BL are “tailored to exclude the everyday routines and materialities” of geopolitics, usually because they were “often so mundane as to be beneath notice” (Dittmer, 2016: 87). As a consequence, Ó Tuathail’s (2002: 605) characterisation of “[reconstructing] the historical record of policy formation and policy-making, without knowledge of crucial private meetings, key memos and other private archival material” as “a challenge” is exacerbated when extended to historical geopolitical research.

Thus structural biography is a way of meeting Ó Tuathail’s challenge by tracing how transcontinentalism emerged in Rhodes’ life across social, intellectual, and spatial contexts. In Part Three of the thesis I follow Rhodes’ life and legacy, utilising “the incomparable collection without which no biographer [of Rhodes] could proceed” (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: xi), which is located in the Weston Library (WL) in Oxford, UK. It contains a large amount of correspondence between Rhodes and his various

associates, as well as copies of all of the letters Rhodes sent and received to the Colonial Office and the British Treasury when he was trying to secure financial backing for the Cape-Cairo Railway in 1898. Of course, the WL's archive is as fragmented, contingent, and incomplete as any other, and despite its comprehensiveness only therefore offers a partial entry point into Rhodes' life – not least because a fire at his house Groote Schuur in 1896 destroyed many of his papers. Nonetheless, triangulated with biographies (written in the immediate aftermath of his death in 1902 by his associates, and then later by academic historians), articles he published in magazines and newspapers, a collection of his speeches published in 1900 (Vindex, 1900), obituaries and testimonies by his associates, and a miscellaneous assortment of other published and unpublished material, I was able to use Rhodes as a window into the complicated emergence of transcontinentalism in the 1880s and after.

Studying Rhodes, however, presents its own unique challenges. Few figures have been equally eulogised and disparaged. In the most recent overview, MacFarlane (2007: 437) has argued that Rhodes' historiography can be divided into two broad categories, "chauvinistic approval or utter vilification." The utter vilification has largely emanated from the pens of post-World War Two historians and biographers, who have criticised Rhodes' practices of capital accumulation, his contributions to the violences of colonialism and imperialism, his treatment of Africans and women, and finally his odd but problematic advocacy of white Anglo-Saxon supremacy. The chauvinistic approval, on the other hand, is predominantly (but not exclusively, see Tabor, 2003) associated with biographies written by Rhodes' friends and contemporaries in the early decades of the twentieth century. They constructed an image of Rhodes as "one of the greatest Englishmen" (Williams, 1913: 133), who ploughed his not inconsiderable wealth and power into the creation of a just, free, and civilised world. Reading contributions to both of these historiographical categories can misdirect, pushing the researcher towards a monolithic interpretation of Rhodes' life as distinctly one thing and not another. I have therefore tried to retain a critical distance from Rhodes, not whitewashing any points that might be worthy of reproach but sometimes understating them in places where they could be more prominent. I have tried as much as possible to heed Hannah's (2005: 240) advice, to be "neither celebratory nor adversarial, but rather 'diagnostic'",

analysing and interpreting his life without following more standard biographical practices of “draw[ing] up some kind of final balance for good or ill.”

Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism did not die with Rhodes in 1902. Rather, it lived on in the work of several of his associates, many of whom were prominent geographers, explorers, soldiers, academics, and imperial administrators in their own right. In Chapter Eight I follow these individuals to ascertain how transcontinentalism developed after Rhodes’ death. Among the individuals followed are Harry Johnston, Robert Williams, and others such as the soldier Ewart S. Grogan, the first Governor of Nyasaland Alfred Sharpe, the engineer Charles Metcalfe, and the journalist Leo Weinthal. Tracing Rhodes’ connections to these people led to three overlapping groups of sources which I make use of in Chapter Eight.³ The first is a range of lectures and debates which took place in the auditoriums of British learned societies around the turn of the twentieth century, especially the Royal African Society, the Central Asian Society, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Royal Commonwealth Society. These societies all functioned as centres of British knowledge formation, organisation, and dissolution in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lubenow, 2015: 26). Lectures were given to these societies by a diverse array of individuals on the Cape-Cairo Railway and its future, and many of the individuals were present at each other’s talks, providing comments and criticisms in the discussions that followed. The learned societies were therefore a space within which transcontinentalism was discussed, negotiated, and reworked after Rhodes’ death.

The second group of sources is a miscellaneous range of articles, books, magazines, speeches, and supplements that discussed the Cape-Cairo Railway. Much of this assortment was written by the same individuals who contributed lectures and discussions to the learned societies. The main exception to this is the magazine entitled *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express* which was edited by Leo Weinthal, and which was largely aimed at mining prospectors, businessmen, and venture capitalists. Thirdly

³ I searched for archival repositories on all of these men. Williams’ archives are held by the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester, but on undertaking a scoping study I judged there was not enough relevant material to justify a detailed exegesis of his archive. Johnston’s archive is held by the Royal Geographical Society in London, but on examination contained no relevant papers. However, I found several letters between Johnston and Cecil Rhodes in TNA, along with various maps of Africa Johnston had published or sketched. Metcalfe burned his personal papers before his death, and I could find no repositories on Grogan, Sharpe, or Weinthal.

and finally, I made use of a mammoth five volume collection, spanning over 2500 pages, which was published in 1923 entitled *The Story of the Cape to Cairo railway & river route from 1887 to 1922* and also edited by Leo Weinthal. Four of these volumes are comprised primarily of text and illustrations, and the fifth is a collection of twelve maps alongside a formidable index of the topics covered throughout. The first four volumes cover a dizzying array of topics; memoirs and biographical sketches of pioneers of African exploration; detailed descriptions of the construction of the parts of the railway that were built (along with speculations as to when the parts unfinished would be complete); arguments concerning the necessity of completing the railway in its entirety; discussions of the wider economic development and civilisation of the African continent; as well as more ephemeral topics such as the varieties of 'Natives of Africa' and wild game found along the route.

These volumes required extra interpretive care. They were a seven year editorial project that Weinthal worked on continually during the First World War, and in the early pages of the first volume he describes the finished collection as a "pulsing literary cenotaph to the great men who brought the route into being".⁴ As a result, it has often been used as a primary source in studies on the history of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Raphael (1936), for instance, bases much of her classical study of the Cape-Cairo idea on it, and even more critical authors such as Ramutsindela (2007) cite it favourably. However, in my reading this collection must be understood as both eulogy and obituary of the Cape-Cairo Railway. It is a eulogy in that it praises 'the great men who brought the route into being' in an exaggerated, adulating, and hagiographical fashion, portraying them as selfless bastions of African development and the railway as a kind of master technological variable inherently connected to the existential fate of the African continent. Yet it is also an obituary in the sense that it was explicitly intended to reinvigorate and garner public support for a project that, during and after the First World War, was largely abandoned and would never be finished. Weinthal's collection can therefore be read as a desperate attempt to resurrect the Cape-Cairo Railway from the dead by eulogising its virtues and stressing the purported necessity of its completion; as Merrington (2001: 353) observes, "[t]he mere bulk of this five-volume

⁴ *SCCRI*, 15.

opus lent a kind of cogency to what was no more than a dream.” My point is that this makes it problematic when used uncritically as a historical source as Raphael and Ramutsindela do, but an invaluable source for tracing the doctrine of transcontinentalism through the connections it evinces between geopolitics and technology, and the inherent quasi-religious *faith* in the power of railway technology which saturates its pages.

As a whole, these sources enabled the core features of Berlin-Baghdad and Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism, along with the spatial, social, and political specificities of each, to be traced in Britain. My reading of these sources was deductive; I did not conceptualise transcontinentalism beforehand and then go to the archive with it pre-conceived in my mind. Rather, it emerged from what I’ve come to think of as an interconnected process of ‘shuttling’. This shuttling was threefold. Firstly, it was textual, shuttling between archival documents, secondary literatures, chapter drafts, ideas books, note documents, and other ephemeral scribbles. Secondly, it was spatial, shuttling between desks at London, Oxford, Newcastle, and between various trains and coffee shops – spaces each with their own emergent properties that impacted on my thinking in ways I cannot fully comprehend retrospectively. Finally, it was interpersonal – shuttling between supervisors, fellow postgraduates, friends, and other colleagues, discussing ideas and collectively “explor[ing] differing constructions of problems and methods” (Petts, Owens, and Bulkeley, 2008: 600). This process of shuttling has persuaded me research is intrinsically non-linear; “[r]ather than moving in a straight line, *a nonlinear research path* makes successive passes through steps, sometimes moving backward and sideways before moving on. It is more of a spiral, moving slowly upward but not directly” (Neuman, 2006: 152, original emphasis). The formulation of the arguments in this thesis was therefore emergent from Neuman’s spiral itself.

1.5. Structure of thesis

This thesis is split into three parts. **Part One** explains and analyses the conceptual and historical foundations of transcontinentalism. It traces transcontinentalism in two overlapping historical discourses, the modern geopolitical imagination, and the development of railway technology, using examples where appropriate. This is achieved

through a critical engagement with a range of literatures, from critical geopolitics to railway history to the philosophy of technology. It also elaborates a critique of critical geopolitics as neglectful of the role of technology in shaping geopolitical thought and practice, thus establishing the broader conceptual and theoretical relevance of the thesis. Part One ends with a return to the ideas of Mackinder, demonstrating how he evinced transcontinentalism in his corpus of writings and how critical histories of Mackinder downplay the role of technology in his thought.

Parts Two and Three are each composed of three chapters, respectively tracing transcontinentalism in Britain's response to the Baghdad Railway and in Rhodes' and his associates attempts to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway. These chapters show how transcontinentalism developed in each case, along with their similarities, different emphases, and divergences. They also demonstrate, when appropriate, how the story of transcontinentalism contributes to wider discussions of continental imperial expansion and British imperial, geopolitical, and diplomatic history. The thesis is bookended by a conclusion which summarises the core contributions and gestures towards future areas of research that would complement and extend the arguments presented throughout.

Part One – Transcontinentalism

Chapter Two – Geopolitics and Technology: The Conceptual and Historical Foundations of Transcontinentalism

2.1. Introduction

This chapter identifies, explains, and analyses the conceptual and historical foundations of transcontinentalism. Transcontinentalism is defined as a geopolitical and technological doctrine with three interconnected components; 1) the projection and territorialisation of state power across continental space, 2) the spread of civilisation across continental space, and 3) the extension, reproduction, and transformation of the state and its spaces of circulation across continental space; through the construction of transcontinental railways. This chapter argues that transcontinentalism emerged in the nineteenth century out of a twofold apex of what Agnew (2003) has defined as the modern geopolitical imagination and the development and spread of railway technology from the 1820s. It shows how out of this apex emerged the three interrelated components of transcontinentalism, explaining and analysing each one and relating them explicitly back to geopolitics and technology. The chapter begins by considering the first dimension of transcontinentalism, geopolitics, before moving to the second, technology. As it explains the salient features of transcontinentalism, the chapter also critiques critical geopolitics for its relative neglect of the role of technology in the production and transformation of geopolitics. This demonstrates the wider relevance of the thesis for ongoing debates in the field of critical geopolitics. Finally, after outlining transcontinentalism, the chapter embarks on a rereading of the work of Halford Mackinder, arguing that his geopolitical and wider corpus of writings epitomises the doctrine of transcontinentalism in all of its essential features.

2.2. Geopolitics and the modern geopolitical imagination

The term geopolitics was coined by the Swedish writer Rudolf Kjellén in 1899 to describe “the geographical influence on the behaviour of states” (Tunander, 2001: 457). Kjellén, Halford Mackinder, the American naval theorist Alfred T. Mahan, and the German geographers Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer all sought to objectively evaluate the importance of geography and geographical position on the changing

conduct of statecraft and thus provide practical advice to the states and empires they respectively served. Following the association of Haushofer with Germany's actions in the Second World War geopolitics was largely sanitised from discourse in political geography and wider international relations before re-emerging in the language and practices of the Cold War (Hepple, 1986). This spurred the development of the critical approach to geopolitics, which focused not only on disarming and deconstructing the logic and endurance of earlier classical geopolitical theorising but also in illuminating and critiquing the ways in which the world is actively demarcated, labelled, and hierarchically ordered by a diverse ensemble of actors at different scales.

Agnew (2014: 314) has commented that “since the 1970s the use of terms like ‘geopolitics’ and ‘geopolitical’ [have] proliferated without any single meaning necessarily having more resonance in the contemporary context than any other.” Agnew argues subsequently that our focus should not be so much on identifying and tracing the multiple trajectories of the word geopolitics across time and space, but rather on how utilising it as a concept denoting a wide range of spatialising practices can help us understand world politics and events. In his words (2014: 315), this is because

“thinking and acting geopolitically is a fundamental feature of modernity. What I mean by this is that geographical designations and assumptions have long entered into the making of world politics. To restrict definition of a redolent word to a narrow disciplinary frame of reference from the early 20th century is to retreat from active engagement with new ways of thinking about world politics.”

This is a helpful statement because it foregrounds the utility of geopolitics as a way of making sense of the world in instances where the broadly classical understanding of the term, ‘geography as an aid to statecraft’ (see Kearns, 2008: 1599), is not applicable. Consequently, my aim in this section is to illustrate how geopolitics, and especially the critical approach developed in the 1990s by authors such as Agnew, Dalby, and Ó Tuathail, helps to explain the emergence of transcontinentalism as a way of thinking in the nineteenth century.

2.2.1. Critical geopolitics

“Critical Geopolitics is no more than a general gathering place for various critiques of the multiple geopolitical discourses and practices that characterize modernity.”

As Ó Tuathail (in Jones and Sage, 2010: 316) suggests above, critical geopolitics is a difficult term to firmly define or delineate. Dalby (2010: 280) also agrees that “there is nothing close to a consensus on what the term designates or how these matters are to be studied.” Consequently, to define critical geopolitics is to paradoxically commit an act that critical geopolitics would reject. Further, “[g]iven the important influence of poststructural philosophies on critical geopolitics”, to try and define what critical geopolitics ‘is’ suggests that the signifier ‘critical geopolitics’ has some sort of abstracted underlying meaning that we can objectively pinpoint and recite (Power and Campbell, 2010: 243). As a consequence, any overview of critical geopolitics must begin by defining what it is while simultaneously being aware of the paradox inherent to doing so.

In the spirit of this paradox, critical geopolitics is here defined as the study, analysis, and critique of the “geographical assumptions, designations and understandings that enter into the making of world politics” (Agnew, 2003: 2). It can be posited as having coalesced from a number of philosophical and intellectual currents within the wider humanities and social sciences. Crucial to its development was the seeping of poststructuralist philosophies into the humanities and social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s. Much like Ó Tuathail, Dillon (2000: 2) argues that poststructuralism “refers to such a diverse body of work and thought that it cannot be captured in a summary definition”, but also that it is nonetheless possible to identify a number of positions that are common to the majority of poststructuralist thinkers. At its broadest, the term poststructuralism simply denotes a movement of contemporary continental philosophy which stretches back a century or more, often to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, and which came to prominence in France in the 1960s with the work of philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault (Harrison, 2006). Poststructuralism is radically anti-foundationalist and anti-essentialist, rejecting any notions of objective truth, meaning, and identity and instead rendering these things as the ongoing and perpetually unstable effects of social, political, economic, cultural, and linguistic struggle (Belsey, 2002; Gibson-Graham, 2003). Truth, meaning, and identity are therefore “not *inside* a word - or an object, a thing, a process - inherent to it, uniquely owned by it”, but continually ascribed in a way that is only ever temporary and

which is given the illusion of permanence through constant social (re)production (Wylie, 2006b: 300).

One early preoccupation of critical geopolitics was therefore to apply such insight to geography and challenge the notion that geography functions simply as the static and fixed backdrop to international politics, a notion encapsulated in Spykman's (1938: 236) famous tautology that "[g]eography does not argue, it just is." As such, one of the principles of critical geopolitics is that "geography is a social and historical discourse which is always intimately bound up with questions of politics and ideology" (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 192). The physical geography of the earth's surface is therefore not self-evident nor "an innocent body of knowledge" but instead the ongoing product of a process of historical and social constitution and definition that is refracted through assumptions about race, class, gender, nationality, and all manner of other things (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 7). Ó Tuathail argues that the definition of what geography 'is' at any given moment is thus "a conflict between competing images and imaginings, a contest of power and resistance that involves [...] struggles to represent the materiality of physical geographic objects and boundaries" (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 14-15). This poststructuralist inspired critique sought to puncture the stability of assertions such as Spykman's by questioning and unsettling the hidden suppositions and biases constituting the supposedly stable and ahistorical complexion of nature and of geography.

Concurrently, a second preoccupation of critical geopolitics was the extension of this critique towards commonsensical geographical designations that portrayed particular places as imbued with essential identities, characteristics, and peoples. Such work dovetailed with concomitant analyses in what came to be termed 'dissident' International Relations (Campbell, 1992; Der Derian, 1992; see also Dalby, 1991: 262-269) and was more widely inspired by Said's ([1978] 2003) influential critique of Orientalism. Said (2003: 40-41; see also Gregory, 1995) described Orientalism as a hegemonic Western discourse purporting "that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West", and emphasised how this Orient came to be discursively associated with barbarism, violence,

backwardness, and mystery in ways which conversely constructed a Western identity defined by enlightenment, progress, authority, and rationality.

Drawing on such work, practitioners of critical geopolitics sought to understand how foreign policy discussions projected spatial renderings of space onto territorially demarcated states through “implicitly geographical policy rationalizations” (Ó Tuathail, 1986: 74) such as references to shatterbelts and domino theories (Dalby, 1990). They sought to analyse how the world is discursively filled “with certain dramas, subjects, histories and dilemmas” by powerful actors through “unremarkable assumptions about places and their particular identities” (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 194). Dodds (1994), for instance, examined how Argentina was historically constructed as an absurd, reactive, and untrustworthy state actor in British foreign policy after the Second World War because of its actions towards the Falkland Islands, and Sidaway (1994) conducted one of the first critical geopolitical analyses of the problematic essentialist representations of the ‘Middle East’ as inherently violent and irrational. In both cases, such language is not banal in that it “[opens] up a field of possible taxonomies and trigger[s] a series of narratives, subjects, and appropriate foreign policy responses” (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 194; see also Dalby, 1990). In other words, the definition of particular places as imbued with certain characteristics has a very real impact upon how foreign policy is conducted. The emphasis was therefore on highlighting and critiquing the discursive construction of meanings and identities and the historically contingent ways in which these meanings and identities came to be attached to certain peoples and places.

A final early concern of critical geopolitics was “the development of critical histories of geopolitical thinkers and discourses” (Jones and Sage, 2010: 316), which traced the diverse and complicated social, intellectual, and cultural undercurrents of geopolitical reasoning and the assumptions geopolitical theorists made regarding the essence and overarching conditioning power of geography. For the most part this was stimulated by the rediscovery of the classical theorists of geopolitics by Cold War strategists such as Spykman and Henry Kissinger who began to apply the supposedly transcendental insights and aura of authority of classical geopolitics to the new bipolar arena of international politics. Key figures from the classical geopolitical canon were

thus 'put back in their place' (Ó Tuathail, 1992) and resituated amongst the constraints and anxieties of their particular national and social contexts. Other scholars sought to excavate the specificity of various geopolitical traditions in parts of the world other than the US and the UK. Atkinson (1995), for instance, has traced a history of Italian geopolitics throughout the twentieth century, with others having done the same for a wide array of European and non-European traditions (see Dodds and Atkinson, 2000; Heffernan, 1998; Mayell, 2004; Megoran and Sharapova, 2013; Murphy, 1997). In all cases, much attention has been paid to how geographical and geopolitical assumptions are always inflected through the variegated historical and cultural contexts within which they are received, and therefore the ways in which geopolitical ideas are translated and transformed as they are capriciously communicated across space.

Largely for heuristic purposes, early critical geopolitical scholarship was divided into three overlapping foci of analysis; a division which is blurry in practice but which loosely still persists today. This is what Rech (2014) terms the 'three-fold superstructure' of critical geopolitics, one which examines practical, formal, and popular types of geopolitical reasoning. Practical geopolitics refers to the ways in which "foreign policy decision makers use practical and pragmatic geopolitical reasoning whenever they try to make spatial sense of the world" (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 113). In other words, practical geopolitics concerns the vocabularies, languages, and rhetorical devices used by politicians and other political actors to render the world (or different parts of it) meaningful. Formal geopolitics refers to the geopolitical knowledge produced by "elite institutions and actors that are not directly part of the state apparatus [such as] think tanks, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations" (Kraxberger, 2005: 50). Popular geopolitics refers to "the various manifestations [of geopolitics] to be found within the visual media, news magazines, radio, novels and the Internet" (Dittmer and Dodds, 2008: 441). Scholars have also highlighted what could be termed the awkward cousin of Rech's 'three-fold superstructure', structural geopolitics, which can be defined as the ways in which "global processes, tendencies, and contradictions affect the contemporary geopolitical condition and its related geopolitical practices" (Ek, 2000: 842; see also Agnew, 2003; Ó Tuathail, 1999). In practice, these four typologies of geopolitical reasoning are always already intertwined. For instance, McFarlane and Hay

(2003: 213) highlight that the popular geopolitical reasoning in newspapers and magazines is often nothing more than “practical geopolitical reasoning found in informal, everyday discourse”, and the knowledge produced in the elite institutions shapes practical geopolitical reasoning and is often disseminated more widely through popular media.

Since its inception, critical geopolitics has been subject to a dizzying array of theoretical, conceptual, and methodological transformations. Crucial to the broadening of the remit of the early critical geopolitical scholarship was the injection of feminist (Dowler and Sharp, 2001) and postcolonial (Slater, 2004) theoretical perspectives, as well as the enlargement of empirical research beyond (mostly Western) state actors towards ‘peripheral’ states and regions, non-state actors (see Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp, 2013: 387-420), and various non-governmental institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (Popke, 1994). Concomitantly, a seemingly endless assortment of conceptual terms have been prefixed to geopolitics, so that it is now possible to speak of alter (Koopman, 2011), anti (Routledge, 1998), banal (Sidaway, 2001), emotional (Pain, 2009), environmental (Dalby, 2014), Marxist (Colás and Pozo, 2011), materialist (Squire, 2015), pacific (Megoran, 2010b), polar (Powell and Dodds, 2014), religious (Sturm, 2013), subaltern (Sharp, 2011) and many other kinds of geopolitics as distinct but all nonetheless tethered to critical geopolitics. Popular geopolitics has also developed as a partly divergent research agenda, drawing inspiration from fandom and audience studies amongst other literatures to more definitively conceptualise the ways in which people consume, transform, and actively produce geopolitical knowledge with, through, and often in opposition to the geopolitical narratives espoused in popular media (Dittmer, 2010; Dittmer and Gray, 2010).

While cognisant of these developments, this thesis connects transcontinentalism most strongly to the modern geopolitical imagination defined by Agnew (2003) in its nineteenth and early twentieth century civilisational and naturalised modes. This does not mean that, as could be argued, the thesis advocates a form of structural determinism, whereby free floating structures determine the course of history irrespective of space, time, or personal agency. Indeed, one of the strengths of the biographical approach taken to Rhodes is that it foregrounds how geopolitics is

reworked across space and time and how geopolitical ideas emerge from social, intellectual, and spatial contexts while simultaneously being influenced by wider structural flows and processes (Livingstone, 2014; Ferretti, 2017a). The approach taken in this thesis therefore allows a broad, geopolitically grounded conception of transcontinentalism to emerge whilst remaining sensitive and appreciative of how this conception was reworked, transformed, and unsettled across space and time.

2.2.2. The modern geopolitical imagination

My argument in this thesis is that transcontinentalism emerged from a wider spatial and geopolitical imagination that Agnew (2003: 2-7) has termed the modern geopolitical imagination. Agnew argues that there are four crucial components to this that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that have been consistently articulated through geopolitical visions and practices, albeit in different forms, from then to the present day. In this section I engage critically with Agnew's analysis of the modern geopolitical imagination, demonstrating its importance for the development of transcontinentalism.

Agnew (2003) identifies and defines the modern geopolitical imagination as a specific geopolitical ontology which germinated in the sixteenth century and consequently solidified into the overarching means by which global space was conceived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its first feature is the emergence of a global imaginary enabling the envisioning of the entire world as an integrated and connected whole. As Agnew (2003: 15) puts it, this is "the imaginative ability to transcend the spatial limits imposed by everyday life and contemplate the world conceived and grasped as a picture." In his landmark book *Critical Geopolitics* Ó Tuathail (1996) provided the most powerful articulation of this feature, and its relation to classical geopolitics, by refashioning it as a form of Cartesian Perspectivalism, a way of thinking about the world that separates the knowing subject from the knowable object. Put differently, Cartesian Perspectivalism "posits a pregiven reality which an independent subject contemplates, represents, and masters from a position of coerced detachment" (Wylie, 2006a: 520). The internal knowing mind is therefore positioned as looking outwards onto a complicated but nonetheless distinguishable world of knowable

objects, all of which can be classified, measured, and recorded with a certainty and objectivity guaranteed by the ontological separation of viewer and viewed. The importance of this perspective for the emergence of transcontinentalism was twofold. Firstly, although the division of the world into natural and essential continental landmasses is one of the oldest and most pervasive geographical imaginations (Lewis and Wigen, 1997), the emergence of Cartesian Perspectivalism allowed the continents to be viewed in relation to one another, and each with a particular place and importance with respect to the universal global whole. Secondly, it allowed the supposedly inherent physical geographical characteristics of different continents to be surveyed, classified, and defined in a manner deemed to be objective and incontestable.

The second feature of the modern geopolitical imagination is the organising and ordering of space based on time and periodisation. In Agnew's (2003: 35) words, this is the categorisation of space "in terms of the essential attributes of different time periods relative to the idealized historical experience of one of the blocks: Europe, or, more broadly, the West." He takes this conceptualisation of time largely from the anthropologist Fabian (1983) and his notion of the 'stream of Time'. For Fabian (1983: 17), "all living societies [are] irrevocably placed on a temporal slope, a stream of Time – some upstream, others downstream." The further societies are placed up the stream the more civilised, progressed, and enlightened they are, and the further down the stream they are placed the more uncivilised, regressive, and unenlightened they are. As will be explained below, this was particularly important in the era of civilisational geopolitics because, broadly, Europeans self-identified their own continent as at the pinnacle of history, projecting their own deficiencies away from Europe and creating a moral imperative of action to enable the rest of the world to 'catch up'. The importance of this for transcontinentalism was that continents other than Europe – primarily Africa, America, and the erratically and imprecisely defined Asia – were considered as fundamentally lagging behind Europe; located to differing levels further down the 'stream of Time' and therefore in need of European influence to reach a status coeval to that of Europe.

The third and fourth aspects of the modern geopolitical imagination are related. The third is the assumption that "the world is made up of states exercising power over

blocks of space” (Ó Tuathail, 2005: 66). In other words, in the modern geopolitical imagination states are conceived of as the locus of power, and this power is implemented firstly over sovereign territories within which societies are contained, and secondly extraterritorially through economic and political influence, social and diplomatic relations, and through the exercise of military power (Agnew, 2003: 51-84). The fourth and final aspect is that these states are conceived of as existing in an anarchical, ungoverned system, “with each state trying to maximize its status relative to that of others” (Agnew, 2003: 54). These two features are intrinsically related to the realist theory of international relations which traces its roots back to a canon of political theorists including Thucydides and Thomas Hobbes. For proponents of this theory such as Waltz (1959), states are *always and already* in a ceaseless and eternal position of competition with other states in a world system defined by the absence of any overarching governmental apparatus (or ‘referee’). States thus compete for power in this unregulated world, and this is assumed to be the essential condition of the international state system (see Weber, 2014: 15-40). In terms of my argument, in the following chapters I will show how transcontinentalism variously became a leitmotif of British imperialism in Asia and Africa, one of several doctrines concerned with the maximisation of state power relative to other states. Further, I will not only show how this was rooted in the realist conception of international relations, but how the evidently continental *scale* of transcontinentalism was eventually seen to be something that if achieved could enable, or contrarily spell the end of, the global hegemony of a particular state.

Summarily, the four features that I have identified as intrinsic to the modern geopolitical imagination are pivotal for understanding the emergence of transcontinentalism in the nineteenth century. However, Agnew postulates that there were three ‘eras’ of the modern geopolitical imagination, each undergirded by the four key components but each with their own core attributes and features. These are the eras of civilisational geopolitics (1815-1875), naturalised geopolitics (1875-1945), and ideological geopolitics (1945-present). For our purposes it is only the first two of these eras that are relevant. The following two sections will expand upon the eras of

civilisational and naturalised geopolitics, and explain their relevance to the development of transcontinentalism.

2.2.3. Civilisational geopolitics

Civilisation, although an enormously complex term with a convoluted history, developed two dominant yet overlapping usages in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; both “a process and an achieved condition” (Williams, 1976: 57-60; see also Gong, 1984; Robertson, 2006). The achieved condition was of civilisation as a territorially bounded complex or entity within which a set of advanced cultural, legal, economic, and political practices took place. Gong (1984: 14-15) defines these practices as encompassing at least five aspects: the provision of basic rights and freedoms such as life and property; an organised and bureaucratic political apparatus with the capacity to make war; an adherence to the rule of law, both domestic and international; a recognition of the importance of, and partaking in, international diplomacy; and finally a rejection of ‘uncivilised’ practices such as slavery and torture. All of these criteria were flexible in practice and open to fluctuation depending on national and cultural context. Typically, however, the notion of civilisation at this time was reserved for Europe alone. The first maritime circumnavigations of the globe, the dual accomplishments of Enlightenment philosophy and science, and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution cultivated a growing sense of pre-eminence among the peoples of Europe, “which gradually hardened into an inflexible conceit that held Europe to be the most civilized and best governed of all the world regions” (Bassin, 1991: 3). This conceit did not deny that other civilisations existed, or had existed in the past, but that Europe embodied an unequalled phase in the development of humankind that had previously failed to transpire.

Yet Europe’s self-identification as a civilisation with previously unparalleled levels of culture and political organisation developed in tandem with a second preoccupation: that because Europe was *the* pinnacle of history’s culmination and industrial development, it was both morally right and technologically feasible to export this mode of being into those places in the world that had, for whatever reason, fallen behind (Agnew, 2003; Robertson, 2006). This was the second prominent usage of civilisation as

a *process*, a “cross-fertilization” (Robertson, 2006: 425) which had unfolded across space and time through the mobility and exchange of people, ideas, and cultural practices. Duara (2004: 2) has argued that prior to the nineteenth century, “the idea of civilization expressed a process – ‘the civilizing process’ – extending out from the courts to wider reaches of society.” In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, however, the courts were replaced by Europe and the ‘wider reaches of society’ were replaced with the rest of the world, which was quickly defined as barbaric and disorderly. The process of civilisation became the civilising mission, through which civilisation would unfold from Europe into the rest of the world in a selfless and righteous diffusion of superior ideas, cultural practices, and political norms. Thus, as Duara (2001: 100) puts it,

“Western imperial nations invoked the signifier [civilisation] to justify their conquest as a civilizing mission. Whole continents were subjugated and held in thrall because they were not constituted as civilized nations by means of a formulation where to be a nation was to be civilized and vice versa.”

In post-Napoleonic Europe both of these entwined meanings of civilisation crested in the aftermath of “the political and economic breakdown in the political order of early modern Europe” (Toulmin, 1990: 170). This gave rise to the modern geopolitical imagination and the era of civilisational geopolitics, the dominant way that the world was envisaged between 1815 and 1875 in Europe:

“Its main elements were a commitment to European uniqueness as a civilization; a belief that the roots of European distinctiveness were found in its past; a sense that although other cultures might have noble pasts with high achievements, they had been eclipsed by Europe; and an increasing identification with a particular nation-state as representing the most perfected version of the European difference” (Agnew, 2003: 87).

Civilisational geopolitics thus drew an ontological schism between Europe and the rest of the world, creating not only a “general self-perception of European states as those who authoritatively define[d] the standards” (Behr, 2007: 240), but also a pressing imperative that the rest of the world should, forcibly if necessary, be assisted in meeting these enlightened standards; whether they be to do with law, culture, political organisation, technological development, or ‘freedom’. This imperative served as a renewed moral and ethical justification for the legitimacy of European colonialism and imperialism from the end of the Napoleonic Wars, particularly in Africa. Thus, as Pomeranz (2005: 36) has commented, although the precise outcome of the civilising

mission “remained a vague, contested goal, most nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires invoked this rationale much more than their predecessors had.”

Of course, as Agnew recognises civilisational geopolitics was inseparable from the need for overseas expansion to demonstrate political power and facilitate the expansion of economic networks of commerce and trade for the purposes of profit. It was a discourse of colonial legitimacy above all else. But I argue it was important to the emergence of transcontinentalism because Asia, Africa, and America were increasingly perceived as the negation of European civilisation; uncivilised, backwards, barbaric, and thus in need of corrective amendment by the self-anointed vanguard of reason, knowledge, and progress in Europe. Transcontinentalism emerged from this as a doctrine of ‘civilising’ entire continental landmasses with one fell technological swoop.

2.2.4. *Naturalised geopolitics*

Agnew (2003) argues that the era of civilisational geopolitics was supplanted in around 1875 by the era of naturalised geopolitics. As he (2003: 94) puts it, this era was defined by

“a world divided into imperial and colonized peoples, states with ‘biological needs’ for territory/resources and outlets for enterprise, a ‘closed’ world in which one state’s political–economic success was at another one’s expense (relative ascent and decline), and a world of fixed geographical attributes and environmental conditions that had predictable effects on a state’s global status.”

In a story that is well known to geographers, naturalised geopolitics materialised partly from the ideas of a combination of biological, racial, and anthropological sciences that were unevenly imported into social, political, and economic thought. At its broadest, this era ushered in a conception of the nation-state as a corporeal, breathing organism, a “living being” composed of an amalgamation of “state, land and people” (Murphy, 1997: 9). Each state was conceived of as an organism occupying adjacent portions of a world that was increasingly imagined as finite and closed because of the expansion of colonialism. As a consequence, each state was perceived as struggling against the others in an indefinite battle for space and resources. This was the reprehensible social twist given to Darwinian biology (Ó Tuathail, 1996), as ideas around

species being locked in a perpetual struggle for survival were applied to the international state system. As Wolkersdorfer (1999: 147) writes,

“[a]s a result of a growing and healthy population, every state needs more space to continue the development of its civilisation. In this manner, a struggle for more space automatically developed between states. For the state this conflict is the driving force of every human development.”

One of the clearest articulations of naturalised geopolitics came from the German anthropologist and geographer Friedrich Ratzel, whose term *Lebensraum* (living space) later became infamous due to its association with Nazi geopolitics and the spatial policies of Hitler’s Third Reich (Antonsich et al, 2001; Murphy, 1997; Giaccaria and Minca, 2016). According to van der Wusten and Dijkink (2002: 27), Ratzel wrote with “a Darwinian vocabulary tinged with German ecology and an idealist philosophy”. He postulated that the nation-state should be thought of as an inherent product of the geographical space it occupied, as “an organism that only displays health and strength when it is capable of indigenous growth, in other words, territorial expansion” (Wolkersdorfer, 1999; 147). Put differently, for Ratzel and the line of German geopoliticians that followed him the ascension of one state could only be achieved through the territorial expansion of that state and the absorption of smaller, weaker states in accordance with the Darwinian laws of evolution. They applied this apparent law in the service of the nation-state they served, suggesting it was the only way the vitality and security of the German state and people could be achieved.

For our purposes, the era of naturalised geopolitics was also defined by two changes particularly vital for transcontinentalism, and which help to explain why transcontinentalism did not properly emerge in Britain until the late 1880s. As mentioned previously, and defined by Agnew (2003) as an intrinsic feature of naturalised geopolitics, it was accompanied by the division of the world into continental landmasses with fixed geographical, environmental, and material attributes that could objectively be described and classified. However, what has not been so noted, and which I will be arguing for in this thesis, is that it also brought to the fore an understanding of continents other than Europe as not only uncivilised, but also lifeless, inert, and unconscious; existing in a state of pure biological nature and slumber and therefore positioning the masculinised process of European colonisation, civilisation,

and enlightened reason as the only means through which these continents could be revitalised, reawakened, and brought back to life. In addition, the naturalised era was important because it was associated with the decline of British political and economic hegemony and the concomitant sense of the closing world. As Kearns (1993: 29) writes, “[t]he British economic lead had evaporated, and for the British the world did indeed seem to be shrinking, to be closing in.” Particularly before the First World War, this entailed the emergence of a seeming reality in which Britain (and to a lesser extent France) was no longer dominant, but increasingly challenged by Russia and, after unification in 1871, Germany. As I will show repeatedly throughout the chapters that follow, spaces that had previously been considered exclusively British domains were progressively pressured by other European states, particularly by Russia and later Germany in the Persian Gulf and India.

In this thesis, however, the supplanting of civilisational geopolitics by naturalised geopolitics is not as simple as Agnew’s (2003) periodisation would suggest. In fact, I will argue that tracing the development of transcontinentalism points to the ways in which biological and naturalised geopolitics should be more suitably thought of as superimposing, enmeshing, and combining with civilisational ideas from the 1880s onwards. In his defence, Agnew (2003: 85-86) admits the problems of periodisation, noting that “[a] periodization of geopolitical discourse [...] obviously simplifies a more complex flow of representations and practices”, and that “[e]ach period has within it the seeds both of its own demise and subsequent periods.” The extent to which the civilisational and the naturalised intermixed at any given moment is therefore a matter for empirical investigation and analysis, and not pre-determined by the eras themselves. As Agnew (2003: 86) summaries,

“we require a concept of a unified period in order to deny it, and thus make apparent the particularity, local difference, heterogeneity, fluctuation, discontinuity, and strife that are now our preferred categories for understanding any moment of the past.”

2.2.5. Summary

In this section I have introduced geopolitics and critical geopolitics as the broad field in which transcontinentalism, and therefore this thesis, is based. I have defined four intrinsic features of what Agnew (2003) terms the modern geopolitical imagination and

detailed the two intermixed 'eras' of geopolitics, civilisational and naturalised, that are relevant for the time period under discussion. In summary, I want to restate the threefold importance of geopolitics for the emergence of transcontinentalism. The modern geopolitical imagination facilitated the emergence of transcontinentalism firstly because it enabled the envisioning of the world and its essential continental landmasses as an integrated whole, with developments on each of these landmasses having inevitable effects on the overall picture. While Europe was the self-anointed pinnacle of civilisation, Asia, Africa, and America were envisioned as continents with intrinsic attributes, although, of course, what these intrinsic attributes were was a matter for social and political contestation and differed considerably in different ways. Secondly, the turning of space into time produced a 'stream of Time', with Europe positioned at the top and the other continents invariably further downstream. This raised questions about how the rest of the world could be civilised. Finally, as the era of naturalised geopolitics intensified, civilisation became inseparable from the logics of colonialism and imperialism, and served as a justification for the so-called Scramble for Africa in the 1880s and concomitant seizures of the 'blank' spaces of map elsewhere in the world. As the balance of power in Europe became a matter of the survival of the fittest, transcontinentalism transformed into a doctrine for the territorialisation of state power across entire continents, something which – depending on one's national affiliation – was to be welcomed as a saving grace or decried as a death knell. Geopolitics however only explains one half of transcontinentalism. The next section turns to the second – technology – and specifically the development of railway technology from the 1820s onwards.

2.3. Technology and the rise of the railway

The importance of railway technology for transcontinentalism is partly evinced by the etymology of the prefix *trans*, common to transcontinentalism, transport technologies, and the word transverse. The Latin prefix encapsulates a sense of "across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing, or state to another" (OED, 2017: online). Put differently, it refers to a movement or mobility of something across or over the space between two distinguishable and identifiable points, whether those points are defined as places, persons, identities, or

other objects or things entirely. Furthermore, it also contains a sense of to surpass, exceed, rise above, and reach a state of being beyond that which is considered average or normal; a sense captured in the words *transcend* and *transform*. This etymology is indicative because it hints at how the development of railway technology in the 1820s unsettled and produced unique relations between times, spaces, peoples, and objects. Indeed, railways have been connected most definitively to the idea of time-space compression, the “ways in which human beings have attempted to conquer space” (Warf, 2008: 5; see also Butler, 2001; Dicken, 1998). Although space-time compression “took different forms, exhibited different patterns, reflected different cause[s], and implied different consequences, depending on where and when it occurred” (Warf, 2008: 39), it has been most usually associated with the image of a shrinking world, the railway’s ability to accelerate the movement of people, goods, and communications producing a notion of a world in contraction.

Most scholars of critical geopolitics, while recognising the importance of technology in this general sense, have however underemphasised the role of transport technologies in the production of geopolitics and geopolitical imaginaries. In a significant exception to this oversight, Williams (2010: 82) has observed that “while Halford Mackinder and his associates may have made reference to trains, planes and ships in their geopolitical writings, little consideration has been given to how these entities act upon, and are influenced by, geopolitics.” Lin (2013: A1) has likewise reasoned for a more nuanced appreciation of the ways in which “transport and travel concerns are intimately intertwined with geopolitical thinking and practices” and Shaw and Sidaway (2010: 507-508) have argued for a greater appreciation of the roles of mobility, transport, and technology in the history of geopolitics. This lack of engagement with transport technology is particularly discernible in critical geopolitical scholarship that engages with the history of geopolitics in the time period under consideration in this thesis, and is therefore something that requires further elaboration than has hitherto been attempted.

2.3.1. Critical geopolitics and technology

A prominent example of this lack of engagement is Ó Tuathail's (1996) aforementioned *Critical Geopolitics*, which pays little attention to how particular technologies shape the ways in which global space is written. The word particular is important here. In *Critical Geopolitics*, Ó Tuathail (1996: 12) dissects with great dexterity how technologies of mapping, surveying, and charting – what he refers to as “the techniques and technologies for displaying space” - were fundamental to the production, delineation, and governance of imperial space from the sixteenth century onwards. But technologies such as the railway and ship are given a shorter shrift in Ó Tuathail's (1996: 15) discussion of the late nineteenth century a couple of pages later. He notes “the transformative effects of changing technologies of transportation, communications, and warfare [...] on the exercise of imperial power across space” in the late nineteenth century, but precisely what these transformative effects were is left rather vague and unspecified. On the same page he writes that the term geopolitics itself was in the same timeframe a “convenient fiction, an imperfect name for a set of practices within the civil societies of the Great Powers that sought to explain the meaning of the new global conditions of space, power, and technology” (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 15). However, throughout the entirety of his book and in his analysis of Mackinder, of this triangle of new global conditions it is only the words space and power that are critically and thoroughly evaluated. The ‘changing technologies of transportation’ are mentioned but then quickly fall away.

Similarly, Agnew (2003: 28-29) recognises that “[t]he late nineteenth century [saw] dramatic shifts in space-time organization with the spread of railways, telephones, steamship lines, foreign reporting, photography and cinema” early in his work on the modern geopolitical imagination. Later on, in his discussion of the late nineteenth century, he repeats that between 1880 and 1914 these innovations “compressed distance, truncated time, and threatened social hierarchies.” In particular, he suggests that “[t]he global spread of railways and the invention of the aeroplane were perhaps the most important challenges to conventional thinking about time and space” (Agnew, 2003: 99), because they engendered and ushered in a sense of a ‘closed world’ and therefore intensified the notion that, in the era of naturalised geopolitics, political-

economic success of one state had to come at the expense of another. Once more, though, beyond this mention there is neither sustained analysis nor empirical evidence offered to develop this perspective.

It is worth focusing in more detail on Agnew here because his mention of the importance of technology at the end of the nineteenth century matches almost verbatim Ó Tuathail's discussion of technology in his 1992 paper on Mackinder. This draws attention to their common reference, Kern's ([1983] 2003) book *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*. In this book, Kern documented the ways in which various technologies transformed human understandings of culture, distance, direction, and speed. What is peculiar is that, while both Agnew and Ó Tuathail cite Kern, they do not explicitly engage with his chapter on direction, where he discusses in great depth how railway technology (dis/re)orientated European states' sense of direction, particularly away from a historical north-south or up-down axis associated with transcendence and freedom at the north extreme and immorality and vulgarity at the south. For Kern the development of the aeroplane, with its promise of upward motion, symbolised this axis, but railway technology underscored for perhaps the first time the political and economic significance of the east-west axis. Of course, and as Kern (2003: 257) agrees, the 'East' had long been associated with exoticism, mysticism, and romance, but

“[t]hroughout the period the attention of world powers was constantly drawn to the new dynamics that emerged along [the east-west] axis. The new east-west railroad lines, the rise in global travel, the division of the world into precise and temporally ordered time zones, the alignment of the alliance systems, and the battle plans of generals underscored the ancient and universal significance of the east-west axis as the direction of the earth's rotation and the location of dawn and sunset so deeply embedded in the poetry and imagery of human consciousness”

Kern (2003: 258) ends this chapter with a brief discussion of Mackinder, before summarising that the “shifting directional orientation of nations was but one aspect of the complex history of diplomacy that led to [the First World War].” Yet none of this chapter is discussed by either of the aforementioned authors, who are satisfied to gesture towards the compression of distance, the truncation of time, and the rearrangement of social hierarchies introduced in the first two chapters of Kern's book.

In other words, there is an evident discrepancy in how critical geopolitics has treated transport technologies such as the railway in comparison to what Ó Tuathail refers to as the techniques and technologies for displaying space, something which is further demonstrated by the focus of popular geopolitics on different kinds of visual media (see Dittmer, 2010). In comparison, transport technologies are marginalised, gestured towards as contextual factors that must be acknowledged before more important and timely analyses can proceed. There also seems to be an offhand recycling of key tropes (the compression of distance, truncation of time, and rearrangement of social hierarchies) garnered from a brief reading of Kern in at least one instance. This is assumed to be a satisfactory gesticulation which is not deemed to require any critical reappraisal. Furthermore, it is perhaps indicative that what I would suggest as Kern's most geopolitically relevant arguments are not specifically engaged with. This line of critique goes further than Williams' (2005: 63) observation that "technology has been little understood as an actor in geopolitical processes". In some of the foundational works of critical geopolitics, technologies of this kind have been little understood precisely because they are assumed to require no more discussion than a cursory glance of appreciation.

An exception to this is the work of Hugill (1995; 1999), which approaches geopolitics and technology not from the perspective of critical geopolitics, but from that of World Systems Theory. In *World Trade since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism* (1995), Hugill borrows from the theorist of technology Lewis Mumford to argue the history of technology may be divided into three phases or cycles – the Eotechnic, Paleotechnic, and Neotechnic. The first of these was based largely on rural production and manufacturing, and was superseded at the end of the eighteenth century by the Paleotechnic, defined by the emergence of heavy industries, steel, iron, and steam power (Hugill, 1995: 15-31). This Paleotechnic era, which was also the "first stage of capitalist industry" (Hugill, 1995: 7), was then supplanted by Neotechnic, which enabled economic production to be diversified:

"[w]hereas the Eotechnic was marked by extremely limited inland transportation and the Paleotechnic was restricted to fixed lines of transport that operated poorly for short hauls, the Neotechnic radically evened out geographic access. Electrically driven streetcars and interurbans, bicycles, and automobiles, buses and trucks with internal

combustion engines made short-haul transport economically viable and filled in the broad interstices between Paleotechnic transportation lines.”

Armed with this framework, Hugill proceeds on a wide-ranging analysis of different technological innovations, showing how each one shifted the economic and social relations integral to the geographical expansion of capitalism. While doing so, he argues the geography of these innovations shaped which states became hegemonic in different time periods. For example, he describes Portuguese maritime supremacy between c. 1430 and the mid-1500s as “essentially driven by innovations in hardware. It was the three-masted ship, reliably navigated with good maps and navigational instruments and armed with cannon, that made Portugal’s hegemony possible” (Hugill, 1995: 20). In turn, these relations between geography and technology shaped the emergence of the global capitalist economy and its associated contours of world commerce.

Hugill argued for the importance of his approach for geopolitics in a subsequent book, *Global Communications since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (1999). Although this work focuses primarily on communications, and specifically how telegraphy, radar, and wireless technologies enabled a transition from British to American global hegemony, its value from the perspective of this thesis is its acknowledgement of the impact of technology on geopolitical processes and relations. In doing so, he draws on Mackinder to suggest that, in 1904, Britain was “at the mercy of a powerful land state coming to control the Eurasian landmass with railroads and telegraphs and thus able to command the resources of the heartland to build an overpowering fleet” (Hugill, 1999: 159). However, there is a weakness with Hugill’s articulation of the relation between technology and geopolitics. This is its lack of focus on how the railway, and technology in general, was important to geopolitical imaginations and visions of space, such as those analysed by Agnew (2003). The root of this weakness is his privileging of the social and economic relations of capitalist production over all else, including the imaginings, divisions, and representations of global space that comprise the foci of analysis in critical geopolitics (Agnew, 2003; 2014). Thus, although Hugill pays more attention to technology than Agnew (2003) and Ó Tuathail (1996), he does so in a way that does not enable a re-evaluation of the links between technology and *critical* geopolitics in the way that this thesis is attempting.

In foregrounding the railway as a fundamental element in the emergence of transcontinentalism, this thesis thus contributes to a broader critique of critical geopolitics as wrongfully neglectful of the importance of transport technologies in shaping both the modern geopolitical imagination (as defined by Agnew) and geopolitical imaginaries and visions of space more generally. In the conclusion I will say more about why this is important to critical geopolitics' research agenda as a whole, but for now I want to underscore the importance of the railway in shaping, and entwining with, the geopolitical processes that gave rise to transcontinentalism.

2.3.2. Power projection and land power

Power projection is a crucial concept for the emergence of transcontinentalism, which while common in strategic studies and defence literature has been given an original and significant conceptualisation by Williams (2005; 2010) in her work on aviation geopolitics. In her PhD thesis, which examined the role of aviation technology and airpower in the territorialisation of the Pacific as a United States space in the interwar years, Williams (2005: 64) developed the idea of the technogeopolitical project, which "seeks to understand how technology is used to incorporate a specific space". More specifically, it seeks to understand how states use specific technologies to project and territorialise control and sovereignty over space in particular time periods. She shows how, after the Spanish-American War in 1898, "the United States began to view the Pacific as a US space, but it was not until the interwar period (1918-1941) that the US was able to use the technology of airpower to materialise and territorialise this perception" (Williams, 2005: 12). Aviation technology enabled the US to conduct surveys of Pacific space, to develop and operate commercial transpacific air routes through the establishment of Pan American Airways, and to construct aviation facilities on a number of Pacific islands. Williams thus captures the essence of what Butler (2001), her key interlocutor, terms the recursive relationship between technology and geopolitics: a (US) geopolitical imaginary of a space (the Pacific) as essentially empty and thus ripe for colonisation precipitated a technogeopolitical project (aviation technology) which subsequently territorialised that space with United States sovereignty.

Pivotal to the technogeopolitical project is the concept of power projection, which Williams develops in dialogue with a number of airpower theorists and contemporary political geographers. Power projection has two tenets, the first of which is defined as “the deployment of resources beyond the territorial boundaries of the state” (Williams, 2010: 83). To return to railways, in political science, military history, and strategic studies they have been studied in this way mostly for their ability to transport troops - those “commanded to execute the violence demanded by the state in pursuit of its wider geopolitical objectives” (Woodward and Jenkins, 2012: 496-497) - and munitions to military fronts with greater speed and precision (see e.g. Onorato et al, 2014; Showalter, 1975; Van Creveld, 1977; Wolmar, 2010). Usually, this is framed as a solution to the perennial problem of pre-modern warfare: logistics. Prior to the invention of the railway, soldiers were firstly forced to bodily carry their own supplies (food, water, armaments, and so on) to areas of combat, and secondly when these supplies grew scarce, soldiers had no means of replenishing them short of foraging, developing agriculture, and in many cases pillaging their conquered lands. Conversely, “[t]he adoption of the railroad allowed states to transport men, munitions, and food in such quantities and with such speed that mass armies representing as much as 10 percent of a society’s total population suddenly became feasible” (Onorato et al, 2014: 451). Virilio (2005: 60-62) equates the invention of the railway to the invention of modern logistics, suggesting that modern logistics *came into being* when armies could no longer rely on the land on which they were operating, and instead had to have all of the necessary supplies moved to them rather than the other way round. Narrating as if present at the invention of the railway itself, he remarks that “initially charged with the transport of supplies, then with the transport of troops, this ‘weapon’ will finally be engaged in combat, in reinforcing the units on the line” (Virilio, 2005: 71). “With the steam engine,” he concludes, “we are in the presence of a weapon of movement that extends that of the engine of war” (Virilio, 2005: 73).

There is a second dimension to power projection that Williams also emphasises. This is the more imaginative and metaphorical side of the concept whereby power projection “produces specific understandings of space that privilege one state’s control over it” (Williams, 2010: 83). It conjures images of power as “highly mobile, but

nevertheless tied to a centre and projected outwards” (Williams, 2010: 84). Thus the US’s territorialisation of the Pacific was achieved not only through methods of colonial survey or war planning, but also through popular geopolitical means. For instance, Williams (2005) shows how the representation of the commercial Pan American Airways transpacific flights through postage stamps, newspaper reporting, and other popular geopolitical mediums engendered an increasing recognition among the general population that the US’s western frontier was gradually extending to encompass the Pacific. In other words, it is not simply that power projection signifies the application of military force beyond the territorial boundaries of the state. Rather, power projection works to territorialise particular spaces and places as under the control of one given state to the detriment of other states. Precisely how this occurs is dependent upon the technology utilised and the attributes of the space under consideration; the Pacific Ocean, for example, was ripe for territorialisation by aviation technology because its vastness rendered previous modes of sea power insufficient for achieving and maintaining US supremacy.

I will argue in the chapters that follow that power projection is crucial to understanding transcontinentalism because a specifically *transcontinental* railway, spanning points at opposite or opposing ends of continental landmasses, came to signify the territorialisation of state power across the space that would be traversed by the railway (i.e. the entire continent). This was because these opposite or opposing points were constructed as the *extreme* longitudinal and latitudinal points of a continent, and the space between these points was consequently rendered as the *entirety* of the continental landmass itself. This enabled the construction of a transcontinental railway to be associated with the territorialisation of power across the entire continental landmass as opposed to the minute space that would be physically covered by the sleepers and rails.

Finally, the importance of the railway and power projection for transcontinentalism is intimately related to a deeper and, by the outbreak of the First World War, arguably entrenched binary opposition drawn between the exercise of sea power and the exercise of land power. This is well known to geographers due to its association with Mackinder (1904), who as noted in the opening line of this thesis

equated the construction of transcontinental railways with the transmuting of land power relative to sea power. As I will analyse in much greater depth in Section 2.5., Mackinder conceptualised Britain as a sea power, dependent upon the power projection enabled by the might of the British Navy to secure and (re)produce its global circulations of troops, resources, and commerce. Germany and Russia, on the other hand, were defined by Mackinder as land powers that by virtue of their geographical position astride the Heartland would attempt to use railway technology to ascend to a position of global hegemony. However, I argue that the displacement of sea power by land power shaped not only the emergence, but also the critical importance of the idea of transcontinentalism as a doctrine that would enable the territorialisation of power across continental space. This was because, especially in the case of the Baghdad Railway, the construction of a transcontinental railway was broadly equated to the establishment of what the British naval strategist Corbett ([1911] 1988) called an *amphibious power* (see Kraska, 2011: 75); a power that could project power across the entire planet through a noxious combination of effective land *and* sea power. Because the terminating points of transcontinental railways were always ports, and because these ports were constructed as the extreme opposites of their respective continents, power could be projected across both land and sea with an unrivalled flexibility, mobility, and severity.

2.3.3. The civilising rails

Aside from power projection, there are two other important aspects of railway technology relevant to the emergence of transcontinentalism; the first well documented by scholars but the second seldom recognised explicitly. The first is the well-known association of railways with the spread of European civilisation, progress, and modernity across the world. As Ahuja (2005: 96) has summarised, “‘railways’ were, to all intents and purposes, used as a synonym for ‘civilization’ in the late nineteenth-century political discourse of colonial legitimacy.” This synonymy became so entrenched within European culture that it very quickly moved from the foreground to the periphery of railway discourse as it became established as a universally recognised truism. In 1916 the President of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir Francis Younghusband (in Fox et al, 1916: 20), encapsulated this perspective:

“In Europe our railways are such everyday matter-of-fact incidents in our life that we do not look on them with any particular enthusiasm; but in any of the three great continents, Africa, Asia, or North and South America, a railway takes on a different aspect. It becomes a thing of romance. We see its branches in the form of great fingers indicating in what direction the firm hand of civilization and commerce will soon follow.”

The most striking example of this was Jefferson’s analysis of what he first termed the ‘civilising rails’ in 1928. Surveying the previous hundred years of railway technology, Jefferson (1928: 230) argued that it had increasingly “enabled men to carry civilization, a civilization that was undoubtedly European, into what had been a trackless wilderness.” Jefferson theorised that the space ten miles either side of a railway line marked what he termed a corridor of civilization, and that when many railway tracks existed in close proximity a *railweb* was created. For Jefferson (1928: 217), those living inside a railweb or within ten miles of a railway were automatically within ample reach of “the agency that for the century past has done more than any other single one of man’s inventions to transform human life, especially in the way of pushing backward people forward and lifting submerged classes”. Jefferson used this theorisation to examine, classify, and analyse all the regions of the world, producing a series of maps displaying the corridors and railwebs of civilisation (see Figure 2.1). The dark black of the railless portions of the world was contrasted with the bright white of everywhere within ten miles of a railway. As Graham et al (2015: 337) explain,

“[t]he white colour of the maps of Western Europe and Britain showed that connectivity had advanced so far that it made up a railwayweb with the ‘the civilizing rails’ having all but eliminated the backwoods areas with their peasant ways.”

The relevance of this to transcontinentalism is that, as with power projection, the construction of transcontinental railways was associated with the accomplishment of the fervent dream of Youngusband, Jefferson, and so many at the time; the civilisation of entire continental landmasses and the hoisting of continents such as Africa out of a state of pure nature to a level coeval to that of Europe. As before, this was because the space between the two opposite extremes of continents was fashioned as the *entirety* of the continent itself. Transcontinentalism was thus defined by the desire to use railway technology to span or transverse continents and thereby enable the civilising of entire continental landmasses.

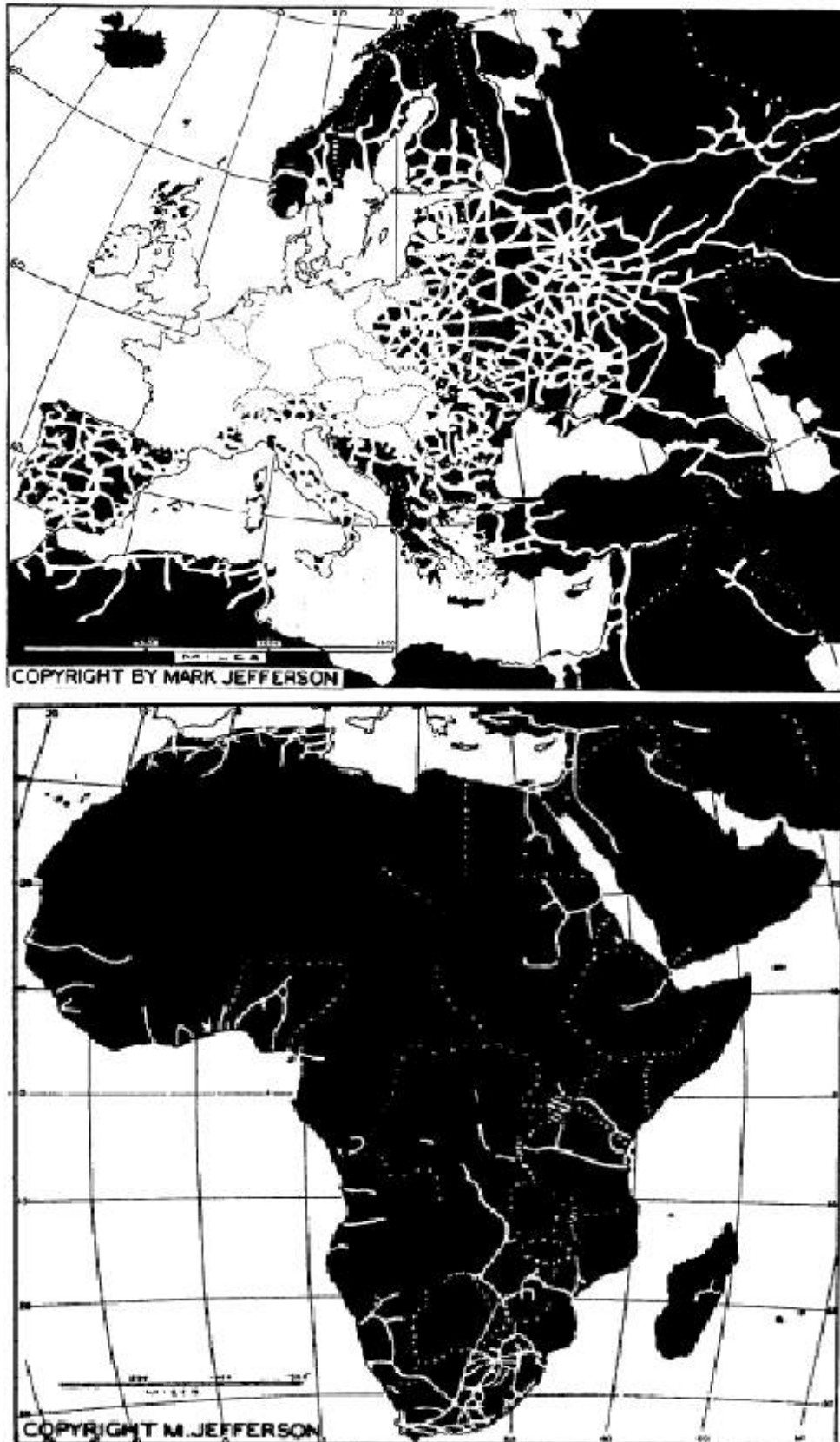


Figure 2.1: Mark Jefferson's (1928: 218, 226) maps of the civilising rails in Europe and Africa.

2.3.4. *The tentacular rails*

Finally, a little noted feature of railway technology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was its biologisation and naturalisation concomitantly to the naturalisation of geopolitics discussed by Agnew (2003). Railway lines were frequently discussed in terms of several different kinds of biological organism; most prominently the pathways of the human cardiovascular system's veins and arteries; the structure of the musculoskeletal system such as the spine, ribs, and fingers; the sinews of the nervous system such as nerves; and finally different parts of plants and trees such as roots, trunk lines, offshoots, and branches. The biologisation of railway discourse was apparent before the invention and spread of the railway itself, emerging after James Watt drew an analogy between steam power and horsepower in 1784. This inaugurated the notion that technological and mechanised power could and should be represented and discussed in terms of natural, biological energy, culminating in the symbolic description of the railway as an iron horse (on this, see Revill, 2012: 25-29). In the 1840s references to railways as 'trunk lines' between British cities increased (e.g. Macneill, 1843; Gandell and Brunton, 1845). The discourse intensified and pluralised enormously from around 1880 onwards, growing to encompass the aforementioned systems of biological energy crucial to the maintenance of complex life. As Revill (2012: 10-11) puts it, "[r]ailway systems were frequently described using organic metaphors, such as the cardiovascular system of a huge body or the tentacles of an enormous octopus."

It is of course tempting to dismiss the biologisation of railway discourse as an intriguing but ultimately unimportant feature of nineteenth century language use. However, as Schivelbusch (1986: 195) has argued it must be seen in the wider context of what he calls "the biologization of social and economic processes and, conversely, the influence of underlying social conditions on biophysiological notions." This, additionally, must be extended into the co-constitutive realm of the social, the geopolitical, and the technological. The most incisive and diagnostic articulation of this co-constitution was provided by the German geographer and philosopher Ernst Kapp (1808-1896), a writer who is as unrecognised in geography as he is revered in other fields as the first modern philosopher of technology. Influenced by the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel and the eminent German geographer Karl Ritter, Kapp became fascinated by the new scientific approach

to geography and consequently published a number of books on geography and history (for more details on Kapp's life and wider work, see Hartmann, 2014: 24-25; Mitcham, 1994: 20-25). Kapp's work argued for and developed Ritter's embryonic organic conception of the state. As Hartmann (2014: 24-25) recalls, it "was especially Ritter who influenced Kapp to think of geography in a physiological way in which elements of the earth were considered to be like inter-related organs." In 1877 Kapp published what is now considered his magnum opus, *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik* ('Principles of a Philosophy of Technology'). It is this book that more than any other elucidates the geopolitical importance of the biologisation of railway (and wider technological) discourse.

In this book, Kapp defined technology as *Organprojektion*, or a direct projection and prolongation of human organs. In other words, he believed that our organs are projected into artificial means of tools or instruments, and that technology is therefore quite literally a reproduction or extension of the human body (Kapp, 1877: 44-45, quoted in Lawson, 2010: 208). Importantly, Kapp suggested that particular technologies are the projections of specific organs only and not in a more general sense. His starting point was the human hand, which Kapp considered the most dextrous and thus most fundamental part of the human body. Many of the earliest human technologies were projections of the hand(s): the cupped hands are projected in entities that hold water such as the hollow coconut or, later, the cup itself; whilst the fists are projected in all manner of entities such as the hammer and many other kinds of weapons (Martins, 1993). He would also suggest projections for the arm (sword, spear, shovel, spade), the bent finger (most notably the fishing hook), and the teeth (knife) (Kapp, 1877: 44-45, quoted in Lawson, 2010: 208; see also Mitcham, 1994: 23-24). The notion of *Organprojektion*, then, refers to the externalisation of an interior, whereby the human body is protracted and given force unto the world in and through its projection by technology.

But Kapp did not stop at simple hand tools such as these. He lived in a time where the proliferation of telegraph and railway technologies was reaching its height, and this is also reflected in his empirical meditations on technology. Kapp analogised the telegraph network as a projection of the human nervous system: "The nerves are the

‘cables’ of the animal body, and the telegraph networks are the projected nerves of humanity” (Steinert, 2016: 63). Hartmann (2014: 29-31) explains how Kapp compared illustrations of the cross section of the undersea telegraph cable to that of the nerve fibre to make this point (see Figure 2.2). Further, Kapp discussed railway networks as an extension and externalisation of the human circulatory system (Lawson, 2010). “Like the organism,” he suggested, “the steam engine circulates energy and needs ‘food’ in the form of coal in order to maintain its activity” (quoted in Steinert, 2016: 63).

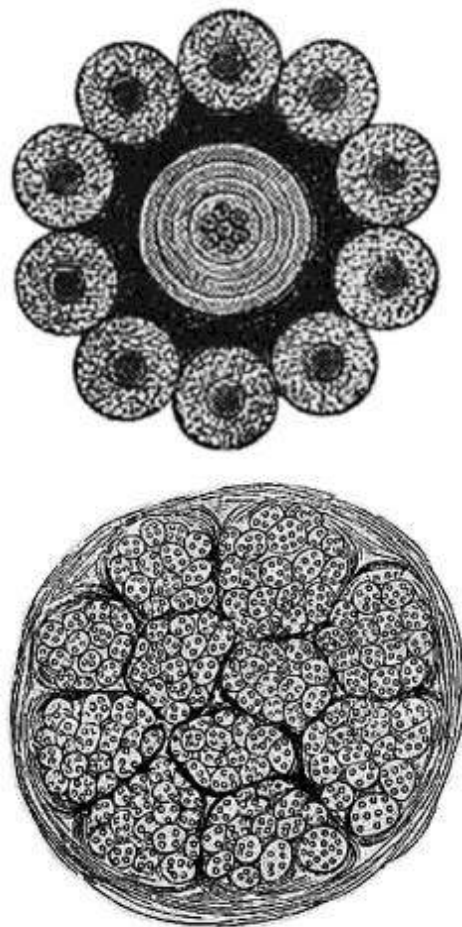


Figure 2.2: Kapp's comparison of the cross section of a telegraph cable (above) and the human nerve (below). Kapp used these images to illustrate how telegraph cables were the nerves of humanity. Reproduced from Hartmann (2014: 30).

What is significant, however, is that Kapp insisted technology is not a simple one-way extension of human reason, intention or judgement, a notion that can sometimes be found in contemporary reformulations of his philosophy (e.g. Lawson, 2010). “Humans not only ‘project’ their organs into their artificial means but these artificial

means also enhance and support the bodily organs” (Kapp, 1877: 42, quoted in Steinert, 2016: 63). Thus, instead of being a passive tool waiting patiently to be thrust into the world by its human masters, Kapp emphasised the active, agential role that technology plays in the reproduction, transformation, and distortion of the original ‘human-species-being’ (Heersmink, 2012). Technology is not reduced to its utility value, but instead “becomes a fundamental functional element in the biological and cultural evolution of *homo sapiens*” (Väliaho, 2008: 7). As Väliaho (2008: 7) continues, “what is projected as an outside, the technological object, gets confused with the very inside, the origin of projection, which is the body.” Kapp thus characterised the human-technology relation as recursive and interdependent; “human and technology are defined as one functional system in which the distinction between human and technology becomes arbitrary” (Heersmink, 2012: 122). In other words, technology is as constitutive of the human as the human is constitutive of technology, to the point where upholding an ontological distinction between the two is entirely untenable. The evolution of humanity for Kapp is in fact a *coevolution* of humanity and technology; a constant process of production and reproduction.

Kapp’s argument has much in common with contemporary philosophical accounts of technology as extension (see Steinert, 2016, for an overview), but his argument was also of its time and should not be hastily divorced from the context of his geographical roots and the era of naturalised geopolitics. In his philosophy, technology is not deprived of the agency to impact upon bodily functions and organs, and nor does it simply extend them. Instead, “it is through various kinds of technological projections of its gestures and organs that the human kind constantly models, replicates and recreates itself in the course of its evolution” (Väliaho, 2008: 7). In short, in this thesis I argue that Kapp’s ontology of technology was ‘upscaled’ from human to state in the era of naturalised geopolitics. Technologies such as the railway or telegraph were not simply extensions or replications of the state, but were constitutive of the reproduction of the state itself. Thus, just as there “is no ontological distinction between the human and technology” in Kapp’s philosophy (Van Den Eede, 2014: 156), I would argue there was little distinction between the state and technology in the era of naturalised geopolitics; both were biologised and thus folded into one another. *Organprojektion* can moreover

be related to power projection; but although power projection suggests the movement of a pre-defined and latent power located at a central node through transport technologies, Kapp's philosophy stressed that the *technology itself* was intrinsic to the very (re)production, replication, and recreation of state power.

An example of this from a similar time Kapp was writing was the French fiction writer Émile Zola's novel *La Bête humaine*, which was published in 1890 and is centred upon the railway between Paris and Le Havre. In this novel Zola embarked on a detailed biological and anthropomorphised depiction of the expanding French railway network. "[The railway] was like a huge body", Zola ([1890] 1948: 51) wrote, "a gigantic being lying across the earth, his head in Paris, his vertebrae all along the line, his limbs stretching out into branch lines, with feet and hands in Le Havre and other terminals." Zola's description conflates the focal points of the railway network and the political and economic urban centres of the French state, producing an image of the feet and hands not as the organs (as Kapp would have it) of the state but analogously as the state's supportive and upholstering structures. Meanwhile, the head of the railway network is depicted as Paris, the calculating administrative, juridical, political, and economic focal point of the French state. As Kapp would have insisted, Zola's description of the railway network draws no distinction between the organs (or bones) of the French state and the skeletal form of the railway network; they are ontologically connected and fundamentally inexorable.

This interplay between the naturalised geopolitics of the state and the biologisation of railway discourse produced the last and possibly most definitive aspect of transcontinentalism. In parallel to how non-European space was imagined as uncivilised with the railway the means by which civilisation would occur, it was also imagined as lifeless and inert, and the railway the means through which it would be given life, structure, and strength. Railways were the means by which biological state power would be reproduced, enhanced, and entrenched across space on a transcontinental scale. As discussed previously, this was important because continents, especially Africa, were similarly imagined as dark, unconscious, slumbering spaces that could only be enlightened, revitalised, and awakened through the construction and penetration of railways. Railways were the arteries through which the lifeblood of

continents would be both produced and given motion, they comprised the skeleton that gave continents their upholstery and structure, and in their association with trunks and branches they were the means by which continents would sprout and blossom upwards, the direction of ascension aloft the 'stream of Time', and away from their previous unconscious incarceration within nature. Transcontinental railways were accordingly the trunk, spine, or backbone of the continents they were constructed to traverse; quite literally providing continents with the *infrastructure* of civilisation and producing, extending, replicating, and transforming the state constructing it simultaneously. This was not always as explicit as Kapp and Zola made it, but I will argue it underpinned transcontinentalism, especially in the years immediately before, during, and after the First World War.

As Schivelbusch (1986) has argued, the biologisation of geopolitical and technological discourses was intimately related. Schivelbusch (1986: 194) suggests that the concept of circulation best captures the enmeshing of the social, biological, and technological together in the nineteenth century: "[t]he nineteenth century's preoccupation with the conquest and mastery of space and time [found] its most general expression in the concept of circulation, which was central to the scientific social notions of the epoch." Circulation is a term that has become enormously influential in the humanities and social sciences, especially in the aftermath of the translation and publication of Michel Foucault's (2007) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* in English. Scholars have utilised his definition to explore a myriad of historical and contemporary connections between security, population, territory, and mobility (e.g; Glück, 2015; Luque-Ayala and Marvin, 2016; Salter, 2013). However, as Behrent (2013: 55) notes, Foucault "never had much to say [...] about technology in its broadest and most conventional sense." On the other hand, Schivelbusch (1986: 194-195) recognised that the development of circulation reflected both biological (cardiovascular) and technological (the movement of traffic on railways) developments, and that the vitality of social, political, and economic institutions became connected to the existence of a functioning circulatory system of one kind or another:

“In this complex sense, the circulation concept serves as a key to unlock the open triumphs as well as the hidden anxieties of the nineteenth century. The formula is as simple as can be: whatever was part of circulation was regarded as healthy, progressive, constructive; all that was detached from circulation, on the other hand, appeared diseased, medieval, subversive, threatening.”

Building on this, in this thesis I argue that transcontinentalism became a doctrine of inserting a functioning circulatory system – a railway system, assembled around the transcontinental railway as its ‘spine’ or ‘backbone’ – into previously inert, uncivilised, and unconscious continental spaces, providing an unrestricted and previously impossible mobility of troops, labour, resources, and other objects across continental space for the political and economic benefit of the constructing state. This system would simultaneously civilise the entire continental landmass in question, territorialise state power across continental space, and enable the full and typically dormant economic and developmental potential of the continent under question to be realised and connected to wider global and transnational flows. This, in turn, was equated with the realisation of the Social Darwinian ideal, the creation of an amalgamation of people, land, and resources so overwhelmingly superior to any other it could even guarantee the global hegemony of that state relative to others. In the last analysis, therefore, transcontinentalism was a geopolitical and technological doctrine of the creation (or maintenance) of global dominance.

2.3.5. Summary

This section has identified and explained the three important technological discourses that conditioned the rise of the doctrine of transcontinentalism, which can be summarised as railways as a tool of power projection, railways as a vanguard of civilisation, and railways as a bodily augmentation and extension of the biological state organism. The section has also critiqued critical geopolitics for its lack of attention to the role of technology in shaping geopolitical processes in the time period under consideration. Finally, it has demonstrated how the biologisation of geopolitical and technological discourses is best captured by Schivelbusch’s (1986) concept of circulation, and thus how transcontinentalism was defined by a fantasy of inserting a functioning circulatory system into a previous inert, docile, and unconscious expanse of transcontinental space.

In the final section of this chapter I return to Mackinder's ideas; not just those three works considered the overtly 'geopolitical' segments of his writing, but his wider corpus as a whole. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, re-examining Mackinder's corpus in the light of transcontinentalism provides a way of clarifying and grounding the sometimes abstract themes and ideas that I have been discussing so far in this chapter. The second reason is that foregrounding transcontinentalism in an analysis of Mackinder's ideas produces a new and fruitful way of reading and understanding his oeuvre. In this reading, Mackinder is not the grand geopolitician who deduced an emergent reality of the relationship between geography, technology, and state power before anyone else. Rather, reading him in the context of transcontinentalism locates him in the doctrine encompassing Gilpin in the American case and Dostoevsky in the Russian. Mackinder, in other words, evinced the attributes of transcontinentalism I have defined in this chapter *par excellence*.

2.4. Transcontinentalism and Mackinder

Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947) is unquestionably one the most important authors in the history of geopolitics, something that is evinced by the sheer volume and variance of subsequent interpretations of his work. In some branches of political science and neoclassical geopolitics, Mackinder's ideas on the relationship between geography, technology, and state power have inspired an enormous amount of writing that seeks to incorporate post-World War Two technological developments into geopolitical theorising. To cite only two examples, Gray (1977: 6, 12) has consistently argued for the relevance of Mackinder's ideas for the field of international relations, postulating that "[t]he meaning of physical geography is, of course, altered by technology" and that the reinterpretation of the likes of Mackinder therefore requires "great caution, in view of the changed meaning that technology gives to geography." Similarly, like Mackinder, Ball (1985) considered both geography and natural resources as stable and rigid factors in the production of national power, fixed in place as they are in the earth. "The most dynamic factor", he continued, "is technology"; the "primary determinant of much of human activity" (1985: 171). Thus, as he summarised,

"there is an extremely complex, interdependent and dynamic relationship between technology, geography, and national power, the particular manifestations of which differ

as between specific technologies, different geographical and strategic circumstances, and over different time periods” (Ball, 1985: 171).

Perhaps most notably, Mackinder’s ideas on geography and technology have been reformulated by neoclassical geopolitical theorists, those who “explicitly locate themselves within the Mackinder-Haushofer-Spykman tradition, but [who] creatively rework it with reference to changed social, economic, political, and cultural factors” (Megoran, 2010a: 187). Two such authors, Deudney (2000) and Dolman (2002: 31, original emphasis), have explicitly argued that “[t]he influence of emerging *technologies* on geography [...] is the foundation of the geopolitical strategists’ thought.”

Much more could be said about the appropriation of Mackinder by such authors, but the prominence of technology in Mackinder’s oeuvre has, in parallel to its wider neglect of technology, been underappreciated in critical geopolitics. Throughout the past three decades or so, Mackinder has been the subject of much discussion in critical geopolitics and beyond. Precisely because of his popularity with Cold War authors and theorists such as Spykman, various scholars sought to contextualise Mackinder’s writings within the broader social, cultural, geoeconomic, and diplomatic currents of his time in order to demystify the seemingly eternal insight of his ideas, while others grounded his geopolitical thought in his parallel and longstanding concerns with “education, imperial trade, banking, man-power and the so-called English tradition” (Dodds and Sidaway, 2004: 293, see also Blouet, 1987; Kearns, 2009; Mayhew, 2000; O’Hara and Heffernan, 2006; Venier, 2004). Yet technology is conspicuous by its absence in many of these discussions, and only mentioned in passing by those who do acknowledge it. For example, in his account of the origins of European geopolitics (and Mackinder’s role therein) between 1890 and 1920, Heffernan (2000: 34) gestures towards the “awesome [...] and deeply disturbing” possibility of a railway system traversing Asia, but this is not developed into any sustained analysis. In his landmark article on Mackinder, Ó Tuathail (1992: 106) discusses four material transformations that occurred between 1875 and 1914 and their relationship to the development of Mackinder’s geopolitical ideas; the third of which he defines as “the time-space compression ushered in by the diffusion of new technologies and new global standards to regulate daily life.” Ó Tuathail (1992: 106) notes that the dynamism of the Trans-Siberian Railway “combined with the

giganticism of this land empire promoted an excessive yet self-assured futurology [...] on Mackinder's part". However, Ó Tuathail does not cultivate these comments into a sustained engagement with Mackinder's ideas about technology.

Despite excluding technology from his later classification of the "six elements that are at the heart of Mackinder's geopolitical works" (Kearns, 2013: 918), Kearns provides perhaps the most developed critical discussion of technology in an earlier consideration of Mackinder's ideas. Kearns (2010: 190-191) notes that, for Mackinder, "the relations between technology and strategy were about to change producing a new post-Columbian age", and that previously the "iron horse had transformed the space relations of the world organism." In a similar example, Ó Tuathail and Luke (2000: 370) have discussed Mackinder in the context of a critical overview of the work of French theorist Paul Virilio. Here, they go as far as stating that "[t]he pivot in Halford Mackinder's famous 1904 'geographical pivot of history' paper is the relationship between physical geography and transportation technology or what he called 'mobilities of power'". Both of these examples have much in common with my analysis of Mackinder below, but I argue that they do not go far enough. Mackinder's geopolitics can be thought, contrarily, as one of the most articulate and prominent examples of transcontinentalism. He equated the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway with the civilisation of the Russian state (or whatever state was to occupy the Eurasian Heartland), its establishment as a land-power far superior to the sea-power available to Britain, and the insertion of a system of circulation that would enrich and invigorate Russian space. For Mackinder, the servant of the British Empire, this came with one inevitable outcome, the final evisceration of Britain's already declining and precarious position in the world. The reason, as is well known, that this was possible was because of the material and physical geographic features of the Heartland itself, containing all of the resources necessary for the creation of an impregnable global power.

To the extent that Mackinder's ([1919] 1942: 176) thought can be encapsulated within a brief sentence, he believed that "[m]an and not nature initiates, but nature in large measure controls." The oft cited 'Geographical Pivot of History' paper, which Mackinder delivered as a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society on January 25th 1904, is the usual starting point for such discussions, but I want to consider two of his

earliest papers first. Blouet (2013: 43) has noted in passing that in his 1887 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography', Mackinder observed that "the significance of space and route ways might be altered by transportation technology." In this paper, Mackinder (1887: 157) argued that

"[m]an alters his environment, and the action of that environment on his posterity is changed in consequence. The relative importance of physical features varies from age to age according to the state of knowledge and of material civilisation."

In what followed, Mackinder (1887: 157) made clear what he meant by 'material civilisation': the development of technology; "[t]he invention of the steam engine and the electric telegraph", amongst others. Thus, while "the distribution of animal, vegetable, and mineral productions has done much to determine the local characteristics of civilisation", Mackinder (1887: 157) was unambiguous that

"[o]ne thing, however, must always be borne in mind. The course of history at a given moment, whether in politics, society, or any other sphere of human activity, is the product not only of environment but also of the momentum acquired in the past."

Mackinder (1887: 143) had preceded this discussion of technology and resource distribution with a thoroughly naturalised geopolitical introduction: different races were "units in the struggle for existence, more or less favoured by their several environments." These sentences, despite comprising just a few lines on one page of his entire paper, indicate that the abstract features of Mackinder's thought were at least embryonic some fifteen years before the delivery of his Pivot lecture. For Mackinder, the 'relative importance of physical features' fluctuated depending on the means of technology used to traverse them. Mackinder's mention of 'the distribution of animal, vegetable, and mineral resources' also foreshadows his later concern with Central Asia and "the likely impact of the area's potentially limitless resources on the global balance of power" (O'Hara and Heffernan, 2006: 55). Importantly, this reflects the more general ability to identify, classify, and pass judgement on the physical geographic attributes on continental landmasses that Mackinder later did in 1904. However, although "the geographer look[ed] at the past [so] that he may interpret the present" (Mackinder, 1887: 146), it was only through also understanding the currents of technological development that it became possible to comprehend the relative importance of this

geography, and also, therefore, to predict the future through speculating on future technological developments.

Mackinder (1890) developed these sentiments more concretely in an address he delivered to the Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on December 18th 1889. Entitled 'The physical basis of political geography', Mackinder (1890: 78) declared his intention "to state a few of the ways in which geographical features govern or, at least, guide history". He discussed how geographical features such as mountain ranges formed barriers to the movement or "travelling" of man, and detailed how before the development of technology these barriers to this movement were "constant" and "rock-like" (1890: 79). However, he also argued that "the resistance offered by a given feature to man's movement [...] are for ever varying with the state of civilisation" (1890: 79). Mackinder's use of the term 'state of civilisation' corresponds closely to that mentioned two years previously in 1887. For Mackinder, whilst the physical geography of the earth's surface was fixed and unchanging, the state of civilisation shaped the extent to which these geographical features prevented or restricted the movement of humanity, because a higher state of civilisation essentially equalled a more developed phase of technological development. He argued that, before the advent of the seafaring ship, "all movement was on land and the sea [was] an absolute barrier" (1890: 79). However, "[w]ith the compass the resistance of the ocean fell [...] to give water so trifling a resistance as compared with rock that men took it inland in canals" (1890: 79). Finally, Mackinder reached the point in history, only sixty or so years before he was speaking, when "suddenly George Stephenson reversed in this respect the whole current of history", so that the resistance to man's movement offered by land "fell so out of all proportion that it is now lower than that of water" (1890: 79). He summarised it thusly: "while the mountains change their form almost imperceptibly in long ages, a daring leader, a mechanical discovery, a great engineering monument, may revolutionise man's relations to geography in the third of a generation" (1890: 79).

Consequently, more than a decade before the Pivot paper, Mackinder's core theorisation of the relationship between geography and technology was in place. While disclosing that due to various earth surface processes the physical geography of the earth was not actually fixed, he understandably considered their changes negligible and,

moreover, far subordinate to the changes that could be engendered by revolutions in technology. Mackinder (1890: 79) did not use the word 'technology', referring to what we would now understand as ship and rail technologies as "arts." Nonetheless, his meaning in these two lectures is clear. To Mackinder history was shaped by the relation between the unchanging geography of the earth's surface (which can be objectively known and analysed in relation to its parts) and the current mode of technological development available at any given point in history. Thus, Mackinder's use of the words 'govern or, at least, guide' as opposed to simply govern (which would be synonymous with determine) indicates that he believed the importance of geographical features was irreducible to their form. While their form remained permanent, their importance to man's movement fluctuated according to the erratic logic of technological development.

Reread in this light, I would argue that there are two major developments of Mackinder's thinking in the Pivot paper. Firstly was the way he connected this already established relation between geography and technology to state power (as Kearns [2010: 189] puts it, this is when Mackinder "wished to develop the implications [of his argument] not for the subject of geography, but for the foreign policy of the United Kingdom"). The second development was how he identified the 'pivot area' as a continental landmass with all of the necessary attributes to secure the hegemony of the state occupying it. In the lecture, Mackinder introduced a new term which he used frequently throughout: the 'mobility of power'; a term which is very analogous to Williams' conceptualisation of power projection and one which I think is integral to how he discusses the relationship between geography, technology, and the shifting balances of global power. He began by analysing the rise and fall of the horsemen of the Mongol Empire, proposing that

"[f]or a thousand years a series of horse-riding peoples emerged from Asia through the broad interval between the Ural mountains and the Caspian sea, rode through the open spaces of southern Russia, and struck home into Hungary in the very heart of the European peninsula, shaping by necessity of opposing them the history of each of the great peoples around" (Mackinder, 1904: 427).

This portion of history, therefore, was for Mackinder (1904: 427) shaped by the horse-riding Mongols, yet, as he continues, "the mobility of their power was conditioned by the steppes, and necessarily ceased in the surrounding forests and mountains". Thus

the horse was the first in Mackinder's litany of transport technologies. Mackinder (1904: 430) defined the horse as a technology which conditioned the mobility of Mongol power across the "naked, unscarped lower ranges" of the steppes and into Europe; however this power was itself hindered by the forest and mountain, which presented geographical barriers to the movement of the horse and thus the mobility of power it enabled. It is thus immediately apparent that the mobility of power is, like the movement or travelling of man, conditioned by the combination of geography with the mode of technology that is used to traverse it. As he previously put it, power "surges and rests, ebbs and flows", around physical geographic barriers (Mackinder, 1890: 79).

Furthermore, Mackinder then documented how different technologies, the horse, the ship, the railway, and – later – the aircraft, were modes of transport with specific attributes which interacted with the physical geography of the earth in different ways to produce different effects. Next in his litany of transport technologies was the "the rival mobility of power [...] of the Vikings in their boats", whose "power was effective only in the neighbourhood of the water" (Mackinder, 1904: 427-428). At this point in history the people of Europe were thus held between two pincers, the dual pressures of the horseman from the East and the Viking from the sea, the mobility of power of each conditioned by the unchanging geography of the earth's surface and the kind of technology used to transverse it. Mackinder (1904: 432) then proceeded to the advanced seafaring ship, "which endowed Christendom with the widest possible mobility of power, short of a winged mobility." With this development came the shift from horse faring land-power to maritime sea-power that Mackinder discussed in depth. This was because, as he later wrote ([1911] 1921: 133), the ship

"carries her own supplies, and the fleet which commands the ocean can establish local bases of supply in islands and peninsulas, such as Malta and Gibraltar. These local bases may be compared to anchored store-ships for the replenishment of the fleet".

Subsequent to this was the shift back from sea-power to land-power precipitated by the coming of the railway. Mackinder argued that "trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land-power", and that as these railways were laced across the "closed heart-land of Euro-Asia", Britain's sea-power would wain and potentially be usurped by whichever Great Power was to occupy this area (Mackinder, 1904: 434; see

Figure 2.3). After his lecture, Mackinder was criticised by Leo S. Amery, who we will hear more from later, for not acknowledging the germinating technology of aircraft in his geopolitical system, but he did touch on air power in his later writings. In 1919 ([1942]: 80) he defined the aircraft as being “of a boomerang nature, a weapon of land-power as against sea-power”, and in 1924 he discussed the importance of the aircraft in overcoming obstacles to direct communication between Europe and the Pacific over the Arctic (Mackinder: 1924: 281).

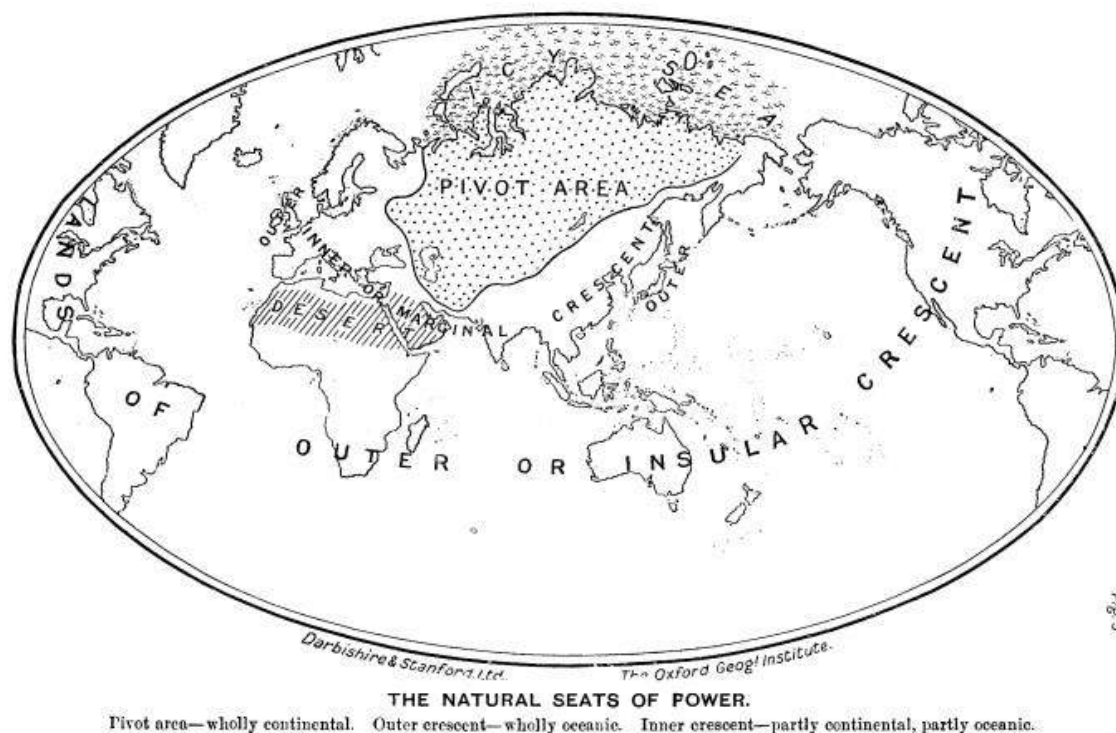


Figure 2.3: The Geographical Pivot of History. Reproduced from Mackinder (1904: 435).

In other words, what I am arguing is that the term ‘mobility of power’ replaced the ‘movement of man’ in the Pivot lecture, and thus connected Mackinder’s earlier theorisation of geography and technology to state power in a way that was then taken, in essence, as his geopolitical theory in the decades that followed. His analysis, as he put it in 1890, provided “our only key to the future” (Mackinder, 1890: 84). But his thought expressed all of the aspects of transcontinentalism discussed in this chapter. As is clear, the modern geopolitical imagination underwrote his thought. He took as a given the

realist view of international relations, positing that states existed in a system of ungoverned anarchy and that they exercised their power in competition with one another across space. He also articulated the changing balance of the mobility of power between land and sea, proposing that with the invention of the railway the balance of power begun to sway away from British sea-power and towards the continental powers of Germany and Russia. Finally, he was able, to a greater extent than any example I have analysed in this thesis, to detachedly and objectively assess the intrinsic attributes of continental landmasses and evaluate the significance of these attributes relative to the rest of the world, and the world as a whole.

Less prominent in the papers discussed thus far are Mackinder's ideas as they relate to civilisational and naturalised geopolitics. However, these are evinced in his wider corpus of work in those instances he wrote about other railways. Mackinder ([1911] 1921: 203), like Younghusband and Jefferson, equated the construction of railways with the civilisation of all of the non-European spaces of the world:

“Until a few years ago, most railways were constructed to connect cities which were already important. Now the steel road is driven out into the vacant wastes of North and South America, of Africa, and of Central Asia, and of Australia. [...] As a consequence, geographical discovery was hardly complete in Africa and Asia before settlement and occupation in what had hitherto been closed continents. Western civilization, which until thirty years ago was confined to Europe and a part of America, is now spreading with marvellous rapidity into every part of the globe and to every race.”

Furthermore, he postulated that the coming of the railway to the ‘vacant wastes’ of the rest of the world was synonymous with the spread of those features most associated with the territorialisation of the modern state across space, and the incorporation of these vacant wastes into a unified political and economic whole. For example, in 1912 he wrote about the Canadian transcontinental railways which had been constructed in the 1880s. “Undoubtedly”, Mackinder (1912: 45) argued, “the railways have been the chief cause of our modern unity.” In considering Canada, he suggested that the modern state of Canada

“would have been only in name had it not been possible to bridge the vast spaces of the Dominion. [...] North of the Canadian Pacific Railway two new trans-continental lines are now being constructed, the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern Railways, which will 'unroll the map of Canada a hundred miles further to the north'” (Mackinder, 1912: 258).

Finally, Mackinder emphasised the circulation of troops and natural resources that the Trans-Siberian Railway in particular would enable. In a commonly quoted example, he wrote that “[t]he Russian army in Manchuria is as significant of mobile land-power as the British army in South Africa was of sea-power” (Mackinder, 1904: 434). The ability to circulate troops, munitions, and supplies quickly across Russian space was therefore an expression of the circulatory nature of the mobility of power that railways afforded, as well as the significance of railways to what he perceived as the usurpation of sea-power by land-power and the awakening and reinvigorating of the Russian state. Moreover, in his 1911 book *The Nations of the Modern World*, Mackinder ([1911] 1921: 228-230) clarified just how its abundant natural resources, as well as its fortress-like inaccessibility from the sea, were significant to the Heartland’s superior geographical status. He noted the similarity between the Steppes and North America in terms of their wheat production, and how the American Pacific Railroad was the key to the transportation of this wheat across North America. He thus extrapolated outwards to argue the Trans-Siberian Railway would do the same for Russia. He also described how the Central Asian Railway had allowed raw cotton to be transported to Moscow and the surrounding region for use in industry. Finally, he mentioned at different junctures deposits of coal south of Moscow, precious metals in the Ural Mountains, and petroleum at Baku on the Caspian Sea. “Thus Russia contains within her own area all the resources and raw materials for industrial progress” (Mackinder, [1911] 1921: 230), and it was the Trans-Siberian Railway and its feeders that would enable their access and use, “bringing wheat, coal and oil together into a gigantic common market” (Kearns, 2010: 191). The gigantic common market was, in other words, the circulatory system that would be inserted into Russian space when the Trans-Siberian Railway and its feeders were constructed.

Put differently, this was what Mackinder ([1919] 1942: 111) called “the unity of the Great Continent under modern railway conditions.” Thus, the 1919 formalisation of the Euro-Asia-as-Heartland theory can be read as a combination between the system of circulation backboneed by the transcontinental railway, the mobility of power the railway would afford, and the unchanging geography of Eastern Europe with its resources and its inaccessibility to sea-power. The Trans-Siberian Railway, for Mackinder, equalled an

unrivalled transcontinental mobility of (state) power, the unity and civilisation of Russia, and the insertion of a circulatory system into the previous dormant expanse of Russian territory. Ultimately the power that ruled Eastern Europe would command the Heartland. And as the most significant of his geopolitical soundbites followed, “who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world” (Mackinder, [1919] 1942: xviii).

2.5. Conclusions

This chapter has explained the conceptual and historical foundations of transcontinentalism. I have defined transcontinentalism as a geopolitical and technological doctrine with three interconnected components; 1) the projection and territorialisation of state power across continental space, 2) the spread of civilisation across continental space, and 3) the extension, reproduction, and transformation of the state and its spaces of circulation across continental space; through the construction of transcontinental railways. I have argued that it emerged from two gradual changes in the mid-nineteenth century; the modern geopolitical imagination in its intermixed civilisational and naturalised modes and the development of railway technology in the 1820s. Geopolitically, transcontinentalism coalesced from the turning of time into space, Cartesian Perspectivalism, and realist understandings of international relations that Agnew (2003) defines, and evinced both civilisational and naturalised geopolitical imaginations in its articulations. Technologically, transcontinentalism emerged from two understandings of railway technology in the mid-nineteenth century, railways as a tool of state power projection and as a vanguard of European civilisation. In the era of naturalised geopolitics its biologisation produced an understanding of the tentacular rails; railways as a natural, biological extension of the European state organism that simultaneously strengthened, augmented, and reproduced the strength and vitality of the state itself. Schivelbusch’s (1986) concept of circulation is the key to this crucial, defining aspect of transcontinentalism – it was a doctrine that emphasised how transcontinental railways would become the backbone of continent-spanning systems of circulation, waking continents from their previous unconscious entombment within nature and simultaneously securing an unprecedented amalgamation of people, land, and resources.

Although germs of transcontinentalism were present as early as the Napoleonic Wars, it only really took hold in Britain in the 1890s in tandem with the intensification of Great Power rivalry in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. From here, transcontinentalism developed interdependently in both Africa and the Middle East, although they retained different qualities and characteristics at different times. In Africa, Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism was at its height in the 1890s, popularly spurred by Cecil Rhodes and developed through his extensive transnational connections in Britain, Germany, and South Africa. After his death Rhodes' vision was taken up and transformed in different ways by those who followed in his footsteps, although their ideas differed only in the parts of transcontinentalism they revealed most strongly rather than its fundamental features. In the Ottoman Empire, transcontinentalism was evinced by Britain's reaction to the granting of a railway concession to Germany for a transcontinental railway to the Persian Gulf in 1903, but developed unevenly from then to the First World War. Few in Britain equated the Baghdad Railway with the annexation and absorption of the Ottoman Empire by Germany before the First World War, and the response of the British and Indian governments was often contradictory, located at the shifting apex between their desire to strengthen the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russian aggression on the one hand, and their desire to keep any foreign power from gaining too much influence on the shores of the Persian Gulf on the other. After July 1914, however, transcontinentalism was expressed as the territorialisation of German power throughout the entire Ottoman Empire (and, by extension, the world) and the complete destruction of the British Empire should Britain lose the war. As we shall see, this was expressed not only in British War Office and Cabinet reports, but in books, maps, and other popular geopolitical media at the time.

The remainder of this thesis therefore demonstrates the utility and validity of transcontinentalism for understanding Britain's engagement and policy towards transcontinental railway construction, primarily between 1880 and 1930. It elucidates how both the Baghdad and Cape-Cairo Railways were planned, envisioned, and constructed, and how considering them alongside the doctrine of transcontinentalism explained in this chapter reveals new and original insights into each. The thesis turns firstly to the Baghdad Railway and its roots in the early nineteenth century.

Part Two – Berlin-Baghdad

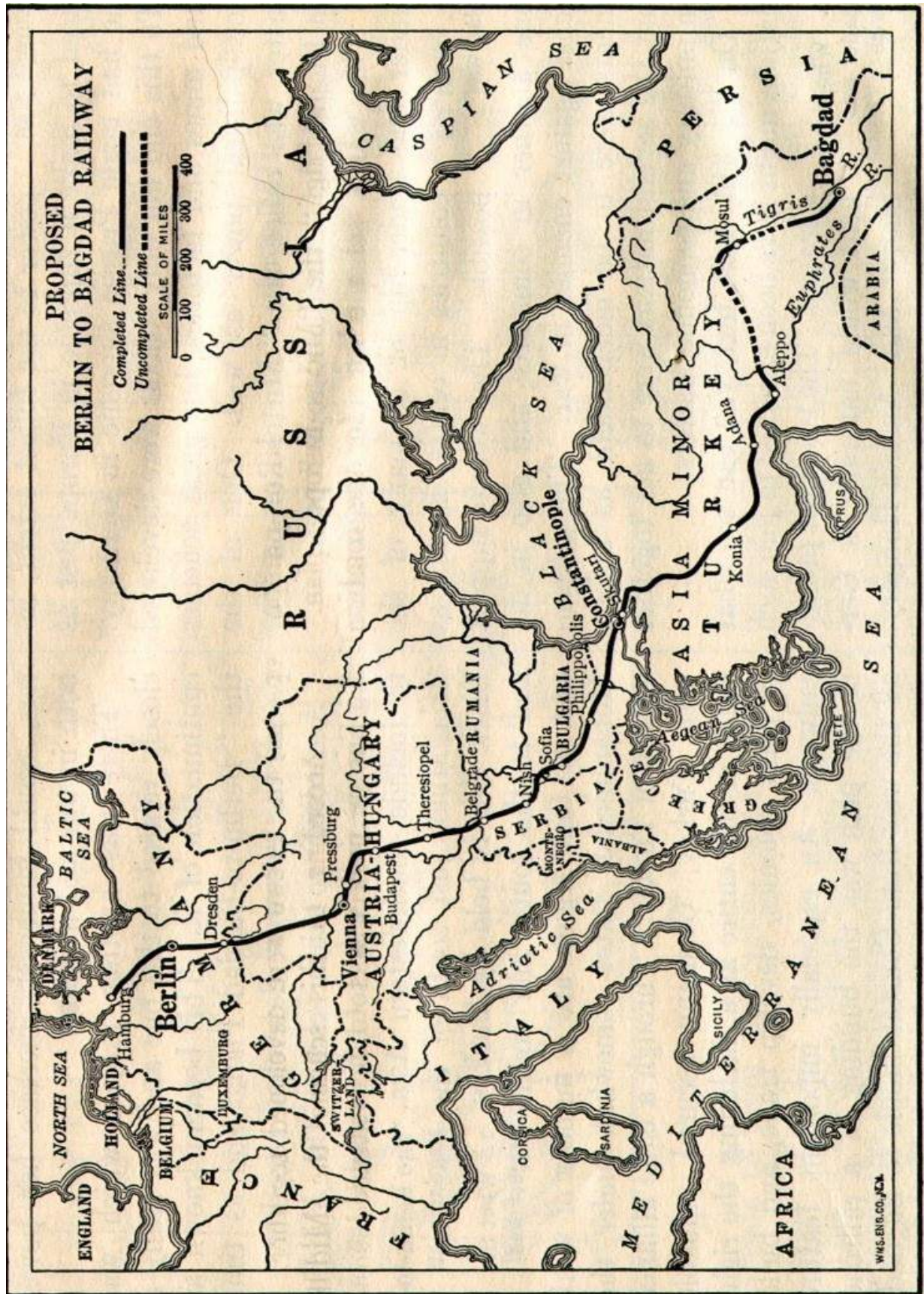


Figure 3.1: The route of the Baghdad Railway, showing the completed and uncompleted sections of the line by 1918. The official starting point of the Baghdad Railway, formally begun after the signing of the Baghdad Railway Convention in 1903, is shown on the map as Konia. Reproduced from McMurry (1918: 6)

Chapter Three - The Genesis of Transcontinentalism in Britain, 1795-1898

3.1. Introduction

This part of the thesis continues my analysis of transcontinentalism by considering Britain's reaction to the construction of the Baghdad Railway by Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The Baghdad Railway Convention was signed on March 5th 1903 by the Anatolian Railway Company (ARC) and the Ottoman government, and gave German financiers and engineers (backed by Deutsche Bank) permission to build a railway between the town of Konya, located approximately 600km south-east of Constantinople in the Ottoman Empire, and some undetermined point on the Persian Gulf. Although numerous diplomatic histories have documented the British and Indian government's response to the railway, these studies typically trace the day-to-day progress of Britain's negotiations with Germany over the railway without recourse to any wider context of transcontinentalism, or otherwise (see Chapman, 1948; Wolf [1936] 1973).

This chapter argues that the foundations of transcontinentalism are evinced consistently throughout the nineteenth century, *before* the construction of the Baghdad Railway began in 1903. It begins by suggesting that Napoleon's short-lived 1798 plan to invade India from the west demonstrates a starting point for transcontinentalism because it raised the prospect for the first time that British India might be militarily vulnerable to overland invasion. From here, the chapter traces the growing British preoccupation with the safety and security of the Persian Gulf and India, demonstrating how a series of discussions around a British transcontinental railway in the 1850s reflected these fears. After this, the chapter switches focus to consider how Germany and the Ottoman Empire became infrastructural bedfellows before the Baghdad Railway Convention of 1903, tracing their growing political and economic entwinement after the unification of Germany in 1871. The chapter also analyses the revival of the Euphrates Valley Railway project in the early 1870s, focusing on some of the arguments proposed in favour before demonstrating how, with Britain's partial acquisition of Suez in 1875, interest cooled in the idea and was never again considered seriously by the British government.

In its final section, the chapter skips forward to 1898 and analyses a fleeting yet illustrative proposal for a transcontinental railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf by a Russian noble, Count Vladimir Ironovich Kapnist. Although Kapnist's proposal was short-lived, briefly examining Britain's response to it demonstrates how the bottled anxieties detailed in the chapter were released when it became clear a foreign power, whether Russia or Germany, would attempt to build a transcontinental railway across the Ottoman Empire. This forms the context for Britain's reaction to the Baghdad Railway in the first decade of the twentieth century, examined in Chapter Four. Throughout the chapter I draw out the early instances of transcontinentalism, suggesting they are evinced particularly strongly in the ideas of three Euphrates Valley Railway advocates: Francis Rawdon Chesney, W.P. Andrew, and Thomas Chenery.

3.2. India, the Persian Gulf, and the Euphrates Valley Railway, 1798-1870

The genesis of transcontinentalism in Britain, and in particular its inherent connection to the shifting balances between land and sea power, can be traced to the height of the Napoleonic Wars. The wars are significant because they represented the first time that the safety and security of Britain's Indian possessions were imperilled by a land power planning, however outlandishly, to use modern technological prowess to enable an invasion. Upon advancing into Egypt in 1798, Napoleon had set in motion a plan to build a road from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and thereafter to the Indian provinces. He commissioned the French *Bureau Topographique* to begin surveying the route and ordered the Engineering Corps to prepare for the construction of the road.⁵ As Cole (2008: 233) puts it, "[t]he invasion force would have probably gone to Syria and along the Tigris to Baghdad, turned east and gone up to Kermanshah in Iran, transited the Iranian plateau, entered Afghanistan, and then crossed through the Khyber pass down into North India." Although this plan came to nothing, sunk along with Napoleon's fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, it was paralleled by an early Russian proposal by Tsar Paul to invade India from the north in 1801, thirty years before the 'Great Game' between Britain and Russia was to begin in earnest (Strong, 1965).

⁵ See the March 15th entry in R.I. Money's 1910 'Journal from Mesopotamia Journey', RGS RIM (SSC/127/1) MS/AR 63.

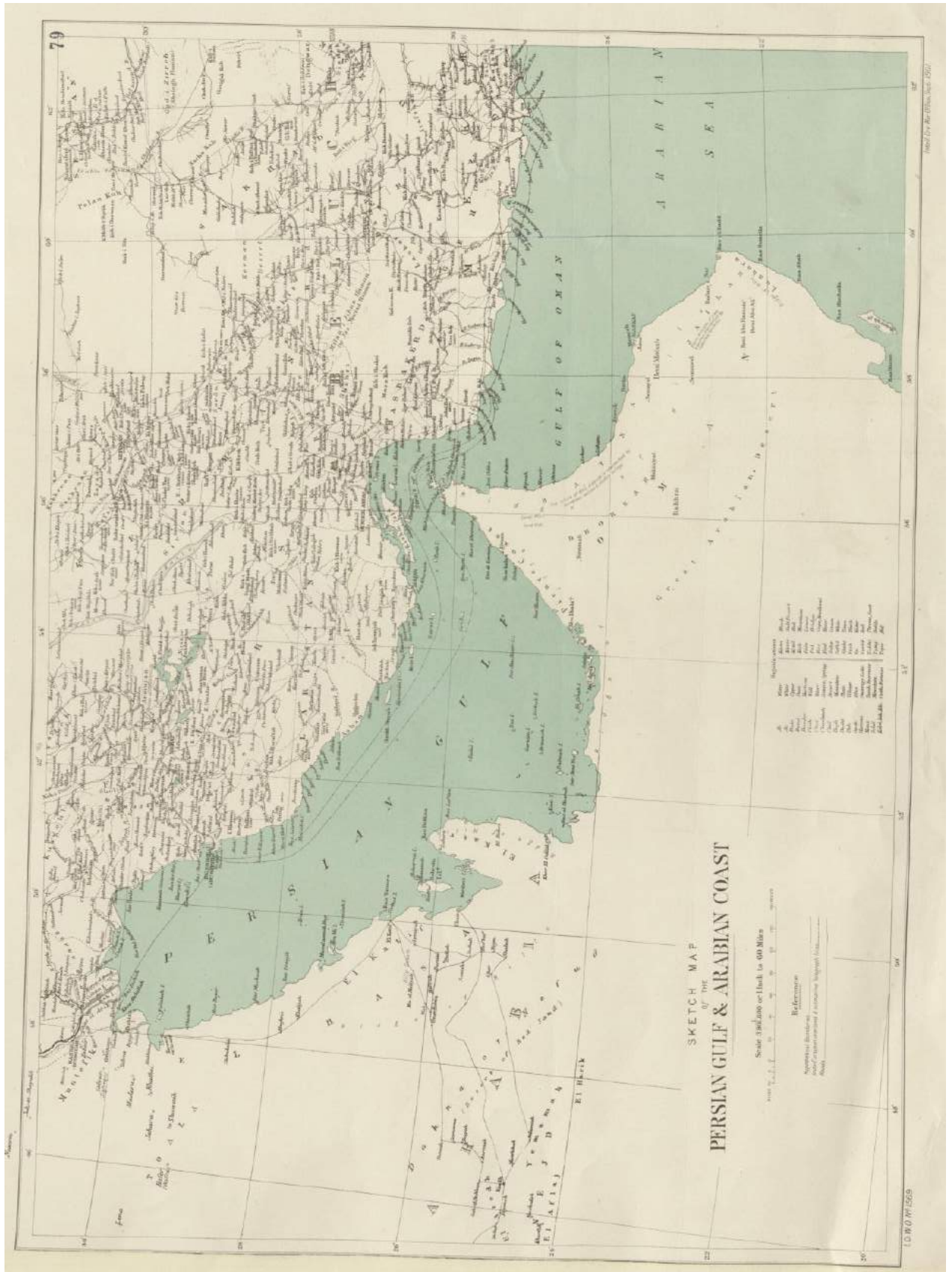


Figure 3.2: Map showing the Persian Gulf and the wider Arabian Coast. Reproduced from TNA MPK 1/178.

The importance of Napoleon's fleeting aspiration to invade India from the west is that it foregrounded, for the first time, India's potential vulnerability via overland routes. Alder (1972: 14) has noted that the problem of defending India from the north-west was historically not a new one, "[b]ut until the end of the eighteenth century it was not a problem for the British." After all, it was a space traversed both by Alexander the Great two thousand years previously, and much more recently by Nader Shah of Persia in his invasion of the Mughal Empire in the 1730s. But the safety and security of India was ensured by the relative mobility of power of the British fleet in comparison to overland means of transportation such as horses, camels, or simple marching – whether on a road or not. Such means could not match British sea power, as was recognised by Napoleon's general Antoine Lavalette, who maintained that after 1805 "[i]t was no longer possible to think, even in the future, of taking the army to India, since the superiority of the British on all the seas had become incontestable" (quoted in Cole, 2008: 233). India was in other words secured by the superiority and mobility of British sea power; any invading force from France or Russia would not be able to reach any points of significance in a time shorter than it would take a British force to be mobilised, transported, and disembarked to resist it.

Britain's rule and superiority in India was paralleled by the development and deepening of British hegemony in the Persian Gulf, a process that shaped and was shaped by the growing external threats to Britain's Indian possessions (see Figure 3.2). As Sidaway (1998: 227) has commented, "[i]n early imperial scripts, notably those of Britain, the Gulf emerge[d] as of vital interest and deep concern." However, as Peterson (2009: 277) has observed, "despite its predominant position during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, Britain began its adventure in the Gulf in a minor, tentative way." Throughout the majority of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Gulf was of only tangential importance to the growing political and economic activities of the British Empire. Prior to 1747, the East India Company represented Britain's only substantial involvement in the region, and it was mostly interested in developing, expanding, and protecting trade and commerce while consciously sidestepping any political obligations to the region or its rulers (Amin, 1967; Erikson, 2014). It developed increasingly dense circuits of trade with Indian and Chinese coastal

settlements, importing valuable products such as pepper, cinnamon, textiles, tea and coffee, and other goods, but “military conquest and colonization were not an integral part of the English Company’s business strategy” for the majority of the eighteenth century (Erikson, 2014: x). However, between 1774 and 1778 two major developments brought the Persian Gulf into sharper imperial focus; the growing colonisation of India by British subjects, and the collapse of some of the local governing structures around the Gulf (Amin, 1967). In particular, the growth of piracy around the Strait of Hormuz, the maritime bottleneck that comprises the entrance to the Gulf, necessitated an increased British political and military presence to protect trading pathways.

Despite this increasing involvement, Onley (2005: 40) suggests that the propelling of the Persian Gulf into British geostrategic calculations dovetailed with the growth of the threat to India in the Napoleonic Wars. Shortly after the cessation of the wars, a naval expedition was launched against the troublesome Qawasim tribe’s pirate strongholds in the Strait of Hormuz in 1819, and one year later a decade long coastal survey of the Gulf by India’s sailors began which, when finished, dramatically increased Britain’s navigational and geological knowledge of the shorelines (Kelly, 1968). Onley (2005; 2007) has argued that these events marked the transition of the Persian Gulf into a part of Britain’s *informal empire*, defined here as Britain’s commercial empire where Britain exercised differing concentrations of authority and control, but which lay outside the formal territorial boundaries of the British Empire.⁶ The informal empire was acquired not in a ‘fit of absence of mind’ (Seeley, [1883] 1914), nor accidentally, but rather incrementally and out of necessity to facilitate, secure, and reproduce the circulations of trade that maintained the formal British Empire. Barton and Bennett (2010) have postulated that informal empire depended on a trisection of factors; extraterritorial legal control, economic domination, and policy influence. In the Gulf

⁶ The term informal empire is contested among historians, particularly with regards to the Persian Gulf. While the definition is agreed upon in a broad sense, there is debate over whether the term informal empire is preferable to the term ‘sphere of influence’, which was the phrasing typically used by British statesmen at the time. The two are often used interchangeably. Radford (2013b: 245-305) further suggests that Britain’s involvement in the Persian Gulf is better characterised by the term ‘indirect rule’, which he argues is more appropriate to the deepening levels of control exercised over the Gulf by the Indian Government under Lord Curzon’s Viceroyalty. Nonetheless, in this thesis I retain the term informal empire, following Onley (2007), to refer to the Persian Gulf as a place integrated into the economic and political networks of the British Empire without being a formal colony.

States, this was primarily achieved by a combination of naval coercion, the 1763 establishment of the Persian Gulf Residency (continually occupied until 1971 by British officials whom Lord Curzon (1892: 451) referred to as “the Uncrowned King[s] of the Persian Gulf”), and bilateral treaties, such as the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement, in which Kuwaiti defence and foreign affairs were handed over to Britain in exchange for a subsidy (Ahmad, 1992).

Significantly, by the time of the formalisation of the British rule in 1858, British activities in the Gulf were conditioned “largely by their relevance to India – whether those activities were concerned with commerce, diplomacy, imperial defense, or strategic position” (Peterson, 2009: 277). This reflected the emergence and solidification of two crucial geopolitical imaginaries of the Persian Gulf in the mid-nineteenth century which are vital for understanding Britain’s reaction to the construction of a non-British transcontinental railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. The first was Persian Gulf as “*communications corridor*” (Onley, 2005: 40) between Britain and India. Originally, mail between the two places was transported via the two yearlong Cape of Good Hope route, and the only intermittent concern connected to the Gulf was that of piracy. A route then developed via Egypt, before the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, whereby mail was landed at Alexandria or Port Said and then transported overland to the Red Sea (Hoskins, 1928: 340-341). However, “difficulties in dealing with the Ottoman authorities made this route intermittently problematic and Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt exacerbated the situation” (Peterson, 2009: 279). This brought attention to another possible route through Anatolia and Mesopotamia to the northern tip of the Persian Gulf, and then on by ship to India, a route which had been used only sporadically during the eighteenth century due to its difficulty to traverse by wagon. But after the Napoleonic Wars, growing developments in rail technology and problems with the French dominated Suez Canal swivelled attention firmly to this Mesopotamian route. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century the Gulf was persistently imagined as a crucial node or corridor through which communications between Britain and India had to pass, whether these communications were by sea or overland across the Middle East.

The second imaginary was Persian Gulf as *frontier*. Threats to British supremacy in the Persian Gulf became intrinsically connected to the very existence of British India. As Peterson (2009: 279) notes,

“[p]erceived threats to the British position in India were seen as emanating from various quarters, with one of the principal ones being the direction of the Gulf. If the Gulf was one of India’s outer frontiers, it followed that the Gulf must be kept under British influence and control. European challenges to the British position in the Gulf constituted potential threats to India, either because they threatened British predominance in the Gulf or because they were seen as possible encroachments on India itself.”

As mentioned previously, this imaginary fused in the Napoleonic Wars in response to Napoleon’s desired invasion of India, but was then largely subordinated by fears of Russian territorial aggrandisement to the north and north-west of India as opposed to from the direction of the Gulf. The Russian acquisitions of the cities Samarkand and Khiva (now in Uzbekistan) in 1868 and 1873 respectively signified the radiation of Russian influence throughout Northern Persia, something that was “viewed warily in India” (Peterson, 2009: 288) and was a part of the wider ‘Great Game’ between Britain and Russia in Central Asia. As Morgan (1981) has argued at length, a major British fear was that Russia would continue to expand throughout Persia and towards Afghanistan and Tibet, two more of the ‘various quarters’ deemed to be frontiers of Britain’s Indian Empire. As a result the geopolitical imaginary of the Persian Gulf as a frontier was largely ancillary to the geostrategic politics of the Great Game in Central Asia, but was increasingly decisive in the 1890s when it became clear a railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf was only a matter of time.

These shifting and transforming aspects of Britain’s preoccupation with the Persian Gulf and India were intimately shaped by the rise of the railway technology in the 1820s. The development of the railway entwined with Anglo-Russian antagonism to signal the beginning of “European, primarily British, geo-political interests, policy and involvement in the Near East, in particular the search for a better route to India” (Goren, 2011: xviii). This was therefore important to how Britain was drawn to the political and economic significance of the east-west geopolitical axis (Kern, 2003), and precipitated a range of early proposals for what came to be known as a British Euphrates Valley Railway from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf (see Figure 3.3). A railway company was formed for this purpose during the Crimean War with the support of the

Foreign Secretary at the time Lord Clarendon (Marshall-Cornwall, 1965), and based upon a survey carried out in the 1840s by General Francis Rawdon Chesney (see Goren, 2011). Chesney's survey and later report emphasised how the railway would accomplish the dual imperative of assisting the defence of India and compressing the time it would take to transport troops and goods across Middle Eastern space for the benefit of Britain. "By means of the proposed Railway," he suggested, "troops and warlike stores, mails, &c., could be conveyed from England to India (Kurrachee) in the space of 15 or 16 days, and to Southern Persia in a much shorter time" (Chesney, 1857: 1-2). One of Chesney's associates and the Chair of the Euphrates Valley Railway Company, W.P. Andrew (1856: 36), underlined how "the imperial considerations, which favoured the old circuitous communication by way of the Cape of Good Hope, have given way before the irresistible desire for rapid locomotion and intercourse with all parts of the world" (see also Munro, 2003: 49). This irresistible desire, which Andrew (1856) explicitly equated with the rise of railway technology, meant that the power of the Royal Navy was no longer sufficient to ensure the defence of India. Thus, he (1856: 61) argued that

"[i]n case our enemies should prove sufficiently powerful to press us hard either in Europe or Asia, it would be a matter of inestimable importance to have it in our power to transport our military forces from Europe to Asia, and from Asia to Europe, with the greatest possible celerity, as the exigences of war may demand".

Both Chesney and Andrew consequently considered the construction of a British railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf as of paramount importance for the continuing mobility of British power in light of increasing Russian aggression and French plans to construct the Suez Canal, and for the maximisation of extracting and actualising the value of Mesopotamia's natural resources such as "cotton, wool, wheat, indigo, sugar, copper, tobacco, valonia, red and yellow berries, &c" (Chesney, 1857: 4). Furthermore, they both argued that the railway was the only way that Mesopotamia's full political and economic potential could be realised for the benefit of Britain, a potential they connected to a quasi-biblical imagination of the area as a historic yet forgotten space of global importance (Goren, 2011). Chesney (1857: 2) noted that Mesopotamia had a "sacred history" of commerce that would be revitalised and energised by the railway, and Andrew (1856: 36) pointed out that the railway, when finished, would "make that mighty river [the Euphrates] once more, as in ancient times,

a highway to the commerce of the East.” They accordingly positioned Mesopotamia as a historically dormant gateway space between the Eastern and Western possessions of the British Empire which would be activated and civilised by the construction of the railway.

Chesney and Andrew provide an early example of transcontinentalism in Britain, and of how laying a transcontinental railway across the Middle East was perceived to enable a future where Britain would reap multiple political, economic, and military benefits. It was underpinned by an anxiety over the perceived increasing mobility of land power in a general sense, and the intensification of the mobility of Russian land power in particular, and the belief that railway technology was gradually closing and compacting the world. Concomitantly, it was undergirded by the crucial features of Agnew’s definition of the modern geopolitical imagination. The space to be traversed by the railway was narrated by both Chesney and Andrew as further down Fabian’s ‘stream of Time’ than the places geographically imagined as its Western and Eastern edges, Britain and India, its ‘sacred history’ demonstrating its potential but the railway acting as the only means through which this history could be ‘once more’ brought into the present. Finally, anxieties over Russian intentions reflected the normalised belief that the European ‘Great Powers’ were discreet entities exercising their power across space, and naturally coming into conflict with one another due to the friction this caused in imperial contact zones such as the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Transcontinentalism in Britain, as evinced by Chesney and Andrew in its embryonic form, emerged from this milieu in the early-mid nineteenth century.

However, although Chesney’s application for a concession from the Ottoman Empire to build such a railway was accepted (*The Times*, 1857: 7), his company never raised the necessary capital to construct it. A parliamentary debate in August 1857 on whether or not the British government would guarantee the capital of private investors was dismissed by the Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston, with support from the future Liberal leader William Gladstone (Marshall-Cornwall, 1965). In a long contribution to the debate, Gladstone advanced two key objections to supporting the railway.⁷ He firstly

⁷ *The Official Report, House of Commons, 3th Series [Hansard 3rd]*, 147 (14 August 1857), 1652-1682.

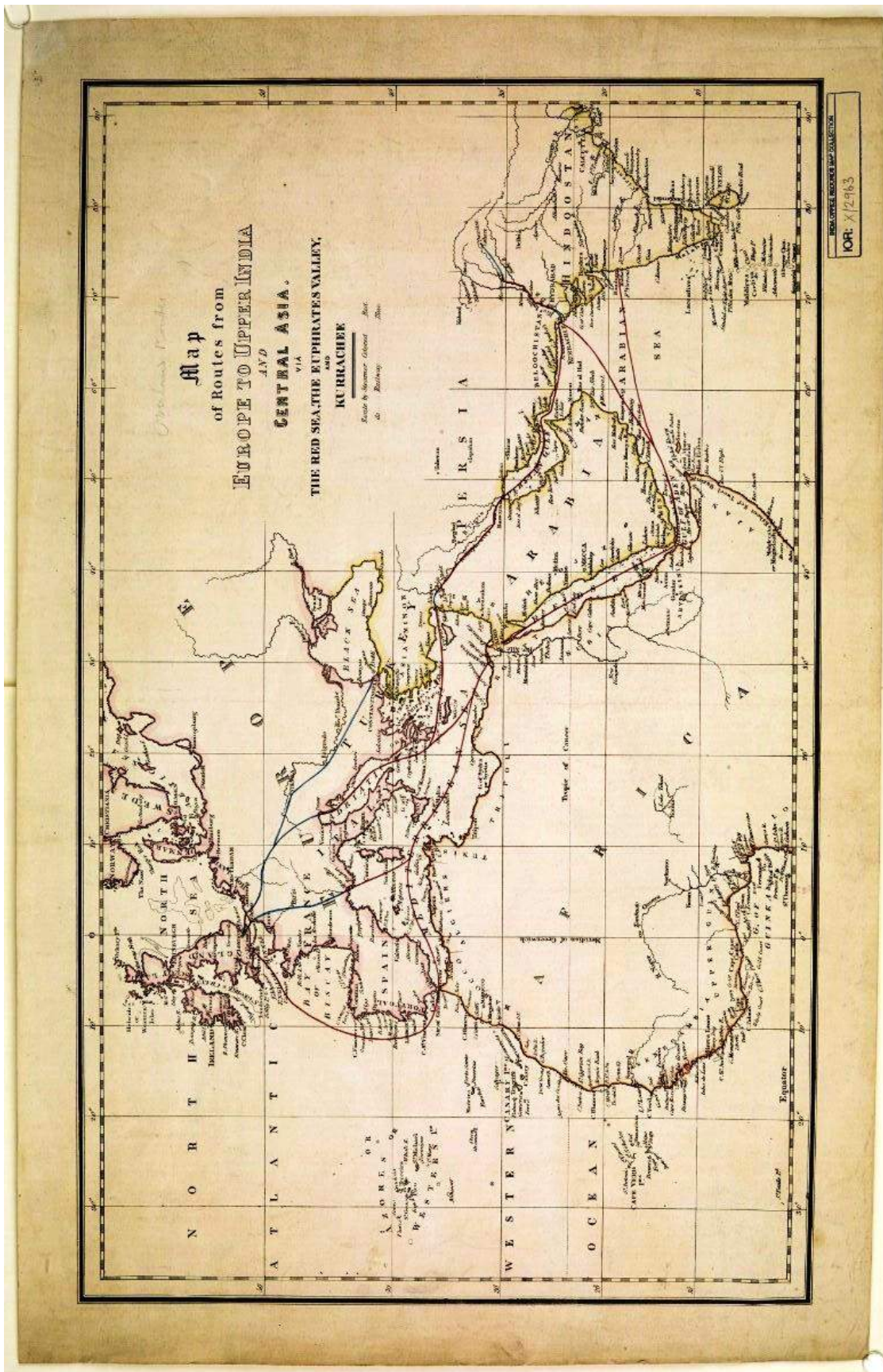


Figure 3.3: An anonymous and undated [c.1850] map of possible railway routes to India. Reproduced from IOR/X/2963.

suggested that should the British government back the railway and it was subsequently mismanaged or misgoverned by Ottoman officials, it would become necessary for Britain to politically interfere in the Ottoman Empire to rectify the situation. This, he continued, would set “an example of interference with their government and domestic affairs” which would be strongly resisted in Europe or which, even worse, would open the gates for every European power to brazenly do the same.⁸ For the sake of the “European concert and concord which [is] of paramount importance in regard to our Eastern policy”, therefore, Gladstone argued Britain could not get involved.⁹ Secondly and relatedly, Gladstone surmised that any transcontinental railway across the Ottoman Empire would provoke the anger of France, “our great ally”, which was at this point preparing to build the Suez Canal.¹⁰ Gladstone would have known that a French Suez Canal would be open to British commerce and sea power as long as France and Britain remained on good terms, ensuring an enhanced mobility of power than had previously been possible via the Cape sea route. For both of these reasons backing the Euphrates Valley Railway was politically unacceptable. Palmerston concurred, summarising that “Her Majesty’s Government ought to be deliberate spectators” to the unfolding of the project. “[H]owever glad we should be to see that project completed,” he continued, “we cannot hold out the slightest encouragement that we should be disposed, either directly or indirectly, to advance any money for the attainment of that end.”¹¹

This demonstrates that, although germinating, transcontinentalism was not at this point widespread, restricted to a few individuals such as Chesney and Andrew and devoid of wider purchase in the machinations of the British imperial governing structures. The construction of a transcontinental railway along the lines Chesney and Andrew suggested was not deemed relevant by the government because of deeply held beliefs in the predominance of British sea power and the necessity of maintaining the balance of power in Europe, regardless of any arguments as to the political, economic, or military benefits it might allow. Simply put, “[a]lthough railways provided for the first time a quick and efficient means of land transport [...] ships remained the most

⁸ *Ibid*, 1666.

⁹ *Ibid*, 1667.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 1677.

satisfactory means of transporting large forces over any great distance” (Speller, 2001: 3). Nevertheless this first mooted of the Euphrates Valley Railway project in 1857 was an indication of the beginning of a shift in the directional awareness of the British government towards the overland route to India (Kern, 1983; Goren, 2011). In its coverage of the August 1857 debate *The Daily Telegraph* (1857: 3) summarised it well when it noted that “[a]t last, the attention of the public has been directed to the necessity of improved communications with India.” It continued by praising Palmerston for recognising the importance of “stud[ying] the condition of the several territories that lie between England and her Eastern possessions” (The Daily Telegraph, 1857: 3). However, it was not until the early 1870s that the matter of the Euphrates Valley Railway was raised again, backgrounded by the rise of Germany and its increasing entanglement with the Ottoman Empire. It is to this that the following section turns.

3.3. Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the 1872 Select Committee, 1871-1898

This section proceeds in two parts, the first analysing the political and economic entanglement between Germany and the Ottoman Empire after Germany’s unification in 1871. It demonstrates how the foundations of transcontinentalism are visible in the relationship that developed between Germany and the Ottomans, and provides additional context for the arguments that unfold in the following two chapters. The second sub-section analyses the revival of the Euphrates Valley Railway project in the early 1870s. It looks at a House of Commons Select Committee established in 1872 to consider whether the British government should back the railway, and analyses how some of the arguments put forward in its favour shows the development of transcontinentalism from the previous section.

3.3.1. Germany and the Ottoman Empire

Chapman (1948: 17) has observed that even though the Euphrates Valley Railway was never constructed, the introduction of railway technology to the Ottoman Empire was still a largely British affair; “British capital, material or management were involved to some extent in every line inaugurated in Asia Minor” from around 1840 onwards. However, parallel to this was a growing entanglement between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire which was to intensify after the unification of Germany in the wake

of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. As Trumpener (1984) has shown, the entangling of Prussia and the Ottoman Empire goes back to at least the 1830s; in this decade many Prussian military officers were advisors or trainers in the Ottoman army, and the Prussian consulate in Jerusalem (opened in 1842) was an important site of political and cultural exchange. However, until the unification of Germany, Prussian-Ottoman engagement and exchange was defined by a disparate and uneven flow of individuals and groups, some of whom sought business opportunities and some of whom sought Oriental pleasures and promises (Weitz, 2013).

However, post-unification, Weitz (2013: 152) argues that German engagement with the Ottoman Empire both deepened and broadened:

“The borderlands of Eastern Europe into the eastern Mediterranean, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, constituted the prime area of German imperial ambitions. The interlocking German elite of bureaucrats and businessmen, officers and diplomats, intellectuals and pastors, kaisers and chancellors, had their gaze fixed tightly on Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Through all the political upheavals of modern German history, the German elite thought of Eastern Europe as the place for German territorial expansion and population settlement and the Ottoman Empire as the prime site of German imperial influence abroad. The widely strewn territory of the Empire, including its European, Anatolian, and Middle Eastern lands, would provide investment opportunities and markets for the German economy and, no less important, a place for Germany to assert its Great power stature and contest British, French, and Russian power.”

This is a helpful statement because it foregrounds how the Ottoman Empire became a place where Germany’s geopolitical and economic ambitions could be realised, and how these ambitions were refracted through a broadly Orientalist gaze which represented the Ottomans and their Empire as a land of opportunity and intrigue. It also underlines that Germany’s ambitions in the Ottoman Empire were not associated, in the main, with colonisation or territorial acquisition. In Jenkins’ (2004: 97) words, the Ottoman Empire became a “site upon which and through which German national and imperial visions were articulated and acted upon.” Although Said ([1978] 2003: 19) famously omitted Germany from his critique of Orientalism, a number of scholars have recently underlined the importance of Orientalist imaginaries in Germany’s political and economic involvement in the Ottoman Empire, particularly after 1871 (Hagen, 2004; Hess, 2000; Wokoeck 2009). These imaginaries underpinned the growing economic and geopolitical entanglement between the two Empires.

Economically, “German involvement in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire grew steadily, highlighted by rising investments in, and trade with, the sultan’s realm” (Trumpener, 1984: 112). Germany’s growing iron, steel, chemical, electrical, and financial industries required a natural outlet beyond the territorial confines of the German state and, lacking the overseas empire that ensured the economic status of Britain and France, the German chancellor Otto van Bismarck

“was forced to develop a policy towards North Africa and West Asia that was quite different to those of the other European powers [...] Trade, commerce, and a peaceful penetration especially in open-door areas [became] cornerstones of Berlin’s Middle-Eastern policy. [From] Morocco to Iran, from Greater Syria to Arabia, German capital invested heavily in railroads, raw material processing, financing, engineering, aviation, and automobiles” (Schwartz, 2004: 1-3).

In this way Germany gradually took its place alongside Britain, France, and to a lesser extent Russia in providing “improvements in transportation, commerce, and urban facilities” in the Ottoman Empire, to the point where “[v]irtually all such facilities that existed in the late Ottoman Empire derived from [European] capital ventures” (Quataert, 2005: 72).

Geopolitically, however, some in Germany began to view the Ottoman Empire as a place where Germany’s fledging imperial ambitions could be achieved. As Jenkins (2004: 99) notes, “the German state and agents of its economy sought to incorporate pieces of the Ottoman Empire into a German-led sphere of influence”, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century when the Baghdad Railway began to be built. McMeekin (2011: 2) has documented the unusual affinity Kaiser Wilhelm II had for Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire more generally, observing that “[h]ere the German Emperor’s *Weltpolitik* first took concrete form, seeking to unite East and West, Asia and Europe, and put imperial Germany firmly on the path to world power.” Nor was the Kaiser alone in representing the Ottoman Empire as a “pliable junior partner or outright satellite of the Reich” (Trumpener, 1984: 122). “All of the leading Germans with experience in the Ottoman Empire”, Weitz (2013: 163) suggests, “had promoted a strong central state with a powerful role for the military. Those institutions would, it was hoped, secure the stability that German imperial interests required.” Among such leading Germans was Colman von der Goltz, who argued that a strong and centralised Ottoman state could unite Turk and Arab against the British Empire in the Persian Gulf

and India (Yasamee, 1998), and Max von Oppenheim, an extraordinary character who sought to loosen and ultimately undo the bonds of collaboration between British colonial administrators and indigenous elites across Egypt and the wider Ottoman lands (McKale, 1997; McMeekin, 2011).¹²

Summarily, as Aksakal (2008: 66) writes, “as the international rivalry of the New Imperialism intensified, Berlin widened its economic and political presence in the Ottoman Empire, a presence that was buttressed within German society by a culture that revered the Near East as hallowed ground.” Yet it is erroneous, as some historians have suggested, to position the Ottoman Empire as a passive actor in the international relations of the European powers, occupying no role other than “a blank canvas upon which Europe’s political unconscious played out its taboos and hidden anxieties” (Goldsworthy, 1998: 13). The encounter between the Ottomans and Germany (and Europe more widely) was shaped profoundly by Ottoman concerns. In particular, the Ottoman concern with infrastructural investment in the late-nineteenth century was shaped by three connected factors; the problematic Ottoman economy, disciplining the unruly and rebellious frontiers of the Empire, and the complicated debates concerning the Empire’s modernisation.

It has become somewhat clichéd to suggest that in the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire, the original so-called ‘sick man of Europe’, was economically unstable (Quataert, 2003), and to say that at the end of the nineteenth century “few things appeared as certain as the eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire” (McMurray, 2001: 13). However, Quataert (2005) has argued that this was recognised as fact by many Ottoman elites, and as a consequence the Empire began to look towards Europe for direct financial assistance. Arguably this process began in 1838, where an Anglo-Turkish Convention removed the previously strictly enforced high tariffs that made trade and investment in the Ottoman Empire difficult for European capitalists (Khoury and Kennedy, 2007), and deepened after the Ottomans loaned a substantial sum of money from France to help finance the Crimean War (Quataert, 2005). Thus, by 1880, “key sectors of the modern economy of the empire was controlled by Western creditors”

¹² For the definition of collaboration, see Chapter Four, Section 4.2.3.

(Khoury and Kennedy, 2007: 238). It was in this context that the Ottomans increasingly welcomed European investment in infrastructure; especially railway construction. Railways “conquered vast interior spaces, sharply reduced transport costs and thus linked inland regions as never before to the coast, its harbors and the global economy” (Faroqhi et al, 1997: 798). To the Ottoman ruling elite, in other words, railway construction was seen as having immediate economic benefits, not only because of its ability to link up agrarian areas with coastal ports (Faroqhi et al, 1997: 805; Schoenberg, 1977), but also through providing employment on construction sites (Faroqhi et al, 1997: 810).

A second Ottoman motivation for railway construction was military. Ottoman historians have noted that from the second half of the sixteenth century to the turn of the twentieth, the peripheries of the Ottoman Empire acquired an almost quasi-feudal autonomy from Ottoman rule, partly due to the crumbling of the legitimacy of the Millet system through which dignitaries ruled local provinces (Deringil, 1998; Hartmann, 2013; Quataert, 2005). European telegraph and rail technology was welcomed as a solution to the problem of controlling the Empire’s peripheries. Specifically, railways enabled the prospect of an enhanced mobility of Ottoman power. Thus while the advantages of railway construction were in one sense economic, “[t]he major motivation was strictly military in nature. With the help of railroads, the Ottoman Empire would be able to mobilise its resources in the event of war and put down any local uprisings” (Schoenberg, 1977: 363; see also Khairallah, 1991).

A final consideration here is the debate that took place among Ottoman elites over the modernisation of the Empire in the nineteenth century. This is important because historians have suggested that conceptualising and understanding how the Ottomans debated modernisation is crucial to comprehending the fortunes of the Empire in the decades before its evisceration in the First World War (see Mikhail and Philliou, 2012; Ze’evi, 2004). Many scholars have studied the relationship between Ottoman modernity, Europe’s growing influence in the Empire, and science and technology. As Burçak (2008: 80; 69) comments, “if the Ottoman Empire was ailing, then its recovery was to come through the adoption of science and technology [...] modern science was to serve as the vehicle that would carry the empire towards a much-desired,

better future.” However, this was additionally based upon what Makdisi (2002b: 768; see also Deringil, 2003: 319; Makdisi, 2002a) has provocatively called Ottoman Orientalism, the idea that in “[the] age of Western dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient. The nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was no exception.” Makdisi (2002b: 769) argues subsequently that the multifaceted drive to modernisation was provoked by a complex process whereby the Ottomans “explicitly acknowledged the West to be the home of progress and the East, writ large, to be a present theater of backwardness”, before projecting this backwardness onto its own provincial territories. European technology would, to put it differently, civilise these spaces, assimilating them “into a cohesive and uniform Ottoman modernity [...] a state and civilization technologically equal and temporally coeval with the West but culturally distinct from and politically independent of it” (Makdisi, 2002b: 770).

The growing entanglement between Germany and the Ottoman Empire was thus co-constitutive, multifaceted, and developed through specific interlocking concerns between German and Ottoman elites. It also reflected the emergence of naturalised geopolitics in Germany; an imagination of an entwining German land, people, and state with biological needs for political and economic outlets, and the idea that Germany’s ascension to a coeval status to that of other Great Powers could only be achieved through a relative decline of one or more of those Powers. Additionally, it reflected the mounting feeling of global closure – much of the world map was already ‘coloured in’ by Britain, France, and other European colonial states, necessitating economic and cultural exchange in places such as the Ottoman Empire as the possibilities for acquiring overseas colonies receded. On the Ottoman side, as Makdisi suggests, the Ottoman Empire gradually turned the civilised geopolitical imagination of Europe onto its own lands, augmenting and reworking the same imagination evinced by German soldiers and diplomats when they described a strong, modernised Ottoman Empire as necessary for the achievement of German imperial ambitions. Simultaneously, it is possible to read the Ottomans’ concern with the movement of troops, goods, and labourers in terms of circulation; the vitality of the Empire could only be enhanced by the circulatory promise railway infrastructure could provide.

3.3.2. *The House of Commons Select Committee on the Euphrates Valley Railway, 1872*

Some aspects of transcontinentalism are therefore discernible in the relationship which developed between the Ottoman Empire and Germany after German unification in 1871. However, the 1870s were also significant as the period in which Britain turned away from participation in the construction of any transcontinental railway across the Ottoman territories. Although Chesney and Andrew had been unsuccessful in persuading the British government of the necessity of the Euphrates Valley Railway in the late 1850s, they continued to press for it through the 1860s. In the first half of the 1870s it was finally brought before parliament once more in response to further Russian intrusions into Central Asia. But it was also motivated by the opening of the Suez Canal. As Andrew (1870: 16) put it in 1867, when the Canal was nearing completion, “[p]olitical disturbance in Europe might deprive us at any moment of our communication with India via Egypt. Hence, the necessity of an alternative route, even were it not a better one.” A Conservative MP, George Jenkinson, subsequently proposed a motion on June 23rd 1871 for the establishment of “a Select Committee to examine and report on the whole subject of Railway communication between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf.”¹³ Jenkinson noted that Viscount Palmerston had already considered and rejected such a railway in 1857, but then suggested that it was now “of the greatest importance to the North-west frontier of India, the line of the Indus, and the North-west Provinces, which in the case of an attack from without would stand in most need of a quick communication from this country.”¹⁴ The Liberal government (now led by Gladstone) abstained from the motion and it was therefore comfortably passed. Yet the government’s abstention spoke to the relative indifference that Gladstone and his circle still attached to the prospect of a transcontinental railway, an indifference which was to surface again after the Committee delivered its report. Meanwhile, the creation of the Committee reignited a wider debate on the railway in the press, especially on its potential trace across the Ottoman Empire. In *The Times* (1871a: 4), for example, the explorer Isabel Burton penned a lengthy letter on the benefits of the having one of the termini in southern Syria. Not to be outdone, W.P. Andrew also wrote a barbed riposte

¹³ *Hansard 3rd*, 207 (23 June 1871), 525.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 527.

to a letter written by the railway engineer Macdonald Stephenson shortly after Jenkinson's Commons debate. Given that the railway was now being assessed by a Select Committee, Andrew had not thought it

“desirable or necessary at the present juncture to obtrude any views of my own on the subject; but as [Stephenson], in a letter which appeared in your coloums yesterday, has made certain statements which are calculated to mislead, I beg you will allow me the the favour of making a few remarks.”

Andrew went on to give a brief examination of the possible locations of the Mediterranean harbour, most of which were ignored by Stephenson, before reiterating the “national value” of the railway to the British Empire (The Times, 1871b: 10).

The Committee itself was appointed in July 1871 with the Secretary of State for India, Stafford Northcote, as chair. It heard from several witness, including Chesney, and gathered reports from a multitude of British administrators stationed in Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian provinces. When completed and published in July 1872 it concluded broadly that “the political and commercial advantages of establishing a second route [to India] would at any time be considerable, and might, under possible circumstances, be exceedingly great.”¹⁵ It was left to Jenkinson to bring the matter before parliament the following session in April 1873. Munro (2003: 160) has remarked that this was unsuccessful, and that parliament “stood its ground and comfortably saw off the railway’s promoters and their supporters in the Commons.” However, the reality was more complex than this. Jenkinson’s resolution moved that

“the evidence laid before the Select Committee on the Euphrates Valley Railway last Session demonstrates the great advantages, both politically and commercially, that would accrue to England by the acquisition of an alternative route to and from India, especially in case of any emergency arising, and that this object would be best secured by a Railway which would connect the Mediterranean with the head of the Persian Gulf; and, therefore, the Recommendation of the Select Committee on this subject to Her Majesty's Government is well deserving of their serious attention, with a view to carrying it into effect.”¹⁶

Crucially, the resolution omitted the word ‘guarantee’ or any similar terminology that might bind the government to financially supporting the railway. This was a conscious

¹⁵ PP 1872 (322) IX, 171, *Report from the Select Committee on Euphrates Valley Railway*, p.viii.

¹⁶ *Hansard 3rd*, 215 (4 April 1873), 606.

move by Jenkinson to secure additional support, but it meant that the resolution itself was a dead rubber; a non-committal nod of encouragement which entailed no promises or guarantees whatsoever by Gladstone or his Treasury. The fact that it was passed was ultimately a hollow victory. After two years of inaction and the ejection of the Liberals from government in 1874, Jenkinson asked his new Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in July 1875 whether he had “contemplate[d] taking any steps towards carrying out the recommendations of [the] Select Committee.” Disraeli’s answer was negative; because “the line could never pay”, he replied that “I hesitate – and probably shall continue to hesitate – to guarantee a great expenditure for that purpose.”¹⁷ Jenkinson responded that he would move a second resolution to parliament on the subject, but it seems he never did.¹⁸ *The Times* (1875: 9) summarised the end of the railway’s prospects the following month, writing that “[t]he Government would view with great satisfaction the construction of a railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf; but as to giving support either as a guarantee or in the shape of a contribution to the funds, the Government could entertain no such proposal.”

The year of Jenkinson’s final question was important, because with Disraeli’s partial acquisition of Suez later in 1875 and the occupation of Egypt seven years later, the British government transitioned from making supportive but non-committal noises towards the railway to consistently opposing any transcontinental link across the Ottoman Empire in its entirety (Bektas, 2004).¹⁹ As the journalist Edwin A. Pratt (1916: 358) put it during the First World War, “the arguments originally advanced in favour of the Euphrates railway lost most of their force on the opening of the Suez Canal.” A secure sea route through Suez ensured faster communications than the circuitous, now outdated path around the Cape of Good Hope, and the continuing supremacy of British sea power was deemed by the majority of officials in both Britain and India to render any Euphrates Valley Railway unnecessary.²⁰ This combined with a decline in the

¹⁷ *Hansard 3rd*, 225 (22 July 1875), 1810.

¹⁸ I can find no record of Jenkinson raising or discussing the matter in *Hansard* after this point, although he stayed in parliament until 1880.

¹⁹ On the few occasions that a transcontinental link was raised in parliament between this point and the late 1890s, the British government was resolutely opposed to any possible railway. See e.g. *Hansard 3rd*, 262 (24 June 1881), 1296-1297.

²⁰ PP 1896 (C.8019) XCVI, 761, *Report by Major Law on Railways in Asiatic Turkey*, p.3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

interests of private capital in railway construction in the Ottoman Empire.²¹ French and especially German financiers were willing to lock down their capital in protracted ventures while British capitalists preferred to keep it liquid, and the lack of paying traffic turned investors elsewhere. Thus, from 1875, the interlocking interests of government and capitalist began to turn away from Ottoman railway construction.

Nonetheless, examining some of the arguments advanced in favour of the Euphrates Valley Railway at the beginning of the 1870s shows how transcontinentalism continued to evolve. Andrew, for his part, continued to equate the railway with an unrestricted mobility of British power. The railway, he argued,

“would render the invasion of India all but impossible [...] It would render the resources of England so promptly available in Asia, that Chatham and Portsmouth might be made the bases of operations as easily as Kurachee or Bombay. It would give England the first strategical position in the world” (Andrew, 1870: 8).

Furthermore, he insisted that the Euphrates Valley Railway was preferable to the Suez Canal, albeit before Britain had acquired control of it. For Andrew (1870: 20), “the Euphrates route presents a striking contrast to that via Egypt, which, during a portion of the year, could not be used for the transport of troops without a serious sacrifice of life, in consequence of the excessive heat of the Red Sea.” This was in other words a matter of climate inhibiting the mobility of power that could be afforded by sea power through the Suez Canal, leading Andrew to conclude the railway was necessary. His arguments were echoed and extended by Chesney’s evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee. Chesney emphasised the importance of a railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf because “both termini [would be] on the sea, where they would be under the entire control of Great Britain.”²²

Here Chesney was hinting at what Corbett referred to as the entrenchment of Britain as an *amphibious power*. In a 1911 publication, Corbett ([1911] 1988: 16) wrote that “great issues between nations at war have always been decided [...] either by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory and national life, or else by fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.” However, for strategists like Corbett amphibious power referred to the ability to strike coastal ports, harbours, and

²² PP 1871 (386) VII, 501, *Report from the Select Committee on Euphrates Valley Railway*, p.5.

fortifications from the sea, rather than the ability to disembark troops and then transport them thousands of miles overland. Chesney, contrarily, proposed that the construction of fortified ports on the Mediterranean coast and on the Persian Gulf, dominated by British sea power and connected by a railway, would enable the movement of troops from the British fleet in the Mediterranean to India (via the communications corridor that was the Gulf) more quickly than going through Suez.

Aside from Andrew and Chesney's repeated arguments concerning the utility of the railway for the mobility of British power, others discussed the railway in overtly civilisational terms. The most notable example of this aspect of transcontinentalism was evinced by Thomas Chenery, editor of *The Times* from 1877 and secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society, in a short book entitled *Suggestions for a Railway Route to India* (1869). Although cognisant of the military advantages offered by a transcontinental railway (Chenery, 1869: 23-24), he was one of the first to detail the overt civilisational geopolitics of the Euphrates Valley Railway. Chenery (1869: 12) spoke of the great "Europeo-Asiatic" continent and narrated the intrinsic attributes of the "extreme" ends of the continent in a very specific way. For Chenery three quarters of the 'Europeo-Asiatic' peoples were concentrated at the opposing, and *civilised*, ends of the continent. Western and Central Europe bookended its western tip, whereas the peoples of India and the slowly "awakening" (Chenery, 1869: 11) Chinese civilisation comprised its eastern extreme. Between these extremes lay

"countries fertile and beautiful, gifted in the highest degree with all that can conduce to the prosperity of their inhabitants, but for various reasons, historical, political, and geographical, peopled but thinly, and by races some of which have but a defective and decaying civilisation, while others seem utterly wild and irreclaimable" (Chenery, 1869: 12).

As a consequence, Chenery continued,

"we have to face the difficulty, and I have no desire to conceal it, that the two wealthy and populous regions of the world which I have mentioned are divided by a great tract where railways are not likely to be constructed by the spontaneous and independent efforts of the people" (Chenery, 1869: 12).

Chenery (1869: 19) was thus one of the first to express an intrinsic feature of transcontinentalism, namely the construction of the space between the supposedly naturally determined (although longitudinally inaccurate) extreme ends of a continent as

fundamentally uncivilised - “inferior to the West in civilisation and enlightenment” - in a direct contrast to the *civilised* attributes of those eastern and western extreme ends. Plainly, Europe was the pinnacle of civilisation, yet what Chenery (1869: 12) called the “Indo-Chinese” eastern extreme was historically also home to a great civilisation, something it was beginning to rediscover through the ongoing British colonisation of India. These are the wealthy and populous regions of the world Chenery (1869: 14) spoke of, divided by a ‘great tract’ of uncivilised space characterised by “stagnation and barbarism”. However, Chenery also narrated these regions as holding great potential for the future, both femininely fertile and beautiful, needing only the masculinised impregnation of railway technology to reverse the defective decay of their civilisation. In sum, he created the conditions for a transcontinental railway stretching between Europe and ‘Indo-China’ as a project that would civilise the entirety of Asiatic Turkey, precisely because it would traverse a space constructed as the entirety of the “Europeo-Asiatic” continent (notwithstanding its extreme, civilised ends). Thus, Chenery (1869: 24) concluded,

“[t]o quicken, if possible, the inert regions of south-western Asia, to bring them within the European system, to interest in their independence not only our own government, but the most powerful and civilized of our neighbours, and thus to give the world security against Muscovite conquest, is a work not unworthy of a statesman.”

A final two points here are that, firstly, Chenery’s use of the word ‘inert’ foreshadowed the naturalised geopolitical trope that portrayed continental spaces as lifeless and dormant in a biological sense, thus requiring the railway’s bodily upholstering and the insertion of a system of circulation to provide a return to life. Chenery’s account of the railway shows an example of the beginnings of this feature of transcontinentalism, and dovetails closely with the case of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Secondly, Chenery (1869: 2) demonstrated a banal yet important feature of transcontinentalism; that civilisation, although represented as a universal good for “human society and intercourse”, was a discourse intrinsically concerned with the imperial logics of European power. Like all who argued for the Euphrates Valley Railway he emphasised the importance of an overland mobility of troops and mails, and foregrounded the railway as a check on the supposed “Muscovite conquest” (Chenery, 1869: 24) of the world. This basic truth was recognised by some. In his evidence to the

Select Committee in 1872, a member of the Public Works Department at Aleppo shrewdly observed that “no one has ventured to assert that [the railway] will be beneficial to the Turks beyond giving utterance to common-place observations as to civilization, &c.”²³ He preferred an international, collaborative transcontinental railway that would benefit all involved in constructing it, including the Ottomans. Thus, civilisation for Chenery was a convenient yet powerful discourse justifying the political and economic advantages of the railway’s construction for Britain by couching it in the moral imperative of the civilising mission.

To summarise, this section has traced the foundations of transcontinentalism in the relationship between Germany and the Ottoman Empire that developed after the unification of Germany in 1871, and the second and final attempt by individuals such as Andrew and Chesney to persuade the British government of the necessity of a Euphrates Valley Railway. The interlocking concerns of Germany and the Ottomans led to a political and economic entanglement between the two empires, as German financiers – backed by the German Deutsche Bank – invested in the infrastructure of the Ottoman Empire. For the Ottomans, this was a means of combatting a tripartite of anxieties; their stagnating economy, their rebellious peripheries, and the perennial question of modernisation. What I want to underline here is that this, combined with the growing reluctance of British officials and financiers to support railway construction in the Ottoman Empire after 1875, created the conditions in which Germany would be the state that was finally able to begin constructing the long-debated transcontinental railway in 1903. British sea power was deemed necessary to secure the Empire against any threat; the opening of Suez, as Mackinder wrote later, appeared to have increased the mobility of sea power relative to land. The arguments of Andrew, Chesney, and Chenery therefore went largely unheeded, although in Chenery’s short book we see the most developed account of transcontinentalism in Britain before the 1890s.

In the final section I move to the 1890s to examine the reaction of the British government to a fleeting proposal by a Russian nobleman, Count Vladimir Ironovich Kapnist, to build a transcontinental railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian

²³ PP 1872 (C.534) XLV, 559, *Reports respecting communication with India through Turkey, by the Euphrates Valley Route*, p.35.

Gulf. Although Kapnist's plot was little more than an implausible scheme that quickly blew over, the reaction to it by the British and Indian governments demonstrates the growing intensification of transcontinentalism, and particularly the railway's role as a means of projecting state power towards the communications corridor between Britain and India, India's frontier, the Persian Gulf. This project placed Russia's supposedly malicious intentions towards Britain's Indian Empire firmly under the spotlight, but did so from a direction not typically associated with Russian expansionism. While in the mid-nineteenth century Russia's threat was primarily from Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet, in 1898 it was believed the Russian imperial telescope was retrained firmly onto the Persian Gulf.

3.4. Count Kapnist's proposal for a transcontinental railway, 1898

The reduction of British investment in the infrastructure of the Ottoman Empire after the occupation of Egypt left the door open for Germany. The same year the House of Commons Select Committee was sitting, a German railway engineer named Wilhelm von Pressel had constructed a new and important railway along the Ottoman Empire's eastern Anatolian shoreline, and in 1878 had attempted unsuccessfully to raise the capital to construct the first section of what would later become the Baghdad Railway. A decade later however he was successful, persuading the director of the Deutsche Bank Georg von Siemens to provide financial backing and underwriting for a programme of railway construction in the Sultan's lands. With the backing of the Deutsche Bank Pressel had a renewed application to build the first section of the Baghdad Railway in October 1888 accepted, a railway line that would run between Constantinople and Ankara. The Deutsche Bank created an offshoot company, the Anatolian Railway Company, in March 1889 to manage the construction. By December 1892 the Constantinople-Ankara line was opened, and the railway was extended to Konya – the official starting point of the Baghdad Railway, in 1896 (see Figure 3.1). Here it remained until 1903 and the signing of the Baghdad Railway Convention (see McMurray, 2001, for more details). It is worth highlighting that the British and Indian governments were not concerned about the slow, creeping progress of the railway eastwards at this time, believing anything that strengthened the Ottomans against the perennial threat of Russia was a good thing. However, with Kapnist's proposal the prospect was raised of a Russian controlled

railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, something which demanded a response.

It was in June 1898 that Kapnist applied to the Ottoman government for a concession to build a railway from an unnamed port on the Mediterranean Sea, through Aleppo, Homs, Baghdad, and Basra, to eventually terminate at Kuwait on the Persian Gulf (see Alghanim, 1998: 63-67; Kumar, 1965: 141-144). A translation of his proposal landed on the desk of the British Prime Minister, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, on August 1st and caused immediate alarm.²⁴ Aside from its transcontinental trace it also included proposals for the irrigation of the Tigris and Euphrates deltas and the construction of a port terminus at Kuwait. “On the face of it”, as Alghanim (1998: 63) has commented, “this was an ambitious plan to create a Russian presence in the region of Iraq and the northern Gulf, with enormous political benefit to Russia but at little economic cost”. However, in early 1899 it transpired that Kapnist had neither the support of the Russian Government nor the private capital needed to construct such a railway, and the project faded into insignificance.

Nonetheless, “the very idea of a Russian railway to the Gulf was enough to raise British hackles” (Busch, 1967: 105). This was largely because of the two geopolitical imaginaries discussed previously; the Persian Gulf as a communications corridor and the Persian Gulf as a frontier of British India. Yet there was a contradiction evinced by these imaginaries. In Britain, the Persian Gulf was an intrinsically British space. “Our position in the Persian Gulf,” said Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Foreign Office Lord Cranborne in January 1902 (quoted in Busch, 1967: 248), “is one of a very special character, and His Majesty’s Government has always considered that the ascendancy of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf was the foundation of British policy. This is not merely a question of theory; it is a statement of fact.” This fact was epitomised by the term ‘British Lake’, one which was disliked by the British Foreign Secretary between 1900 and 1905, Lord Lansdowne, but which is nonetheless apt.²⁵ It signified a *de-facto* and deeply commonsensical belief in British society that the Persian Gulf was a fundamentally

²⁴ De. Bunsen to [the Marquess of] Salisbury, August 1st 1898, TNA FO 78/5102/ff17.

²⁵ The term ‘British Lake’ is used disapprovingly by Lansdowne in: ‘The Baghdad Railway’, 14th April 1904, TNA CAB/37/64/24/ff7.

British space. Yet the intensification of the rivalries of the naturalised geopolitical era and the growing friction in the contact zones of empire had created a problem: “the ‘Lake’ was no lake at all, but an international waterway of steadily increasing importance in an age of imperial rivalries, diplomatic flux, and sizable dangers to international peace of mind” (Busch, 1967: 1-2). This problem created anxiety in Britain, and the prospect of a Russian transcontinental railway making berth at the Persian Gulf was reacted to strongly as a result.

Two dispatches received at the Foreign Office in November 1898 illustrate this most prominently. The first was a memorandum authored on November 29th by the Director of Military Intelligence at the War Office, Major-General Sir John Ardagh. Ardagh argued that the exploitation of the Tigris and the Euphrates Valleys would allow the “[s]tate financiers of [Russia] to acquire predominant influence in the basins of the Euphrates and Tigris, with a view to their eventual inheritance.”²⁶ According to Ardagh, underlying Kapnist’s scheme were “aspirations for extending Russian power over Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, for ports on the Persian Gulf and, for the invasion of India; to none of which we can afford to be indifferent.”²⁷ For Ardagh the status of the railway as a tool of Russian power projection was self-evident; it was equated with the acquisition of the river basins in Mesopotamia and the overland projection of Russian power towards India via ports on the Persian Gulf. The second was a memorandum from Lord Curzon (reproduced in Lauterpacht et al, 1991: 8) on November 19th, prepared two months before he became Viceroy of India. Curzon was an influential British statesman who travelled extensively in Persia in the late 1880s and early 1890s, subsequently writing and speaking extensively on questions pertaining to the safety and security of British India. After working as the Under-Secretary of State for both India and then Foreign Affairs in the 1890s he was appointed to the Viceroyalty in January 1899, two months after his memorandum on the proposed transcontinental railway was written.

Curzon used the Kapnist scheme to reflect on the wider issue of British and Indian policy in the Gulf. “Koweit is the best,” he declared, “indeed the only port

²⁶ ‘Memorandum by Sir J. Ardagh on Count Kapnist’s Scheme for a Railway between the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf’, November 29th 1898, TNA FO 78/5102/ff114-116 [ff115].

²⁷ *Ibid.*

deserving of the name in the Persian Gulf, and should a line be protracted to the actual shores of the Gulf instead of stopping at Bussorah, Kuwait is about the only place to which it could go.”²⁸ But for Curzon any concession granted by the Turkish Government for a transcontinental railway terminating at Kuwait could not be valid because the legal question of who in fact was sovereign over Kuwaiti territory was not resolved. Curzon thought the recognition “of Turkish, or indeed, of any alien authority at Kuwait, might be fraught with danger to British interests in the Gulf.” The reason why the railway would be fraught with danger he gave shortly afterwards:

“A Russian railway ending at Kuwait would be in the highest degree injurious to British interests. A German railway to Kuwait would be scarcely less so – even a Turkish railway to Kuwait would be unwelcome. Any one of these would challenge our hitherto uncontested supremacy in the Gulf, and would turn those waters into a sort of mid-Asian Gulf of Pechili” (in Lauterpacht et al, 1991: 8).

As we will see, this was just the beginning of Curzon’s concerns with the Gulf. For Curzon any non-British railway to the Persian Gulf would be disastrous, whether constructed under the auspices of Germany, Russia, or the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the analogy drawn by Curzon between the Persian Gulf and ‘a sort of mid-Asian Gulf of Pechili’ is a revealing one.²⁹ Although judicially the territory of the Chinese Government, by 1899 the British, French, Germans, and Russians all had ports and differing degrees of naval power concentrated there – a microcosm of the wary confrontation that had come to characterise the relations between the Great Powers at the turn of the twentieth century (see Otte, 2005: 4-18). Thus Curzon’s fear was structured by the belief that the Persian Gulf was a British space, its status as a frontier and communications corridor secured by the supremacy of British sea power and yet in danger of being eroded and undermined by the prospect of railway enabled land power.

Put differently, the arguments that Chesney and Andrew had offered in favour of the Euphrates Valley Railway were now turned on their head and depicted as reasons why Russia (or any other Power) could not be allowed to construct a railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. From Kapnist’s scheme onwards, British transcontinentalism here was shaped by this fundamental feature of railway technology.

²⁸ Bussorah is the present day city of Basra in Iraq.

²⁹ The Gulf of Pechili is today known as the Bohai Sea, and is located to the south-east of Beijing and to the west of the Korean peninsula.

It was a tool of power projection, not merely concerned with the conveyance of troops but also producing imaginations of spaces such as the Tigris and Euphrates valleys as contested and threatened – and ultimately at risk of absorption. One important difference between the responses to Kapnist's fleeting scheme and the later Baghdad Railway Convention of 1903 was the lack of an economic component in Britain's reaction. This reflected the common imagination of Russia as a greedy, irrational state that sought territorial gain for no other reason than to enhance its own military and political power (Morgan, 1981). The civilisational and naturalised undercurrents of transcontinentalism remained subdued as the twentieth century began. As the next two chapters will suggest, Britain's concern with the Baghdad Railway in the 1900s was primarily about defining, and then responding to, the power projection potential of the railway. It was only in the First World War that I argue we see British fears of transcontinentalism emerge to their full extent.

3.5. Conclusions

As Hoskins (1928) and Goren (2011) have argued, the history of Britain's Middle Eastern diplomacy and policy in the nineteenth century can be thought of as a consistent encounter with the possibility of an overland route to India rendering the supremacy of the Royal Navy superfluous. In this chapter I have documented the ways in which this was so. The chapter has charted the transforming relationship between Britain, the Persian Gulf, and India in the decades immediately following the Napoleonic Wars. I have demonstrated how, in partial response to fears over the safety and security of India, Britain slowly assimilated the Persian Gulf into the political and economic networks of informal empire, producing as it did so two geopolitical imaginaries of the Gulf as a frontier of India and a communications corridor between Britain and India. The first of these imaginaries was important because it meant that any encroachment upon the Gulf was seen as tantamount to a future encroachment upon India itself. The second was equally important because it created and solidified a belief that because the Persian Gulf was part of all routes of communication with India, and that any disruption at the Gulf could concomitantly disrupt Britain's communications with India. However, for most of the nineteenth century British sea power was sufficient to ensure that both of

these possibilities were extremely unlikely, especially after the partial acquisition of Suez in 1875 and the occupation of Egypt in 1882.

And yet, not everyone believed sea power was enough to secure Britain's Indian possessions. As I have shown, germs of transcontinentalism were present in the nineteenth century, firstly in the 1850s with the formation of the Euphrates Valley Railway company by Andrew and Chesney, and secondly in the early 1870s when the matter was placed before a House of Commons Select Committee. Chesney, Andrew, and others recognised the potential of a transcontinental railway across the Ottoman Empire for the mobility of British power, and equated its potential construction with the establishment of Britain as an *amphibious power* able to project power across both land and sea, thus "render[ing] the invasion of India all but impossible" (Andrew, 1870: 8). Others discussed the Euphrates Valley Railway slightly differently. In particular, Chenery demonstrated an early and rare example of the civilisational geopolitical trope that a railway spanning the civilisations of Europe and India would, by virtue of covering a space constructed as the *entirety* of a continental landmass, civilise all that lay between. Neither Chesney nor Andrew lived to see the Baghdad Railway constructed, but their early transcontinentalism was prescient in that they identified some of the crucial aspects of the shifting balance between land and sea power that became more central to the British government during the building of the Baghdad Railway. Their words were however not heeded, with the British government believing, like Mackinder, that the opening of Suez increased the mobility of sea power relative to land. By the time Kapnist's proposal had come and gone, a transcontinental railway linking Europe and India was a more prominent concern in the Foreign Office and the Indian Government.

Lastly, this chapter has shown how the co-constitutive and interlocking political and economic concerns of the newly unified German state and the Ottoman Empire entwined in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. As R.W. Seton-Watson (1945: 575) noted,

"[b]y the turn of the century British influence at the Porte was negligible, while German predominance, already entrenched by the military mission under Kolmar von der Goltz, found its economic expression in railway concessions in Asia Minor, the germ of 'Berlin-Baghdad'."

The Ottoman Empire became the site upon and through which German geopolitical visions and economic necessities were articulated, while to the Ottomans German infrastructural investment was welcomed as a component of an oft-debated programme of modernisation and a means of economically and militarily safeguarding the status of the Empire. In the next chapter I show how Britain responded to the transcontinental offspring of this German-Ottoman entanglement.

Chapter Four – ‘A foreign port at the end of a foreign line’: Britain’s response to the Baghdad Railway, 1902-1914

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I analysed the development of transcontinentalism from the Napoleonic Wars to the proposal of Count Kapnist to build a transcontinental railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf in 1898. In this chapter I narrow the focus to a detailed archival examination of Britain’s response to the construction of the Baghdad Railway. The granting of the Baghdad Railway Convention to the German-backed Anatolian Railway Company (ARC) in March 1903, and the subsequent formation of a Baghdad Railway Company (BRC) was a significant catalyst for the development of transcontinentalism in the corridors of the British and Indian Governments. It established that only one state could construct and work a railway between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf – Germany. It technically foreclosed any possibility of Britain having a say in the direction or eventual terminating location of the railway. Finally, it raised the possibility of that which had so worried Chesney, Andrew, and later Curzon becoming a reality. The construction of a transcontinental railway under the auspices of Germany would make Suez, and the mobility it afforded British sea power, basically irrelevant to the defence of India. It would also tear at the seams of Britain’s informal empire in the Persian Gulf and unfasten the bonds of collaboration so painstakingly cultivated by the British Empire over the course of the nineteenth century. It was, as the Indian Government put it in 1906, tantamount to the “Germanisation” of the Persian Gulf and the potential destruction of Britain’s Indian possessions.³⁰

From Kapnist’s proposal, therefore, the Baghdad Railway was no longer about the modernisation and civilisation of the Ottoman Empire (at least not to the British). Unlike, as we will see, in Africa, transcontinentalism between Europe and India moved away from this course. In fact, the civilisational geopolitics evinced most strongly by Chenery was one of many contradictions sufficing the mechanisms of the British Empire at this time. While the civilisation of the Ottoman Empire was regarded a good thing

³⁰ ‘Government of India to Morley’, 12th July 1906, TNA FO 881/9055X/ff7-8.

because it would strengthen the unstable Ottomans against the supposedly greedy designs of Russia, the construction of the railway under German auspices signalled that the imperial rewards – including the fastest route to India – would be exclusively in German hands. Britain's policy towards the railway subsequently became concerned with preventing two possibilities: the projection of German military power towards India and the destruction of Britain's informal empire in the Gulf. Although the majority of Britain's preventative strategies were exhausted by April 1910, analysing them demonstrates how transcontinentalism took a specific form along the east-west, Europe-India axis in the 1900s.

This chapter is split into two main sections. The first analyses Britain's reaction to, and definition of the problems that would be caused by, the railway. I argue Britain's reaction can be divided into three related components. The first explicitly concerns the projection of German power, and the prospective consequences of a German naval base being established on the shores of the Persian Gulf. This was equated to the establishment of Germany as a kind of inverse-amphibious power; with an unprecedented mobility of power between Europe and the Persian Gulf which could then be extended via sea towards India far quicker than Britain could mobilise the Raj's defences. As suggested in the previous chapter, this was a threat intrinsically shaped by the entrenched understandings of the Persian Gulf as both a frontier of India and a communications corridor between Britain and India. The crux of the problem was therefore simple – the Persian Gulf would be straddled by Germany, the frontier transformed into a launchpad for the attack of India and the communications corridor blockaded by German destroyers.

The second and third components of the problem were deemed to be the extinguishing of Britain's informal empire. British and Indian officials feared that the Baghdad Railway would be fundamentally faster, more efficient, and less prone to disruption than Britain's existing pathways of maritime trade. As Andrew (1870: 15) had been at pains to argue, where a battalion of troops could go a bale of goods could also go, and with the same efficiency. Thus, I demonstrate how the completion of the railway was equated with the extinguishing of Britain's informal empire in the Gulf and the redirecting of flows of goods, resources, and peoples away from British control to those

dominated by Germany. Lastly, the third component of the problem posed by the railway was the impact it would have on the bonds of collaboration that existed between British officials and the Arab ruling elites at the Gulf. As I will discuss, collaboration was an integral part of Britain's informal empire, based on the social relations carefully cultivated and maintained by British officials between themselves and certain members of the Arab ruling elite. The prospective impact of the railway, however, was the unfastening of these relations and their reterritorialisation towards Germany. Crucial to this were relations of prestige, which were commonly referenced by British and Indian officials and which evince how gravely important the maintaining of collaboration was to the continuing existence of Britain's informal empire in the Gulf.

The second main section of the chapter documents Britain's strategic and diplomatic manoeuvres, analysing in turn British proposals to internationalise the railway, Lord Curzon's naval tour of the Persian Gulf in the winter of 1903, and a secret proposal for Britain to purchase any shorelines on the Gulf that were potential locations for the mooted naval base. Ultimately the first of these solutions came close to succeeding in 1914, before being rendered impossible by the outbreak of the First World War. It was with the war that British fears of a 'Berlin-Baghdad' block of German territory erupted, and this forms the content of the following chapter. Throughout this chapter, two important aspects of transcontinentalism undergird my arguments. The first is the idea of relative ascent and decline in a closed political world. To Lansdowne, Edward Grey, Curzon, and the other British officials involved in Britain's Baghdad Railway negotiations, there was no question of co-operation or collaboration in the Persian Gulf. There could be no balance or harmony if a German port was constructed there, only strife. The benefits that Germany would garner from the railway were proportionate to the losses that would assuage Britain. The broader structural conditions associated with the naturalised geopolitical era consequently shaped the severity of Britain's reaction to the railway.

The second aspect of transcontinentalism that needs to be emphasised is the oscillating balance between land and sea power. The Baghdad Railway Convention was signed less than a year before Mackinder's famous 1904 lecture, and his dictum concerning the transmuting of the conditions of land power is consistent with the

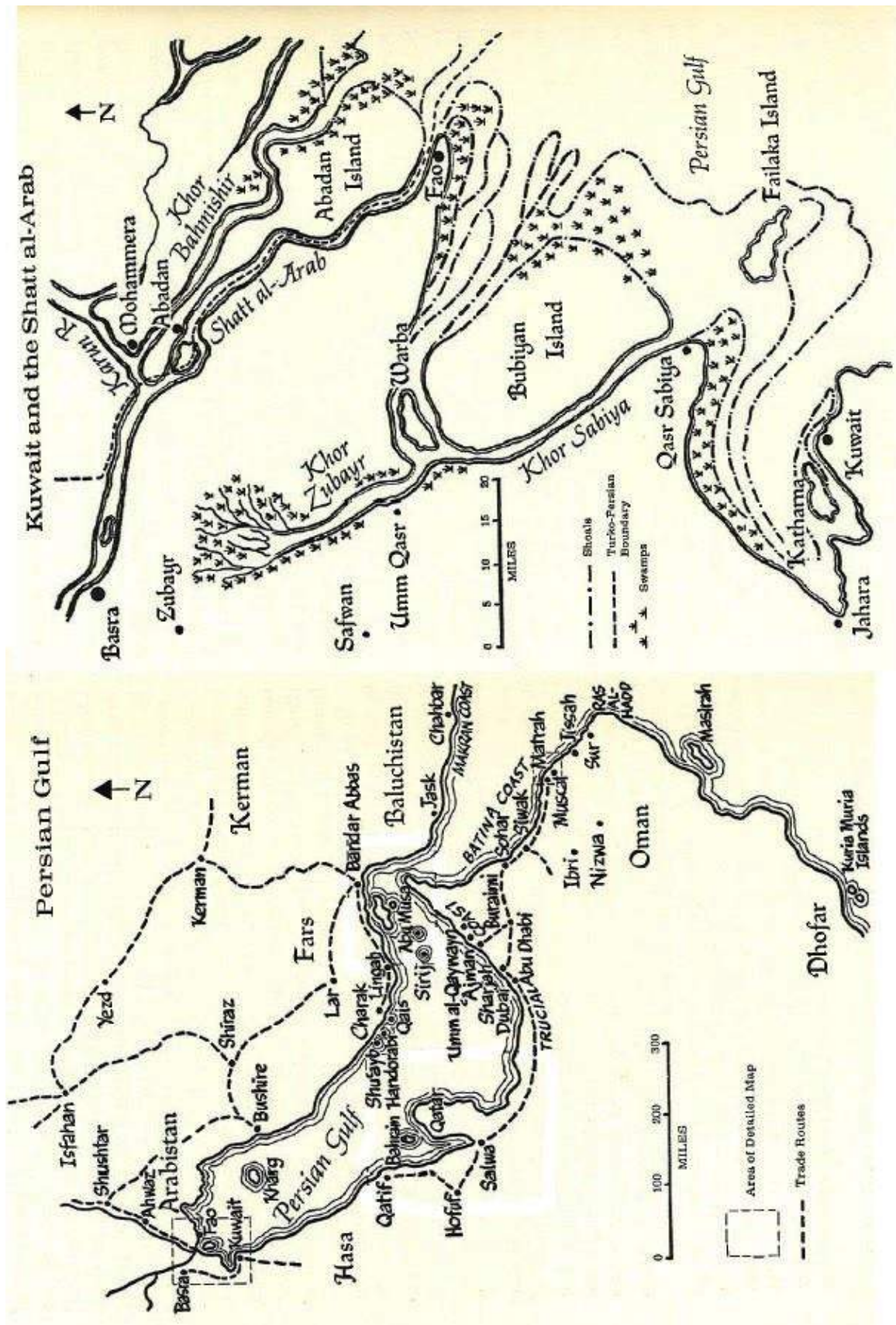


Figure 4.1. Location maps of the Persian Gulf and the proposed termini of the Baghdad Railway. Reproduced from Busch (1967: 8, 96).

response of the British and Indian governments to the railway. It also shaped and restricted the practical strategies and diplomatic manoeuvres that Britain attempted to use to neutralise the threat of the railway, as the second half of the chapter will discuss. But what is equally important is that, as for Mackinder, the global swing back towards land power was in 1903 past the point of no return. Britain's practical response to the railway was therefore about diplomatic obstruction, neutralisation, and damage limitation above anything else, and operated with a resigned acceptance that the railway would be constructed at some point.

4.2. The Germanisation of the Persian Gulf

During and after the problems that were created by Kapnist's proposal for a transcontinental railway in 1898 and 1899, the German-backed ARC had discussions with the Ottoman Empire to extend their existing lines to Baghdad and thence onwards to the Persian Gulf for a number of years. It is important to note that, in contrast to Kapnist's scheme, "the basic Foreign Office view at this time was cooperative" (Busch, 1967: 203). Lord Lansdowne fundamentally supported the extension of the Ottoman railway system to Baghdad, but on the specific provision that Britain could "acquire a proper share in the control of the railway and of its outlet on the Persian Gulf."³¹ Consequently, there were several discussions over the potential participation of British capital in the construction of the ARC's planned railway in 1900 and 1901 before the formal conventions of the railway agreement were drawn up in January 1902 (for the best analysis of these years, see Wolf [1936] 1973: 17-35). These conventions were a surprise: "the terminus was to be at Basra, with the [ARC] reserving the right to build a branch to some undetermined point on the Gulf" regardless of whether Britain was to contribute or not (Busch, 1967: 203). Between January 1902 and March 1903 debates over British participation continued in various forms, before the signing of the contract between the Ottoman Government and the ARC and the subsequent creation of the BRC

³¹ 'The Baghdad Railway' (note 25), ff7.

to construct and administer the new railway.³² As initially mooted in January 1902 the convention, in Article 1, decreed that

“[t]he Imperial Ottoman Government grant the concession for the construction and working of an extension for the line from Konia to Bagdad and Basra [...] as well as the following branches [...] From Zobeir to a point on the Persian Gulf to be agreed upon between the Imperial Ottoman Government and the concessionaries”.³³

Article 23 of the convention further stated that the BRC would have the right to build a harbour at this point on the Gulf, as well as harbours at both Baghdad and Basra.³⁴ At the same time, and due to a complicated diplomatic tangle the House of Commons voted against allowing British capitalists to participate in the railway in April 1903, and the railway concession for the transcontinental line thus became a bilateral agreement between Germany and the Ottoman Empire (see Francis, 1973). Both British and French capital was excluded, and the British Government, at least on paper, was to have no legal say in its construction.

In other words, Lansdowne’s conditions of Britain having a proper share and control of the outlet on the Persian Gulf were not met. As he put it to the House of Lords in May 1903,

“I say it without hesitation – we should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal.”³⁵

This, in turn, was tantamount to what the Indian Government called the ‘Germanisation’ of the Persian Gulf. The next three sub-sections elucidate why this was so.

4.2.1. The German naval base on the flank of India

The most severe impact of the Baghdad Railway was connected to Lansdowne’s fear of a naval base being established on the shores of the Persian Gulf, and was typically referred to as the ‘strategic’ impact of the railway by British officials in their letters and memos. Simply put, to Lansdowne and his colleagues the Baghdad Railway

³² PP 1911 (Cd. 5635) CLL, 1, *Bagdad Railway. No. 1 (1911). Bagdad Railway. Convention of March 5, 1903.*

³³ *Ibid*, p.37 [emphasis added].

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.42.

³⁵ *The Official Report, House of Commons, 4th Series [Hansard 4th], 121 (5 May 1903), 1348.*

was a transcontinental tool of German power projection, and the naval port would enable a translation of German land power to the sea; a reversal of the terms of the amphibious power touched upon by Chesney. A German naval base at any location on the Gulf would, in other words, render it a place from which German power could be projected onwards towards British India, and which due to its fortifications and relative proximity to Germany would be impregnable to any neutralisation from British sea power.

In November 1904 a memo was published on the Baghdad Railway by the British War Office which speculated on the future of the railway and its possible impacts. The War Office postulated that “the terminus on the Gulf, being the point of distribution and transshipment, will eventually become a great focus of trade, and therefore of great strategical value.”³⁶ Because of this, the memo continued, it was doubtful whether or not the Ottoman Empire could provide adequate levels of commercial and military security that the terminus would require, and this would necessitate the devolution of control over the terminus to Germany. Should this happen, it was believed that Germany could “succeed in gradually converting the port into a naval base, notwithstanding promises and agreements to the contrary.” The slow transformation of the terminus into a naval base “would enable [Germany] to keep a fleet in eastern water, independent of the Mediterranean route, for protecting her maritime trade and for attacking that of the enemy.” Furthermore, the War Office speculated, if Russia and England were at any point to go to war and Germany became allied with Russia, the position of the base would make it impossible to reinforce the Indian military garrison. This was because the overland route would be straddled by the Baghdad Railway, and the base would enable the confrontation of British naval vessels with German military force on their maritime route to India.

These fears, I argue, were intimately shaped by the intrinsic understanding of the Persian Gulf as a frontier of British India, an understanding that was evinced in several ways. After the construction of the port and its transformation into a naval base, the War Office stated that German warships would be placed “on the flank of our

³⁶ Quotes in this paragraph from ‘Effect of the Baghdad Railway on Our Relations with Persia and on the Defence of India: Memorandum by General Staff, War Office’, November 16th, TNA CAB 38/6/109/ff2.

communications via Suez with India.”³⁷ This basic geographical description, connoting an attack from an exposed side onto a point of centrality and importance, formed the crux of how the strategic threat of the railway reaching the Gulf was defined. In 1906, the British Consul in Basra, Consul Crow, summarised this best when he grimly stated Britain would be “face to face with a great military and naval Power, advantageously based on a railway ten days from Berlin and four from Bombay.”³⁸ This was crucial because of the imagined proximity of the Gulf to India and reconfiguration of the time and rapidity with which German military power could be projected from the port towards Indian space. This prospective ability to transport people, troops, munitions, stocks, and other resources across the Ottoman Empire in ten days, combined with a fortified naval base at some point at the Gulf, was imagined as “a means of overthrowing our present predominate position in the Gulf and menacing India.”³⁹ Put simply, a space deemed to be one of the most integral frontiers of India would be turned into something akin to a launchpad; a place from which German power could be projected by combination of rail and sea over the entirety of the Persian Gulf and, as a consequence, towards India.

There was a second military consequence which was defined as the imperilling and disrupting of British communications with India. Although estimates differed in their specifics, it was typically agreed among the British and Indian Governments that the journey from Germany to Bombay would take around twelve-to-fourteen days via the railway, as opposed to around fifteen from London by sea via Marseilles, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. Thus, as Lansdowne’s successor Edward Grey put it in a memo to the French and Russian Ambassadors in June 1907, “[t]he interest of Great Britain in a railway which, if completed, would form the most direct mail route to India is so evident as to require no demonstration”.⁴⁰ At its worst, it offered the possibility of communications being entirely disrupted during a severe international crisis. This gloomy future was understandably magnified when viewed through the lens of the Indian Government, who with Curzon at the helm from 1899 repeated his fears over

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ [British Consul in Basra] Crow to [Chargé D’Affaires at Constantinople George] Barclay’, January 8th 1907, FO 881/9157X/ff22.

³⁹ ‘Government of India to Morley’ (note 30).

⁴⁰ ‘Memo from Foreign Office to French and Russian Ambassadors’, June 4th 1907, TNA FO 881/9055X/ff12.

Kapnist's plot consistently throughout the 1900s. For instance, in 1906 several of the top Indian officials signed a long, piercing letter to the Secretary of State for India John Morley arguing that "it is difficult to believe that a trans-continental railway terminating on the Gulf would not sooner or later bring with it the construction of fortifications". This they then connected and equated to the "consolidation of German influence through [the Ottoman Empire] and the eventual passing into German hands of all the real power in this particular zone."⁴¹

This issue of the deepening of German influence in the Ottoman Empire was a contentious point that was perceived markedly differently by the British and Indian Governments, something reflecting the Foreign Office's subordination of Indian affairs to the intricacies of European diplomacy. The Indian Government reacted, for instance, with great alarm to unconfirmed and relatively trivial stories concerning the German subsidisation of Carmelite schools in Ottoman Arabia, arguing that it was evidence of "the intention to spread German influence through this country."⁴² This can be juxtaposed with the fact that Grey seemingly did not respond to reports from his Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Nicholas O'Connor, that German archaeological digs in Anatolia in 1906 were fronts for the "collection of information and dissemination of German influence in connection with the construction of the Baghdad Railway."⁴³ Both the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Board of Trade, on the other hand, consistently argued that the prospective increase of German influence in the Ottoman Empire was secondary to the issue of the naval base, and that "[w]e might without serious disadvantage consent to the Anatolian Railway remaining under German control."⁴⁴

Notwithstanding these important disagreements between London and the Raj, the issue they did agree on was the severity of the potential naval base. Consul Crow's summation of the problem is perhaps the most revealing. In particular, his description of Germany as a 'great military and naval power' captures the essence of Germany as

⁴¹ This and the previous quote from 'Government of India to Morley' (note 30).

⁴² 'India Office to Foreign Office', March 5th 1906, TNA FO 406/30/ff1.

⁴³ 'O'Connor to Grey', April 11th 1906, TNA FO 406/30/ff12.

⁴⁴ 'The Situation on July 31, 1905, and Suggestions for an Arrangement' [undated (c. August 1905) memo from CID], TNA 406/26/ff25; 'Memorandum communicated by Board of Trade', June 23rd 1905, TNA 406/26/ff10-17.

comfortable on both land and sea and able to project power across and between both with relative ease. If, in (at most) fourteen days, Germany could transport troops from Berlin to Bombay via the Gulf, the fifteen days it would take Britain to reinforce the Indian garrison would plainly be insufficient. It would also ensure, as the War Office put it, that a German fleet could be maintained in the Persian Gulf, something that was hitherto impossible because of the lack of a proximate friendly port. Finally, even Crow's rendering of the problem as leaving Britain 'face to face' with Germany reflects the sense of a closed international political map, with states wriggling combatively in close proximity to one another for the smallest relative advantage that could be gained.

The 'strategic' impact of the Baghdad Railway was therefore simple. It would enable the projection of German power across the Ottoman Empire to a fortified naval base on the Persian Gulf, from which Germany's growing fleet of warships could be deployed with menace towards Britain's Indian possessions. Germany's presence at the Persian Gulf constituted the reimagining of that space as a launchpad; a place from which power could be projected towards India. It was coupled with a second component, which took on a distinctly commercial character. The next sub-section turns to this.

4.2.2. The extinguishing of informal empire

In the previous chapter I discussed how, in the early nineteenth century, the Persian Gulf became a part of Britain's informal empire, a disparate patchwork of spaces which were not formal colonies of the British Empire but were economically and politically dominated by British influence. Accordingly, the second component of the Baghdad Railway's impact was the extinguishing and exanguination of Britain's informal empire – but not just in the Persian Gulf. It also included the probable elimination of the "commercial interests which we have in the past two centuries secured in the valley of the Tigris and Shatt-el-Arab, and on the Persian and Arabian shores of the Gulf."⁴⁵ Britain's dominance in India and the Persian Gulf had gradually been extended inland to Mesopotamia, and by the end of the nineteenth century the majority of trade focused around Baghdad and the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys was controlled by British

⁴⁵ 'Effect of the Baghdad Railway' (note 36).

merchants (Cohen, 1976). This was maintained in part due to the Lynch Steamship Company's effective monopoly on the Shatt-el-Arab, a river linking the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the Persian Gulf. Arguably, therefore, Mesopotamia was just as much a part of Britain's informal empire as the Persian Gulf. This was put most emphatically by Edward Grey, who often in his correspondence repeated the line that "[t]he commercial position of Great Britain in the Mesopotamian delta is altogether exceptional; that position has been steadily consolidated since the foundation, upwards of two and a-half centuries ago, of the first English factory in Bussorah".⁴⁶

It was this informal empire that the railway was projected to destroy. By 1910, the consensus was that the impact of the railway reaching the Persian Gulf would confer on Germany "a monopoly on the economic development of the country [and lead to] the destruction of British commercial interests".⁴⁷ The process through which this 1910 prediction was reached was relatively straightforward. Between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf, it was calculated that Lynch's steamship trade would effectively disappear overnight, simply because it would not be able to compete with the cheapness, efficiency, and speed of a railway between these two places. It was expected that "[t]he Railway Company would presumably make it their business to cut freights between Bussorah and Bagdad so as to be able to compete with the river-borne traffic."⁴⁸ This perhaps explains why Lynch (1911: 8) spoke to the Central Asian Society about the ways in which "the railway is designed to control all the country lying between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf" and how it was therefore essential that the railway did not undercut steamship rates on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The voluminous trade that was dispersed and shipped throughout the entirety of Mesopotamia and the Gulf would therefore veer away from British hands and be usurped by the Baghdad Railway.

In addition to this unpleasant probability, in late 1909 a new Mesopotamian threat was identified and considered. Somewhat ironically, a British civil and irrigation engineer, the famed William Willcocks, had been for some years employed by the

⁴⁶ 'Memo from Foreign Office' (note 40); 'Grey to [Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Gerard] Lowther', 20th April 1910, TNA BT 11/3/C5480/ff2.

⁴⁷ 'Grey to Lowther' (note 46), ff3.

⁴⁸ 'Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee', March 26th 1907, TNA CAB 37/87/36/ff14.

Ottoman government to plan and undertake the irrigation of the Shatt-el-Arab and wider Mesopotamian lowlands to stimulate agriculture. Grey thought that this irrigation scheme was “of a kind probably calculated to render the rivers non-navigable, in which case no means of transport would be available until the completion of the railway.”⁴⁹ Further, when the railway was completed and river transport impossible, the inevitable consequence would be that trade would have to travel on the railway out of sheer necessity, allowing the BRC “to tax all of our trade with India and our sea-borne trade with Europe” at whatever rate it pleased.⁵⁰ “With the rivers closed,” another official added, “British trade might be made to pay under the guise of freight and considerable share of the guarantee given by the Turkish Government to the Bagdad Railway Company.”⁵¹ Finally, it was projected that Germany would subsequently endeavour to establish a system of its own steamships from the prospective terminus to Bombay, replacing Lynch’s. If this happened,

“practically the entire trade between India and the Persian Gulf would fall into German hands, because it would be quite impossible for the British lines to stand against ships supported by this enormous Railway Company, which could give through rates and through bookings for passengers and cargo.”⁵²

Aside from these problems, there were other prospective economic impacts that were discussed from time to time. Some, for instance, argued that branch lines would run from Bagdad into Persia, and thus “oust British Indian goods from the promising market which now exists for them via Khanikin and Kermanshah.”⁵³ Taken as a whole, it was to be nothing less than the deterritorialisation of Britain’s established economic networks and their replacement by German economic activity centred on the railway and its terminus.

4.2.3. Collaboration and prestige

A final component of the threat of the Baghdad Railway was the impact it was seen to potentially have on British *prestige* in the Persian Gulf. Prestige was an important element in the production and maintenance of informal empire that must be

⁴⁹ ‘Grey to [Ambassador to Russia Arthur] Nicolson’, November 23rd 1909, TNA FO 406/34/ff47.

⁵⁰ ‘Lowther to Grey’, May 25th 1909. TNA BT 11/3/C5480/ff7.

⁵¹ [British resident in Baghdad] Major J. Ramsay to Barclay’, 9th January 1907, TNA FO 881/9157X/ff25.

⁵² ‘Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee’ (note 48), ff13.

⁵³ *Ibid*, ff14.

placed within the wider context of the role of collaboration in British imperialism. Collaboration was proposed as an essential component of European imperialism by Robinson (1972), who argued that imperial historiography had disproportionately focused on the strategic and commercial imperatives of territorial expansion. Robinson argued a third factor needed more attention, collaboration; or the social relationships between agents of European imperialism and the indigenous elites residing in any given place subject to European encroachment. Collaboration worked as a balance between two factors. On one hand, European imperialism required indigenous elites to provide administrative and organisational support (or, more colloquially, the 'know-how'), typically because it was difficult and expensive for imperial officials, with potentially limited or no knowledge of local customs or history, to do so on their own. On the other hand, association with wealthy imperial powers allowed indigenous elites to buttress and secure their own financial, political, and social interests. This often extended to explicit imperial backing and sheltering in places that were subject to local unrest, rebellion, and frequent political upheaval. Thus, collaboration was a mutually beneficial arrangement for both the imperial power and the indigenous elite, and the relationship between them was a key mechanism through which imperialism unfolded on a day-to-day basis.

This is important because "[i]n the Gulf, the British were so light on the ground that they had no alternative but to rely heavily on local agents and staff" (Onley, 2007: 73). British presence in Gulf towns such as Bushire and Basra was often limited to a single Consul who had in his employ several local staff to conduct day-to-day administrative duties. Prestige was intimately related to this system of collaboration. Wood (2013) argues that, at its simplest, prestige is a social relation defined by a certain 'recognition of importance', and in the Gulf States this could be amended to recognition of the privileged importance of one Great Power in relation to the importance of other Powers, particularly in places such as Muscat, Bahrain, and Kuwait. In the British case it referred in other words to a recognition of British importance by local elites in the Gulf States, a recognition which favoured and privileged British interests over all others, enabling and smoothing the movement of goods and peoples throughout the Persian Gulf. Prestige can thus be seen as an element of soft power, a way in which British

imperialism was enabled through non-coercive means of attraction, protection, and persuasion (Wood, 2013). British officials worked hard to maintain this prestige; it was seen as “the fundamental interest from which security and wealth flow[ed]” (Halvorson, 2010: 439). This was especially so because, as Wood has suggested, when the material power of one state declines, “the importance of prestige increases. When prestige wains, empires end” (Wood, 2013: 401). Given anxieties about foreign encroachment towards the Gulf, British and Indian officials were anxious that prestige was maintained among the Arab elites to the greatest possible extent.

However, as an enabler and facilitator of trade and a symbol of technological progress and modernity, railways played a pivotal role in transforming the social relations intrinsic to collaboration and “were thus characteristic of the collaborative bargains of informal imperialism” (Robinson, 1991: 5). The prestige that could be produced by the promise of a railway was large indeed, and equally the impact of the Baghdad Railway reaching the shores of the Gulf was expected to be severely detrimental to British prestige in the region. In the debates surrounding the exclusion of British capital from the project in April 1903, O’Conor had made clear to Lansdowne that “England’s exclusion from a public enterprise so intimately connected with the progress and development of the country will affect her prestige and position throughout Asia Minor.”⁵⁴ In the following years it was the Indian Government that most emphatically underlined the potential effect of the Baghdad Railway on British prestige. They warned repeatedly that “the undivided occupation by a German Railway Company of a potentially invulnerable position is not calculated to conduce the enhancement [...] of British political prestige.”⁵⁵ The stream of memos and letters that winged their way from the India Office to the Foreign Office attesting to this diminution of British prestige stresses the severe importance that Curzon and his officials attached to it. “[T]he probable antagonism of German interests to our own in this quarter,” read one particularly barbed letter, meant that “no time should be lost in endeavouring to retrieve, so far as may still be possible, the position which we have so seriously

⁵⁴ ‘O’Conor to Lansdowne’, April 28th 1903, TNA FO 406/19/ff33.

⁵⁵ ‘Government of India to [Secretary of State for India St John] Broderick’, February 4th 1904, FO 881/9055X/ff3.

endangered by acquiescence in these encroachments.”⁵⁶ The effect of the Baghdad Railway on British prestige in the Gulf was therefore feared to be what Wood (2013: 388) calls the negative dimension of prestige; “diminution, loss of face, and disrespect”, the subsequent erosion of the recognition of privileged importance of Britain by the Gulf States, and its possible usurpation by Germany.

Many of the officials based in the vicinity of the Gulf who contributed evidence to the Baghdad Railway Committee in 1907 expanded on exactly why this was so. The Baghdad Railway Committee was established in 1906 by Sir Charles Hardinge, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office, on Grey’s orders. Its objective was explicitly to consider “[t]he effect of the Bagdad Railway, if completed without British co-operation, on British political and commercial interests in the Middle East.”⁵⁷ It collected the speculations not only of the Foreign Office, the India Office, and the Board of Trade, but also from consuls, merchants, and other agents who lived and worked in the Gulf States, and who thus understood from first-hand experience the importance of collaboration and of the maintenance of British prestige. The Report of the Committee, delivered to Edward Grey on March 26th 1907, quoted evidence from the Consul-General at Bushire, who argued that should the railway be completed “we should suffer immensely in prestige and in regard to our present predominant influence among the maritime Arabs as ‘keepers of the peace by the sea.’”⁵⁸ This role entailed, *inter alia*, the minding of Shia Muslim pilgrims, who travelled yearly up the Euphrates to the holy city of Karbala from the Indian provinces; the more general protection of the Shia minority in Persia, India, and the surrounding regions; the mediating and settling of disputes between different ruling indigenous elites; and finally the elimination of piracy and slave trading.

In his evidence to the Baghdad Railway Committee, the Vice-Consul at Mohammerah William McDouall also speculated that this loss of prestige in the Gulf would logically mean “the Arabs on the ground” would turn to Germany for

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, ff2.

⁵⁷ ‘Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee’ (note 48), ff13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, ff14.

protection,⁵⁹ while a representative from the War Office stated that one of the principle objects of the railway in the first place was to “increase the prestige of Germany in the Middle East, and to make her attitude as the ‘Friend of Mahommedans’ still more imposing.”⁶⁰ A 1905 dispatch from the Board of Trade agreed that

“[i]t is difficult to discern how either our general consideration in the eyes of the Arabs or our particular position as the local protector of the Shia section of the Mahommedan faith are to benefit by the introduction of a new and powerful Frankish nation in this part of the Ottoman Empire.”⁶¹

Moreover, some also believed that a domino effect would destroy British prestige at greater distances in Persia, India, and Central Asia. “German influence will permeate these regions,” Consul Crow believed, and “a current of feeling may set in hostile, if not directly antagonistic, to British interests.”⁶² To amend Woods’ aphorism, the grim inference was that when prestige wanes, (informal) empires end, and were replaced by Germans.

4.2.4. Summary

In this section I have analysed what I have termed the three components of how British and Indian officials defined the problem of the Baghdad Railway. I have argued that these three components were, firstly, the projection of German military and naval power across the Ottoman Empire and on towards India via a fortified port on the shores of the Gulf. If this port was constructed Germany would become a transcontinental power, able to transport troops, munitions, and other military essentials between Europe and the Persian Gulf, and thence to India, faster than any response could be mustered by Britain. Secondly, I have suggested that, to Britain, the construction of the railway was tantamount to the destruction of Britain’s informal empire in the Gulf, the redirection of trade away from British maritime networks of transport, and the development of Mesopotamia for the benefit of Germany and the Ottoman Empire alone. Finally, I have elucidated how British and Indian officials feared the railway would loosen and tear the bonds of collaboration that were so crucial for the

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, ff24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, ff15.

⁶¹ ‘Memorandum communicated by Board of Trade’ (note 44), ff13.

⁶² ‘Crow to Barclay’ (note 38), ff21.

maintenance of British power in the Persian Gulf. Taken together, these three components comprised nothing less than the 'Germanisation' of the Persian Gulf. As Kumar (1962: 76) has put it, "[a] German terminus at the head of the Gulf would lead to the Germanization of Mesopotamia; it would disturb British relations with the Arab chiefs of the Gulf; it would reflect adversely too on the British position in Persia, and necessitate the maintenance of a powerful fleet in the Gulf."

These conclusions were solidified with the publication of the Baghdad Railway Committee's report in March 1907. It stated that "[t]he evidence we have collected is remarkable for its unanimity."⁶³ "No witness that we have heard", it read, "has doubted that if the railway is completed to Bagdad and the Persian Gulf without British co-operation, the effect on British political and commercial interests will be disastrous".⁶⁴ Evidence as to the likely impact of the railway reaching the Persian Gulf on British commerce in the region oscillated from the severely disadvantaging to the categorically eradicating. Germany would "in course of time [...] virtually monopolize the entire trade between India and the Persian Gulf"⁶⁵ and ensure that "British trade in South-Western Persia, Bagdad, and Bussorah would first languish and then vanish."⁶⁶ Furthermore, "our political standing and ascendancy, which have been undisputed and predominant over those of every other foreign nation [...] will be eclipsed and must disappear."⁶⁷ The expected transformation of the terminus into a German port meant that, "[s]trategically, we should have a potential naval base and supply depot, fed by a railway controlled by a rival naval Power, within 1,200 miles of Kurrachee, and we should have German men-of-war cruising about the Gulf".⁶⁸ The "shortest route to India [would be] under the auspices of Germany", a fact that would give rise to "serious anxiety" as it would also be the only realistic route for mails and goods to travel, and they would be at the whim of German freight rates.⁶⁹ The Committee ended the Report thus:

⁶³ 'Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee' (note 48), ff13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, ff1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, ff13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, ff14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, ff15.

“The Committee desire to place on record their opinion that the completion of the Bagdad Railway to the Persian Gulf without British co-operation would inflict grave and irreparable injury upon British interests, both Imperial and Indian, in the Middle East.”⁷⁰

The characteristics of the ascent of the land power Germany in direct proportion to the decline of the sea power Britain were thus codified and solidified. A final point, however, is that this was not equated by either the British or Indian governments to the colonisation and annexation of any of the Ottoman Empire by Germany. The closest anyone in the British government came to this was the firebrand King’s Lynn MP Thomas Gibson-Bowles, who like Mackinder was worried about the decline of British sea power (see Gibson-Bowles, 1910: esp. 47, 227 for his views on land and sea power), something which made him a fierce opponent of the Baghdad Railway. In 1904 he had told parliament the railway was fundamentally concerned with the “general extension of German predominance into Asia Minor”⁷¹, and the year before he had written a letter to *The Times* scolding the government for what he perceived as “giving [...] special encouragement to a German scheme likely to have effects so detrimental to British interests” (Gibson-Bowles, 1903). In March 1911 he was also to tell a meeting of the Central Asian Society that the railway was an imperial project masquerading as a railway, and was concerned with the extension of German power into Asia Minor over any and all commercial intentions (in Chéradame, 1911: 17). Yet not even Gibson-Bowles went as far as to fear German annexation. This final feature of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism was only to come later with the outbreak of war.

In the meantime, the slow, creeping progress of the railway itself left much scope for negotiation. In the next section I analyse how Britain took action to attempt to mitigate the threefold problem identified here.

4.3. Stopping the Germanisation

4.3.1. Internationalisation and the Baghdad-Gulf section

“If we participate in the further construction of the railway, and can obtain a share equal to that of any other Power in respect of construction and management, more especially of that portion of the line extending from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf, with a prepondering influence as regards the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Hansard 4th*, 130 (25 February 1904), 980.

control of the terminus, the railway would not, as far as can be foreseen, exercise any detrimental effect.”⁷²

To some degree, the internationalisation of the entire system of Ottoman railways remained the ideal solution to Britain’s problems even after the withdrawal of British participation in 1903. Lord Lansdowne continued to reiterate in 1904 that he viewed the railway as a question of “common and international interest”, and went as far as suggesting that “an international free port, open to all, and unfortified, at Koweit would not be a source of danger to us.”⁷³ Memos authored by the Board of Trade and the Indian Government in 1905 and 1906 respectively also evidence their tacit support for internationalisation.⁷⁴ Furthermore, after the first section of the railway was completed in 1904, the BRC “became increasingly anxious to secure British co-operation” when it became apparent some German capitalists would not be reinvesting their profits into the next sections.⁷⁵ In Britain internationalisation was based on the simple premise that a fully international railway company which had no majority of directors with one nationality would ensure any continuation of the line could only be made with Britain’s assent. The management of the railway company would be organised into what Cohen (1976) has termed the *quatre* structure, where 25% of shares would be each allocated to French, British, and German investors, with the rest directed towards smaller powers. As O’Conor put it, “it would be impossible to direct its policy and working to the benefit of any single country at the expense of others.”⁷⁶ Put differently, British board members, lent on by the British government, could ensure that no discriminatory railway tariffs would impact on British maritime trade, and any port on the Persian Gulf would be subject to regulations preventing its transformation into a naval base.

However, this solution was unrealistic precisely because French and German capital was locked into more railway lines than British capital at this time. The prospect of full internationalisation was thus not appealing either to French or German financiers,

⁷² ‘Effect of the Baghdad Railway’ (note 36), ff2.

⁷³ ‘The Baghdad Railway’ (note 25), ff7.

⁷⁴ ‘Memorandum communicated by Board of Trade’ (note 44); ‘Government of India to Morley’ (note 30), ff9.

⁷⁵ ‘The Situation on July 31, 1905’ (note 44), ff25.

⁷⁶ ‘O’Conor to Lansdowne’ (note 54), ff31.

even as the BRC warned that without British assistance the Baghdad Railway might not be completed at all. As construction on the Baghdad Railway progressed, George Clarke, secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, made clear in June 1906 that “the bringing of existing lines into a great international system seems beyond the scope of present possibilities.”⁷⁷ Some therefore began to mix the idea of internationalisation with the necessity of Britain having a controlling influence over the section of the railway from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf; “international control, which appears to be essential, is not incompatible with the construction and maintenance of the Baghdad-Gulf section by Great Britain.”⁷⁸ The essence of this solution was that the Anatolian and Baghdad Railways would remain under the control of Germany, the Syrian railways owned and operated by French capitalists would likewise remain, and the BRC would cede the right to construct and maintain the Baghdad-Gulf section to Britain. George Clarke commented that British control of the Baghdad-Gulf section “might fairly be regarded as a legitimate counterpoise to the French and German railways in Syria and Asia Minor respectively.”⁷⁹ This seemed possible, even likely, but for the question of Russia. Specifically, in 1906 the notion of an international railway system spanning the entire Ottoman Empire and split into sections controlled by Britain, France, and Germany was unacceptable in Moscow. Consequently, it was quickly realised that any plan along such lines would have to be a joint Anglo-French-Russian proposal to Germany and the BRC. The question of how to achieve this occupied the attention of Grey and the British Ambassadors to France and Russia almost constantly in the latter half of 1906.⁸⁰ In essence, by the time this issue was resolved (primarily with the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in August 1907), German capital had been found for the continuation of the railway. Furthermore, when the Entente was signed *The Times* (1907) reported, with some scorn, the reaction of a German newspaper, which believed it was a prelude to Britain attempting to turn “the *Hinterland* of Koweit, together with the Euphrates region and the Bagdad Railway, into a second Egypt.” Not only this, as the same newspaper had reported the year before, there were still some in Germany who

⁷⁷ ‘The Baghdad Railway: Note by the Secretary’, June 14th 1906, TNA CAB 38/12/29/ff3.

⁷⁸ ‘The Baghdad Railway’ (note 25), ff3.

⁷⁹ ‘The Situation on July 31, 1905’ (note 44), ff26.

⁸⁰ See on this the 1906 letters between Grey and the British Ambassadors to France and Russia, Francis Bertie and Arthur Nicolson respectively, in: TNA FO 406/30/ff20-69.

believed British participation of any kind “was out of the question in view of the fact that the original proposal of the German concession-holders had been wrecked by the refusal of England to participate” (The Times, 1906a). Whatever the reasons, the crucial question, defined in January 1905 as “can Germany complete the line without British co-operation?”, was for the time being definitely answered in the affirmative in the summer of 1907.⁸¹ Internationalisation of any kind slid off the table altogether, leading the Baghdad Railway Committee to (rather desperately) argue for “supreme British control over the portion of the railway in which British interests are most vitally concerned.”⁸²

This was also a solution favoured by those concerned with the railway in parliament. It is important to underline that the majority of the discussions over the impact of the Baghdad Railway (as discussed in Section 4.2.) were not shared with British MPs in parliament. The deliberations and report of the Baghdad Railway Committee, for example, were never brought before MPs, and nor was most of the information contained within the various memos and letters shared by the Foreign and India Offices. Thomas Gibson-Bowles remained the main agitator over the railway in the mid-1900s, and he was joined by John Rees, a Liberal MP first elected in 1906, in asking Grey repeatedly in parliament for news regarding the railway’s progress. Each time Grey responded matter-of-factly with the current position of the railway, and what construction was taking place at that time.⁸³ However, more specific requests by Gibson-Bowles and Rees were strictly denied. For example, in February 1907 Rees asked Grey in parliament “whether he can make any statement to the House regarding the internationalisation of the Baghdad Railway or the participation of Great Britain in the progress of the line”, to which Grey replied drily “[t]he [a]nswer is in the negative.” Gibson-Bowles then interjected, asking “whether His Majesty’s Government have recently entered into negotiations with any foreign Government with a view to the construction of the Baghdad Railway; and whether any Papers on the subject can be laid upon the Table.” Again, Grey replied that the answer to both questions was “in the

⁸¹ ‘The Baghdad Railway: Memorandum prepared by the Direction of the Prime Minister’, January 26th 1905, TNA CAB 38/8/5/ff3.

⁸² ‘Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee’ (note 48), ff2.

⁸³ See for example: *The Official Report, House of Commons, 5th Series [Hansard 5th]*, 1 (4 March 1909), 1561; *Hansard 4th*, 154 (28 March 1906), 1261-1262.

negative”, an outright lie considering the aforementioned discussions of 1905 and 1906,⁸⁴ and given that he had recently ordered the formation of the Baghdad Railway Committee explicitly to answer such questions. Yet Rees never wavered from the view that was eventually to become dominant once internationalisation had slid off the table, that “it ought to be an absolute sine que non that England should have control of the section between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf.”⁸⁵

The logic behind the response of internationalism was that if achieved it would directly combat the first two components of the threat of the Baghdad Railway discussed in the previous chapter. British control of the Baghdad-Gulf section of the railway would block the projection of German power that the railway was deemed to potentially enable. Thus by constructing, controlling, and managing this line, any movement of troops or munitions by Germany towards the Gulf could be blocked swiftly and easily. Furthermore, the crucial add-on to this was that Britain would also construct, control, and manage the terminating port of the railway on the Gulf, thus ensuring that it could never be turned into a German naval base. With regards to the second component, the extinguishing of informal empire, British control of the Baghdad-Gulf section would ensure a concomitant control of freight rates and tariffs, which would be internationally agreed and thus not discriminatory to British goods as was feared. It would also ensure that none of Britain’s Mesopotamian trade in the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris (i.e. between Baghdad and the Gulf) could fall into German hands. The destruction of Britain’s informal empire would therefore be checked, and the careful regulation and management of railway tariffs would guarantee the continuation and relevance of Britain’s preponderant maritime pathways of movement.

While internationalisation of this kind was ultimately agreed upon in 1914, other responses to the threat of the Baghdad Railway were put forward alongside internationalisation in the mid-1900s. The next two sub-sections analyse two of these responses; a naval tour embarked upon by Lord Curzon in November 1903, and a secret plot to purchase and lease parts of the Gulf shoreline that were thought suitable for the location of the much-feared railway terminus.

⁸⁴ *Hansard 4th*, 169 (19 February 1907), 708-709.

⁸⁵ *Hansard 4th*, 162 (2 August 1906), 1419.

4.3.2. *Curzon and the spectacle of power and prestige*

Curzon embarked on his naval tour of the Persian Gulf in November and December 1903, backed by a considerable entourage. This was a continuation of his attempts, noted at the end of the previous chapter, to proactively defend and secure those spaces identified as the frontiers of British India against foreign encroachment. As Radford (2013a: 890) puts it, “Curzon’s strategic vision for the frontiers of the Indian Empire, and the Persian Gulf in particular, was based on securing the interests of the British and excluding those of other powers.” He did this in various ways, such as replacing the part-time ‘native agents’ at the Gulf with full-time British officers such as Sir Percy Cox, who were much more active and prominent than their predecessors had been. In 1902 Curzon also commissioned a gargantuan six-volume gazetteer and a map of the Persian Gulf; documents that “Curzon and the British establishment regarded as information necessary to ensure that they could know, and therefore control, the Persian Gulf” (Radford, 2013a: 897). While these instances comprised elements of Curzon’s ‘forward policy’ in the Gulf, I want to focus on his naval tour because it demonstrates how Curzon attempted to use the spectacle and theatricality of British sea power to visualise British power in the region and negate the prospective impacts of a German railway reaching the shores of his British lake.

Curzon had wanted to tour the Gulf States as early as May 1901 in response to the growing threats that Russia, Germany, and to a lesser extent France were thought to pose in the Gulf, but conflict with the India Office and the distraction provided by the war in South Africa meant he was denied until mid-1903. Curzon timed its revival well: coinciding with the granting of the Baghdad Railway Convention, Lansdowne’s 1903 speech to the Lords, and the growing furore in the British press towards German expansionist intentions, thus ensuring the softening of the previously hostile Secretary of State for India George Hamilton to the idea. Curzon departed from Karachi on November 16th 1903 and, over the following three weeks, visited Muscat, various towns around the Strait of Hormuz, Kuwait, and finally Persia. While his tour has been analysed before (Radford, 2013a), I argue that the trip was first and foremost a *spectacle*, a voyage designed to demonstrate both to British collaborators in the Gulf and to Germany that any encroachment upon the ‘British lake’ would not be tolerated. Further,

it was an instance of power projection in Williams' (2010) second sense; designed to internationally (re)produce the notion that the Gulf was an intrinsically British space.

Many geographers have highlighted the importance of spectacle in inculcating feelings of attachment, belonging, and identification with a particular ideal; most often the modern nation-state (Daniels and Cosgrove, 1993; Kapferer, 2004; Kong and Yeoh, 1997). Although often used to modify behaviour through viscerally punitive spectacles, which inculcate fear and shock, Kong and Yeoh (1997: 216) have argued that equally important are those spectacles that seek to instil a sense of wonder, awe, and reverence through "the deliberate use of ceremony; the conscious construction of pomp; the creation of occasion and circumstances for celebration, and visual effects." Moreover, this is a tactic that scholars such as Rech (2015) have argued takes on a special significance militarily. Spectacular displays of military prowess such as modern day military airshows and Curzon's naval tour

"are in many ways a legitimisation of the nation state, are designed as a celebration of military strength and reproduce imaginaries of the world as backdrop to threat, host to difference and stage to war" (Rech, 2015: 541).

Understood as spectacle, and viewed in the context of the previous section, Curzon's cruise had two aims. Firstly, he sought to reinforce and enhance British prestige among the ruling elites in the Gulf through the spectacular inculcation of "feelings of admiration and wonder" (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 216), and secondly to demonstrate through a showing of military prowess "that the British were the ruling power in the Gulf and would not be supplanted by any other rival" (Radford, 2013a: 889).

In the first instance, Curzon explicitly utilised the tour as an opportunity to cultivate ties with the Arab Rulers at Muscat and Kuwait. Muscat, in present day Oman, was a contested space where France and Britain had historically competed for influence and prestige. In an act of obvious seduction, Curzon made Muscat's Sultan a 'Knight Grand Commander' of the British Empire, and afterwards told Percy Cox that "he took my hand between his and swore eternal fidelity and devotion" (quoted in Radford, 2013a: 893). At the railway's potential terminus in Kuwait, meanwhile, Curzon made every effort to entrench British prestige with the Sheikh. He invited the Sheikh to board the *H.M.S. Hardinge* on November 28th, and after coming ashore Curzon rode on

horseback under the escort of an Arab entourage down to the town. The fanfare that accompanied Curzon was more than the extravagant but not unordinary performances of diplomacy, but a very real recognition of the need to reproduce and cement relations of prestige, favour, and esteem among the Arab Rulers of the Gulf. Upon Curzon's return to India, *The Times* (1903b: 5) newspaper captured the importance of this to the mutually beneficial nature of collaboration:

“The tribes and peoples of the Gulf [...] have received from the mouth of the representative of the Sovereign assurances as to the continuance of the protection which they have so long enjoyed and which has been a guarantee of their peace and security for more than a century.”

Yet in the second sense, the intended recipients of Curzon's spectacle were not only the Arab Rulers of the Gulf, but the other European powers – primarily Germany, but also France and Russia. As MacDonald (2006: 67) has suggested in a different context, the tour can be argued to have existed in a “tension between being known, seen and understood on the one hand and being secretive and protective [...] on the other.” Curzon needed to emphasise the magnitude, aptitude, and valour of British sea power if it was to act as a sufficient deterrent to the other European powers, yet its exact itinerary, operational details, and precise intentions were obscured. Thus Curzon's fleet was excessively large, “by far the most imposing which had ever flown the flag of single power” in the Gulf (Radford, 2013a: 888). It included the *H.M.S. Argonaut*, “a large and impressive 11,000-ton cruiser” which had never been seen in the Gulf (Radford, 2013a: 888). However, a journalist embedded on the *Hardinge* for the duration of the tour dutifully reported its proceedings to *The Times* (1903c: 6) but omitted crucial details, such as a survey of the waters surrounding Kuwait to identify possible ports and waterways potentially suitable for a railway terminus. At the same time, reporters in Berlin carefully relayed to *The Times* (1903a: 7) the reaction of the German press, such as the *Cologne Gazette's* observation that “[such] an imposing display of power will not fail to create the desired impression.”

Curzon's tour can therefore be understood as a Janus-faced spectacle of British sea power, engineered and stage managed to reinforce Britain's prestige among the Arab elites and demonstrate to Germany that any designs they might have on the Persian Gulf would be met with considerable naval force. As the Indian Government

later recognised in 1906, the tour had as its objective “to consolidate our influence [in Kuwait] in anticipation of the day when the port of a trans-continental railway system should be located in this neighbourhood.”⁸⁶ More broadly, of course, it reflected the recognition that the relations of collaboration that were so crucial to the maintenance of informal empire could be unfastened by the progress of the railway. In the prosaic sense that railway technology threatened to reterritorialise the social relations of collaboration towards Germany, Curzon’s tour demonstrates a different angle of the gradually sliding importance of sea power relative to land, and just as importantly the continuing yet increasingly unsatisfactory ability of the British navy to defend British spaces of predominance.

4.3.3. Shadowy strategies

Curzon’s attempt to reproduce relations of prestige and renown with the Sheikh of Kuwait foreshadowed the final way in which Britain attempted to dilute the railway’s threat, which was kept secret from Germany and the BRC. This was Britain’s partly successful attempt to purchase or lease those portions of the Gulf shoreline that were deemed likely candidates for the terminus of the railway. In early 1905, the Foreign Office had dispatched a railway surveyor, Edward Mahon, to “examine the country adjacent to the Khor Abdullah at the head of the Persian Gulf, with a view to reporting on the places which appeared most suitable as termini of the proposed Bagdad Railway.”⁸⁷ Mahon reported there were five suitable termini; Basra, Fao, Um Kasr, Warba Island, and Kuwait itself, at which a port could be built at either El-Kathama or Bunder-es-Shwiekh (see Figure 4.1 for these locations in respect to the wider Persian Gulf, and Figure 4.2 for the maps produced by Mahon). Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each one, Mahon concluded Basra would be the best due to its commercial position – “[t]he Power holding Bussorah as a port, would control the trade of north-east Arabia which is at present almost entirely British.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ ‘Government of India to Morley’ (note 30), ff7.

⁸⁷ ‘Report (with maps) on the country adjacent to the Khor Abdullah, and places suitable as Termini of proposed Bagdad Railway, by E W S Mahon’, July 24th 1905, IOR L/PS/18/B165/ff1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, ff5.

Mahon's conclusions were welcomed dimly, especially in India, which in 1904 had already noted that "the anchorages below Um Kasr and at Warba Island can at any time be converted into an impregnable harbour."⁸⁹ They wrote to Morley that:

"The arrival of a German railway at Bussorah, Um Kasr, Koweit, or other point in this quarter, must tend to the Germanization of Bagdad and Bussorah Vilayets, the diminution of British prestige and commerce in these provinces, and the disturbance of our relations with the Arab chiefs of the Gulf."⁹⁰

Furthermore, Mahon's report led to little consensus over the most suitable spot for the terminus. The former Military Attaché at Constantinople Francis Maunsell believed Mahon's report exaggerated Basra's suitability, while the steamship magnate George Mackenzie agreed with Curzon that Kuwait "was capable of being developed into an excellent harbour."⁹¹ As McMurray (2001) has suggested, this uncertainty was reflected in Germany, where neither the railway's financiers nor the German government had agreed on even a suitable list of possible termini. Regardless, as the Government of India was to put it in August 1906, "the necessity for securing in anticipation an effective control over the future terminal port of the line [had] come prominently under notice."⁹² Thus the Foreign and India Offices sought to use their influence with the Sheikh to ensure a future terminal port, wherever it might end up, could not be developed into a military base by Germany.

As a broad strategy this was first put forward by Percy Cox in November 1905, but it was only seriously considered in the middle of 1907 when, as discussed previously, the construction of the railway had recommenced after the BRC's financial problems.⁹³ In October 1907 the Indian Government and the British Treasury agreed to lease one of the possible ports at Kuwait, Bunder-es-Shweikh, from the Sheikh for a yearly sum. The lease was defined as a rectangular plot of 3750 yards in length, with a British right of pre-emption stretching a further 1000 yards in any direction and the option to also lease El-Kathama in the future if it was deemed necessary. As Cox observed, the lease

⁸⁹ 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Conference on the Bagdad Railway Terminus', October 2nd 1907, TNA 406/32/ff16.

⁹⁰ 'Government of India to Morley' (note 30), ff7-8.

⁹¹ 'Baghdad Railway Committee Evidence', TNA FO 881/9157X/ff16; 'Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee' (note 48), ff16.

⁹² 'Government of India to Morley', August 2nd 1906, TNA FO 881/9055X/ff25.

⁹³ 'Cox to Government of India', February 10th 1907, TNA FO 881/9055X.

provided Britain with “the whole of the valuable rock-fronted strip in the neighbourhood of the position.”⁹⁴ The Sheikh also promised that “neither I nor my heirs after me will grant, sell or lease to a foreign Government [...] any of our land within Koweit boundaries, or around it, without the permission of the precious Imperial English Government.”⁹⁵ In sum, leasing the foreshore of Bunder-es-Shweikh ensured that Kuwait, which by 1907 Grey was describing as “possess[ed of] capabilities [...] superior to those of any other port on the Persian Gulf”, could not be used as the railway’s terminus without Britain’s acquiescence.⁹⁶

It was not just at Kuwait that British officials forwarded this strategy. While negotiations over Bunder-es-Shweikh were ongoing, an Interdepartmental Conference featuring representatives from the India Office, Admiralty, Board of Trade, and Foreign Office met in September 1907 to consider each of the possible termini. Grey asserted that although the Bunder-es-Shweikh negotiations were almost concluded, “it is also of great importance that we should secure prior rights to all suitable sites for a terminus.”⁹⁷ The report of the conference concluded in kind, noting that “we do not consider that the possession of [Bunder-es-Shweikh] would exclude the Germans from access to the Persian Gulf.”⁹⁸ Quoting the India Office’s 1904 ‘impregnable harbour’ comments, the report recommended that Warba and Bubiyan be similarly secured “since both command the approaches to the Khor Abdullah and [Um-Kasr]”.⁹⁹

This, however, was more problematic. Warba, Fao, Bubiyan, and Um Kasr were all points “where Ottoman, Persian, and Kuwaiti authority blurred” (Radford, 2013a: 900). Their jurisdiction was not agreed upon internationally. Consequently, moves were made to encourage the Sheikh to assert claims to Warba, and the Interdepartmental Conference recommended establishing a British posting on the northern end of Bubiyan to frighten the Ottoman troops presently occupying the southern end, and on Warba too if feasible. As O’Conor wrote to Grey in September 1907, “we should let wily Shiekh

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, ff19.

⁹⁵ ‘Translation of Lease by Sheikh Mubarak of Koweit of the Bunder Shweikh Lands and of the Acceptance of that Lease by the Political Agent, Koweit’, October 15th 1907, IOR L/PS/18/B425/ff4.

⁹⁶ ‘Foreign Office to Treasury’, September 16th 1907, TNA FO 881/9055X/ff32.

⁹⁷ ‘Grey to O’Conor’, September 17th 1907, TNA FO 406/32/ff1.

⁹⁸ ‘Report of the Inter-Departmental Conference’ (note 89), ff16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

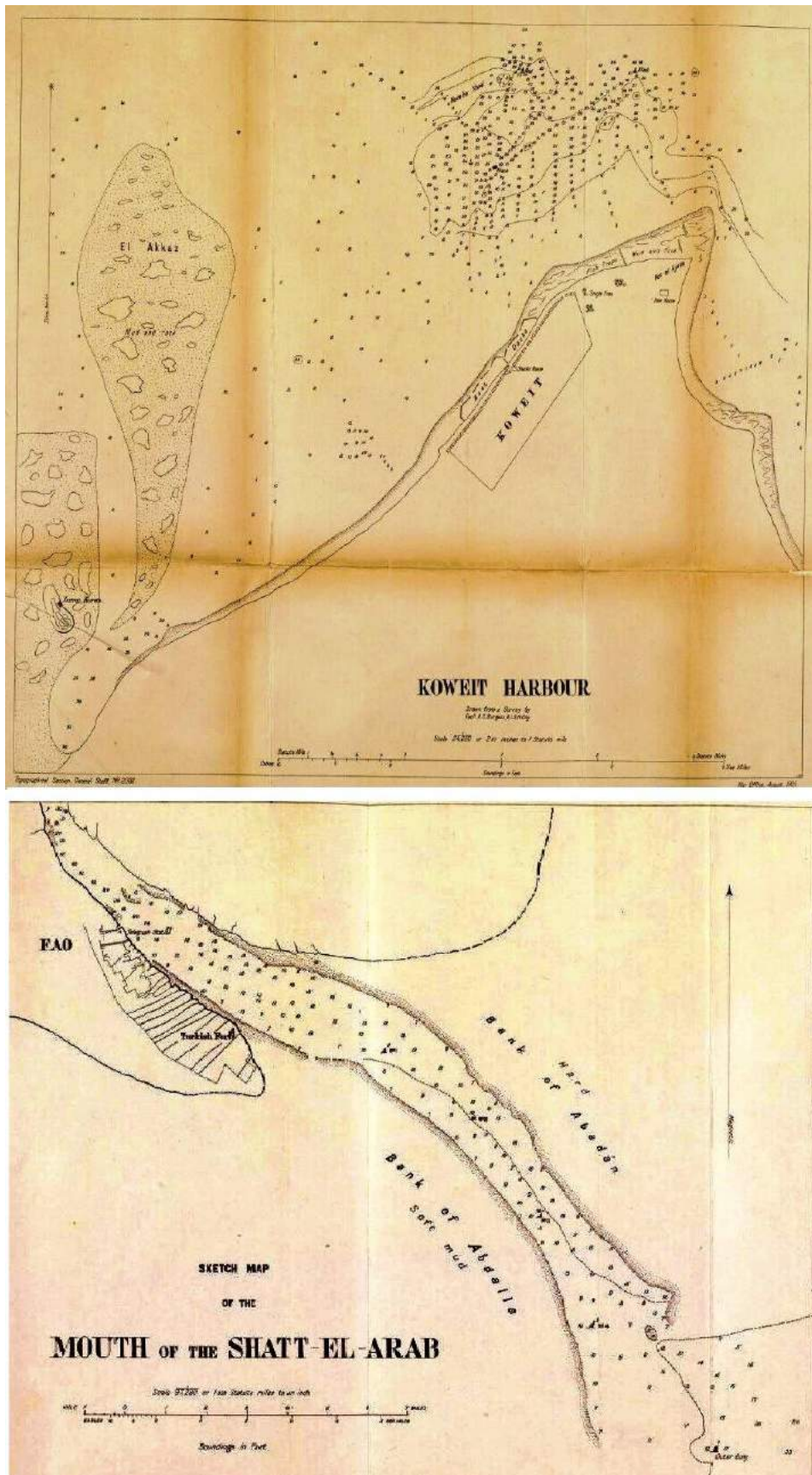


Figure 4.2: Mahon's maps of Kuwait and the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab. Reproduced from IOR L/PS/18/B165.

watch his opportunity to extend his territorial jurisdiction to Um Kasr and other neighbouring districts of most importance from the point of view of the Baghdad Railway.”¹⁰⁰ “With this”, as the Indian Government put it the month before, “we should command all possible railway outlets on the western shore of the head of the Gulf.”¹⁰¹

As with the discussions over internationalisation, this entire process was not only kept secret from Germany, but from parliament as well. In June 1906, over a year after Mahon had delivered his report and as the Indian government were explicitly extolling the ‘necessity for securing in anticipation an effective control over the future terminal port of the line’, John Rees stood up in parliament once again to ask another doomed question about British policy towards the railway. He asked whether Grey “had received any official information that the German Embassy in Constantinople has made overtures to the Porte, for the purchase or lease of an island or station in the Persian Gulf”, but was told bluntly that Grey had “no official information which I can give to the hon. Member on the subject.”

4.4. Conclusions

Ultimately, neither the leasing of the foreshore at Bunder-es-Shweikh nor the spectacular performance of British power in the Gulf by Curzon brought any kind of closure to the threat posed by the Baghdad Railway. By April 1910, after the upheaval of the Young Turk Revolution in July 1908 had stopped the progress of the railway for some months,

“the negotiations for the Bagdad railway had reached the same state of deadlock as the [Anglo-German] naval conversations; and although the Anglo-German negotiations continued intermittently until they were interrupted by the second Moroccan crisis in July 1911, no real progress was made” (Sweet, 1977: 232).

This largely remained the case until the First World War, as the railway’s physical construction ran into unsurmountable problems due to the Ottoman Empire’s troubled finances, the task of tunnelling the Amanus, Taurus, and Nur mountains, and frequent outbreaks of disease on the construction sites (McMurray, 2001). An Anglo-German

¹⁰⁰ O’Conor to Grey, September 23rd 1907, TNA FO 406/32/ff2.

¹⁰¹ Government of India to Morley, August 27th 1907, TNA FO 881/9055X/ff18.

Convention of March 28th 1914, which had been in the making for over a year, decreed in Article 2 that

“[t]he terminus of the Baghdad Railway Company's line shall be at Basra, and the Bagdad Railway Company has renounced all claims to construct a branch line from Basra (Zobeir) to the Persian Gulf, referred to in article 1 of the Bagdad Railway Convention of the 5th March, 1903, and to build a port of railway terminus on the Persian Gulf, under article 23 of said Bagdad Railway Convention.”¹⁰²

By this point, the railway had been completed only to the small outpost of Tel-Helif, some 476km away from Baghdad. But additional securities were still built into the Convention, such as Clause B of Article 3, a declaration by the German Government that they would not initiate or even support any attempt to construct a port on the Persian Gulf without Britain's assent.¹⁰³ Although the ratification and formal signing of the agreement never took place due to the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914, the premise of the agreement was an acceptable outcome for both states which confirmed Britain's rights in both Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.

However, at no point during this period was this solution an inevitable conclusion. What I have shown in this chapter is how Britain considered the construction of the Baghdad Railway to be fundamentally concerned with the projection of German power across space, and if a naval base was constructed on the shores of the Persian Gulf, the ascension of Germany to a state that would hold an unrivalled mobility of power between Europe and India and thence onwards to the Persian Gulf. I have also shown how Britain equated the construction of the Baghdad Railway with the destruction of the informal empire in the Gulf and its replacement by Germany, and the diminution and eventual disappearance of the social bonds of collaboration that were so integral to the (re)production and maintenance of informal empire on a day-to-day basis. The chapter has therefore lain bare in more detail the fears surrounding German encroachment towards spaces of British influence and ascendancy in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the responses that British and Indian officials devised to attempt to mitigate, neutralise, and pre-empt the identified threats.

¹⁰² 'The Anglo-German Convention on the Baghdad Railway', March 28th 1914, IOR L/PS/10/415/ff7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, ff8b.

More broadly, this detailed focus on the machinations and discussions of the British and Indian governments evinces the importance of the doctrine of transcontinentalism for shaping Britain's reaction to the railway. The projection of German power towards vital spaces of British predominance was the crucial factor determining Britain's fears to and responses to the railway. The railway truncated and compressed the relative proximity of the two places deemed to be at the extreme and opposite ends of the railway – the German state at the western and the Persian Gulf at the eastern extreme. Germany, in accordance with the wider structural context of naturalised geopolitics, was deemed to be a state with an innate and instinctive need to expand its political and economic influence in the Ottoman Empire, and as I have shown in the previous chapter this was importantly related to a German imaginary of the Ottoman Empire as a space upon and throughout which a growing German *Weltpolitik* could be manifested. The Persian Gulf, on the other hand, derived its importance from its dual status as a frontier of British India and a communications corridor between Britain and India. The transcontinental Baghdad Railway twisted these two places together in the geopolitical imagination, and when completed would amount to a 'rival naval Power within 1,200 miles of Kurrachee'. This intrinsic feature of transcontinentalism, the projection of power across space between two naturally determined points with specific imagined characteristics, therefore shaped Britain's response to the railway.

At the same time, a qualification is needed to Williams' (2005) assertion that her technogeopolitical project involves the materialisation and territorialisation of the sovereignty of one state over a specific space. As I have noted, the construction of the railway was not equated to the annexation and colonisation of the Ottoman Empire by Germany. And nor might it have been, had the First World War not broken out in July 1914. If it had not, it is likely the Anglo-German Convention would have been ratified and the railway completed before the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. Britain's predominant position in Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, and India would have probably continued, Germany would presumably have begun to reap the commercial and political benefits of administering the line, and there is also every chance that the Ottoman Empire would have been strengthened and stabilised by the

economic, modernising, and military benefits such a railway and its branch lines would have brought. The railway could, therefore, have been a project that contributed to the lubrication of the frictitious system of international relations at a point when it was becoming increasingly heated; a reification of the important role of internationalism and diplomacy in solving European problems at a point when faith in them was crumbling. As it happened, the lights went out at the end of July, and the Baghdad Railway was soon being fingered in Britain as a vital part of a wider German conspiracy to destroy the British Empire and establish a grand Germanic transcontinental empire stretching from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. Transcontinentalism accordingly reached its height, and as the next chapter will examine brought all the historical concerns over the overland route to India to the surface.

Chapter Five – The rails to world power: the Baghdad Railway and the First World War, 1914-1921

5.1. Introduction: the Baghdad Railway in the war

The signing of the formal alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire on August 2nd 1914 marked the culmination of the political and economic relationship that developed between the two Empires in the late nineteenth century. The construction of the railway, unaffected by the now redundant Anglo-German Convention of March 1914, continued, and at the end of 1914 it had for the first time passed the halfway mark: 1104km out of the total 2190km between Konya and Basra were completed. Despite this, the outbreak of war decimated the railway's multinational labour forces, who were conscripted into military service by their respective nations. Meanwhile, German engineers continued to wage their own war against the intractable Taurus and Amanus mountain ranges, a war which they were finally beginning to win; "after years of boring around the clock and using tens of thousands of drill bits", the majority of mountain tunnels were completed by July 1915 (McMurray, 2001: 118). However, as an important logistical and communications pathway the railway immediately became a potential military target, which ensured that no private capital was forthcoming for its continuation. In this environment, Deutsche Bank was forced by the German war government to fund the railway. As McMurray (2001: 117) summarises, "the railway had simply become too strategically important to squabble over its funding. The railway still represented Germany's last remaining trump card, whether or not an attack on the Suez took place in the future."

McMurray (2001) here indicates how, with an attritional stalemate reached on the Western Front by 1915, Germany's war strategists began to think about how the Baghdad Railway could be utilised to put pressure on two of Britain's key positions, the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf. The major fear of the British and Indian governments in the 1900s became a reality as the railway "metamorphosed from being an independent advocate of German commercialism to an involuntary surrogate of German militarism" (McMurray 2001: 125-126). As McMeekin (2011) has masterfully demonstrated, the Ottomans had planned to attack Suez since the outbreak of war, but due to the only

Ottoman munitions factory being in Constantinople and suffering from poor output, weapons for any attack on Suez had to be transported directly from the Central Powers in Germany and Austria-Hungary. Yet when the decision was finally taken to attack Suez in the first week of February 1915, with

“several dozen kilometres on the Baghdad railway near Cilicia still uncompleted, getting guns to Syria was like sending them to the moon. Not for the last time, [German general] Kress lamented the dreaded Taurus and Amanus mountain gaps, which had ensured that his forces would be woefully short of firepower at Suez” (McMeekin, 2011: 167).

Partly as a result, the attack on Suez failed. McMeekin (2011: 178) suggests its failure demonstrated to German generals that “the Baghdad railway gaps had to be forded as soon as possible” if any successful strikes were to take place in the Middle East. However, by January 1916 any hope that the railway would be finished by the end of the year was in tatters. The fluctuating and precarious workforce was inadequate to maintain any consistent progress, and the war disrupted the lines of communication between the multiple construction sites and the BRC’s headquarters in Frankfurt. A second German-Ottoman attack on Suez failed in August 1916, and over the following winter shortages of food, shelter, and clothing combined with harsh weather to produce several outbreaks of disease, decimating the workforce even further. The construction was thus stationary when, on March 11th 1917, an army led by Frederick Stanley Maude marched triumphantly into Baghdad having finally driven out the Ottoman garrison.

As Leo Amery was to put it in 1917,

“As regards warfare on land the factor that has dominated the situation has been railway power. To a large extent the war has been one of railway power versus sea power, and, within its radius, railway power has proved the more effective. The secret of Germany’s striking power is in her great railway system, and it is through her control of the great railway arteries that she dominates and keeps together the Alliance of the Central Powers.”¹⁰⁴

The implication here is that, had Germany’s ‘great railway system’ included Baghdad in its ‘radius’, Maude’s recapture of Baghdad might not have been possible. This aspect of power projection and its relation to the First World War has been thoroughly documented by McMeekin (2011: 342), who speculates that had the Baghdad Railway

¹⁰⁴ Leo S. Amery, ‘Notes on Possible Terms of Peace’, April 11th 1917, TNA CAB 24/10/GT 448, 7.

been completed by July 1914, “a decisive blow might well have been struck at the Suez Canal, severing the lifeline of the British Empire [...] which would surely have seen Germany emerge as the leading power in the Near East.” McMeekin’s (2011) argument is a tantalising one because it emphasises how the projection of German military power that was so feared during the 1900s could have become a pivotal reality in the German-Ottoman offenses on Suez. In this chapter, however, I want to focus on how in the First World War the Baghdad Railway came to be feared in Britain as the backbone of a great transcontinental German empire spanning the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. This in turn prompted a different response. No longer was it sufficient to secure Britain’s position at the Persian Gulf, simply because German absorption of the Ottoman Empire would leave the Gulf, and India, completely vulnerable in a future war. What was explicitly called ‘Berlin-Baghdad’ for the first time during the war had to be stopped both *now*, and from ever being realised in the future.

To do this the chapter is split into two main sections. The first details the rise of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism after the capture of Baghdad, and the second considers proposals for a series of buffer states in South Eastern Europe to prevent Berlin-Baghdad from ever being resuscitated in the future. In the first section I focus my analysis in two directions. The first concerns three documents, authored in 1917 by Lord Curzon, Leo Amery, and the British war government’s Intelligence Bureau, which discuss the Baghdad Railway and the doctrine of Berlin-Baghdad from a British perspective and in relation to Germany’s supposed war aims. These three documents are part of a vast cross-section of papers concerning British strategizing in the First World War, and are certainly not the only ones that could have been chosen. They were selected however for two reasons. Firstly and most relevantly, they all explicitly discuss Berlin-Baghdad, and relate it to wider questions of German war aims and the history of the Baghdad Railway. They are thus manifestations of transcontinentalism in the British government in the war. Secondly, their dating is important because they were all written after the recapture of Baghdad. Their context is therefore one in which Britain could increasingly contemplate possible terms of peace, which in turn required an appreciation of

Germany's war aims.¹⁰⁵ The second direction of the sub-section turns to a more popular geopolitical analysis of two maps and a cartoon that, in different ways, illustrate Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism. These examples are relevant to my argument because they enable us to

“examine not only the role and place of [railway] technologies within the high-level practical geopolitical planning and strategising, as undertaken by governments, but also to consider the popular geopolitical processes associated with ways of seeing and envisioning geopolitical space created by and through transport technologies” (Williams, 2010: 82).

As I will discuss these examples are not unproblematic. But taken alongside the analysed documents they demonstrate how Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism emerged in Britain as a doctrine of German territorial domination from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, and how this was equated to the ascension of Germany to the status of global hegemonic power.

In the second main section of the chapter I turn to how Britain planned to prevent Germany from establishing this feared transcontinental dominion across the Ottoman Empire. In the environment of the war the problem was now far greater than any internationalisation of the Baghdad Railway could alleviate. Instead, the solutions proposed involved the reconstruction of the entire political geography of South Eastern Europe, and the creation of new, territorially large and racially homogeneous nation-states to act as barriers to any future German expansion towards Constantinople – the ‘buffer state’ principle. I trace these arguments by following one particularly important individual, the British historian and journalist Robert William (R.W.) Seton-Watson. Seton-Watson believed that Germany's central war aim had, from the beginning, been to conquer the Ottoman Empire, and he proposed the creation of a South Slav state as a barrier to Germany's future expansion in his writings throughout the war, in his involvement with the so-called New Europe school of post-war planning, and during his time at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. My argument is not that Seton-Watson singlehandedly orchestrated the creation of a South Slav state from behind the scenes, but that he was important in shaping and promoting the wider logic of preventing

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 1; Intelligence Bureau, ‘Memorandum on German War Aims’, July 15th 1917, TNA CAB 24/23/GT 1792, 1.

'Berlin-Baghdad' from ever coming close to happening again. I end the chapter by discussing the three 'Berlin-Baghdad' chapters as a whole and relating them back to the overall argument in the thesis.

5.2. Berlin-Baghdad and the rails to world power

5.2.1. A solid block of German influence

The starting point of Amery, Curzon, and the Intelligence Bureau's memos were all the British seizure of Baghdad, which allowed consideration of the prospective post-war peace settlement for the first time. In turn, this necessitated a retrospective appreciation of both Britain's and Germany's war aims. Especially for Amery, these war aims were based on the two states' divergent historical courses. Amery suggested that Britain's policy had always been reliant on "the use of British sea power at the enemy's overseas sources of strength, or points of vantage and menace, and [incorporating] them into the British system".¹⁰⁶ However, Germany's historical course was not the same. "'Power' has been the Prussian watchword", Amery argued, "Prussia, as a rule, has deliberately provoked wars in order to increase her power and enlarge her frontiers."¹⁰⁷ Amery traced this historical course back to before German unification, when East Prussia, Brandenburg, and other territories in western Germany had "indefensible natural frontier[s]".¹⁰⁸ Amery's argument was that because of the naturalised geopolitical law that small states could not survive on the world political stage, these territories had to unify under the Prussian flag or face eradication. As he put it, "[t]here is little scope in the Europe of the future for completely independent and detached small nations. A small nation, unless extremely favourably situated geographically, has to maintain fortified frontiers out of all proportion to its resources."¹⁰⁹

Amery's argument was repeated in the Intelligence Bureau's report, which noted that "[t]he day of small States is over. Every [t] small State, even if nominally independent,

¹⁰⁶ Amery, 'Notes' (note 104), 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

is destined to be drawn within the orbit of one or other of the World-States.”¹¹⁰ There were thus two entwined parts to these arguments; the general law of state competition and the law as it applied to Germany. The general law was one of naturalised geopolitics, with those states comprised of a propitious combination of territory and peoples able to survive while those that were not would inevitably struggle. Yet this was combined with a historical narrative of an expanding Germany as destiny. For Amery the unification of Germany was a “natural outcome of the conditions” of international relations, and had created an “inbred” need for future territorial expansion.¹¹¹ As he put it, unification was the beginning of “the conception of Prussia as the controlling and organising state over a confederacy of smaller states whose military and economic systems should be incorporated into hers.”¹¹² In other words, Amery narrated a world defined by the laws of naturalised geopolitics, but a particular and unique principle of teleological territorial expansion as Germany’s destiny. This not only shaped Germany’s war aims, but was also the primary cause of the war itself.

As Neilson (2014: 396) puts it, within this narrative the First World War is rendered “another attempt by one of the great powers, this time by the newly created *Kaiserreich*, to obtain control of Europe.” This is an argument that has recently been reformulated by Simms (2013), who proposes that since the fall of Constantinople in 1453 the European political system has been dominated by the question of whether or not Germany could unite the predominantly German speaking races in Central Europe and thus become the indisputable European hegemon. The important difference is that Simms bases his reading on labyrinthine primary and secondary sources, whereas the narratives of Amery and the Intelligence Bureau operate with the geopolitical logic of naturalised state expansion. For Amery, this logic continued in two ways after the unification of Germany. “The first was the development of the policy of organisation and control outside Germany, first to Austria and to the Balkans and Turkey. This was the project whose watchword was ‘Berlin to Baghdad’”.¹¹³ The second continuation of Germany’s expansionist logic was for Amery a plan to wrest both naval supremacy and

¹¹⁰ Intelligence Bureau, ‘Memorandum’ (note 105), 7.

¹¹¹ Amery, ‘Notes’ (note 104), 4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

overseas empire from Britain, “which in German eyes appeared to show signs of incipient decay and disintegration.”¹¹⁴

It is enormously significant that the watchword of Berlin-Baghdad – what the Intelligence Bureau simply defined as “control of the Ottoman Empire”¹¹⁵ – constituted a considerable rewriting of the history of the Baghdad Railway negotiations in the 1900s. As I emphasised in the last chapter, ‘control’ of the Ottoman Empire was not the concern of the British or Indian Governments in their discussions and responses to the Baghdad Railway. Heffernan (1996: 527) has noted that there were several books published in Britain before and during the war that demonstrated anxiety at Germany’s *Drang nach Osten*, but what he does not emphasise is that these publications were severely weighted in favour of the war years themselves (as Section 5.4. will additionally show). Two of the most prominent books published before the war were by Harrison (1904) and Sarolea (1907), who both worried about the Baghdad Railway as a possible prelude to German colonisation and annexation of the Ottoman Empire. Yet there is no evidence that their books had any impact in the policy making circles of the British and Indian Governments. Anti-German animosity in Britain during the 1900s emanated from a number of other sources; most commonly the press, but also from sections of the army, navy, Foreign Office, and Liberal party (Kennedy, 1980). But throughout the Baghdad Railway negotiations there was no consideration, even in the increasingly worried Indian Government, of the Ottoman Empire suffering territorial annexation by Germany and absorption into any German empire. This was a rewriting of the history of the negotiations that only took place in the environment of war itself.

This is an important point to emphasise because some authors, writing both in the immediate aftermath of 1914 and more recently, have sought to finger the railway as a cause of the war. The origins and causes of the First World War constitute an extraordinary large debate which I cannot do justice to here. However, two books authored during and after the First World War placed the blame for the war squarely on the tracks of the Baghdad Railway, and largely for the same reason (Jastrow Jr., 1917; Earle, 1924). They narrated Germany as an evil, perpetually expanding, Empire and the

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Intelligence Bureau, ‘Memorandum’ (note 105), 2.

railway as a “preeminent tool of German imperialism designed to enslave the Ottomans, rob them of their sovereignty, and exploit their labor and resources” (McMurray, 2001: 5). In particular, Earle (1924) argued that the Baghdad Railway negotiations necessarily brought Britain, France, and Russia closer together as they collectively negotiated their response to a railway with which they were all concerned. For Earle (1924) this directly led to the formalisation of the Triple Entente which in turn produced the confrontational relations between the Entente and the Central Powers which led to war. This perspective has recently been restated by Somerwil-Ayrton (2007).¹¹⁶ In opposition to these authors are those who have considered the Baghdad Railway within wider studies of the causes of the First World War. Clark (2012) and Otte (2014: 100) both reject any connection of the railway to the war’s causation, with the latter stating that the

“Anglo-German Convention of June 1914 [...] testified to the reciprocal wish of the two governments ‘to prevent all causes of misunderstandings between Germany and Great Britain’, and so seemed to prepare the ground for future cooperation.”

I argue it is best to consider the arguments of Jastrow Jr., Earle, and even Somerwil-Ayrton not as causal explanations of the First World War, but as evidence of the seductive power of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism as a doctrine of naturalised German state expansion between Berlin and the Persian Gulf. They project this doctrine into the messy realm of causation, their reading of ‘Berlin-Baghdad’ as it manifested in the war itself shaping their perspective on the construction of the Baghdad Railway *before* the war began. In doing so, they fall into a trap of causality, what Neilson (2014) has aptly called the teleology of 1914. As he writes,

“This means at least two things: that [their arguments] are inevitably German-centred and that the other possibilities of the era are ignored. In short, they conflate the study of the relations between and among the great powers with the study of the origins of the war” (Neilson, 2014: 411-412).

¹¹⁶ The arguments of these authors are therefore distinct from that famously advanced by A.J.P. Taylor (1969). Taylor suggested that none of the major adversaries in Europe wanted war but were forced into it because of their mobilisation plans and strategies, prominent among which were railway timetabling schedules. Taylor (1969) thus attempted to explain, with reference to logistics and mobilisation, why the Great Powers could not actively prevent a dispute between Serbia and Austria-Hungary spiralling into a European war. The key difference is that while Taylor focused on the mobilisation strategies in the months immediately before war, for Jastrow Jr., Earle, and Somerwil-Ayrton the construction of the Baghdad Railway made war inevitable because it solidified the alliance between Britain, France, and Russia against Germany. For an appraisal of Taylor’s thesis, see Stevenson (1999).

Neilson (2014: 412) argues that only scholars who examine “European power politics before 1914 without seeing them as prefiguring an inevitable war and without being concerned primarily with Germany” can escape from this teleology and reach a balanced understanding of the causes of war. Perhaps Jastrow Jr. (1917) and Earle (1924) can be excused from this critique, given their proximity to the war and lack of access to primary documents, but Somerwil-Ayrton (2007) cannot. She reads the First World War into the diplomatic history of the Baghdad Railway to fashion a story that could lead only to war, when – as I noted at the end of the last chapter – if the Anglo-German Convention had been ratified in March 1914 things could have turned out entirely differently.

It is a similar teleology that assuaged the arguments of Amery, Curzon, and the Intelligence Bureau. The naturalised tendency of the German state to expand had naturally brought it into conflict with the other prominent organisms occupying European space, and war was therefore inevitable even it had not broken out in July 1914. “Indeed,” as Curzon believed, “the only party that entered the war with a policy of territorial aggrandisement at the forefront of its programme was Germany herself.”¹¹⁷ As noted previously, this logic of territorial aggrandisement supposedly manifested itself in two ways in Germany’s war aims. The first was the projects of Mitteleuropa and Berlin-Baghdad, which according to Amery and the Intelligence Bureau “belong[ed] together as two parts of a single scheme.”¹¹⁸ Mitteleuropa was quite simply defined as a “Central European *bloc* of Allied Powers, politically, militarily, and economically associated, under German leadership”¹¹⁹ (see Meyer, 1955). Berlin-Baghdad was Mitteleuropa “*plus* the Ottoman Empire, shut off from the outside world”.¹²⁰ What was gestured towards by the watchword of Berlin-Baghdad was therefore the absorption of the Ottoman Empire. Under German leadership, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire would be tied together, “and the stretch of one organised Power from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf [would be] made a reality.”¹²¹ This, in other words, was when the fear of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism in its most

¹¹⁷ Lord Curzon, ‘German and Turkish Territories Captured in the War’, December 5th 1917, TNA CAB 24/4/G 182, 1.

¹¹⁸ Intelligence Bureau, ‘Memorandum’ (note 105), 7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 6.

holistic form finally emerged inside the deepest echelons of the British War Cabinet. The construction of the Baghdad Railway and the close entwining of Germany and the Ottoman Empire were equated to the annexation and territorialisation of German power across the entirety of Ottoman space in accordance with the naturalised geopolitical laws of state expansion, resulting in “a definite tract of continental territory within which Germany commands”.¹²²

The term ‘Berlin-Baghdad’ (sometimes rendered as ‘Berlin-to-Baghdad’) first emerged in the British press one month after the outbreak of war (e.g. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1915; *Sunday Mirror*, 1915) and had become a common occurrence across British newspapers and magazines by the end of 1916 (e.g. Dillon, 1916a: 545; 1916b: 721). From the beginning it referred to the territorialisation of German power across the Ottoman Empire, with an early August 1915 usage by the *Daily Mirror* (1915: 9) arguing that had Britain not got involved in the war, ‘Berlin-Baghdad’ would have already become an established reality. Its subsequent proliferation was likely a direct result of its rising use in Germany. As Meyer (1955: 108, 142, 214) has noted, in parallel debates in Germany about what Germany’s war aims should be strains of Berlin-Baghdad advocacy emerged, especially in pamphlets published immediately after the outbreak of war and through to its cessation. This was in direct contrast to pre-war discussions of the Baghdad Railway; as Meyer (1955: 72) wrote, “there is no evidence prior to 1914 that Berlin was seeking to integrate Turkey with the Reich via some mid-European or political scheme.” However, some of the pamphlets Meyer discusses were translated into English and circulated among the British government’s strategists and officials.

One example is from June 1916, in an enclosure sent by Britain’s Director of Military Intelligence George Macdonogh to the Under Secretary of State for India John Fickson-Poynder. The enclosure is a precis of a book translated as *The Development of the Bagdad Railway Policy*, authored by the German writer C.A. Schaefer in 1916. Not only did this precis explicitly use the term Berlin-Baghdad, it also summarised Schaefer’s book as arguing for a turn away from Russia as Germany’s primary enemy. Make peace with Russia, Schaefer is quoted as arguing, and encourage Russia to attack India, “thus

¹²² *Ibid*, 9.

freeing the Antwerp-Basra line, and assuring Germany her position as the leader of Europe.” Germany would thus not be deprived of the railway, “her last land-route to the outside world.”¹²³ A second example is the Intelligence Bureau’s memo on German war aims, which discussed in great detail the “chief exponent of *Berlin-to-Bagdad*” Paul Rohrbach, editor of a periodical entitled *Deutsche Politik* and who, on June 5th 1916, formed the ‘German National Committee for the Preparation of an Honourable Peace’ as a group to argue for the necessity of Germany retaining both Mitteleuropa and Berlin-Baghdad in any peace settlement (on Rohrbach, see Rash, 2011). Although I do not want to press this claim too far, it would appear that the rise of the fear of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism in Britain was motivated by the translation and reception of authors such as Schaefer and Rohrbach who it seems did argue for the annexation of the Ottoman Empire by Germany.

This was also reflected by the widespread and common usage of the term in the British press from the end of 1916. For example, when it reported that one of the tunnels through the Taurus Mountains had finally been completed, *The Times* (1916) lamented that “the long-cherished German dream of [...] ultimate control over the whole of the Middle East” was one step nearer. *The Times* also ran a series of articles under the name *Through German Eyes*, which selectively relayed the pages of German newspapers to its British audience. It frequently mentioned Berlin-Baghdad (e.g. *The Times*, 1917b; *The Times* 1918), and in one notable article after the war celebrated the fact that “[t]he great German scheme, crystallized in the phrase Berlin-Baghdad, by which a gate was to be opened for German colonization and German industry, has gone for ever” (*The Times*, 1919). A final example comes from the letters section of *The Times*, a place where popular geopolitical narratives can be both supported and contested by the public (see Pande et al, 2012). This letter, by a W.J.H. (*The Times*, 1917a), discussed a supposedly “remarkable” 1907 book published in Germany entitled *Berlin-Baghdad*. Gesturing towards the burgeoning era of air power (see Omissi, 1990), the German author of this book apparently argued that “Germany’s future ‘lies in Asia and in the air.’” Should Germany conquer the Ottoman Empire, it would give her control of the Gobi Desert, which could subsequently “be developed into the most formidable

¹²³ Macdonogh to Fickson-Poynder, December 9th 1916, IOR L/PS/11/117/p326/1917.

air-base in the world.” From this air-base a thousand zeppelins could threaten India and Russia with an unrivalled mobility of power (as Mackinder would have it), enabling Germany “to ‘hold the principle overland route to the East’ and to ‘establish her transcontinental empire.’” “There are the facts”, summarised W.J.H. matter-of-factly. That *The Times* considered this a knowledgeable and publishable letter on Germany’s transcontinental ambitions rather than an example of a wider imperial and Orientalist paranoia speaks to how rooted the fear of Germany’s Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism was in Britain at the time.

However, the reason these fears were stressed so strongly was because the absorption of the Ottoman Empire by Germany was not considered an end in itself, but rather a way of achieving the second war aim Amery spoke of – the destruction of Britain’s naval supremacy and colonial empire. This is where the railway became important, and where I argue we see Kapp’s notion of a railway system as the circulatory system of a naturalised transcontinental empire emerge. Much ink was spilled on the resources that would fall into Germany’s orbit should the Ottoman Empire be annexed. Amery noted how the Ottoman Empire

“can be developed so as to produce all the foodstuffs, all the petrol, and almost all the minerals and other raw materials which the populations of the Central Powers can require. Cotton can be grown extensively in Asia Minor, and there are many oil yielding plants which can be grown in Asia Minor and the Balkans to make good, in time of war, the absence of palm oil and copra.”¹²⁴

The only resource the Ottoman Empire could not provide, as Amery and the Intelligence Bureau both commented on, was rubber. Furthermore, they also commented on the impregnability of a German empire stretching from Berlin to Baghdad. Amery underlined how Poland and Romania under German control would constitute the shortest land frontier in Europe, and how control of the Balkans would eliminate Germany’s southern frontier altogether while dominating the Aegean, Adriatic, and Black Sea coasts.

Moreover,

“[t]he control of Turkey increases this sea frontage and involves no difficult land frontier problem whether the whole of the Turkish Empire in Asia is recovered or whether the

¹²⁴ Amery, ‘Notes’ (note 104), 10.

frontier is drawn back to Asia Minor. The whole area controlled is thus eminently defensible."¹²⁵

It is difficult not to read these comments in parallel to Mackinder's writings on the heartland. To Amery, Curzon, and the Intelligence Bureau, Berlin-Baghdad was nothing less than a space with all of the natural attributes necessary for the domination of the world, just as for Mackinder the heartland was a space with all of the natural attributes necessary for the domination of the world. It was impregnable and laden with natural resources. All that was required was the unity of Berlin-Baghdad under modern railway conditions, what Amery called the "Railway Empire scheme".¹²⁶ This, in turn, would lead to the formation of so unassailable a land power that it would gradually and inevitably overwhelm Britain's naval power and overseas colonies. Amery noted only that Berlin-Baghdad presented "immense advantages for the future".¹²⁷ Meanwhile, the Intelligence Bureau argued that if Berlin-Baghdad was accomplished,

"Germany will have got the necessary basis for future expansion later on. The solid stretch of power from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf is not to be regarded as something finally adequate, but as a secure foundation. No blockade will be formidable; no assault of outside enemies will imperil Germany any more; no one will be able to hinder her while she organises herself for the next advance."¹²⁸

Amery feared that the completion of the Baghdad Railway and the accomplishment of Berlin-Baghdad would in due course enable the recapture of the German colonies in Africa and, through the long-mooted German port on the Persian Gulf, the eventual draining of all British sea power from one of India's primary frontiers. The Intelligence Bureau also considered that Germany would be able to chase Britain out of Egypt – as Mackinder ([1919] 1942: 187) put it, "a great military power in possession of the Heartland and Arabia could take easy possession of the cross-ways of the world at Suez." Amery argued this would result in a "great Railway Empire [...] continuous from Hamburg to Lake Nyasa."¹²⁹ The last word here however goes to Curzon, who insisted that

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²⁸ Intelligence Bureau, 'Memorandum' (note 105), 9.

¹²⁹ Amery, 'Notes' (note 104), 11.

“if the central block remains unconquered by the Allies at the end of the war, then, to allow it to thrust out its military and economic tentacles towards the Persian Gulf on the one hand, and the Suez Canal on the other, and to permit Germany to create another central block in Africa, which would for ever be pushing northwards to establish connection with the European block, would be to hand over the future of the Eastern hemisphere to the Germans, and give her the precise spoils at which she has aimed.”¹³⁰

5.2.2. Astride this vast space



Figure 5.1: Berlin-Baghdad or 'Mittel Europa'. Reproduced from TNA MPI 1/389.

In the previous sub-section I demonstrated how Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism was manifested in three important documents that were at the heart of Britain's war planning after the recapture of Baghdad in 1917. I illustrated how Berlin-Baghdad came to signify the territorialisation of German power across the Ottoman Empire and its eventual absorption into the naturally expanding German state

¹³⁰ Curzon, 'German and Turkish Territories' (note 117), 2.

organism. The Baghdad Railway was to be the backbone of the circulatory system enabling the mobility of German power and resources across the Berlin-Baghdad Empire, something that would afford Germany the basis from which to attack and eventually destroy the British Empire. In this sub-section, I want to show how this was manifested in and through popular geopolitical means, exemplified by two maps and one cartoon from the First World War.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism in visual form. Figure 5.1 shows the intersection of the German schemes of Mitteleuropa and Berlin-Baghdad, its powerful red hue depicting the German Empire as it would be should Germany's supposed war aims be accomplished. Figure 5.2 shows Curzon's 'Eastern hemisphere' under the control of Germany, with the tract of Berlin-Baghdad territory connected to an African empire conjoined by a conquered Egypt. However, care must be taken with an analysis of these maps, primarily because I have been unable to find much information about their production, usage, circulation, or reception. This is important not merely because it means there is little context behind the images, but because geographical scholarship has stressed the limits of analysing maps representationally without also paying attention to their production and circulation. We are now adept at critiquing the notion that maps are accurate and objective reflections of different spaces and realities, instead investigating how they work to produce the very spaces and realities they purport to impartially display (Harley, 1989). However, analysing maps in this way has in turn been critiqued in two ways. Firstly, Edney (1997) has critiqued the focus on examining the representational aspects of maps because it eschews the contested networks of collaboration, exploration, editing, and production that determine the final content of the map itself. For instance, drawing on Edney's work, Prior (2012) has shown how the maps of Africa produced by the geographer Harry Johnston, who was cited in Chapter One, in the late nineteenth century were shaped by complex and contingent networks of editorial decisions, intended audiences, uncertainties over accuracy, authorial identity, and the professional standards of British cartography. Edney and Prior's point is that a focus on representation ignores *production*.



Figure 5.2: What Germany Wants. Reproduced from TNA MFQ 1/379.

Secondly, scholars have critiqued the lack of attention to how maps are consumed by and affect the subjectivities of those who encounter them. In this critique, the map is conceptualised as something that takes its place within variegated networks of audience reception and consumption to shape both geopolitical space and the

geopolitical subject (Pickles, 2004; Wood and Fels, 2008; Steinberg and Kristoffersen, 2017). As Steinberg and Kristoffersen (2017: 6) put it, “[a]s networked relations emerge between the map, the reader and the cartographer, new spaces and subjectivities are produced as individuals use the map to locate themselves in space.” In other words, this line of critique stresses how a focus on representation ignores questions of *agency* and *audience consumption*. These two critiques are important because they draw attention to the limitations in analysing maps representationally without also giving careful attention to “the range of processes of production and circulation that enable [them] to be seen” (Woodward et al, 2009: 221). My point is that it has been problematic to do this with Figures 5.1 and 5.2 because I have been unable to trace much information on how they were produced or consumed. However, despite these difficulties the maps are still worthy of consideration because of the dynamics of the map itself, how they freeze a complex array of territorial and imperial fears into an authoritative and consequently indubitable truth of Germany’s war aims. Following Monmonier (1996: 88), not only was Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism “on paper, it’s on a map, so it must be real.”

Furthermore, we can infer possible clues as to the production and reception of these maps. Figure 5.1 was archived in CAB 21/77, which contains the minutes of the Committee of the Imperial War Cabinet, a British war planning committee that was chaired by Lord Curzon. It comprised figures such as the Foreign Affairs parliamentary under-secretary Lord Robert Cecil, Jan Smuts, eventual Prime Minister of the unified South Africa, and Joseph Chamberlain’s son Austin, Secretary of State for India at the time.¹³¹ Although it is impossible to reconstruct the committee’s processes of “recognizing, interpreting, translating, [and] communicating” the map (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 335), its mere *presence* indicates that it had a role in the discussions of the committee. It can consequently be inferred that the map took its place within the wider deliberations of the committee which produced knowledge of Berlin-Baghdad as a definable, recognisable, and meaning-laden feature of Germany’s war aims. The map thus helped to (re)produce Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism rather than merely reflecting it. Of course, it is problematic to take these inferences too far because it is entirely possible that as the archive has been reassembled and transformed over the

¹³¹ ‘Imperial War Cabinet: Report of Committee on Terms of Peace’, April 24th 1917’, TNA CAB 21/77.

years the map has changed positions. However, on balance it is possible to consider it an object that took its place in a wider textual network helping to produce and solidify the reality of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism at the centre of Britain's post-war planning.

Figure 5.2, on the other hand, is more ambiguous. While evidently a propaganda map, no documents referencing it or seemingly related to it in any way are to be found in the papers it was archived with. However, a clue as to its production can be inferred from some of its text, 'enlarged and reproduced from the map accompanying *The Pangerman Plot Unmasked* by Andre Chéradame'. Chéradame was an exemplary French anti-German writer who published a number of books arguing for the intrinsically expansionist and imperialist intentions of Germany's foreign policy. Only some of these books were translated into English (e.g. Chéradame 1916, 1918, 1923). The 1916 translation referenced by the map is the best indication of Chéradame's conflation of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism with Pan-Germanism and Germany's ambitions to crush the British and French nations in a prelude to world domination. 'From Hamburg to the Persian Gulf' was for Chéradame (1916: 6) not only "the chief formula of Pan-German domination", but also the singular cause of the war itself. Moreover, Chéradame had been consistent in this view for some years. In 1906 *The Times* translated an article of his published in a French newspaper in which he had argued that the construction of the railway "would be tantamount to the seizure by Germany of the Ottoman Empire" (The Times, 1906b). There is not the scope here to fully analyse Chéradame's fascinating writing on Berlin-Baghdad, but the emphasis he placed on it along with its connection to the Baghdad Railway is best evinced by the following:

"[B]eyond the Bosphorus, Germany would reach Asia-Minor, that immense quarry of wealth. The huge German railroad projected to run from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf without a break, would link Berlin to the Far East. Then would Emperor William's Brobdingnagian dream be fulfilled. Germany would rule the world by her might and by her commercial wealth" (Chéradame, 1916: 82-83).

Interestingly, none of the maps in Chéradame's book correspond exactly to Figure 5.2. Instead, Figure 5.2 appears to have been stitched together from four different maps presented by Chéradame (1916: 79, 95, 101, 185; see Figure 5.3). Furthermore, some important features have been added to the reproduction. First and

foremost, Chéradame's book was published in black and white. Although a narrow focus on the importance of colour in maps has been critiqued by scholars such as Herb (1997: 3), it is significant because the orange hue has evidently been added to emphasise the territorial extent of the German Empire in relation to the lighter yellow hue of the Triple Entente powers. Monmonier's (1996: 171) description of progressive shading is insightful here. He observes that "the addition of progressively redder, more intense tints makes a forceful propaganda map even stronger." The chosen hues are in other words noteworthy because the German Empire is progressively redder, making the map more impactful than Chéradame's original through its relative proximity to the colour red and its cultural associations of danger, threat, and warning (Greenfield, 2005; Monmonier, 1996: 170).

Secondly, the 'Hamburg-Constantinople-Bagdad Railway' has been given a darker hue than the 'other railways' depicted on the map. It has also been given its own place on the legend. This, I argue, is not accidental, but intended to emphasise the centrality of the Baghdad Railway as the "backbone" (Chéradame, 1916: 107) of the scheme, which as I have suggested is saturated with connotations of the railway as the biological and geopolitical upholstery of the predicted German empire. It is also significant that the 'other railways' depicted on the map, including the Cape-Cairo Railway, the French Syrian railways, and the TransCaspian Railway (proceeding through 'Wheat, Oil, Coal, Iron', as the map states) are included in their lighter, subsidiary hue. I argue this corresponds to their status as the veins and arteries of a German circulatory system, enabling the life-giving mobility of German power and resources across the space of the empire. Put differently, here is Kapp's naturalised geopolitical and technological ontology of a functioning biological state; the railways, centred on the backbone, are the very augmentation, transformation, and realisation of the German Empire itself, rather than its mere extension. In the remainder of this section I want to turn to a second popular geopolitical manifestation of Berlin-Baghdad in the form of a cartoon. Cartoons, as Greenberg (2002: 194) has noted, "are normally understood by readers to be satirical depictions of real events, [but] they nevertheless draw from an available stock of public knowledge and reproduce a common sense view of the world". Geopolitically, Dodds

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now the Press of the Allies has published articles on Austria-Hungary revealing a total misconception of the facts, and they have thus unconsciously encouraged the Pangerman project as regards the Hapsburg Monarchy.

In the Allied Press, also, the expression: "Drawn Game" is currently employed to mean that Germany might be considered as vanquished if she evacuates the now occupied territories in the East and in the West; but nobody has yet pointed



THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE DODGE CALLED THE "DRAWN GAME."

out with the necessary precision that the so-called "Drawn Game" would not be a draw at all, since it would allow Germany to effect enormous acquisitions, which would make her much more powerful than before the war.

And yet the Allies ought not to be again the dupes of a German stratagem; which, if it succeeded,

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eyes with a prospect of the restoration of a great empire, even greater than in days of old.

The Panislamic movement, minutely and long prepared during peace by Germany, was started by her as soon as hostilities began. On the advice of Berlin, the Sultan proclaimed, as early as the end of 1914, the Jihad or Holy War. No doubt the Moslem insurrection has not become general, but the Islamic agitation has nevertheless yielded local results, which will be better understood after the war, and which have hampered the Allies in



ASIATIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE SCHEME "FROM HAMBURG TO THE PERSIAN GULF."

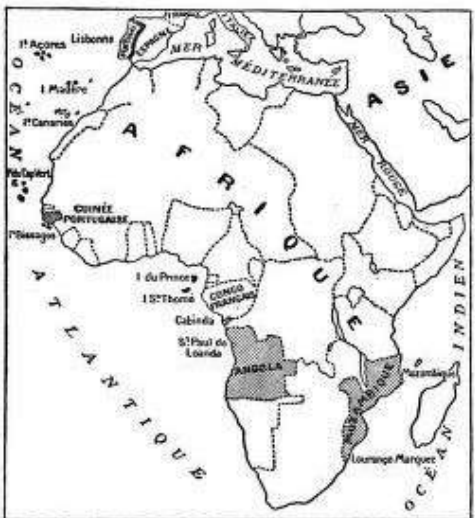
India, in Egypt, in Libya and in the French possessions of North Africa. Particularly in April, 1915, an insurrection of British Indian troops at Singapore very nearly succeeded. About the same time in Siam, numerous German officers, with the assistance of Indian and Burmese revolutionaries, had begun to muster a small army of 16,000 men, who, after being armed, were to attack British Burma. This Islamic agitation was threatening to assume serious proportions, when the success of the Russians in Armenia and in Persia fortunately checked it by striking a heavy blow at the prestige of the Sultan, the Commander of the Faithful.

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relics of the once magnificent colonial empire of Portugal; they are accordingly an essential base for Portuguese commerce, and especially for a future commercial revival of Portugal, which the government of Lisbon is naturally anxious to promote.



WORLDWIDE CONSEQUENCES OF THE "HAMBURG TO THE PERSIAN GULF" SCHEME, AS PROVIDED FOR BY THE PLAN OF 1911.



PORTUGAL AND COLONIAL PANGERMANISM.

At the very commencement of hostilities in Europe, the Germans, discounting their victory in Europe, invaded Angola, and it is only lately that the Portuguese soldiers succeeded in driving them

Figure 5.3: Four maps from Andre Chéradame's *Pangerman Plot Unmasked* (1916), upon which Figure 5.2 was based.

(2007b) has suggested cartoons are worthy of analysis because they entwine image, text, and symbol into a compressed visual frame, allowing complicated geopolitical events and processes to be represented in an initially obvious message but with layers of nuance and cultural reference. As with the two maps I have presented, we must be careful not to take a historical analysis of cartoons too far because it eschews how they were produced and consumed. However, unlike the two elite maps, it shows the “practical geopolitical reasoning” of Berlin-Baghdad as it was manifested “in informal, everyday discourse” (McFarlane and Hay, 2003: 213).

W.K. Haseldon’s *Big and Little Willies’ Bagdad Trick* (see Figure 5.4) was published in the *Daily Mirror* on March 13th 1917, and its context is therefore the British recapture of Baghdad two days previously. It also has an important reference point which, momentarily, necessitates a diversion into Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism. A more famous cartoon by Edward Linley Sambourne was published on December 10th 1892 in the satirical magazine *Punch* depicting Cecil Rhodes, his body conflated with the idea of the expanding British Empire, stretching across the latitudinal length of Africa, his left foot in Cairo and his right at the Cape (see Figure 5.5). In his hands he holds a telegraph wire, which cleverly doubles as a rein demonstrating his masculinised taming, domestication, and mastery of the African continent. The title of the famous cartoon, *The Rhodes Colossus*, is mirrored in the *Daily Mirror* cartoon, which replaces the ‘C’ with the ‘K’ of the Kaiser in the midst of his giant stride act. The fact that Haselden’s cartoon copies but changes the terms of the *Punch* cartoon is significant, because it represents the feature shared by both transcontinentalisms: the projection and territorialisation of state power, embodied in the figure of a conquering, male agent of Empire, across the space deemed to be the two naturally opposed extreme points of a continent. Of course, the Cape-Cairo cartoon, satirical as it is, depicts Rhodes’ transcontinental feat as both a personal and imperial triumph, a miraculous achievement against the odds gestured towards by the doffing of Rhodes’ hat. In the Berlin-Baghdad case, the terms are again reversed; the Kaiser’s stretch between Berlin-Baghdad is shown as perilously close to being realised yet tempered at the last minute by the patience, cunning, and perfect timing of the British lion.

BIG AND LITTLE WILLIES' BAGDAD TRICK.



It falls, as most of their great Eastern acts have done. Bagdad is now under the Union Jack.—(By W. K. Haselden.)

Figure 5.4: W.K. Haselden's Big and Little Willies' Bagdad Trick. Reproduced from *Daily Mirror*, March 13th 1917.



THE RHODES COLOSSUS
SHEDDING FROM CAPE TOWN TO CAIRO.

Figure 5.5: The Rhodes Colossus. Reproduced from *Punch*, December 10th 1892. Linley Sambourne took inspiration for the cartoon from the Colossus of Rhodes, a statue erected by the Ancient Greeks on the island of Rhodes. For more on the history and origins of the cartoon and the trope it inspired, see Scully (2012).

There are further noteworthy features in Haseldon's cartoon. Most palpably is the figure of the Kaiser himself, stretching between Berlin and Baghdad, the geographical and cultural otherness of the latter emphasised by the Islamic symbols sketched upon its front. The figure of the Kaiser, like the figure of Rhodes, entwines the personal and imperial, which is especially significant because it implicitly signifies the intermingling of the biological, geopolitical, technological, and the state. In other words, in my reading the Kaiser's stride act symbolises the wider trope of the biological German state extending itself according to the naturalised laws of territorial expansion, the oneness of the Kaiser's *body* emphasising the Baghdad Railway as that which is *generative*, not a mere *extension*, of the German Empire. Kapp's (1877) disavowal of the ontological distinction between biology, technology, and state is consequently pushed to the forefront of Haseldon's cartoon. A second central feature of the cartoon is its location, which is a satirical amalgamation of gladiatorial arena, theatrical circus, and world stage. This is an important trope because it reproduces multiple senses of the modern and naturalised geopolitical imagination: the Darwinian 'struggle for survival' inside the gladiatorial arena representing the stakes of the war between Britain and Germany in a closed political space, and the notion of an ontological separation of viewer and viewed epitomised in the inherent *spectatorship* of the audience. The brilliance of Haseldon's cartoon is therefore how it embodies the geopolitical, biological, and technological tropes of Berlin-Baghdad, while simultaneously, through the connotations of a theatrical circus, gesturing towards the absurdity of Berlin-Baghdad itself.

5.3. The peace settlement and preventing Berlin-Baghdad

In the previous section I demonstrated how, in the eyes of the British wartime government, German Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism was narrated as a doctrine of establishing a German Empire 'from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf'. Further, it revealed how this was connected to the by-now deeply skewed perceived balance between small and large states, the naturalised geopolitical trope of a German state with biological needs for territorial expansion, and the ultimate ascension of Germany to the status of global hegemonic power. As in the previous chapter, defining Germany's Berlin-Baghdad aims in this way demanded a particular response to prevent its

realisation and the concomitant destruction of the British Empire. In this final section I argue that the solution to the problem of Berlin-Baghdad was a very particular one. Put simply, it was to support the creation of a South Slav state in the Balkans to act as an obstacle to the projection of German power towards the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Gulf in the future. The section traces this solution not through the papers of the British Government, but primarily through the work of R.W. Seton-Watson, a British historian and journalist who articulated the solution forcefully and who played a small but not insignificant role in its eventual adoption. The solution was additionally geopolitical, but in more ways than the naturalised geopolitics of the previous section might suggest.

Mackinder is a useful starting point here because of his discussions, in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, of the necessity of a series of Eastern buffer states to prevent the possible melding of Russia and Germany at any point in the future. This was his answer to a question he had previously posed in 1917: “how shall we solve the problem on the eastern side?” (Mackinder, 1917: 10). Mackinder considered that “whatever the result of this war, the German race as an active agency in the centre of Europe will remain” (Mackinder, 1917: 10). As a consequence, he insisted that “there must be a complete territorial buffer between Germany and Russia [because] a German East Prussia would be a stepping-stone for German penetration into Russia” (Mackinder, [1919] 1942: 113-114). As Sloan (1999: 28) has noted, this was not just a proposal for the creation of Poland to separate Russia and Germany, but also for a whole series of buffers running from north to south across Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, consisting of newly anointed states White Russia, Ukraine, South Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Daghestan. Thus Poland would keep Germany out of Russia, and the other buffer states would restrict the mobility of Russian power in the Heartland. This later policy failed to gain wider support, something which “Mackinder maintained would increase the chances of Russia becoming a great heartland power” (Sloan, 1999: 31). The suggestion of buffer states was a logical progression of Mackinder’s geopolitical thinking, a conscious proposal to ensure that the Heartland could not be dominated by either land power of Russia or Germany.

Yet Mackinder also turned his attention to the route of the Baghdad Railway and, implicitly, to Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism. He proposed that alongside the creation of Poland there must also be a South Slav state composed of the “three tribes of Slovenes, Croatians, and Serbs” (Mackinder, 1919: 114). Together with Poland and Czechoslovakia, the South Slav state would be part of “a broad wedge of independence, extending from the Adriatic and Black Seas to the Baltic [...] together effectively balanc[ing] the Germans of Prussia and Austria” (Mackinder, 1919: 116-117). Or, as he put it in 1917,

“Europe can have peace if we can erect on the Danube and southward to the Aegean Sea sufficient native strength to dam the ambitions, mainly of the Germans, and to a minor extent of the Magyars. [...] What we can get [...] is a barrier formed partly by Serbia, a great Serbia, and partly by Roumania, a great Roumania, which will extend across from the Black Sea to the Adriatic” (Mackinder, 1917: 10).

Put differently, Mackinder envisaged a South Slav state, what was to become Yugoslavia under the rule of the House of Karađorđević in 1918 before being formally recognised by the Allied Powers in July 1922. Yugoslavia and Romania were a part of his system of buffer states effectively severing Germany’s future connection with Constantinople; as he recognised, “one of the trunk railways of the world will run down the Save Valley to Belgrade, and then through the Morava and Maritza ‘Corridor’ to Constantinople” (Mackinder, [1919] 1942: 114). To my knowledge, here Mackinder came as close as he ever did to discussing the Baghdad Railway, and seemed to recognise, by arguing for a barrier separating Germany from the Near East, the need to prevent any future opportunity for Germany to absorb the Ottoman’s rapidly disintegrating Empire.

Moreover, Mackinder was not the only intellectual who lent his assistance to the war effort to suggest this. One example is his fellow geographer Thomas Holdich, President of the Royal Geographical Society between 1917 and 1919. Holdich (1917: 169) observed in 1917 that “[a]bsolute dominance in the Balkan States and in Turkey is the basis of [Germany’s position], and the open line to Baghdad is the inevitable sequel which appears at present to be well within her grasp.” His solution to the problem was the same as Mackinder’s, an independent union of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs which would be “a new power of the first class in mid-Europe to face any Germanic combination that might arise” (Holdich, 1918: 9). A second opinion was provided by the

celebrated archaeologist and Balkan specialist Arthur Evans, most noted for his work on the Minoan civilisation. Speaking to the Royal Geographical Society in January 1916, he argued that the formation of a

“united South Slavonic State has a geographical importance which in an even more special degree affects the British Empire [...] it would place in friendly guardianship what can be shown to be a most important chain of connexion in the future overland route to the East” (Evans, 1916: 255).

Holdich, Evans, and a number of other intellectuals (e.g. Vosnjak, 1918; Woods, 1918: 325-327) thus espoused the doctrine of transcontinentalism as one of the chief war aims of Germany and suggested the same preventative solution, the creation of a buffer state occupying the space between Berlin and Constantinople. This was also the opinion of Curzon and Amery, the latter of whom explicitly supported the South Slav state and who wrote more generally of the necessity of “creating a series of effective barriers to the project of German domination or permeation over Central Europe by a rearrangement of the political map on ethnographic lines.”¹³² In one sense, their arguments were genuinely based on the principle of self-determination. As authors such as Lampe (1996) and Prpa-Jovanović (2000) have documented, British support for the prospect of a South Slav state was shaped by the complex independence movements in Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia. This was best represented by the Yugoslav Committee, which was based in London for the duration of the war and lobbied the Allies to support the creation of a South Slav state (see Evans, 2008: 18-19). The notion that racially homogeneous groups should determine their own political future and that such a future could only be properly realised within the parameters of the modern nation-state was important to the arguments of all the aforementioned authors.

Yet their arguments were simultaneously shaped by what Todorova (1997) has termed the discourse of Balkanism, which at its simplest imagined ‘the Balkans’ as a “contagious disease, an infectious sore in the underbelly of Europe” (Goldsworthy, 1998: xi) due to its supposedly ahistorical and ethnically determined violent characteristics. However, Balkanism is also a discourse constructing the Balkans as the geographically determined ‘route to the East’, the supposedly natural path across which one had to pass to travel from Europe to the Ottoman Empire, and thence onwards towards the

¹³² Amery, ‘Notes’ (note 104), 18.

Persian Gulf. Historically, this discourse manifested as “a vast human shield area protecting Europe from Turkish incursion” (Udovički, 2000: 16), but during the First World War it transformed into a binary depiction of the Balkans as either a bridge over which German power would be projected towards the Ottoman Empire, or contrarily as a barrier preventing the projection of German power across that space (Scott, 2012). Simply put, the naturalisation of the Balkans as the route or bridge to the East conjured an imperative to, as Bjelić (2002) puts it, ‘blow up the bridge’. Or, to go back to Evans (1916), to place in friendly guardianship the corridor which was an essential part of Germany’s feared Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism.

The Balkans could therefore only ever be a bridge or a barrier between Europe and ‘the East’, and for Britain it was essential that it be a barrier to negate the transcontinental threat of Berlin-Baghdad. The barrier could only be comprised of strong, independent, ethnically unified states. And while Mackinder, Holdich, and Evans did not to my knowledge explicitly refer to the South Slav state as a check on German Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism (although some variant of this is certainly what they meant), one particularly important author did, the British historian Robert William (R.W.) Seton-Watson. Seton-Watson was one of the foremost advocates of South-Slav unity throughout the 1900s, forming close relationships with the Vienna correspondent of *The Times* Henry Wickham Steed and the Czech philosopher and first president of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Masaryk. Widely travelled, he published a number of books and articles on religious and ethnic issues in Austria-Hungary, the Balkans, and Germany, and like many others turned in the First World War to suggesting ways to alter the political geography of Europe to prevent German aggression (see Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, 1981; Péter, 2004, for good analyses of his pre-war views). Yet he is most relevant here because he explicitly linked the question of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism to the necessity of a South Slav state and, more than Mackinder *et al*, played a small but not insignificant role in the state’s eventual creation. Seton-Watson did not singlehandedly create Yugoslavia, but through following his writings and activities in the later years of the war and at the Paris Peace Conference we can see how Berlin-Baghdad was connected to the creation of a South Slav state more widely.



Figure 5.6: R.W. Seton-Watson's Three Stage Pan-German Plan. Reproduced from Seton-Watson (1916b : 175).

Seton-Watson was unambiguous about Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism: “[a] great State running from Hamburg to Basra, from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. That is the plan. It is clear as daylight” (Seton-Watson, 1916a: 262). He argued that Berlin-Baghdad was but the second part of a three-part plan for the German domination of the

entire world (see Figure 5.6). The first part, he suggested, was Mitteleuropa; “a great Central European state-organism of 130 to 150 million inhabitants, as an economic and military Europe” (Seton-Watson, 1916c: 386). This was accompanied by Berlin-Baghdad, which he defined as “the inclusion in the political and economic spheres of influence of the new Zollverein of all the territory lying between the Hungarian frontier and the Persian Gulf” (Seton-Watson, 1916c: 386). The final part of the German plan was the destruction of Britain’s sea power, the last genuine obstacle barring the path of Germany’s *Weltmacht*. Seton-Watson regarded the first two parts of this plan complete. “The Germans have already realised,” he wrote in 1919, referencing how the political geography of Europe stood at war’s end, “for all practical purposes, their programme of Berlin-Baghdad, as a glance at the war map will at once reveal” (Seton-Watson, 1919: 145). Thus, as he put it back in 1916, “the extension of German land power [between Berlin and Baghdad] will be the prelude to a fresh attempt to challenge our security on the sea” (Seton-Watson, 1916c: 386). Put more plainly, Seton-Watson blended together all of the elements present in the previous section. Mitteleuropa and Berlin-Baghdad were already achieved, and would act as the foundation for the final assault on British sea power and colonies.

Moreover, Seton-Watson anchored this narrative, like Amery and those before him, in a teleological narrative of naturalised German expansion, rewriting the diplomatic history of the Baghdad Railway negotiations in the 1900s to portray the railway as the “policy of ‘peaceful penetration’ by which Germany prepared the way for what her leaders [are] describing as ‘the German war’” (Seton-Watson, 1916c: 394). As early as May 1905 he had argued, with reference to Germany, that “expansion is inevitable for a country which is already overpopulated, and is growing at an alarming rate every year” (quoted in Péter, 2004: 659). Thus, while in 1905 he was talking primarily about German economic and financial investment in Brazil and the Ottoman Empire, his war writings about Berlin-Baghdad continued to be underpinned by the notion that German expansion was, and always had been, inevitable. In these writings Seton-Watson selectively traced both the doctrines of Mitteleuropa and Berlin-Baghdad through a plethora of German writings, from Helmuth von Moltke’s writings on Palestine, Friedrich List’s proposing of the German colonisation of Asia Minor, and a

pamphlet entitled *Berlin-Baghdad: New Aims of Mid-European Policy* authored by Albert Ritter. The ideas of Berlin-Baghdad he then traced forward to Paul Rohrbach, arguing that he and others “have done much to popularise the idea that Mesopotamia and Asia Minor are destined to become ‘an economic substitute for the lack of a German Canada or Australia’” (Seton-Watson, 1916c: 394). The *Drang nach Osten* was consequently recast as the overwhelming cause of the First World War by Seton-Watson, a cause driven by the innate need for the German state to expand and the projection of this innate need onto the Ottoman Empire since (at latest) the 1840s. For him, “the root cause of the war was Germany’s imperialist ambition in south-east Europe and beyond” (Evans, 2008: 90-91).

This was accordingly the principle reason why Germany had attacked Serbia – “Serbia is the route to the East, the last land obstacle to the German *Drang nach Osten*, to the programme of ‘Berlin to Baghdad’” (Seton-Watson, 1916b: 49; see also Seton-Watson, 1916d: 11). He repeatedly chastised the British government for not recognising this basic truth, particularly Edward Grey, whom Seton-Watson regarded with a special antipathy; “[he] did not realise what has been obvious for the past nine months, even to the man in the street, that Serbia alone blocked the German advance to Constantinople and Bagdad” (Seton-Watson, 1919: 110-11). In Seton-Watson’s narrative, therefore, Serbia was attacked simply because of the requirement to destroy the barrier it posed to the doctrine of Berlin-Baghdad before the war, and subsequently transform Balkan space into a bridge for the swift projection of German power and the insertion of Germany’s circulatory tentacles into the Ottoman Empire. Seton-Watson was insistent that not supporting the creation of a South Slav state was tantamount to “accepting the Pan-German design of ‘Berlin-Baghdad’ as inevitable” (Seton-Watson, 1916b: 117). Or, as he later put it in 1919,

“[t]he Allies are therefore confronted with the alternative of breaking the chains which Germany has riveted right across Europe and Asia, or of resigning themselves to a German hegemony on the Continent such as could only end in the assertion of German world-power” (Seton-Watson, 1919: 145).

“The only alternative”, Seton-Watson proposed, “is to have a counter-plan, which can only be the creation of a barrier across Prussia’s path towards the domination of the Near and Middle East” (Seton-Watson, 1916a: 262). He went as far as suggesting

that “Serbia is one of the pivots of our Continental policy, and the erection of a strong and unified Southern Slav state upon the Eastern Adriatic [...] is one of the most vital of British interests in this war” (Seton-Watson, 1916b: 117-118). Like Mackinder, Seton-Watson (1916c: 395) also considered the creation of independent states in Poland and Czechoslovakia imperative to the wider plan of checking Germany in the future. He wanted Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the future Yugoslavia to become three great Slavonic states blocking Germany from eastward intrusion, bolstered by the independent states of Hungary, Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria, which would be refashioned and governed as modern Western democracies (see Figure 5.7). Together, the creation of these states would contribute to the fashioning of a peaceful, prosperous ‘New Europe’ (see Figure 5.8).

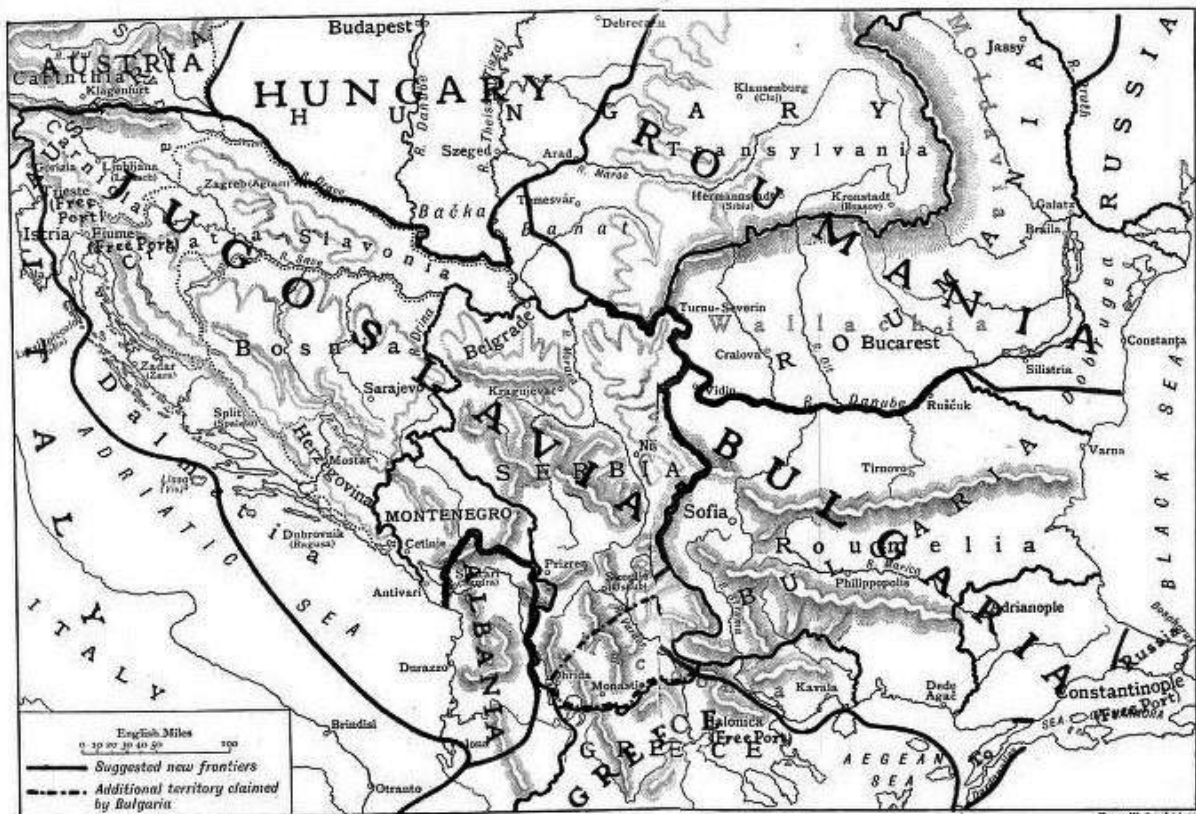


Figure 5.7: R.W. Seton-Watson’s buffer states of Jugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Roumania. Reproduced from Seton-Watson (1919: 213).

Although Seton-Watson’s ideas overlapped with those of Mackinder, Evans, and Holdich to some degree, he is particularly important here because of the influence of his ideas beyond the learned societies at which they all articulated their ideas. In contrast to

these men, Seton-Watson was near the centre of the peace planning of the British government from 1917 onwards. As “one of the very few British academics who knew central and south-eastern Europe at first hand” (Calcott, 1984: 982), in April 1917 he was recruited by the Department of Information’s newly created Intelligence Bureau (Goldstein, 1991: 59), which produced the ‘Memorandum on German War Aims’ discussed in the previous section. Months earlier in October 1916 he had formed a magazine with Steed entitled *The New Europe* to support his own and similar ideas. A highly influential group of experts gradually assembled around this magazine and became known as the ‘New Europe’ group, and Goldstein (1991: 4) has observed that the “views of this group had a great impact on British policy, particularly after they came to dominate the PID [Political Intelligence Department], the hub of the peace-planning machinery.”¹³³ Although he himself refused an offer to join the PID, preferring to remain at the Intelligence Bureau, the PID remained in “frequent and unfettered communication with Seton-Watson”, consulting him on ethnic and territorial matters in Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Goldstein, 1991: 62, see also 131-133 for memos Seton-Watson produced at the bequest of his colleagues in the PID). Thus whereas Mackinder’s plan for buffer states failed to gain support (Sloan, 1999: 31), Seton-Watson was close to the centre of the machinations of British peace-planning. Throughout the war, he “proposed solutions, interfered in the decision-making process of the British government, and use[d] the force of his journalistic abilities to press his case” (Miller, 1988: 67).

Furthermore, a second reason why Seton-Watson’s influence is important is because of his prominent role at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which was the first step to the formal recognition (in 1922) of the South Slav state he had argued for so strongly (Evans, 2008). Although his official role was small,

“his indirect influence was considerable [...] During the peace-making process *The New Europe* continued its work, and he himself influenced some of those British, American

¹³³ The Political Intelligence Department was created in 1917 after the British government became aware that delegates to any future peace conference would require more data on Europe’s political geography than was presently available (see Goldstein, 1991: 59-62, for more detail). The PID was created as a department “to co-ordinate and synthesize the material being produced” in other intelligence and government departments during the war for this purpose (Goldstein, 1991: 2).

and French persons directly involved in the peace conference” (Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, 1981: 434).

For instance, one member of Britain’s peace delegation, Harold Nicolson, later wrote that he and one of his colleagues “never moved a yard without previous consultation with experts of the authority of Dr. Seton Watson”, and subsequently declared that he was “imbued” with the ideas Seton-Watson was advocating in *The New Europe* magazine (quoted in Goldstein, 1998: 150-151). As Goldstein (1991) has pointed out, part of the reason Seton-Watson and *The New Europe*’s ideas gained currency was because, in their emphasis on self-determination in Eastern Europe, they dovetailed closely with the American president Woodrow Wilson’s principles and those of some other Gladstonian liberals. Goldstein, however, draws no connection between Seton-Watson’s role at the Peace Conference and his writings on Berlin-Baghdad and Germany’s war aims. As a consequence, he also does not recognise that one of Wilson’s principle aims at the conference was to prevent the future possibility of Germany

“throw[ing] a broad belt of German military power and political control across the very centre of Europe and beyond the Mediterranean into the heart of Asia [...] to stand aside, President Wilson warned, would be to risk a map in which the [German] block stretched all the way from Hamburg to Baghdad – the bulk of German power inserted into the heart of the world” (Simms, 2013: 310).

The principle of self-determination common to Wilson, Seton-Watson, and the wider New Europe group thus overlapped with a desire to create buffer states, and a South Slav state specifically, to prevent any future realisation of Berlin-Baghdad. In his account of Isaiah Bowman’s role at the Paris Peace Conference, Smith (2003: 177) writes that “Paris combatants were obliged, however much they sought territory, to fight their disputes in terms of competing national and ethnic justice.” In South Eastern Europe, however, this was much less a frustrating contradiction than a happy coincidence. The creation of a South Slav state served Allied interests, by establishing a barrier state in between Germany and Constantinople, *and* national and ethnic justice.

Michail (2011: 175) has proposed that Seton-Watson was “the most influential of all experts at Versailles.” While this is certainly an exaggeration, in this section I have demonstrated how his impact was not insignificant, and how through tracing his ideas, connections, and writings we can simultaneously trace how preventing Berlin-Baghdad

motivated, at least in part, Allied support for the creation of a South Slav state. As it relates to transcontinentalism, the logic was remarkably simple. The twisted naturalised geopolitical reasoning of the time imagined small states as weak and divided, thus enabling the smooth, unencumbered projection of German power across space and ultimately foreshadowing the absorption of these states in the growing German Empire. On the other hand, strong, territorially large, and racially unified buffer states, composed of “people possessed of sufficient political acumen to construct, maintain, and defend [them]” (Murphy, 1997: 9), could prevent the future projection of German power across space. It was for this reason that a unified South Slav state was deemed so crucial by Seton-Watson and his associates. For Seton-Watson, it was the only way to counter the reality “that small states cannot subsist and must inevitably become the prey of the great” (Seton-Watson, 1916b: 389). In the South Slav case, these arguments were given additional force by the swirling South Slav independence movements and Balkanist perceptions of the Balkans as a natural thoroughfare to the Near East. Therefore the necessity of restraining Germany, the principle of self-determination, and the “hard facts of geography” (Calcott, 1984: 892) rendering the Balkans the naturally determined route to the East blended together in a perfect match.

The Paris Peace Conference in 1919 was thus arguably the end of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism, even as it was one of the beginnings of the path to the Second World War. Out of the war arose Karl Haushofer and the German school of *Geopolitik*, and Dodds (2007a: 33) has noted that Haushofer was a wholehearted supporter of the construction of the Baghdad Railway. Yet as he correctly suggests, “the 1919 Peace Conference terminated German ambitions to pursue such a scheme” (Dodds, 2007a: 33). There seems to be no evidence that Adolf Hitler was ever attracted to the idea of establishing German hegemony across the Middle East (Meyer, 1955), which was by 1939 an even more exclusive preserve of Britain and France. In 1941 the Baghdad Railway was finally completed, yet the conclusion of a century old idea was barely noted at the time, a fact which reflects the horror into which Europe had by then descended. As McMurray (2001: 138) glumly but aptly summarises, at the end of the First World War “all the railway could offer its German benefactors was a slow ride home.”



Figure 5.8. Seton-Watson's 'New Europe'. Reproduced from Seton-Watson (1919: 183).

5.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that with the outbreak of the First World War, British concern over the construction of the Baghdad Railway metamorphosed into a much more deadly fear of the establishment of a transcontinental German empire stretching from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. This empire would comprise Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Balkans, and the entirety of the Ottoman Empire, creating a fortress empire impenetrable from the exterior and containing almost all of the natural

and mineral resources necessary for its flourishing and dominance. The Baghdad Railway was imagined in these worried accounts as the backbone of the German empire's circulatory system, the central route that would act as the political, economic, and military skeleton of the new, enormous German organism. In Britain the possibility of the realisation of Berlin-Baghdad was accompanied by an inescapable and inevitable conclusion, the destruction of British sea power and by extension the British Empire. Britain's faltering grip on global hegemony would be eradicated and usurped by Germany, which would use the transcontinental empire, with the Baghdad Railway as its spine, to project its power across the entire world. The solution to this, as I have argued through a detailed examination of the works of R.W. Seton-Watson, was the creation of a barrier to Germany's path in the Balkans. This was based upon the logic that only strong, ethnically unified and territorially large nation-states could prevent the future projection of German power across space. Because the Balkans was the supposedly naturally determined route to the East, the creation of the South Slav state was considered a necessary obstacle that it was imperative to place across the path of any future German expansion. This solution was implemented at the Paris Peace Conference and after, although it is a grim irony – and testament to the flawed logic of Social Darwinism – that the young supposedly robust Yugoslav state was destroyed within months of the outbreak of the Second World War.

The analysis that I have provided in this and the previous two chapters has further implications for my argument in this thesis. Firstly, in showing how transcontinentalism gestated in the nineteenth century before erupting in the First World War, I have deepened the argument of Goren (2011) that Britain's policy towards the Ottoman Empire, Mesopotamia, and the Persian Gulf needs to be reconsidered in terms of the route to India, the shifting balances between land and sea power, and the wider political and economic dynamics of relative ascent and decline among the Great Powers. With the benefit of hindsight the arguments of Chesney and Andrew have a certain prescience, in that they evinced in their writings the air of inevitability accompanying the rise of railway technology in the impact it would have on the political, economic, and military affairs of the British Empire. More narrowly, this chapter has shown that British support for the creation of a South Slav state (and buffer states more

generally) must be reconceptualised to account for the prominence of naturalised geopolitics and the doctrine of Berlin-Baghdad. Reading Britain's concern with the overland route to India in terms of transcontinentalism has thus produced new and original insights into Britain's relationships with Germany, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire with regards to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Secondly, these three Baghdad Railway focused chapters have shown the different emphases that were placed on the aspects of transcontinentalism identified in Chapter Two. Again, the notion of the railway as a tool of power projection is crucial here, and has been shown to have conditioned much of Britain's responses to the Baghdad Railway as it was constructed towards spaces imagined and maintained by the Empire as quintessentially British. The chapters have demonstrated the tight entwinement of railway technology and the naturalised geopolitical imagination, and how at its peak the Baghdad Railway was to serve as the backbone of a great German empire, imagined as the focal point of a circulatory system ensuring the impregnability and enduring dominance of the German state organism. Had the First World War been won by Germany, as McMeekin (2011) has speculated, it is highly likely that Berlin-Baghdad would have become a reality. The consequences of this could surely not have been far away from that envisaged by the individuals discussed in this chapter.

However, the part of transcontinentalism that I have outlined in Part One which was not as prominent in the story of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism was civilisational geopolitics. Although authors such as Chenery (1869) invoked civilisation as an explanation for the construction of the Euphrates Valley Railway, once it became clear that such a railway would not be constructed by Britain the civilisational underpinnings of such a project largely evaporated from British discourse. The reason for this was simply that civilisation was first and foremost a discourse of colonial legitimacy, validating infrastructural technologies such as railways as universal moral goods. It was therefore muted in Britain precisely because it would have justified a project that would have derived political and economic gain for Germany. It is entirely possible, and indeed likely, that German authors such as Rohrbach and Schaefer invoked civilisation and civilisational geopolitics as a justification for the construction of the Baghdad Railway. This will have to be left for future research. In the next part of the

thesis, I turn to the Cape-Cairo Railway, tracing its history through a structural biography of Cecil Rhodes. Through the history of the Cape-Cairo Railway, the important entwining of civilisational and naturalised geopolitics for the doctrine of transcontinentalism will become apparent.

Part Three – Cape-Cairo

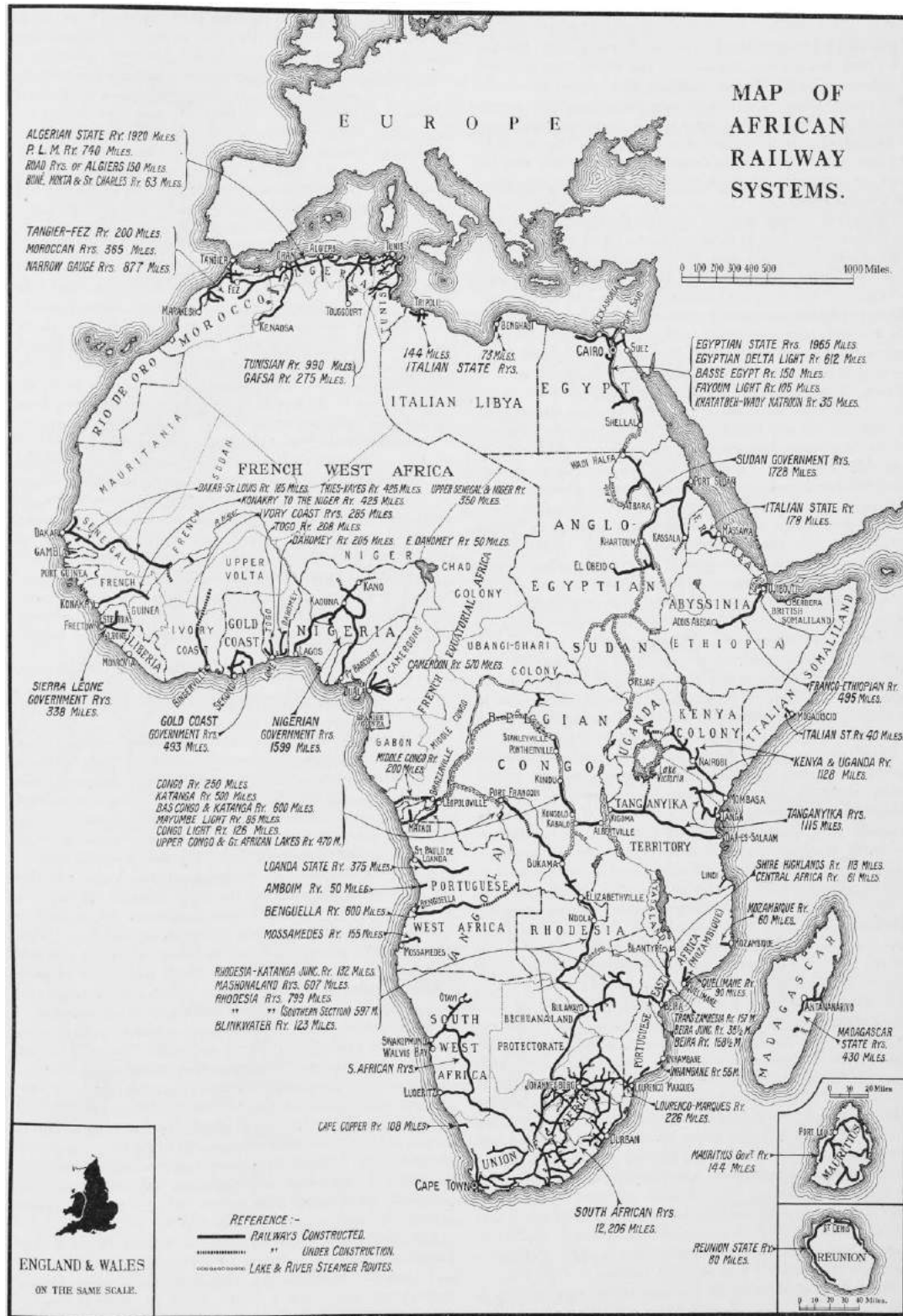


Figure 6.1: Map of the African railway system, as it stood in 1927, and depicting the railway routes still under construction at that point. The map shows the network of railways in South Africa stretching northwards from Cape Town into the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and to the town of Bulawayo. The railway never reached the southern tip of Lake Tanganyika or passed through German East Africa as Rhodes intended, but instead proceeded to Bukama via the Victoria Falls and Elizabethville in 1917. As the map shows, the railway was never constructed directly north from that point to potentially connect to the Sudanese railway system, but instead continued further into the Belgian Congo. See Figure 7.2 for a map showing only the Cape-Cairo Railway route. Reproduced from The Railway Gazette and Railway News (1927: 5).

Chapter Six – Cecil Rhodes’ geopolitical vision and Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism, 1870-1895

6.1. Introduction

This chapter begins my analysis of Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism by introducing the geopolitics of Cecil John Rhodes. Following the method of structural biography, in this chapter and the following one I switch from the broader analysis that characterised the previous Berlin-Baghdad chapters to a tighter, more in-depth analysis of Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism as it took shape in Rhodes’ life and work. I argue that his efforts to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway stemmed from the mixture of civilisational and naturalised geopolitical and technological discourses that I elucidated in Chapter Two and is thus characteristic of the doctrine of transcontinentalism. After the two chapters specifically on Rhodes, Chapter Eight then traces the path of transcontinentalism through the numerous writings, activities, and lectures of his various associates after his death until around 1930. My argument is that Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism shared the same intrinsic features of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism whilst simultaneously deviating from it in important ways. Most prominently, Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism fully blended together the civilisational and naturalised modes of technogeopolitical reasoning to construct Africa as an uncivilised space requiring the insertion of a circulatory railway system to civilise it and bring it back to conscious, breathing life. In contrast to Berlin-Baghdad, civilisational imperatives did not disappear but instead intensified as the First World War approached. Just as importantly, Rhodes’ desire to project and territorialise state power ‘from the Cape to Cairo’ emerged before any idea of constructing a transcontinental railway between the Cape Colony and Egypt. This reflected specific differences between Berlin-Baghdad and Cape-Cairo, which I will explore in more detail in this chapter.

To accomplish this, this chapter begins by analysing what I will be terming Cecil Rhodes’ geopolitical vision. My argument is that Rhodes’ articulated a vision for the territorial expansion of the British Empire which emerged from the social, spatial, and intellectual contexts of Oxford and his affinity with the history of the Roman Empire, the classic texts of Ancient Greece and Rome, and his identification with ‘Great Men’ of

history such as Caesar and Napoleon. Out of these contexts Rhodes' ideas emerged in his 1877 Confession of Faith, which portrayed the continent of Africa as an uncivilised inert space and the British Empire as the only means through which the continent could be revitalised. I argue that this vision was immensely significant to the emergence of Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism in the late 1880s and 1890s, and it is for this reason that I reconstruct it in considerable detail. The second half of the chapter explores Rhodes' involvement with railway construction in southern Africa in the 1880s. I argue that Rhodes gradually grasped the power of the railway as a tool of empire through his involvement with the extension of the Cape railway system to Kimberley in 1881 and his role in the establishment of a British Protectorate over Bechuanaland in 1885. Finally, I demonstrate how, through his networks of association with Harry Johnston and the British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, Rhodes adopted the 'Cape-Cairo' idea as his own. This analysis therefore explains how Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism emerged through the entwining of geopolitics and technology, using Rhodes' life and work as the method to do so.

6.2. Cecil Rhodes' geopolitical vision, 1870-1879

Cecil John Rhodes (see Figure 6.2) was born on July 5th 1853 in Bishop's Stortford. At the age of seventeen he left Britain for South Africa, arriving in Durban after a seventy day voyage. There he joined his brother Herbert on his cotton-farm, a farm young Cecil was soon running by himself after Herbert departed to seek his fortune in the South African diamond rush at Kimberley (Rotberg, 1986). Cecil soon followed him and in 1888 consolidated the whole of Kimberley's diamond deposits under his control at the age of 35, a feat which guaranteed him an almost unparalleled personal wealth (Newbury, 1981; Phimister, 1974; Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 180-214). His business dealings dovetailed with an increasing interest in politics and the future of the British Empire. In 1881 he had become a member of the Cape Colony parliament – he would later become Prime Minister in 1890 – and in the ensuing years was influential in extending the colony northwards, arguing for the annexation Bechuanaland and later establishing the territory that would bear his name, Rhodesia. He formed the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1889 to promote the expansion of the British Empire under the auspices of economically developing the territories to the North of the Cape, and by

1893 both Mashonaland and Matabeleland had also been secured for the British flag. In 1895 Rhodes' associate Leander Jameson attempted to annex the Transvaal in what became known as the Jameson Raid, an endeavour which ended in humiliating failure and which forced Rhodes to resign the Premiership of the Cape Colony in disgrace (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 515-550; Wilburn, 1997). For the last five years of the nineteenth century Rhodes busied himself with other projects, especially the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway, before his longstanding heart and lung issues claimed his life on March 26th 1902 aged 48.



Figure 6.2: Cecil Rhodes, his hands crossed over a map. Source: Mss. Afr. 229/2/1/File 4.

Rhodes has often been described by his colleagues and contemporaries as a visionary. Both throughout and immediately after his life there were numerous references to Rhodes as “*the Visionary* – the giant genius who dreamed of reuniting the English-speaking worlds” (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 3, original emphasis). For instance, an 1899 article in the short-lived London newspaper the *St. James' Gazette* described how Rhodes' “keen vision pierced the future and from Cape Colony looked northwards

steadfastly from Bulawayo to the Nile.”¹³⁴ Rhodes’ architect Herbert Baker likewise wrote during the First World War of the “world-wide reach” of his “prophetic vision [...] of a better ordering of the world through the civilizing genius of the English speaking races.”¹³⁵ In his reminiscences Rhodes’ associate E.A. Maund spoke of the “wonderful far-seeing vision” which allowed Rhodes to “gauge and prophetically speak of the future.”¹³⁶ While all of these examples must be seen in the context of MacFarlane’s (2007) chauvinistic approval categorisation of Rhodes’ historiography, references to him as a visionary also pervade more contemporary historical literatures and biographies. In his history of the Cape-Cairo Railway, for example, Tabor (2003: 11) writes unrequitedly of the “visionary Empire Builder” Cecil Rhodes.

Although mostly falling firmly within the tradition of hagiography, these examples gesture towards the possibility of considering Rhodes’ ideas in the context of the modern geopolitical imagination. In particular, I will argue in this section that Rhodes’ ideas can be conceptualised as a geopolitical vision rooted in the ontological separation of viewer and viewed consistent with Agnew’s (2003) and Ó Tuathail’s (1996) notion of Cartesian Perspectivalism. Rhodes, I will show, envisioned the world *as a whole* with a detachment and taciturnity which positioned him anterior to both space and time, his own agency in shaping and narrating the flows of history and geography erased and unacknowledged. In this reading Rhodes is rendered a “timetraveller and prophet” (Hutchings, 2008: 175) who could cut through the shifting complexities of space and time to grasp the world *how it had been, how it was, and how it should be*. With respect to transcontinentalism, what is important is that this kind of geopolitics “results in the sorts of visions of the world – ‘world stages’, ‘global views’ – pivotal to the practical geopolitics of empire, the state, or territorial control” (Rech, 2015: 536).

In this section I trace the development of Rhodes’ geopolitical vision in the early years of his life. However, I pay close attention to the social, spatial, and intellectual contexts from and with which his ideas emerged. I want to not only analyse Rhodes’

¹³⁴ ‘Cutting from St. James’s Gazette’ [undated 1899], WL Mss. Afr. s 228/C18/8/e.

¹³⁵ ‘Letter from Herbert Baker, English architect, to Mr. Howell Wright, a student of Cecil Rhodes, reprinted in The Post [undated, c. 1914]’, WL Mss. Afr. t 5/251.

¹³⁶ Papers of E.A. Maund, ‘Cecil Rhodes Reminiscences: Rhodes and General Gordon’, WL Mss. Afr. s 229/4/7/78-98 [81].

vision, but also explain its production through contextualising it within his movements between South Africa and England, the intellectual and spatial atmosphere of Oxford, and through his affinity with the Roman Empire and the ‘Great Men’ of history. Rhodes’ vision was simultaneously situated and structural, reflecting his own specific path as well as the wider geopolitical currents of the time.

6.2.1. Rhodes’ intellectual gestation

Rhodes arrived in Durban on September 1st 1870, disembarking “clear-headed, bright-eyed, enthusiastic, and with a characteristic confidence in his own resources” (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 36). Although the first couple of years he spent in South Africa at his brother’s cotton farm were relatively uneventful, it is apparent that before long it was actually a lack of vision and purpose that began to characterise his life. Writing to his brother Frank on August 19th 1875, just weeks after his twenty second birthday, Rhodes agonised about whether he should abandon his life in South Africa, return to England, and train for the bar. “I always feel my lungs to be a sort of skeleton in a cupboard”, he wrote, “ever ready to pounce down and clear me off, but really what is life worth at my present mode of existence with no object, no aim?”¹³⁷ Even though by this time he had started to make a modest earning by swapping working in the cotton fields for diamond prospecting at Kimberley, Rhodes was restless and rudderless as a young adult. Despite his increasing wealth, social capital, and mobility, much of Rhodes’ correspondence, especially that which was sent home to his family during this period, gesture towards someone searching with futility for a direction and purpose. For example, in a note appended to his Seventh Will and Testament of September 8th 1893, he retrospectively explained that his “idea in life” had always been “the active working of the soul in pursuit of the highest object in a complete life”, something which he borrowed incompletely from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹³⁸ This object for Rhodes had to overrule all other ordinary pursuits and pleasures. In 1875, writing to his brother, his object was blurred and concealed, but only two years later it was expressed with a striking idealistic force in his Confession of Faith.

¹³⁷ ‘Rhodes to his brother Frank’, August 19th 1875, WL Mss. Afr. s 115/94-96.

¹³⁸ ‘Note by C.J. Rhodes appended to Will of 8th September 1893’, WL Mss. Afr. t/13.

The Confession was handwritten by Rhodes in Oxford on June 2nd 1877. Leaving his growing diamond conglomerate in the hands of his business partners, Rhodes had entered Oxford University in the Autumn of 1873, and would return, on and off, for several years (see Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 69-107). In Oxford Rhodes was seemingly an average student, and the little evidence we have from his time there indicates that he was far more interested in associating with Masons and other gentlemanly clubs than he was studying. Nonetheless, his steeping in Oxford's intellectual atmosphere formed the context to the coalescing of his beliefs and ideals, which found their expression in 1877 as the Confession. Specifically, I argue that in Oxford Rhodes' thought was shaped by three wider components of British imperialism that are important to understanding the content of the Confession and consequently his geopolitics.

The first component was what Betts (1971) has called the allusion to Rome in British imperial culture, whereby the British Empire was imagined as the moral and secular successor to the Roman Empire (see also Hagerman, 2013). Rhodes' infatuation with the Roman Empire stemmed largely from the English historian Edward Gibbon's colossal six volume *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, originally published between 1776 and 1789. The book was crucial to him; as the historian Brendon (2007: 188) puts it, "Rhodes read Gibbon rather than the Bible." Rotberg and Shore (1988: 75, 95) have observed that the book was something he had first encountered (if not actually 'read') on his brother's cotton farm, and it was in Oxford that he apparently "read and reread" Gibbon's work. It was therefore in the intellectual, cultural, and imperial climate of Oxford that he became most acquainted with Gibbon (Symonds, 1986: 182). Certain parts of Gibbon's thesis had a heady impact on Rhodes. For instance, in his Commonplace Book Rhodes quoted Gibbon in writing that "when the Coliseum falls Rome will fall when Rome falls the world will fall", indicating that in the present, with Britain as Rome's successor, the fall of the British Empire would mean the fall of the world.¹³⁹ According to Williams (1921: 40), Gibbon's analysis of Rome's ethical imperative to rule also "gave [Rhodes] a basis for his political creed, [and convinced him] that Rome's burden of governing the world had now fallen on England's shoulders." In practical terms, Gibbon was part of what convinced Rhodes that the British Empire must

¹³⁹ 'Commonplace Book of Cecil Rhodes', WL Mss. Afr. s1647 Box1/Item 6.

“federate or *disintegrate*”, as his friend and banker Lewis Michell put to him in a letter.¹⁴⁰ Rhodes thus reached into the history of the Roman Empire, mediated by Gibbon, and mapped it onto the present, garnering from it a moral justification for the supremacy and expansion of the British Empire.

The second component of Rhodes’ intellectual gestation was his encounter with some of the classic texts of Ancient Greece and Rome, from which he extracted small nuggets of wisdom that spoke to him in some way.¹⁴¹ Rhodes read these texts extremely selectively, gravitating towards prosaic sentences or passages that he could connect, however tenuously, to his germinating ideas. For instance, he often referred to Marcus Aurelius’ obscure panegyric of the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius “as showing how thoroughly the Antonines recognised the republican character of their Empire”, something which furnished authority and certainty to his own germinating republican and federal leanings.¹⁴² The classics also served to enhance Rhodes’ growing feelings of self-importance, eminence, and purpose. His *Commonplace Book*, for example, is littered with cryptic quotations from Seneca’s *Epistles* on subjects of greatness, fortitude, and duty, such as Seneca’s axiom that “[g]reatness has no certain measure; comparison either raises or depresses it. The ship which is great in the river, is little in the sea.”¹⁴³ The *Confession* also contains multiple oblique references to Aristotle, such as in Rhodes’ repeated use of the Greek term *μεγα οψεις*, which translates imperfectly to *mega views* or *great views*.¹⁴⁴ Rotberg and Shore (1988: 95) summarise that the classics were “a heady, mystical brew justifying and extolling the fervor of imperialism”, persuading Rhodes that “Britain was Rome’s successor in world leadership”. As he digested the supposedly timeless insights of Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Aristotle, his incubating ideas about the world, and Britain’s place in it, were turned into truths.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Michell to Rhodes [undated, c. 1898]’, WL Mss. Afr. s 228/C2B/207a.

¹⁴¹ Among Rhodes’ favourite classics were Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Plato’s *Republic*, Seneca’s *Epistles*, Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*. Isolated quotes from all of these works can be found in his *Commonplace Book* (note 139).

¹⁴² Papers of E.A. Maund, ‘The Flag as Emblem’, WL Mss. Afr. s 229/4/6/57-77.

¹⁴³ ‘Commonplace Book’ (note 139).

¹⁴⁴ ‘The Confession of Faith’, WL Mss. Afr. t 1/17, [7; 11]. The *Confession* is transcribed and printed in Flint (1976: 248-252), but the original at WL contains many amendments and crossings out in Rhodes’ hand that Flint does not include.

The final component shaping Rhodes' views was his affinity with, and self-comparison to, a number of the so-called 'Great Men' of history, such as Caesar and Napoleon. To a large extent this reflected his allusion to Rome, as many of the figures he idolised were Roman Emperors like Marcus Aurelius, and it has also been well documented that Rhodes made much of his apparent physical resemblance to the Roman Emperor Titus.¹⁴⁵ But he particularly fixated on Caesar and Napoleon. As E.A. Maund recalled, "[h]is discussions about Julius Caesar, whom he would contrast with Napoleon in their respective environments, which afford[ed] them such varied dreams and opportunities, were quite delightful."¹⁴⁶ He discussed Caesar's military strategy and Napoleon's foresight in constructing long, straight roads between towns and camps to aid the mobility of his troops.¹⁴⁷ In his Commonplace Book, meanwhile, Rhodes jotted down the simple and enigmatic words "Caesar undertook conquest of Gaul at age 42."¹⁴⁸ Although it is difficult to date these words, Rhodes, ever aware that his life would probably be cut short by his severe heart and lung problems, would have taken much from the fact that Caesar expanded the Roman Empire to the extent he did at such a relatively young age. It is evident that Rhodes looked up to both Caesar and Napoleon as conquerors *par excellence*; two of history's great individuals from whom he could take inspiration for his own territorial ambitions. In their leadership, achievements, and greatness he perceived himself; or at least what he wanted to become, and how he wanted to be remembered. Therefore, if in the classic texts Rhodes found wisdom and virtue, in the Great Men he found individuals who had acted upon these inherent truths for the supposed benefit of all of civilisation.

In taking these inspirations, Rhodes constructed the British Empire and his own ideas as "mighty and right" (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 95). He found in Gibbon and the classics (re)affirmations of his vision, and he found in Caesar and Napoleon examples to follow in making that vision a reality. Rhodes' absorption of these influences found their expression in the Confession in 1877, and in the next sub-section I turn to a detailed

¹⁴⁵ See, Basil Williams Papers: 'Reminiscences of Cecil Rhodes by Herbert Baker', WL Mss. Afr. s 134/1/63 [18]. Baker writes that "Rhodes had an undoubted likeness to one bust of the Emperor Titus, and he knew it. He would say when he came to this photograph in a book of the Roman Emperors which he was fond of looking at, 'he had a fine fore-head,' his hand at the time, passing unconsciously over his own."

¹⁴⁶ Papers of E.A. Maund: 'The Flag as Emblem' (note 142), 70.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ 'Commonplace Book' (note 144).

analysis of its content. My argument here is that the Confession is extremely important to understanding the later emergence of Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism because it articulated a world in which the continent of Africa was apparently there for the taking by the British Empire. In 1877, Rhodes' plan was an incoherent one, but as I will show it was the entwining of these ideas with his involvement with railway technology in the 1880s and 1890s that precipitated the emergence of his Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism.

6.2.2. *The Confession of Faith*

Rotberg and Shore (1988: 99) have described the Confession as nothing less than a statement of "the principles and the coherent life agenda which had come to seem vital to Rhodes." Stretching to thirteen pages, in it Rhodes articulated an unusual and unsettling manifesto for the federal unification of the racially superior Anglo-Saxon race, and the main object in life that had so occupied him in previous years was defined as "the furtherance of the British Empire, and the bringing of the whole uncivilized world under British rule in the recovery of the United States for the making [of] the Anglo-Saxon race but one Empire."¹⁴⁹ It is important to underline that the ideas he espoused in it and his Second Will and Testament "never jettisoned from a central position in his ideological universe" (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 102). He shared the Confession with only a few trusted colleagues during his life. In August 1891 he enclosed a copy to the journalist W.T. Stead, alongside a note reading "I send you a draft of mine of my ideas you will see I have not offered much as to my feelings. I wrote it when I was about 22. You will of course respect my confidence."¹⁵⁰ It seems he also shared it with his solicitor, Bouchier Francis Hawksley. After Rhodes' death, Hawksley wrote to Lewis Michell on January 9th 1904 enclosing a copy of the Confession, writing that "I know – perhaps no one better – how much store Rhodes put upon the long document and his wishes therein indicated."¹⁵¹ It is important therefore to foreground the Confession as an articulation of the ideas that would shape Rhodes' life from his mid-twenties onwards.

¹⁴⁹ 'Confession' (note 144), 3.

¹⁵⁰ 'Rhodes to Stead', August 19th 1891, WL Mss. Afr. t 1/19.

¹⁵¹ 'Hawksley to Michell', January 9th 1904, WL Mss. Afr. t 1/16.

Rhodes began the Confession with the Aristotelian imperative; “[i]t often strikes a man to enquire what is the chief good in life,” before remarking that he had decided his own imperative was to render himself useful to his country.¹⁵² From here, Rhodes contended that the English race is the “finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.”¹⁵³ He continued:

“Just fancy those parts that are at present occupied by the most despicable specimens of human beings what an alteration there would be in them if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence [...] I contend that every acre added to our territory means in the future birth to some more of the English race who otherwise would not be brought into existence.”¹⁵⁴

His object defined, Rhodes proceeded to outline a double-edged plan to achieve this aim. The first edge was the creation of a secret society “with but one object the furtherance of the British Empire.”¹⁵⁵ This society would be worldwide, with members located at schools and universities throughout the entire British Empire, testing whether the “English youth” passing through were “endurant, possessed of eloquence, disregardful of the petty details of life, and if found to be such, then elected and bound by oath to serve for the rest of his life his Country.”¹⁵⁶ The society would seek out those with “high thoughts, high aspirations, endowed by nature with all the faculties to make a great man”, but lacking the means and opportunity to put these faculties forward in the service of Queen and country.¹⁵⁷ It would even “own portions of the press for the press rules the mind of the people.”¹⁵⁸ The society, in other words, would mould the finest English youth into the imperialists of tomorrow and equip them with the tools they needed to unify the English speaking peoples of the world under the banner of the British Empire.

The second edge of Rhodes’ plan was the physical acquisition of territory by the British Empire. “Fancy Australia discovered and colonised under the French flag”, he posed, subsequently answering that it would surely mean that the several million English

¹⁵² ‘Confession’ (note 144), 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

people who had colonised and subsequently been born in Australia would never have existed.¹⁵⁹ As he elaborated:

“We learn from having lost to cling to what we possess. We know the size of the world we know the total extent. Africa is still lying ready for us it is our duty to take it. It is our duty to seize every opportunity of acquiring more territory and we should keep this one idea steadily before our eyes that more territory simply means more of the Anglo-Saxon race, more of the best, most human, most honourable race the world possesses.”¹⁶⁰

For Rhodes, the world is *known*. It has been mapped and surveyed, its primary characteristics defined, and it is consequently able to be rendered into a spatial hierarchy stretching “from most friendly to most dangerous” (Agnew, 2003: 16). At the top of Rhodes’ hierarchy are Britain and the Anglo-Saxon race, whilst at the bottom are those parts of the world he deemed occupied by the ‘despicable specimens’ of the world; one of which was Africa, which Rhodes implicitly feminises and thus represents as ‘lying ready’ for masculinised conquest and subjugation by those most appropriately ‘endowed’ for the task. Slightly below England in Rhodes’ hierarchy are the United States and Australia. At the time Rhodes was writing, Australia was composed of six Crown Colonies, while the United States was independent. The folly of allowing the United States to become independent from Britain was returned to again and again by Rhodes throughout his life; he considered it a mistake that hindered the possibility of Anglo-Saxon federation occurring more promptly. The vision articulated in the Confession was therefore for the British Empire to territorially annex as much of the world as it could, whilst distributing members of a secret society throughout the globe to promote the ideals of federation under the superior Anglo-Saxon British Empire. Eventually, as Rhodes put it, “this absorption of the greater part of the world simply means the end of all wars.”¹⁶¹

The Confession therefore sketches the contours of the imperialist ideals that would emerge recurrently throughout Rhodes’ life. However, what I want to underline is how it demonstrates an assured certainty about the state of the world. Its full extent has been unravelled and its different spaces determined. Rhodes therefore grasped the world as a picture, apparently transcending positionality and subjectivity to gaze upon

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 2.

its surface and identify the inherent characteristics of different spaces and their relation to one another. Furthermore, Rhodes categorises the continent of Africa and those other 'despicable' spaces in the world as primitive, backwards, and underdeveloped in direct opposition to the developed, modern, and racially superior British Anglo-Saxon race. He thus placed the British Empire at the civilisational pinnacle with Africa and concomitant spaces at the bottom, with France, Australia, and the United States somewhere in between. As Agnew (2003) stresses, the consigning of (in this case) non-Anglo-Saxon races and societies to an uncivilised status 'further downstream' the stream of Time produces a moral imperative of action; it compelled Rhodes to speak with urgency about what could be done to help those further downstream reach a coeval level of civilisational development. The world was thus divided by Rhodes into the Anglo-Saxon dominated British Empire on the one hand, and the rest of the world on the other, "in terms of what the latter lacks and what the former has to offer to make up for this deficiency" (Agnew, 2003: 36).

Yet the Confession also evinced another related feature of Rhodes' life, that of the global and colonial competition between the European Great Powers in the wider context of the relative decline of the British Empire. In the Confession Rhodes blamed the House of Commons for the creeping failures of Britain, writing of "the mediocrity of the men"¹⁶² that populate it and how their time has been spent accumulating money rather than studying any past history. He lamented that "in the hands of such men rest our destinies."¹⁶³ Indeed, Rhodes continuously criticised the British government throughout his life, especially the Colonial Office and the Treasury, for not supporting him in several of his later imperial schemes. As will be discussed in the next chapter, he raged particularly at the British Treasury for not supporting his plans to continue the Cape-Cairo Railway into Central Africa. The Confession thus developed another theme which was also to occupy Rhodes throughout his life; that of the British government as an inadequate and failing body that did not fully grasp the realities and truths that Rhodes himself had perceived, and which consequently mismanaged the affairs of the Empire in a way that Rhodes despised.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*.

The ideas articulated in the Confession received little explicit iteration throughout Rhodes' life. His First Will from 1874 appears not to have survived, but it is mentioned by his associate J.G. McDonald (1927: 26), who states that in it Rhodes bequeathed all of his wealth "to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in trust for the extension of the British Empire." His Second Will, dated just months after the Confession in September 1877, is perhaps the most extraordinary and is worth quoting at length. In it, Rhodes leaves all his wealth

"for the establishment, promotion and development of a Secret Society, the true aim and object whereof shall be the extension of British rule throughout the world, the perfecting of a system of emigration from the United Kingdom and of colonization by British subjects of all lands wherein the means of livelihood are attainable by energy, labour and enterprise, and specifically the occupation by British settlers of the entire Continent of Africa, The Holy Land, the valley of the Euphrates, the Islands of Cyprus and Candia [Crete], the whole of South America, the islands of the Pacific not heretofore possessed by Great Britain, the whole of the Archipelago, the seaboard of China and Japan, the ultimate recovery of the United States of America as an integral part of the British Empire, the consolidation of the whole Empire, the inauguration of a system of Colonial Representation in the Imperial Parliament which may tend to weld together the disjointed members of the Empire and finally the foundation of so great a Power as to hereafter renders wars impossible and promote the best interests of humanity."¹⁶⁴

A final example, which has the important distinction of being written some years later, was a second letter to W.T. Stead from August 1891. As well as emphasising his plan for a secret society, Rhodes reiterated "the sacred duty of taking the responsibility of the still uncivilised parts of the world."¹⁶⁵ This time, his list of uncivilised places was not as long as it was in his Second Will, but it still included Portugal, Persia, Spain, and "the whole of the South American Republics."¹⁶⁶ As Rhodes concluded, this plan required "the best energies of the best people in the world [and] the devotion of the best souls of the next 200 years."¹⁶⁷ The best people in the world were evidently the Anglo-Saxon race, who "must now be trained to *view the world as a whole* and not only consider the social questions of the British Isles."¹⁶⁸ This particular letter indicates that Rhodes' geopolitics persisted throughout his life, and not just in the years he spent in Oxford.

¹⁶⁴ 'The Second Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes', September 19th 1877, WL Mss. Afr. t 1/2.

¹⁶⁵ 'Rhodes to Stead', August 14th 1891, Letter 140 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume One*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

My argument is that the ideas Rhodes articulated in the Confession and which he reiterated at different points in his life are crucial for understanding his transcontinentalism and his later attempts to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway. It mixed the civilisational and naturalised underpinnings of geopolitics by emphasising the civility of the British Empire and the Anglo-Saxon race against the despicable places in the world, narrating the Anglo-Saxon race as a people which had to expand, colonise, and unite in order to secure “permanent peace in the world.”¹⁶⁹ Among a wild and disparate array of spaces, Rhodes had already identified ‘the entire Continent of Africa’ as ‘lying ready’ for British colonisation. In the context of the late 1870s, when the ‘Scramble for Africa’ had not yet begun in earnest, Africa was still regarded as the final expanse of uncivilised *terra nullius* in the modern geopolitical imagination. Rhodes’ definition of Africa as a continent awaiting the civilising mission of the British thus anticipated his later work in the 1880s and 1890s.

6.2.3. Summary

In this section I have analysed what I have termed Cecil Rhodes’ geopolitical vision and the social, spatial, and intellectual context from which it emerged. This was a vision for the unfettered and unlimited territorial expansion of the British Empire and the colonisation of those spaces Rhodes had identified as the vacant, wasted areas of the world map with the racial and moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. In summarising, I want to stress two points. Firstly, although Rhodes had explicitly identified the entire continent of Africa as a prime target for his ideal of colonisation and territorial annexation, at the time of the Confession this was no more than the pipe dream of subjugating and colonising Africa that occupied the fantasies of many self-appointed imperial agents in the 1870s. There is no evidence that, at this time, he was thinking about Cape-Cairo as a realisable and achievable programme of territorial expansion. It was, as John Verschoyle (who edited the collection of Rhodes’ speeches under the pseudonym Vindex) put to Rhodes, simply the “sole continent which remained for European hands to grasp.”¹⁷⁰ Secondly, there is no evidence Rhodes made any connection between his ideas and railways at the time of the Confession. This was

¹⁶⁹ ‘Note by C.J. Rhodes’ (note 138).

¹⁷⁰ ‘Verschoyle to Rhodes’, July 4th 1900, WL Mss. Afr. s.228/C28/110-111 [111].

only to come when he returned to South Africa from Oxford, which I will examine in the following section.

These two points – railways and Cape-Cairo – became increasingly central to Rhodes' life throughout the 1880s, the decade where the new imperialism witnessed the European powers swarming for the vacant spaces of the African map. Rhodes entered the Cape Colony parliament as the representative for Barkley West in 1881, the same year he entered into the political and economic maelstrom of African railway construction. The next section turns to this decade to show how, by the beginning of the 1890s, Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism had emerged in earnest.

6.3. Railways and 'from the Cape to Cairo', 1880-1892

This section traces Rhodes' activities throughout the 1880s. In particular, I want to stress his involvement in railways and with wider imperial concerns concerning the status of the British Empire in southern Africa, and how what came to be termed the Cape-Cairo idea came to his attention at the end of the decade. My argument is that by 1892, the scene was set for Rhodes to attempt to conquer the expanse of African space between the Cape and Cairo with railway technology as his tool.

6.3.1. Rhodes and railways

Rhodes' first significant involvement with railway construction was in 1880, the year before he entered the Cape Colony parliament. Between 1877, when he wrote the Confession, and 1880, his position had changed profoundly. His wealth was accelerating, and he was increasingly seen in the Cape Colony as a representative of Kimberley's mining industry and an influential political force. At the same time, by the beginning of the 1880s "[r]ailways were radiating out of the Cape to Beaufort West and on to Hopetown, Colesberg, and Aliwal North" (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 129; see Figure 6.3). Rhodes supported the prospective extension of the railway from Beaufort West to Kimberley in 1880, an extension that was prompted by the agreement of the Cape government to annex Griqualand West, the province where Kimberley was located. "We are evidently at last to be annexed," Rhodes wrote to the veteran Cape Colony politician John X. Merriman in May 1880. He continued:

“I hope that you will support railway extension direct here as though I see you are rightly opposed to that wretched system of making a railway to every village in the country for the sake of the political support of its members still facts are incontrovertible [*sic*] to shew [*sic*] that a direct line here from Capetown would return a splendid interest on its construction.”¹⁷¹

Rhodes emphasised that the construction of the line would mean Kimberley would pay almost half as much of its supplies of wood and coal by having it transported from Cape Town, and the line would also be profitable to the Cape because of the duty levied on the transmission of these resources.

It seems that nothing more came of this until Rhodes entered the Cape Parliament in April 1881, serving the Prime Minister Gordon Sprigg. Sprigg was a committed railway builder and Rhodes consequently leant towards backing him (Rotberg and Shore, 1988). But Sprigg made a fatal error over a territory to the east of Cape Town called Basutoland, which is now the state of Lesotho. In 1869, it had been annexed by Britain and was incorporated as part of the Cape Colony in 1871. This annexation proved unpopular amongst the native Sotho, and due to rising tensions and fears across the Colony as a whole the Cape Parliament passed the Peace Preservation Act in April 1880, which gave the governor the power to demand that the Sotho relinquish their weapons at any time. In 1880 Sprigg himself informed a crowd of Sotho that this would be accompanied by an increase in their taxes. War subsequently broke out and had soon spread into Griqualand, and it took the Cape Colony a year to restore order (see Burman, 1981: 132-161, for details on this).

Sprigg was variously condemned for his role, and a motion of censure was brought forward by a local politician, Thomas Scanlen. Effectively, this was a vote of no confidence in Sprigg that had to be approved by a majority in the parliament. Rhodes, despite his misgivings about the Basutoland fiasco, voted along with the other members from Griqualand West to back Sprigg. Their support was pivotal, as the motion was rejected by 37 votes to 34. As Rotberg and Shore (1988: 135) narrate, “[a]s long as Sprigg, the railway builder, continued to promise progress in driving steel towards Kimberley, Rhodes would remain with him, despite Basutoland.” However, ten days later

¹⁷¹ ‘Rhodes to Merriman’, May 16th 1880, Letter 30 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume One*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

Rhodes changed his mind, and persuaded two of the other Griqualand West members to change theirs too. Sprigg's government fell, Scanlen became Prime Minister, and Merriman became the new Minister for Railways. According to Rotberg and Shore (1988: 135), "Rhodes had suddenly decided [...] that Sprigg was 'too weak' to push the rails forward with sufficient speed." It was not until November 28th 1885 that the first train finally travelled into Kimberley from Cape Town.



Figure 6.3: Location map of southern African railways, showing the extent of the railway from Cape Town (bottom left) to Kimberley. Reproduced from University of Cape Town Digital Collections. Available at: <http://www.digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/collection/islandora-19581> > [Accessed 30/03/2016]

Flint (1976: 50-51) has attempted to argue that Rhodes' railway politics in 1880 and 1881 should be seen as closely connected to the Confession, and that they were a conscious attempt to increase his own social and political capital for the purposes of enlarging the British Empire. There seems to be little evidence for this, and I am more inclined to agree with Rotberg and Shore's (1988: 125) caution that such an interpretation "credits Rhodes with a prescience and a knack for long-range planning that he had not then begun to display." What I do want to emphasise is that through his

experiences in railway politics in 1880 and 1881 Rhodes learned much about the political and economic necessities of railway construction, and how railways were imbricated in the colonial and civilisational logics of the rapidly expanding Cape Colony. Further, and although this is a fairly obvious point to make, his letter to Merriman demonstrates how he understood the role of railways in circulating people and resources across colonial space, and how the construction of railways released places such as Kimberley from their previous economic enclosure. As Rotberg and Shore (1988: 125) put it, his support for the Kimberley railway is best interpreted parochially: “[i]n order for both his company and his town to prosper, Kimberley needed to be connected to the sea by rail.” It was in his early political career that Rhodes consequently learned the colonial and power politics of railways, and their ability to create spaces of circulation where previously there had been none.

Rhodes’ second significant involvement in railway construction was in March 1885, when he was influential in arguing for the establishment of a British Protectorate over Bechuanaland (see Figure 6.4). Under Paul Kruger the Transvaal had been slowly encroaching westwards from 1880, and the establishment of German South West Africa in 1884 caused an imperial panic in the Cape and in London. Essentially, Rhodes and others feared that Germany and the Transvaal might ally against Britain “to form a Teutonic belt across the continent, making the future British expansion there very difficult if not impossible” (Zins, 1999: 58). This was exacerbated by a wider discourse fashioning Bechuanaland as a land corridor to the interior of Africa. As Griffiths (1997: 67) writes, “[w]ithout land corridors of access some states would be land-locked, isolated or without access to a perceived natural artery of communication.” The loss of Bechuanaland would thus be the loss of any future route to the interior. Rhodes (in Vindex, 1900: 62) argued in August 1883 that “I look upon this Bechuanaland territory as the Suez Canal of the trade of this country, the key of its road to the interior.” In a subsequent letter to *The Times* in November 1885, Rhodes captured the intensifying ‘Scramble’ in southern Africa when he stressed that Britain was no longer the only colonial power in region. It was now possible, Rhodes argued, “for the German Empire [...] to cut off our settlements in South Africa from communications with the interior”. Rhodes thus argued that the Protectorate should be turned into an official Crown Colony

to cover “the link which may join our settlements to the richer districts beyond” (Rhodes, 1885: 8).

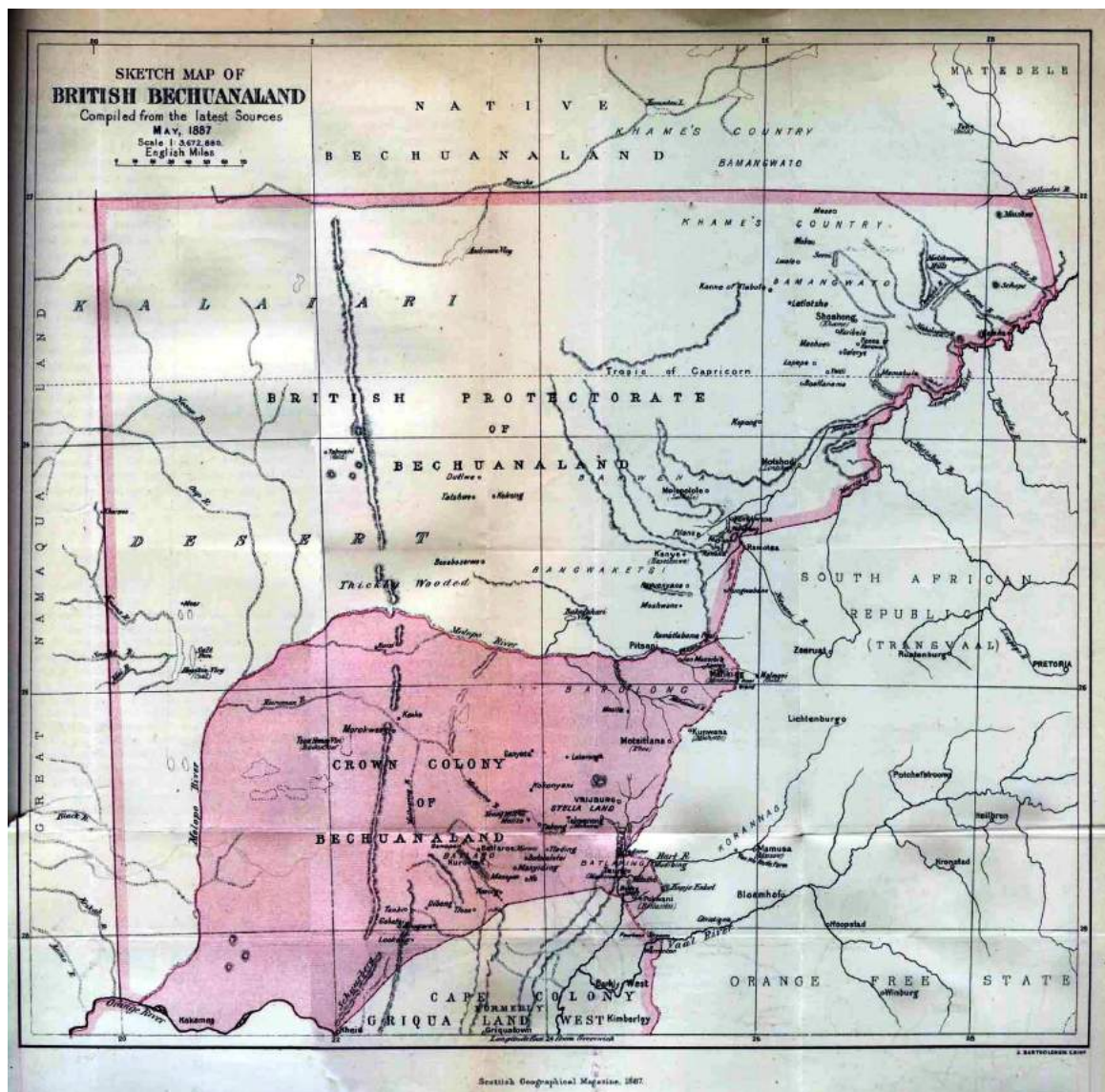


Figure 6.4: Map showing both the Crown Colony of Bechuanaland (shaded red), and the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland (demarcated by the red line). To the east of Bechuanaland can be seen the South African Republic (the Transvaal), and to the west Great Namaqua Land, part of German South West Africa. Reproduced from <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/images3/bechuanaland1887map.jpg> [Accessed 30/03/2016]

The importance of Rhodes' intervention into the Bechuanaland debate was his concomitant support for the extension of the railway from Kimberley into Bechuanaland itself. In his letter to *The Times* (1885: 8), he argued that

“[o]ver 500 miles of this [territory] a railway has been already constructed, and with the advance lately made in the development of Bechuanaland we may look to the extension of the railway system to Shoshong, Khama's capital, leaving only a distance of 350

miles to the borders of Mashunaland [*sic*], and of about 200 miles further to the Zambesi [river].”

To this Rhodes (1885: 8) added that “a railway system extended along the healthy ridge of the centre of Africa [would] defeat any attempt at German colonisation and will tap the lake system of Africa.” Rhodes’ concern with the railway through Bechuanaland was later crystallised with his formation of the BSAC in 1889, which had as its aim “to open up, develop, and colonise the territories to the north of British Bechuanaland, with the best results, both for British trade and commerce, and for the interests of the native races.”¹⁷² One of the first actions of the BSAC “was to arrange the extension northwards of the Colonial Railway which then terminated at Kimberley.”¹⁷³ Thus with the Bechuanaland debacle and the increasing pressures of Germany, the Transvaal, and the Portuguese in southern Africa, Rhodes learned just how potent railway technology could be as a tool of imperial expansion and entrenchment. It was when he began to equate it not only with the simple political and economic needs of the Cape Colony, but with the territorialisation and extension of British power more generally. With the Bechuanaland railway and the BSAC, Rhodes began to perceive the railway as “the sturdy armature on which an empire could be assembled, shaped and cast” (Strage, 1973: 16).

6.3.2. From the Cape to Cairo

While Rhodes was dabbling in the imperial politics of Cape Colony and railway construction, the British Empire was facing wider anxieties over the status of empire in Africa. After the occupation of Egypt in 1882, the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury was constantly occupied with potential threats to Britain’s position on the Nile. This was exacerbated in 1887 and 1888, when, as Pakenham (1992: 336-357) has shown, tensions with both France and Germany placed pressure upon Egypt’s security. Meanwhile, in the southern half of the continent fears over the malicious intentions of Germany, Portugal, and Kruger’s Transvaal continued unabated despite the efforts of Rhodes and others to drive the British flag further towards Lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika. By 1888, the Scramble for Africa was at its height, conjuring anxiety and worry in the metropolitan centres of empire.

¹⁷² ‘Directors Report and Accounts, 31st March 1891’, in *British South Africa Company Reports, 1891 to 1898, inscribed the Right Hon. C.J. Rhodes*, WL Mss. Afr. s 299/7/2/Item 1 [3].

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 4.

Out of this maelstrom of imperial competition emerged what has been variously referred to in the historical literature as the Cape-Cairo 'idea' or 'imaginary'. As Ramutsindela (2007: 124) has put it, Cape-Cairo

“was neither preconceived nor originated as an instrument of imperialism from the onset. Instead, it emerged as a result of the fusion of interests among disparate European agents [...] It fascinated British Empire builders and, at the same time, created a climate of rivalry among colonising powers, in particular the French, Germans, and Portuguese.”

Although Merrington (2001; 2002) has brilliantly traced the cultural roots of Cape-Cairo deep into the Victorian psyche, it first coalesced as an imperial term with the publication of an article in *The Times* on August 22nd 1888, authored by the same Harry Johnston whom we encountered earlier. Johnston was a renowned linguist, translator, geographer, and explorer who served in various consular and administrative positions in Africa throughout his life. On a trip to Mount Kilimanjaro in 1884, which was funded by the Royal Geographical Society, he negotiated treaties with local chiefs giving priority to British interests in the area, and as a consequence of this success he became the Vice-Consul of the British colony in Cameroon and the surrounding Niger Delta in 1886 (see Oliver, 1957 for more details on Johnston's life). His growing political reputation dovetailed with the establishment of a working relationship with Lord Salisbury; they shared similar concerns about the future of the British Empire and it was as a direct consequence of their discussions that Johnston published the article in *The Times*.¹⁷⁴

In this article, Johnston (1888: 8) suggested that British protectorates should be established over “countries which we have no desire to directly govern, but which we merely wish to secure against outside aggression”, in order “to obviate the jealous interference of a rival European power [...] without at the same time charging ourselves with the internal administration of the country.” This was basically an argument for the extension of informal empire, as discussed in the context of the Persian Gulf in Chapter Three. Johnston (1888: 8) consequently recommended that Egypt “should become a vassal state under English hegemony” and opined that “Nubia, the Suakin district, Darfur, and the Egyptian Soudan will no doubt be eventually administered directly or indirectly by us.” He then turned his attention to East Africa, speculating that

¹⁷⁴ *SCCRI*, 69.

“the English domination on Lake Tanganyika may be connected at some future day with the rule of British companies or feudatories on the Albert and Victoria Nyanzas and the Upper Nile; in the south with Lake Nyassa, of which the western and southern banks will probably some day come under our protection, while the eastern bank is left open to German influence” (Johnston, 1888: 8).

The extension of British rule south to the northern shores of Lake Tanganyika was then pushed by Johnston (1888: 8) to its ultimate conclusion, that, if the British government put its full support behind British commercial and missionary activities, “our possessions in South Africa may be linked some day to our spheres of influence in Eastern African and the Egyptian Soudan by a continuous band of British dominion.” With this sentence, the Cape-Cairo idea was arguably propelled into the mainstream arena of imperial ideology for the first time. While Johnston maintained that before this article the notion of “through communications between the Cape and Egypt had never before been specifically enunciated”, he did not claim originality for the Cape-Cairo idea itself, acknowledging in a subsequent publication that credit for the conception “should really be given to the late Sir Edwin Arnold, who first projected the idea of a British dominion stretching from the Egyptian Sudan to Cape Colony in a pamphlet he published in 1876” (Johnston, 1897: 81; see also Johnston, 1909: 182). Nonetheless, while tracing the political impact of the Cape-Cairo idea up to this point is difficult, it is not unreasonable to state that through Johnston and Salisbury (and later Rhodes) it slowly dispersed throughout the British political consciousness (Ramutsindela, 2007).

It is important to point out that, in contrast to Berlin-Baghdad, the Cape-Cairo idea emerged at a time before any transcontinental railway was mooted or discussed in any of the European countries. Whereas Chesney’s proposal for a transcontinental railway between Europe and India in the 1850s predated the full emergence of Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism in the First World War by several decades, in Africa the terms were reversed. This reflects at least two geographical differences between Africa and the Ottoman Empire. The first is that Africa was imagined as *terra nullius*, and thus it was possible to consider the annexation and territorialisation of state power across African space relatively easily. This was not the case in the Ottoman Empire, which was a sovereign empire not exactly coeval to but nonetheless recognised by the European powers. As a consequence, it was not until the First World War that German territorial annexation became conceivable. A second geographical difference was the sheer

distance and terrain between the Cape and Cairo (7210 km) in comparison to the distance between Konya and the Persian Gulf (2190km). Even in an age of thinking in continents, the distance between the Cape and Cairo was significant compared to that covered by the Baghdad Railway. This was even more evident considering that much of Central Africa was still unexplored and uncharted in the European epistemology in the 1880s, and the suitability of its terrain for railway construction was consequently undetermined. Chesney, on the other hand, had demonstrated as early as the 1850s that it was technologically feasible to construct a railway between Constantinople and the Persian Gulf. This is nonetheless an indication that transcontinentalism was not the same everywhere and at all times; it developed differently and for different reasons in the two examples considered in this thesis.

It is difficult to know if Rhodes was aware of the Cape-Cairo idea before a chance meeting with Johnston in London in the spring of 1889. The testimony of the approving hagiographers cannot be trusted, because they tend to pronounce opinions such as that of the South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts in 1922, that “Cecil John Rhodes conceived the great idea.”¹⁷⁵ While the notion of Cape-Cairo is now associated most prominently with Rhodes, Johnston was the first to propel it into wider usage through his article in *The Times*. What is clear, however, is that in May 1889 Rhodes and Johnston met in Marylebone in London at the invite of John Verschoyle (see Oliver, 1957: 152-155; Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 280-281).¹⁷⁶ In this meeting, Rhodes and Johnston apparently discussed their ideas over dinner before retiring to Rhodes’ room at the Westminster Palace Hotel. According to Johnston (1909: 182), before this moment Rhodes had “thought of little more than a dominion which might extend from the Cape of Good Hope to the Upper Zambezi.” But afterwards Rhodes wrote Johnston a cheque for £2000 for treaty-making expeditions across the Zambesi and towards Lake Tanganyika, and promised him further funds to help him “take over any degree of Central Africa between the Zambesi and the White Nile” (Johnston, 1923: 238). Johnston went to see Salisbury the following day, telling him that Rhodes wanted to use the BSAC for “the ultimate extension of chartered company government from the Zambezi

¹⁷⁵ *SCCRI*, xxvii.

¹⁷⁶ This meeting has been recorded numerous times, both by Johnston and Rhodes’ biographers, although Rhodes himself seems never to have written about it.

northwards to Lake Tanganyika, and possibly from Lake Tanganyika northwards to Uganda” (Oliver, 1957: 154). This meeting between them has been much mythologised in the historical literature as the definitive moment that Rhodes learned of the Cape-Cairo idea and put into motion a decisive plan to actualise it. To take one example, Gross (1957: 172) writes without any evidence that Rhodes sat up all night until dawn the next morning “repeating again and again Johnston’s phrase which he had now heard for the first time, ‘Cape to Cairo’ [...] He was captivated by it.”

Despite this, it is clear that in the years that followed Rhodes adopted the mantra as his own (Ramutsindela, 2007; Rotberg and Shore, 1988). The reasons for this are complex. On the one hand, ‘from the Cape to Cairo’ was a term that certainly had a kind of alluring resonance which sloganized Rhodes’ ideas and ambitions in a way that no Confession or letter to *The Times* could possibly achieve. It was a watchword in no less a way than Berlin-Baghdad was, phonetically summarising a complex geopolitical fantasy within a simple alliterative slogan. Furthermore, it would have appealed to a Rhodes who, by 1889, was growing confident in his manipulative and seductive ability to persuade others as to the promise of his ideas. Rhodes, in other words, would have appreciated the term’s power as a popular geopolitical catchphrase, a tabloid headline around which support for his ideas could be rallied. W.T. Stead (1899: 368), for his part, shrewdly noted that a “hardly less potent reason is the fact that the Cape and Cairo both begin with the letter C.” Cape-Cairo was thus a superficially simple yet profoundly complex term that summarised and gave a renewed force to Rhodes’ earlier designs on the ‘entire continent of Africa’.

By 1893 a bitter Johnston, aggravated that Rhodes had taken what he considered his own idea, awkwardly praised him in a letter for helping to persuade the British and Cape Colony’s peoples that “we should not abandon our control over Egypt, but [...] should rather seek to open up a continuous chain of Empire from the Cape to Cairo.”¹⁷⁷ As Johnston continued, “[t]his last expression, ‘From the Cape to Cairo’, though often credited to you, is of my invention and was one of the first phrases I uttered on the earliest occasion of my meeting you in 1889 which attracted your attention.”¹⁷⁸ There is

¹⁷⁷ ‘Johnston to Rhodes’, October 8th 1893, TNA FO/2/55.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

little evidence that Rhodes himself used the term in much of his written correspondence, despite what the hagiographers such as Gross claim. However, at his house at Grooteschoor J.M. Soloman noted the presence of two maps of Africa in the billiard room and bedroom with the route of the Cape-Cairo Railway “marked in red”.¹⁷⁹ Objects such as these, as DeSilvey (2007: 403) has suggested, “once occupied a place in an active web of social and material relations”; they “yield their stories through their alignment with other, equally inscrutable remains.” Juxtaposed with the evidence presented in the rest of this chapter, the presence of these two maps evince the point at which this chapter ends – that by 1892 Rhodes still wanted the world, and Cape-Cairo was beginning to form an integral part of the world he wanted to create. As Ramutsindela (2007: 124) puts it, “Rhodes embraced the idea because it expressed all he had ever dreamt of, namely, the establishment of a British World Federation in which a British Pax Africana formed an important part.”

6.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have traced the development of Cecil Rhodes’ ideas from his arrival at Durban in 1870 to the years when, in one way or another, he adopted the Cape-Cairo idea as the semantic watchword for what could increasingly be described as his programme of African imperialism. The first part of the chapter has demonstrated the development of Rhodes’ geopolitical vision, and how in the 1877 Confession of Faith he sketched the contours of an idealist and racially motivated scheme for the extension of British rule throughout the world and the formation of a secret society to further the aims of the British Empire. This vision, I have argued, is only graspable when related to Rhodes’ experiences in Oxford and his affinity with the Roman Empire, the classics, and the ‘Great Men’ of history. Out of this milieu emerged Rhodes’ ideas, which displayed many core aspects of the modern geopolitical imagination in both its civilisational and naturalised modes. It exhibited a turning of time into space that placed the British Empire at the pinnacle of Fabian’s ‘stream of Time’ and Africa at the bottom, a narration of a anarchical world competing for the last remaining colonisable spaces in the context of a wider crisis in the British Empire, and a deeply troubling racialized rendering of the

¹⁷⁹ ‘Grooteschoor Catalogue 1911, by J.M. Soloman’, WL Mss. Afr. s 229/7/2/3 [78].

Anglo-Saxon race as superior to all others. The second half of the chapter has traced Rhodes' early railway activities and his adoption of the Cape-Cairo idea. My argument here is that with his railway activities Rhodes came to appreciate the power of the railway as a tool of empire. In the second case, with his adoption of Johnston's Cape-Cairo idea Rhodes' early fantasies about the continent of Africa being awoken from its uncivilised and unconscious slumber were given an alluring and tantalisingly realisable slogan.

It is perhaps easy given the analysis in this chapter to think there is something to the various descriptions of Rhodes as a visionary or genius. Certainly he was high-functioning, controlling, and commanded fierce loyalty from his associates. Further, he came to be regarded as a beacon of greatness and fortitude to many who never actually met him. Yet in 1895 Rhodes, alongside his associate Leander Jameson, tried to annex Kruger's Transvaal in a dismal and disorganised plot which ended in failure and which forced Rhodes to resign the lead of the BSAC and the Cape Premiership. This proves if nothing else Haraway's (1988: 582) dictum that "infinite vision is an illusion, a god trick." But this, however, is not how it seemed to Rhodes. He "believed that he was acting for nature; by the mid-1890s he had also come to believe that he could interpret the designs of nature better than anyone else" (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 530). With the failure of the Jameson Raid Rhodes turned his attention back to the Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism that was now at the forefront of his thoughts. In the next chapter I will show how Rhodes' railway construction efforts in the final five years of the nineteenth century demonstrate the doctrine of transcontinentalism, and the specific, ultimately desperate form it took as Rhodes laboured without success to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway.

Chapter Seven – Rhodes and the Cape-Cairo Railway, 1895-1902

7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I analysed what I have termed Cecil Rhodes' geopolitical vision and its emergence within the entwined spatial, social, and intellectual currents of Oxford. I subsequently traced Rhodes' involvement in railway politics and his adoption of the Cape-Cairo mantra at the beginning of the 1890s. In this chapter I argue that Rhodes' attempts at the end of the 1890s to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway in its entirety were shaped by his geopolitical vision, thus demonstrating how transcontinentalism emerged in Africa at the confluence of geopolitics and technology. More specifically, I argue that by focusing on one letter he wrote to the British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain in April 1898 and extrapolating its themes outwards, Rhodes' intentions for the Cape-Cairo Railway become clear. I argue that he equated the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway with the territorialisation of British power across space and the falling of the Cape-Cairo swathe of space Johnston articulated into British hands. Furthermore, I argue that, using his discourse of civilising the barbarous space of Africa as a moral justification, Rhodes equated the construction of the railway with the production of a transcontinental space of circulation in the African continent; a space defined by the circulation of labour and resources for the gain of the British Empire and one freed from its previous political and economic enclosure. Put differently, tracing Rhodes' activities with railways in the 1890s show how the doctrine of Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism developed out of his geopolitical vision and his adoption of Johnston's Cape-Cairo 'idea' in the late 1880s.

In November 1892 Rhodes told a meeting of the BSAC shareholders that

"I may say when the [Royal Charter for the BSAC] was obtained some of my friends were willing to stop at the Zambesi, but I did not think it right to take two bites at a cherry [...] and that it was just as well to go north and complete the map in so far as the map of Africa was then open."¹⁸⁰

Under Rhodes' stewardship, what was increasingly referred to as the 'Colonial Railway' crept northwards in the first half of the 1890s as part of the BSAC's wider activities (see

¹⁸⁰ 'Report of the Second Annual General Meeting [of the BSAC]', in *British South Africa Company Reports, 1891 to 1898, inscribed the Right Hon. C.J. Rhodes*, WL Mss. Afr. s 299/7/2/Item 1 [8].

Figure 7.1). It was swiftly extended to the towns of Vryburg, Mafeking, and finally Bulawayo by October 1897 (Maylam, 1980: 78-112; see Figures 6.1 and 7.2). Yet Rhodes was not politically inactive during his time at the head of the BSAC, and he continued to play a role in British foreign politics that concerned Africa. Importantly, Rhodes engaged in wider British debates concerning the future of Egypt and Uganda, two territories forming the essential northern sections of his Cape-Cairo route. He directed the majority of his attention towards the question of Egypt. In 1891 Rhodes donated £5,000 to the British Liberal Party on the condition that if the Liberal Party backed a Home Rule Bill of any kind without Irish representation at Westminster it would be void. As Taylor (1971) has explained, Rhodes was strongly in favour of Irish Home Rule because it chimed with his belief that the best way to consolidate the British Empire was the creation of self-governing colonies that would nonetheless have their say in the decisions of Empire as a whole. Yet Rhodes also added a postscript, stating that he had been horrified by a recent speech made by John Morley suggesting Britain should withdraw from Egypt, and that if Britain did the £5,000 should be given to charity to prevent Rhodes' money inadvertently funding "the breaking up [of] the Empire" (quoted in Michell, 1910: 48).

However, on October 2nd 1891 Gladstone, now back on the opposition benches but once more the leader of the Liberal Party, gave a speech which argued for the removal of British forces from Egypt (Gladstone, 1891). Dismayed, Rhodes wrote to the Liberal politician Francis J. Schnadhorst as soon as he returned to Kimberley in April 1892 from a long stay in Mashonaland. "The matter that is troubling me most is your policy as to Egypt", he wrote. "I was horrified when I returned from Mashonaland to read a speech of Mr Gladstone's evidently foreshadowing a scuttle if he came in."¹⁸¹ True to his earlier word, Rhodes subsequently asked Schnadhorst to send his previous £5,000 donation to the Liberal Party to charity, blasting that he "did not subscribe to your party to assist in the one thing that I hate above everything, namely, the policy of disintegrating and breaking up our Empire."¹⁸² This demonstrates that the two features of Rhodes' vision from the last chapter remained prominent in his activities; he criticised the breaking up of Empire, and the ceding or withdrawal of British power from any of

¹⁸¹ 'Rhodes to Schnadhorst', April 25th 1892, Letter 141 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

the territories on the Cape-Cairo route. Of course, 1890 also witnessed the establishment of the German colony of German East Africa to the east of Lake Tanganyika, which effectively blocked the path of the Cape-Cairo Railway. I will return to this in Section 7.3., but for now it is sufficient to note that Rhodes continued to make his force felt in the affairs of the Empire, especially with the office of Cape Premier and the might of the BSAC behind him from 1889.

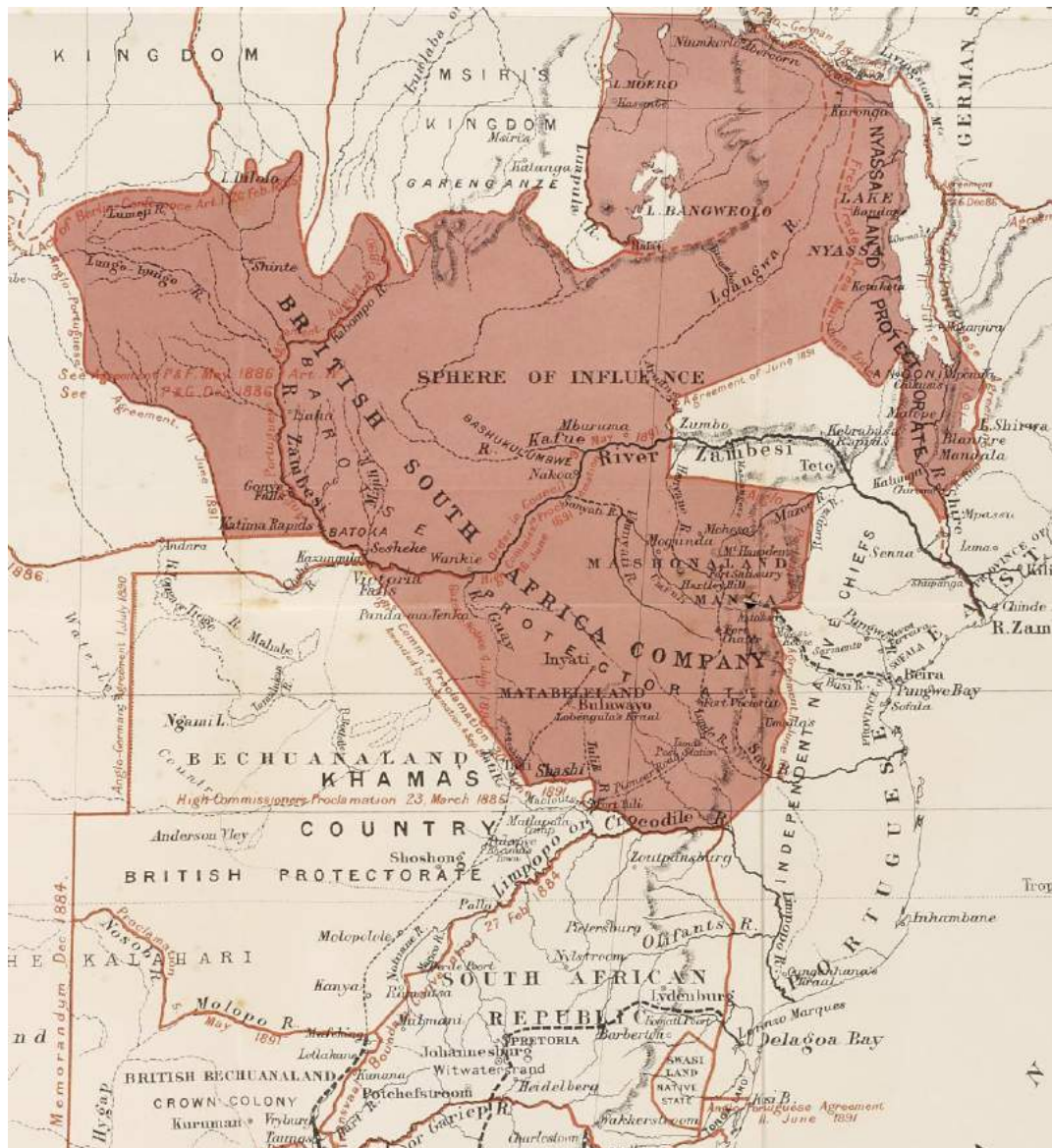


Figure 7.1: Map showing the proposed territories that would be colonised and developed through the formation of the British South Africa Company and the granting of the Charter, including Matabeleland, Mashonaland, and territories beyond the Zambesi River. Annexed to the First Report of the British South Africa Company. Reproduced from WL/ Mss. Afr. s 299/7/2/Item 1.

There is little evidence that Rhodes actively discussed the extension of the 'Colonial Railway' in terms of the Cape-Cairo Railway. If he did, the documentation has not survived, and even if it did it would be a mistake to consider the BSAC a vessel of Rhodes' Cape-Cairo vision. Such an argument places too much emphasis on the agency of Rhodes within the structural and financial constraints of the BSAC itself. Instead, it is more sensible to agree with the careful conclusions of the historians Galbraith (1974) and Maylam (1980), who have both painstakingly studied the finances and activities of the BSAC as it related to railway construction. Maylam (1980) considered the arguments of authors such as Phimister (1974) and Blainey (1965), who contended that Rhodes only embarked on railway construction when it was clear the most profit could be accrued from working this or that section of the line. The implication is that had Rhodes wanted to construct the railway just for the British Empire, he would have used his already considerable wealth and power to do so and disregarded the question of financial risk. Maylam's (1980: 92) convincing answer is that Rhodes delayed the construction of the railway until his authority had been solidified as effective ruler of both the BSAC and the Cape Parliament. Furthermore,

"[i]n the short term, [the railway] was a financial burden that the company could not bear; but in the long term, it was still an essential part of his Cape-to-Cairo vision. His concern was to delay the company's participation in the project until other more important interests had been consolidated."

In his study of the BSAC, Galbraith (1974: 203) emphasises the financial constraints of the BSAC that Rhodes had to negotiate:

"'Cape to Cairo' was a dream with little relationship to reality. The British South Africa Company did not invest in dreams ... [T]he development of territories from South to North Africa was far beyond the resources of any private corporation even if international diplomacy had not destroyed any possibility of an 'all-red' swath."

Rhodes' railway construction in the early 1890s is thus best understood as a project of slow, incremental continuation of the Colonial Railway with one eye on Cairo and the other on the finances of the BSAC and his broader concerns in the Cape Colony. It was only with the Jameson Raid and his subsequent resignation from both the BSAC and the Cape Premiership that Rhodes turned his explicit attention to the Cape-Cairo Railway. "Political matters may have subsided", said Rhodes to Alfred Milner in March 1898, referencing the fallout from the failed Jameson Raid, "and in that case it is

everything to attempt [the railway] at once.”¹⁸³ Thus in 1898 he began an ambitious plan to initially extend the railway from Bulawayo to the southern tip of Lake Tanganyika. In doing so he wrote to the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, asking for a financial subsidy towards the capital necessary for the extension. Examining this letter, and the arguments Rhodes presented in favour of the railway, elucidates just how he connected the Cape-Cairo Railway to the geopolitical and transcontinental vision analysed in the previous chapter.

7.2. Rhodes, the Cape-Cairo Railway, and the production of a space of circulation

“My plan is to secure all territory before it is gone.”¹⁸⁴

My argument in this section is that Rhodes envisaged the Cape-Cairo Railway in two entwined ways; firstly as the projection and territorialisation of British power across space, and secondly as equivalent to the production of a transcontinental space of circulation which would simultaneously lift the African continent out of its previous unconscious inertia. To return momentarily to Schivelbusch (1986), Rhodes’ imagination of African space was one in which railway construction was a means of connecting the uncivilised and inert mass of the African continent to increasingly global flows of labour and resources. As Schivelbusch (1986: 194-195) reminds us,

“[t]he formula is as simple as can be: whatever was part of circulation was regarded as healthy, progressive, constructive; all that was detached from circulation, on the other hand, appeared diseased, medieval, subversive, threatening.”

However there is an additional element here that Schivelbusch (1986) does not discuss, namely the division of circulation into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ domains, with the former circulations facilitated and encouraged and the latter controlled, restricted, and if possible eliminated. Drawing on Foucault in his work on the production of maritime space, Glück (2015: 644) conceptualises what he calls a security space:

“the production of secure spaces for the circulation of certain desirable elements (in this case cargo vessels, commodities, and capital) and the suppression of other ‘undesirable’ elements (that is, piracy and the interruption of commodity and capital flows).”

¹⁸³ ‘Rhodes to Milner’, March 1898, Letter 332 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Rhodes to Earl Albert Grey’, August 30th 1889, WL Mss. Afr. s. 73.

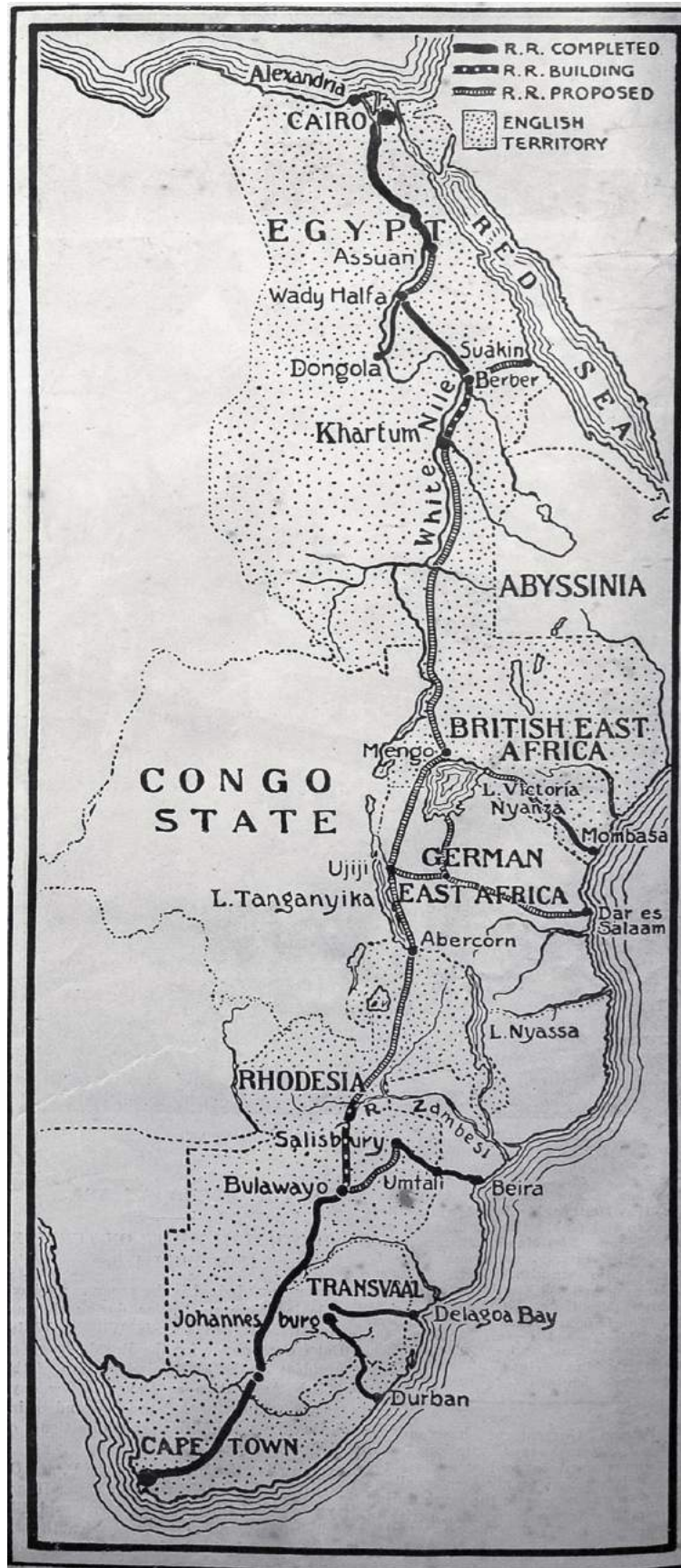


Figure 7.2: The Cape-Cairo Railway route in 1899, showing completed, under construction, and planned lines. As can be seen, Rhodes wanted to go along the eastern shoreline of Lake Tanganyika, through German East Africa. Reproduced from Stead (1899: 363).

This quote epitomises Rhodes' logic perfectly. Rhodes argued for the Cape-Cairo Railway because he equated it to the production of a transcontinental space of circulation for the mobility of labour and resources across African space, while simultaneously underlining how the construction of the railway would inhibit the evils of the slave trade and suppress the possibility of rebellion. For Rhodes, therefore, the Cape-Cairo Railway was equated to the production of a space of circulation atop the blank, previously enclosed African continent, a process which would simultaneously 'civilise' the continent while facilitating the territorialisation of British power towards the final destination of Cairo.

7.2.1. Encouraging the circulation of labour and resources

Rhodes' first letter to Chamberlain requesting financial support from the British Treasury to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway was dated April 28th 1898, and is a lengthy document stating precisely why Rhodes believed the British government should support his plan. The letter began by outlining his plan for the "immediate extension of the Bechuanaland Railway to Lake Tanganyika" and inviting "the co-operation of Her Majesty's Government in this important undertaking."¹⁸⁵ The first and most evident reason he gave for this was the impact the railway would have on the extraction and circulation of natural resources across and ultimately out of African space. The railway would pass through "valuable coal fields [...] and promising gold districts", while the second section to Tanganyika would pass through an area "in which many gold reefs that have been favourably reported upon by competent engineers have already been exposed."¹⁸⁶ Beyond the Zambesi, he continued, the railway would proceed through "excellent cattle country" and reach "valuable deposits of copper [...] on the borders of the British South Africa Company's territories" before finally allowing the "opening up of the Zambesi coalfields."¹⁸⁷ This is evidently not a complex argument; most scholarly work on African railway construction has emphasised the tight relationship between railways, resource extraction, and capitalist development and exploitation (Galbraith, 1974; Lunn, 1992; 1997; Maylam, 1980). Therefore, as the Witwatersrand prospector

¹⁸⁵ 'Rhodes to Chamberlain', April 28th 1898, Letter 333 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Owen Letcher wrote in 1923, “the attraction which has pulled the [Cape-Cairo] Railway northwards and still further northwards has been the development of the wonderful mineral resources of the southern portion of Africa.”¹⁸⁸

However, for Rhodes it took on a special status precisely because of the transcontinental scale of the railway. In February 1900 the military explorer Ewart S. Grogan concluded the first traverse between the Cape and Cairo on foot (see Paice, 2001: 44-129), after which he published a book recounting his journey. This book was important as a wider cultural reproduction of the Cape-Cairo idea in British society (Merrington, 2001). It was also important because Grogan, who had full knowledge of Rhodes’ efforts to build the Cape-Cairo Railway, asked him to write a short foreword for the book. Rhodes politely declined, saying he was too busy, but Grogan published Rhodes’ written declination as a foreword anyway. In it Rhodes wrote that

“[e]very one supposes that the railway is being built with the only object that the ‘human being’ may be able to get in at Cairo and get out at Cape Town. This is, of course, ridiculous. The object is to cut South Africa through the centre, and the railway will pick up trade all through the route. The junctions to the east and west coasts, which will occur in the future, will be outlets for the traffic obtained along the route of the line as it passes through the centre.”¹⁸⁹

His ambition did not just therefore concern the Cape-Cairo Railway itself, but the variety of branches and feeders that would connect it to the east and west coasts of Africa to provide an outlet for the extracted resources and the trade attracted by the route. Thus here Rhodes’ captured the essence of the circulatory imperative discussed by Kapp. Keeping in mind his previous articulation of the African continent as uncivilised and inert, Rhodes equated the insertion of the railway system into Africa with the construction of a system of circulation which would extract the resources and minerals necessary for the entrenchment of Empire and, through its connections to the sea, circulate these resources out of African space so their value could be actualised elsewhere. Although Rhodes did not utilise the biological language I have suggested is important to such a conceptualisation of circulation frequently, he did narrate to E.A. Maund that “we should have a trunk-line right up to the Nile Valley. Let the offshoots to

¹⁸⁸ *SCCRI*, 667.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Rhodes to Grogan’, September 7th 1900, Letter 346 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

either coast be as numerous as the fish-bones radiating from a Sole's back-bone."¹⁹⁰ I argue this is the kind of banal language that nonetheless reproduced an implicit notion of Africa as inert, lifeless, and docile, and thus necessitating the skeletal and bodily upholstering of the railway to inject life and vitality across transcontinental space (see Figure 7.3).

The second and related reason he gave for this extension was the impact it would have on the flexibility and intensity of labour supply. In his work on the social history of labour in the Indian Ocean in the nineteenth century, Ahuja (2006: 111) argues that a "transcontinental regime of labour circulation" was produced through the expansion of British shipping industries in India. This is an apt term with which to describe Rhodes' intentions. He put to Chamberlain that the demand for labour in Kimberley and Rhodesia had reached "an unduly high figure" because the "natives in [the] northern districts are anxious to obtain work, but [...] the great distances which they had to cover on foot have prevented extensive employment of their services."¹⁹¹ Thus, Rhodes suggested, the completion of the railway to Tanganyika would entail "every probability of large numbers of labourers being constantly carried to and from the mining districts", which would result in a "considerable benefit" to "the most important industry of South Africa."¹⁹² Rhodes' foregrounding of the notion of labour being constantly carried to and from the mining districts perfectly epitomises the logic of circulation, the ceaseless and uninterrupted flow of bodies "ensuring that everything remains in motion" (Elbe et al, 2014: 447) to facilitate the continued working of the mines and other industries with which Rhodes was so involved in.

Furthermore, Rhodes returned to the question of labour in 1900. Writing to his associate J.P. Jones in August of that year, when the railway was beginning to once again creep northwards from Bulawayo, Rhodes emphasised that "[t]he want of the future is labour and it is a very serious question." He continued by underlining that "[t]he three things necessary for the success of our mines are railways, coal, and labour."¹⁹³ The

¹⁹⁰ Papers of E.A. Maund: 'Cecil Rhodes Reminiscences', WL Mss. Afr. s 229/4/13/201-215 [208].

¹⁹¹ 'Rhodes to Chamberlain' (note 185).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ 'Rhodes to Jones', August 6th 1900, Letter 310 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

major problem facing Rhodes and indeed all those involved in African railway construction at this time was the necessity of transporting sufficient labour to the newly discovered coal, copper, and gold deposits in Central Africa and Northern Rhodesia. By August 1900, the discovery of coal at Wankie had produced an extra impetus to drive the railway forwards, and Rhodes was therefore envisaging a sizable mining settlement served by the route of the Cape-Cairo Railway. The construction of the railway was therefore equated to the creation of the material pathways that would enable and facilitate the motion of labour across African space in response to the shifting demands of extractive industries old and new.

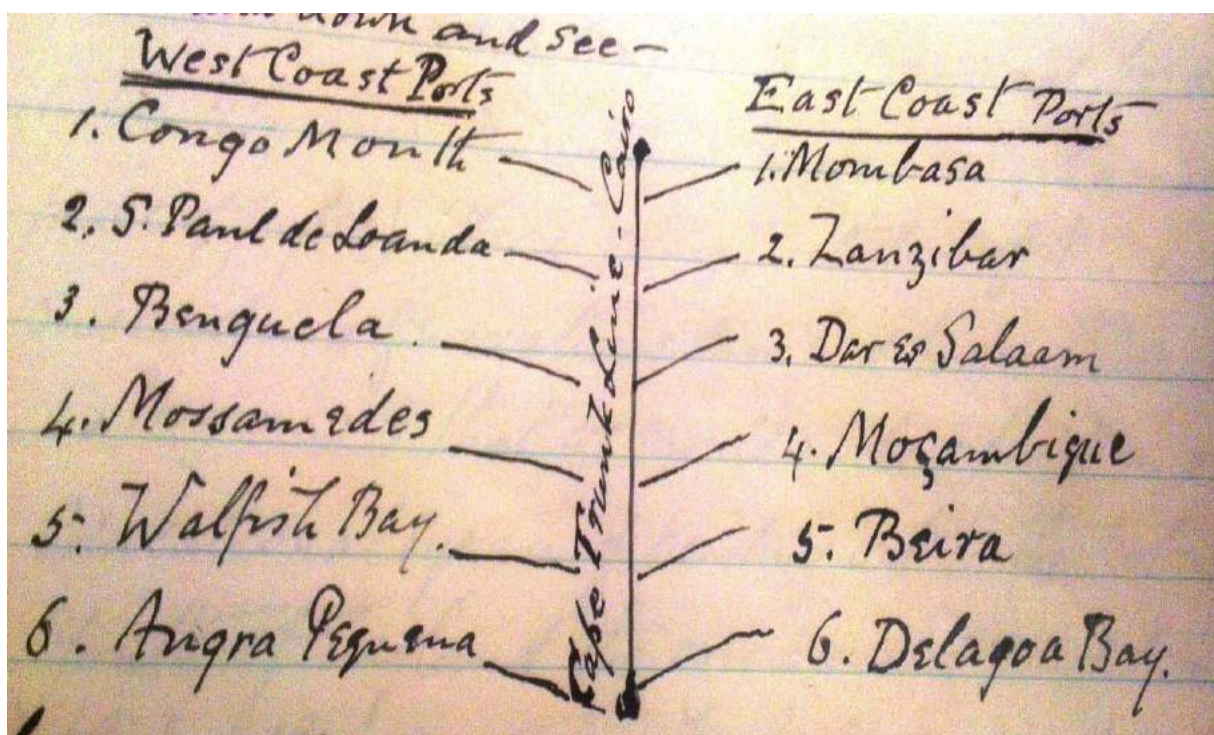


Figure 7.3: E.A. Maund's sketch of Rhodes' Cape-Cairo trunk line and 'fish-bones'. Reproduced from WL Mss. Afr. s 229/4/13/201-215 [208].

It is possible that Rhodes considered the transcontinental circulation of labour as the foremost task of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Although he emphasised to Grogan and Maund the necessity of extracting and circulating natural resources, some of his associates shrewdly picked holes in his plans. His financier Alfred Beit told Rhodes on at least one occasion that he was vastly overestimating the potential profits that would accrue from the railway (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 592-593), and after Rhodes' death one of his other associates, Alfred Sharpe, poured scorn on those who suggested that

the Cape-Cairo Railway would turn Africa into the resource depository of the British Empire. Sharpe was the Commissioner and Consul-General for the British Protectorate in Central Africa between 1896 and 1910 and, like many others, had long argued for the necessity of railway construction for the development of Africa (Sharpe, 1896: 384-385; 1910; 1912). In June 1918, Sharpe (1918: 151) told the Royal Geographical Society that “[w]e have heard much of the ‘Cape to Cairo Railway,’ a phrase which, after all, when the question is carefully studied, does not mean much.” In a subsequent book Sharpe (1921: 220) detailed the mines and places that would be served by the Cape-Cairo line, arguing that

“[n]one of these [places] I have mentioned which already send their produce and receive their imports by lines running to the East Coast will ever make use of a route either to the Cape or to Cairo: it would not pay to send their produce to either; what they want is the shortest and cheapest route to a port [...] west, south, or north makes no difference, it’s a matter of business.”

As Sharpe rightly recognised, by 1921 the central mines of Africa were already being served by numerous lateral railways to the coast, something that made the Cape-Cairo Railway even less necessary. However, he also insisted that Rhodes, whom he regarded with the same reverence as the other Cape-Cairo proponents, would have understood this simple economic fact too.

There is perhaps therefore something to Denoon’s (1973: 133) speculative suggestion that “if Rhodes really did want a land route from Cape to Cairo, he had labor supply in mind. It is difficult to imagine another economic (or indeed political) rationale for such a grandiose scheme” (but see Butler, 1977: 269, for a critical comment on this hypothesis). Although the grandiose nature of transcontinentalism was an integral part of its appeal, it is clear that whether or not Sharpe was correct the questions of labour and natural resources were inexorably entwined (Butler, 1977). The disruption or decline of the circulation of one would always have an impact on the other; emphasised most strongly when Rhodes grumbled about the impact of labour shortages on the Kimberley mines. Taken together, Rhodes’ intentions can be read in terms of a concern with “how people, resources, commodities, money, and information [were] given passage across the physical and metaphysical boundar[ies] of [African space]” (Usher, 2014: 550). It could be fairly argued, as has been done by Phimister (1974: 267), that in

light of this “Rhodes’ railway policies are best interpreted when related to his interests as a capitalist, even if the rationale offered was couched in the ideology of his time.” However, such an argument firstly fails to acknowledge the potency and continual articulation of Rhodes’ geopolitical vision throughout his life in relation to his railway schemes, and is secondly problematic in “treat[ing] economics and politics as if they exist in inverse causal proportion to each other” (Lunn, 1997: 8).

Instead, I argue, for Rhodes capitalist expansion was concomitant to imperial expansion, and the production of transcontinental spaces of circulation was equally concomitant to the production of new spaces of the British Empire. This was best articulated in a rambling letter (Rhodes himself acknowledged its “ill connected sentences”) he sent to Stead.¹⁹⁴ In it, he emphasised how the combined questions of labour and the market necessitated the expansion of British trade, to the point of inaugurating “a commercial war with those who are trying to boycott [our] manufactures”. “You might finish the war”, he continued, “by union with America and universal peace I mean after 100 years and a secret society organised like Loyola’s supported by the accumulated wealth of those whose aspiration is a desire to do something”.¹⁹⁵ This demonstrates the incoherent way that Rhodes connected his wealth to his geopolitical vision. I therefore do not think it is a stretch to agree with the comments of Walford Dowling, a Rhodes Scholar born in Johannesburg, who wrote in 1923 that Rhodes “saw in the accumulation of wealth a necessary means to the end with which he identified”.¹⁹⁶ His attempts to create the Cape-Cairo Railway were thus equally about the “material network that allows the circulation of goods and possibly of men” (Foucault, 2007: 325), and the territorialisation of British power across the entirety of the north-south stretch of the continent of Africa.

7.2.2. Diminishing the circulation of rebellion and the slave trade

Whilst extolling his transcontinental railway system as something which would enable and accelerate the mobility of labour and resources across and out of African space, Rhodes was simultaneously considering how the railway could contribute

¹⁹⁴ ‘Rhodes to Stead’ (note 165).

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *SCCRI*, 22.

towards the elimination of what he considered the uncivilised and the barbaric in Africa. Most prominent in his letter to Chamberlain was the emphasis he placed on the railway as a tool facilitating the governance of native populations and minimising the possibility of native rebellion. Fresh in Rhodes' mind at this point would have been the Matabele rebellions of 1895, which were followed by a second rebellion that is also referred to as the Second Matabele War in 1896 and 1897. Matabeleland, as Rotberg and Shore (1988: 285) write, was "a vast hinterland which had not and would never welcome the vision of its future which Rhodes had". The rebellions stemmed from the enclosure and appropriation of native Ndebele lands in Matabeleland by the BSAC throughout the 1890s, which coincided in 1896 with outbreaks of disease, drought, and rinderpest among the cattle whom the Ndebele depended on for their livelihoods.

Nonetheless, it was these rebellions that Rhodes explicitly discussed in his letter to Chamberlain, suggesting that if the railway had been completed to Bulawayo by 1895 the first Matabele rebellion could never have occurred. He argued that the railway would facilitate "the future government of the vast native populations within the British sphere", justifying this on the grounds that "[e]xperience has conclusively shown that the contact of European civilisation with barbarism will always result in native wars and disturbances unless authority can be effectively exercised."¹⁹⁷ This is a significant comment because of his positioning of European civilisation and barbarism against one another, indicating that it was only the authority of the former that could diminish the latter. I argue there were two elements to this. Barry (1996: 127) has argued that communications infrastructure

"came to provide the necessary link between the deliberations of public authorities and the dispersed space of the national [or colonial] territory; appearing to enable the authorities both to direct and to trace the course of distant events in real time, however imperfectly [...] establishing a complex feedback between such disturbances and the exercise of more or less subtle forms of administrative or military action."

The first and most obvious way the railway would check such disturbances would therefore be through the mobility of British colonial troops to areas of rebellion and potential instability. This was later demonstrated by the prominent role that railways

¹⁹⁷ 'Rhodes to Chamberlain' (note 185).

played in the Boer War. As Girouard (1903: 11) documented, they not only facilitated the mobility of British troops, supplies, and weapons, but were “invaluable for making big strategic changes of front, such as Lord Roberts’ concentration near Modder River”. There is a parallel here to the military logic of the Ottoman Empire’s railway construction, whereby railway infrastructure was supposed to enable the swift putting down of rebellion wherever it might occur.

A second element was the logic of the civilising rails discussed in Chapter Two. Even if the enhanced mobility of troops enabled by Rhodes’ railway could swiftly subdue any future rebellion in the Matabele territories, a larger priority was to eliminate the conditions that facilitated and permitted rebellions themselves. For Rhodes as for many others, the foremost of these conditions was the conflation of the Ndebele and other native tribes with inherent qualities of violence, instability, tribal warfare, and barbarity. Rebellion was in other words caused not by colonial expropriation, but by the uncivilised status of native peoples themselves. Rhodes believed this could be cured by the presence of a railway. He wrote to Chamberlain that “in the absence of rail or water transport, the establishment of a strong administration is practically impossible.”¹⁹⁸ This strong administration he equated to the disciplining and ‘civilising’ of the native peoples through the spreading of European political and economic norms and structures. No-one was to put this better than his associate Robert Williams (1922: 4), who wrote in 1922, referring to the slave trade, that

“the coming of the railways has blotted out this atrocious traffic. In its place have come the civilising influences of commerce and industry. The African has already been taught in hundred of thousands to work instead of fight. Thousands of them have been trained to the trade of carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths; others drive locomotives, work on the telegraph instruments, and perform other skilled jobs. Many are entering colleges and passing out as surveyors, architects, and medical men. In short, the African is rapidly becoming civilised.”

This quote perfectly foregrounds the recursive relationship between the good and bad circulations that Rhodes was implicitly speaking to. Not only was the railway a means of preventing rebellion, this was connected to the desired production of the African subject as a labourer, who could then join the wider transcontinental flows of labour circulation that Rhodes desired for the economic prosperity of his mines and for

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

other colonial industries. It was a process of what Monaghan (2013: 124) has referred to as “liberal order-making”, or in other words the envisioned role a railway could play producing the African native as a free, liberal, conscious subject, who would nevertheless be enmeshed within and dependent upon the wider systems of colonial rule for their existence. Therefore, as Ajuha (2006: 112) has observed again in the Indian context, Rhodes’ intention was the structuring of the labour market into a rigidly racialized hierarchy with native Africans occupying the very bottom and thus most exploited rung. Rotberg and Shore (1988: 121) similarly argue that Rhodes’ concern for the subjugation of rebellions and wars actually came not from a concern for native African life, but from a “belief that the time had come for whites to ensure the steady and dependable exploitation of African labor by almost any reasonable means.”

It is in this context that Rhodes’ concern with the slave trade in his letter to Chamberlain should also be seen. At the Brussels Conference of 1890, a group of states including the Ottoman Empire, the US, and all of Europe had ratified an agreement which pledged them all to reduce and if possible eliminate the slave trade in Africa (as well as in the Ottoman Empire and other parts of the world). Article I of this agreement declared that

“the most effective means for counteracting the Slave Trade in the interior of Africa are the [...] construction of roads, and in particular railways, connecting to the advanced stations on the coast, and permitting easy access to the inland waters and to the upper reaches of streams and rivers which are broken by rapids and cataracts, so as to substitute economical and speedy means of transport for the present means of portage by men.”¹⁹⁹

By 1890, the European powers were in unanimous agreement that the slave trade was a moral blight on the civility and progressiveness of Empire. With regards to circulation, the slave trade can be thought of as one of “those social phenomena that cannot be left to circulate freely lest they spiral out of control” (Elbe et al, 2014: 448). In Africa, the enmeshment of African natives within the circuits of the slave trade was simultaneously their removal (as Rhodes knew fine well) from the pool of labour that was necessary for economic and political growth. Thus Rhodes proposed that

¹⁹⁹ ‘General Act of the Brussels Conference relative to the African slave trade, signed at Brussels, July 2, 1890’, 37. Available at: <<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/010445236>> [Accessed 22/05/2017]

“the duty of Her Majesty’s Government, as well as its interest, lies in the furtherance of the proposed scheme, which, whilst promoting the development of valuable British possessions, will at the same time serve on the completion of the [Uganda Railway] to close entirely the slave routes to the East coast, and thus deal a final blow to the slave traffic throughout the greater portion of Central Africa.”²⁰⁰

Rhodes’ argument was largely based on wider proposals dispersing throughout Africa at the time. In 1894, just before the official declaration of Uganda as a British protectorate, the British Special Commissioner to East Africa Sir Gerald Portal published a report that Rhodes would almost certainly have read about the slave trade, repeating the claims of the Brussels Conference that “to efficiently check the Slave Trade, there is but one course open. The only means of effectively doing this is by making a railway” (quoted in Huzzey, 2012: 168). The construction of railways was also advocated by the manager of Britain’s first railway in 1829, Joseph Pease (1895: 7), as the only solution to the slave trade in Central Africa. Rhodes’ concern was probably more selfish than Pease’s, and his emphasis on the railway as a tool for the prevention of the slave trade was probably intended to attract Chamberlain’s moral compass towards acquiescing to his proposal. Whatever the reason, Rhodes’ foregrounding of the slave trade can be analysed, alongside his concern with rebellions, as an obstacle to the efficient and ceaseless circulation of labour and resources across African space. Rhodes’ criticising of the slave trade as uncivilised, immoral, and barbaric thus merged conveniently with his desire to see the mobility of labour and resources accelerated across the continent of Africa.

Rhodes’ letter to Chamberlain, and the wider examples I have discussed in this section, can thus be interpreted as an attempt “to create a frictionless, obstacle-free space of circulation that is as efficient as possible” (Glück 2015, 645), but on a truly transcontinental scale. Yet I also want to emphasise how Rhodes connected the production of this space of circulation to the expansion of the British Empire. Arguably his letter to Chamberlain deviated from the activities of the BSAC earlier in the decade only in the Cape-Cairo extent of its proposed scale, and was equally concerned with the extension of his earlier plan to “gradually assimilate the territory south of the Zambesi” to Lake Tanganyika and, ultimately, to connect these territories to British Egypt.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ ‘Rhodes to Chamberlain’ (note 185).

²⁰¹ ‘Report of the Second Annual General Meeting’ (note 180), 13-14.

Recalling Galbraith (1974), Rhodes had evidently decided that although it was beyond the capabilities of the BSAC to seize the territories from South to North Africa, it was not beyond the power of the great Cecil Rhodes. He summarised to Chamberlain that the importance of the railway was in “its effect upon the development and consolidation of British interests in Africa.”²⁰² It was therefore entirely consistent with his geopolitical vision and his professed aspiration to conquer the continent of Africa and hoist it from its natural, unconscious slumber into the civilised world. His transcontinental railway – and its radiating ‘fish-bones’ stretching to the coasts – can therefore be conceptualised in terms of Kapp’s system of circulation, the infrastructure that would circulate the lifeblood of civilisation across, within, and out of the inert African continent, connecting it to wider flows and releasing it from its historical enclosure.

To his dismay, Rhodes was not to get his guarantee from the Colonial Office. Although Chamberlain, a committed imperialist himself, agreed that the proposed railway was “the most advantageous and most economical means” of securing “the peace, order, and good administration of the territory controlled by the British South African Company”, the British Treasury did not hold the same view.²⁰³ The letters between Rhodes and Chamberlain went back and forth until April 1899, at which point the Chancellor of the British Exchequer Sir Michael Hicks-Beach informed Rhodes that no money would be forthcoming for his railway. Hicks-Beach later explained to the British parliament that “we were asked to incur a liability of £60,000 a year practically for 73 years”, and that he calculated, like Alfred Beit, that Rhodes was vastly overestimating the revenue that the railway would generate.²⁰⁴ Rhodes subsequently raged at him, writing to Hawksley in July that “[t]he more I think of that Beach the more angry I am [...] he is not fit to be treasurer to a village council and yet is in charge of the empire.”²⁰⁵ Hicks-Beach was thus added to the list of mediocre statesmen that Rhodes had disparaged in the Confession.

²⁰² ‘Rhodes to Chamberlain’ (note 185).

²⁰³ ‘Bertram Cox to Rhodes’, July 29th 1898, WL Mss. Afr. s 228/C18/8/f.

²⁰⁴ *Hansard 4th*, 71 (16 May 1899), 741.

²⁰⁵ ‘Rhodes to Hawksley’, May 25th 1898, Letter 478 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

Before April 1899, however, Rhodes had little reason to believe his request would be unsuccessful. Between his original proposal to Chamberlain in April 1898 and then he had simultaneously turned his attention to a different obstacle to his Cape-Cairo designs. It is to this that the next and last section of this chapter turns.

7.3. Rhodes in Berlin: transforming geopolitical visions

In this section I want to focus on a contradiction apparent in Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism that has confused some of his biographers (see Lockhart and Woodhouse, 1963: 400; Marlowe, 1972: 258; Roberts, 1987: 263), and which demands special attention because it has relevance to, and on initial observation could undermine, the argument I have been making so far in this thesis. The contradiction was the establishment of the German colony of German East Africa in 1890, which effectively blocked the way of Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism in the same way that the South Slav state was designed to block Berlin-Baghdad (see Figure 7.2). Given that, as Rhodes had argued for, Uganda had been made a British Protectorate in 1894 and Lord Kitchener had finally conquered the Sudan in 1899, German East Africa became the singular blot of green blocking the all-red dominion of British territories stretching between the Cape and Cairo that Johnston and then Rhodes had envisaged. Rhodes, it must be remembered, had previously greeted Germany's imperial ambitions in Southern and Central Africa with much angst. He had argued strongly for the Protectorate over Bechuanaland in 1885, declared himself "tired of this mapping out of Africa at Berlin" in 1888 (Vindex, 1900: 225), and went as far as telling the French foreign minister in 1897 that "he 'hated' the Germans" (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 597). However, the presence of German East Africa on one side of Lake Tanganyika and the Belgian Congo on the other meant that, regardless of what happened with Chamberlain and Hicks-Beach, Rhodes would need to seek either Germany's or Belgium's permission to continue the railway. After failing to persuade the King of Belgium to allow it to go through the Congo, he wrote to the Prince of Wales in March 1899 that "[m]y only other chance was to get permission from the Emperor of Germany."²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ 'Rhodes to the Prince of Wales', March 1899, Letter 340 in *Yrs, Cecil Rhodes: The Letters of an Imperialist Volume Two*, WL Mss. Afr. s 1804.

Rhodes arrived in Berlin on March 11th 1899. Three days later he was given the Kaiser's blessing to construct the railway through German East Africa. Wasting no time, the day after this on March 15th Rhodes wrote to Germany's Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Berlin, Bernhard von Bülow, stating that "[m]y trans-African railway having now reached Bulawayo [...] I desire to make arrangements for its extension to the Zambesi and thence northwards."²⁰⁷ The negotiations were therefore concluded with such speed that *The Times* (1899: 9), in its reporting of the meeting, mused "[h]ow long, it may be wondered, would the regular diplomatists have taken to accomplish so much practical work?" Six months later in October 1899, the agreement for the continuation of the Cape-Cairo Railway through German East Africa was drawn up. But this was not all. Rhodes seemingly said nothing of the fact that a large part of the Cape-Cairo axis of British dominion would be a German colony, which would certainly benefit from tariffs that the Kaiser insisted on enforcing. In fact, Rhodes attempted to persuade Chamberlain to concede the Pacific island of Samoa to Germany later in 1899, and he subsequently lobbied the British government to drop their opposition to Germany's planned undersea telegraph communications line to North America (Kennedy, 1974: 162). Most extraordinarily of all, Rhodes' Last Will and Testament subsequently bequeathed a small number of Rhodes Scholarships to German nationals; the only country to receive them other than Britain or Britain's colonies (Stead, 1902: 35-36).

Put differently, after visiting Berlin Rhodes changed from positioning Germany as a potentially fatal threat to his imperial ambitions to including German students in a system of scholarships that was explicitly intended to educate the future leaders of the British Empire. However, this is of more relevance to my argument than a mere biographical curiosity. I have argued throughout this thesis that transcontinentalism is defined in part by the projection and territorialisation of state power across space. In the previous chapter I demonstrated how the Cape-Cairo 'idea' was for a dominion of British territories stretching from Egypt to the Cape Colony. Consequently, it would be reasonable to expect that Rhodes was dismayed at the Kaiser's establishment of German East Africa because it prevented the potential realisation of the Cape-Cairo 'idea', and that he therefore accepted the Kaiser's acquiescence in continuing the railway only

²⁰⁷ 'Rhodes to von Bülow', March 15th 1899, WL Mss. Afr. s 228/C22/15/189-190.

begrudgingly. However, as Lockhart and Woodhouse (1963: 400) first put it, “Rhodes was highly pleased with the result, though it is difficult to see why.” My point is that, on initial consideration, this undermines my argument about the nature of transcontinentalism. If there is no evidence that Rhodes was concerned about German East Africa, if he “said nothing at the time about the loss of the Cape-to-Cairo” path (Rotberg and Shore, 1988: 309), and if he was in fact ‘highly pleased with the result’ of his meeting with the Kaiser, there is perhaps reason to question how much Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism was really about the projection and territorialisation of British power from the Cape to Cairo. It follows that it must also be reasonable to question this aspect of my analysis of transcontinentalism as a whole in this thesis.

In this section I draw on the resources of historical geography to confront this contradiction, and to explain why it does not invalidate my analysis of transcontinentalism. I argue that the seeming change in Rhodes’ Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism can be explained at the interstices of space, place, and the masculinised interpersonal relations that developed between him and the Kaiser in Berlin. As noted in Chapter One, historical geographers have repeatedly stressed the importance of transnational mobilities and the (trans)formative impact of space and place on the continual refashioning of ideas and identities. In refracting individual lives through a geographical lens, “certain underexplored spaces, sites and places emerge that move biographical discussions into new terrains” (McGeachan, 2013: 68). Much of this work has focused on the history and geography of science. For instance, Withers (2009: 653) has argued not only that “the nature of science is conditioned by place, [it] is *produced through place* as practice rather than simply *in place*”. Historical geographers thus gesture towards how transcontinentalism might be transformed by place (in this case, the city of Berlin) and space (in this case, a billiard room in which Rhodes and the Kaiser met, as I will show). Examining Rhodes’ visit to Berlin on these terms explains his disavowal of the presence of German East Africa on the Cape-Cairo route, and demonstrates how the geopolitical ideas evinced in the Confession, especially his affinity with the ‘Great Men’, intersected with his time in Berlin to transform both his geopolitical imagination of Germany and his Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism.

Rhodes had never visited Germany before, and therefore gleaned his understanding of its culture, history, and politics purely through his continual enmeshment in an imperial and colonial environment of Anglo-German suspicions. As Rotberg and Shore (1988: 596) put it, “[t]here was every expectation that the [K]aiser, although half-English, would be just as antagonistic as [the Belgian King]. After all, Britain and Germany were competitors. Germany had supported President Kruger in the Transvaal.” However, although Rhodes himself never wrote about his visit, it can be inferred that Berlin had a transformative impact on his Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism. In his memoirs the Kaiser (1922: 84) recalled that Rhodes expressed regret at having not visited before, and “was full of admiration for Berlin and the tremendous German industrial plants, which he visited daily.” Moreover, Rhodes’ architect Baker (1934: 153) recalled how he was “greatly impressed by the appearance of manliness and discipline of the German people. He thought the British might, in respect of discipline, learn a lesson from them.” As I suggested in the last chapter, it was partly the qualities of discipline and manliness that Rhodes gravitated to in his thinking on the Roman Empire and the classics, and it is likely that he perceived the same virtues in the industrial plants and people that he encountered. It is thus possible, yet difficult to substantiate due to lack of evidence, that in Berlin Rhodes developed the racialized strains of what Merrington (2009: 34-35) has called “the deep Christian kinship between the ‘Anglo-Saxon’, the ‘Teuton’, and the ‘Goth’ [as] part of a deeper narrative of British imperial destiny.” Certainly Rhodes’ architect Baker (1934: 154) believed his visit to Berlin persuaded Rhodes that “[s]uch a strong race [...] must be brought into his idea of allied powers to promote world peace.”

Rhodes’ transformation from Germanophobe to Germanophile is however best evinced by his intriguing relationship with the Kaiser, which was underwritten by their masculinised recognition of each other as ‘Great Men’ seeking to impose their own idealised orders on a world inhabited by uncivilised peoples and stupid statesmen. Writing to his mother not long after Rhodes had left Berlin, the Kaiser described him as “a most energetic man and marvellous organiser.” “I have of course promised”, the letter continued, “to help him as far as is in my power so that he may be able to see the wish of his life fulfilled” (quoted in Röhl, 2005: 988). Oddly, the Kaiser also gave Rhodes

a portrait of himself to take back to Groote Schuur, presumably for Rhodes to place among the statues and tributes to the other 'Great Men' he idolised in his study.²⁰⁸ Rhodes, for his part, inclined towards the Kaiser immediately. "I like that man. He has large ideas", he said in an Aristotelian manner to the British Ambassador to Germany Frank Lascelles after the railway agreements were concluded.²⁰⁹ Rhodes' affinity with the Kaiser lasted far longer than his time in Berlin. In April 1900 he asked Lascelles to personally deliver a selection of his favourite classics to the Kaiser, and the year after Rhodes dispatched a wreath to Berlin to mark the death of the Kaiser's mother.²¹⁰

It was not only that Rhodes was "grateful at the fulfilment of his pet ambition by Germany", as the Kaiser (1922: 84) later put it. The interpersonal relations that emerged between the Kaiser and Rhodes stemmed from a certain kinship they felt towards one another. In short, they recognised their own self-perceived identities in each other; Rhodes, who was striving to leave his mark on the world in the same way that his idols Caesar and Napoleon had, perceived in the Kaiser a similar conflict, that of attempting to actualise a complicated vision of German destiny that only he had been able to accurately and objectively foresee. Rhodes would have taken much from the fact that the Kaiser was often impeded by the Reichstag similarly to how he was often frustrated by the British government. Furthermore, it is significant that according to Lascelles Rhodes impressed the Kaiser by talking about the supposed ancient riches of Mesopotamia and the Euphrates Valley, which as we have seen comprised some of the key spaces upon which the Kaiser projected his own imperial dreams.²¹¹ A final noteworthy point is that Rhodes, ever-obsessed with his own heart and lung ailments, probably sympathised with the Kaiser's own withered left arm. Thus here were two 'Great Men' with unparalleled geopolitical visions paddling against the tide of imperial regression, seeing in each other the masculine qualities of virtue, strength, fortitude, and determination that they both anxiously sought to evince in their own lives. Berlin, as John Verschoyle (Vindex, 1900: 634) was to write, was "where one great ruler of men

²⁰⁸ WL Mss. Afr. s 228/C28/96. Rhodes study featured, for example, a twelve inch statuette of Napoleon, which stood on his writing desk. See 'Grooteschuur Catalogue' (note 179), 78.

²⁰⁹ 'Cecil Rhodes and the German Emperor' [1899 recording of Rhodes and the Kaiser's meeting by Frank Lascelles], WL Mss. Afr. s 8/64-68 [66].

²¹⁰ 'Lascelles to Rhodes', 11th April 1900, WL Mss. Afr. s 228/C28/102; 'Count Metternich to Rhodes', 25th September 1901, WL Mss. Afr. s 229/5/164-165.

²¹¹ 'Cecil Rhodes and the German Emperor' (note 209), 65.

recognised another.” *The Times* (1899: 9) also eulogised the masculinised similarities between both men, noting that “[b]oth love to mould their plans on a colossal scale and aspire to build for generations to come”, before praising their shared “tenacity and keenness.”

My argument here is that Rhodes’ transcontinentalism was therefore transformed by the entwining of place and interpersonal relations. His time with the Kaiser in Berlin had a tangible impact on his geopolitics and his Cape-Cairo ambitions, and this helps to explain the contradiction that has so confused biographers such as Lockhart and Woodhouse (1963). Yet there is also the role of space to consider (McGeachen, 2013). Indeed, I argue that it is highly significant that Rhodes and the Kaiser’s decisive meeting on the Cape-Cairo Railway took place in a billiard room, which, following McGeachen (2013), is one of those mundane and therefore underappreciated spaces of geopolitical knowledge production. Although little formal research has been done on this, billiard rooms were spaces of intense social, cultural, diplomatic, and geopolitical negotiation in the two decades before the First World War. Holland (2012: 132), for instance, describes a hurried conversation between Joseph Chamberlain and the French Ambassador Joseph Cambon in a billiard room concerning the Agadir crisis in April 1911 – “[t]heir full conversation could not be caught except for two words: ‘Egypt’ and ‘Morocco’.” Billiard rooms were mainstays in upper-class mansions, palaces, and houses around the 1900s (Hamlett, 2009), but operated as a social space through interconnected logics of gendered and classed exclusion in tandem with their furnishings and associated discourses of who did, and who did not, belong in them.

Most evidently, “[t]he pool halls and parlors of the past were not open to women” (Ryan and Alexander, 1973: 29). In the Victorian middle and upper-class home or mansion, space was typically divided across rigid gendered lines, with the morning room and boudoir characterised as female spaces and the study, smoking room, and billiard room exclusively “male terrains” (Hamlett, 2009: 576). As Chee (2011) has observed with reference to the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, the aura associated with billiard rooms was therefore shaped by the influence of colonial and patriarchal power which operated in part through its exclusion of women from male spaces of leisure and debate. The billiard room must therefore be understood as an important space in the

reproduction of manly power and discipline, the social relations essential to the manifestation of the masculinised geopolitical gaze. Accordingly, as Holland (2012) hints at they were spaces where issues of political or diplomatic importance could be discussed away from the frivolities of female life. In a novel based upon original research into the Kaiser's life, Conrad (2013: 34) narrates a typical scene: "[s]ervants wheeled in a table filled with cheese, fruit, coffee, wines, and bread", after which the Kaiser "settled in for an evening of bawdiness with his cronies." The dual status of the billiard room as a space of leisure and a space of geopolitics is then captured when Conrad (2013: 35) tells how, after much "guffawing and backslapping", the Kaiser pulled one of his closest confidants aside for a serious discussion.

In this context it is easier to understand how, inside and through the billiard room, the Kaiser and Rhodes together discussed their geopolitical rearrangement of Africa's railway map. However, a second and little noted feature of the billiard room's dynamic of exclusion is its segregation of class. This is not a noteworthy topic in extant discussions of the social and cultural subtleties of the billiard room, but it is highly relevant here. Frank Lascelles made much of the fact that he and von Bülow were both initially excluded from the billiard room (von Bülow was also apparently irritated by their meeting, see Kennedy 1974: 162), writing that Rhodes and the Kaiser were alone inside for some time before they were permitted to come inside.²¹² This division was perhaps not so much based on class but on a conception of *greatness* driven by Rhodes' and the Kaiser's identification with each other as 'Great Men' of history. Lascelles and von Bülow, despite both being highly regarded upper-class diplomats, were excluded on the simple basis that neither the Kaiser nor Rhodes considered them remotely close to the lineage that they themselves were part of. Such an exclusion of the two diplomats does not merely reflect the self-identities of the Kaiser and Rhodes, rather the very act of exclusion itself can be seen as the constituting moment of social division, the point at which a sense of the Kaiser and Rhodes as great was produced and felt. This, in turn, shaped the geopolitical sensibilities of the Kaiser and Rhodes inside the billiard room. Away from the meddling eyes of agents of the British and German governments, they could negotiate freely over their shared ambitions and visions. This is potentially

²¹² 'Cecil Rhodes and the German Emperor' (note 209).

significant not just in abstract terms. In Lascelles' report of the meeting, he seemingly did not know that which the Kaiser (1922: 85-86) only revealed in his memoirs, that Rhodes had declared building the Baghdad Railway and developing Mesopotamia to be "Germany's task, just as his was the Cape-to-Cairo line." If he did, this might have had consequences in the Foreign Office.

In this way the classed and gendered dynamics of the billiard room had a tangible impact on the reworking of Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism and the mutual identification of the Kaiser and Rhodes as 'Great Men', shaping the world to their designs. There is a final aspect to this, that of the material and architectural constitution of the billiard room itself, and its potential agential role in shaping geopolitical subjectivities. Billiard rooms were often furnished with trophies of masculine and imperial conquest. Hamlett (2009: 584) describes a furnishing of "oak with skin rugs, a crocodile skin, guns, mounted ibex horns and Egyptian souvenirs" in one of the billiard rooms in her research, noting how this "typology of masculine décor" reflected the identities, histories, and imagined futures of those who owned them. Although the furnishing of the room the Kaiser and Rhodes met in is not known, Rhodes' own billiard room at Groote Schuur gives an indicative example (see Figure 7.4). As noted in the previous chapter, upon the wall was a trace of the Cape-Cairo route inked across a map of Africa. Also in his billiard room was a flag carried by Ewart S. Grogan on his 1900 walk from the Cape to Cairo. J.M. Soloman recorded that Grogan "[c]arried two flags, one presented to Rhodes, and the other to Queen Victoria."²¹³ The furnishing of billiard rooms, particularly Rhodes', therefore speak more generally to the question of how matters of "environment and materiality inject into the everyday mediation of power and ideas" (Dittmer and Gray, 2010: 1673). It foregrounds the billiard room as a geopolitical space defined by the relational interactions between architecture and furnishings, the subtle gendered and classed dynamics of exclusion, and the ideas, identities, and movements of the bodies within it. In doing so, it helps to demonstrate how the change in Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism occurred in Berlin.

²¹³ 'Grooteschuur Catalogue 1911' (note 179), 49-52.

As Megoran (2010b: 383) puts it in a different context, the time Rhodes and the Kaiser shared “emphasises the power of geographical proximity and intimate interactions to change deeply held world views.” It shows how Rhodes’ Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism was transformed through the combination of his kinship with the Kaiser and his experiences in Berlin, and how this was simultaneously shaped by the geopolitics that he articulated in the Confession. It demonstrates how Rhodes’ time with the Kaiser transformed his geopolitical imagination of Germany, and how this in turn led him to believe that the presence of German East Africa on his Cape-Cairo route was not an impediment to his ambitions. This is important because it explains how Rhodes was able to square his Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism with the presence of German East Africa in a way that does not undermine my wider claim that transcontinentalism is partly defined by the projection and territorialisation of state power across space. By “analysing the relationship between individuals’ continually reconstituted subjectivity, the places in which they dwell, and the spaces through which they move” (Lester, 2012: 1470) it is possible to reach a more nuanced perspective, one which acknowledges ideas and doctrines like transcontinentalism are not immune from the spaces and places in and through which they are (re)produced. We can only speculate on whether Rhodes truly came to believe the Teutonic race should join with the Anglo-Saxon race to provide the leadership and civilisation he insisted the world needed. But it is certain that his time in Berlin changed his view of Germany to a sufficient degree to accept, even cheerfully, the existence of German East Africa on his Cape-Cairo axis.

7.4. Conclusions

After travelling to London to secure the £2,000,000 guarantee Hicks-Beach had denied him from private capitalists, Rhodes returned triumphant to Cape Town on July 18th 1899. Upon arriving he gave a speech partly on the topic of “my railway to Egypt” (Vindex, 1900: 644):

“When the thought came to get through the continent it was a mad thought, it was the idea of a lunatic. This is what they said; but it has grown, and it has advanced, and you greet me here to-night because you see that it has passed from the era of the imagination to practical completion. It is now not a question, sir, of the lunacy of the project; it is merely a question of the years that it will take to complete” (Vindex, 1900: 639).



Figure 7.4: Rhodes' billiard room at Grootte Schuur. It is unclear whether the large Union Jack or the smaller flag bearing the Union Jack and the Islamic Star and Crescent is the flag carried by Grogan. Reproduced from <
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hilton-t/8622958556/>> [Accessed 22/05/2017]

“[W]e have to complete”, Rhodes continued, “with all the rapidity we can, the project that is before us, that is the project of uniting the North and South of Africa” (Vindex, 1900: 639-640). He praised the qualities of “my people [...] the English people”, who “intend to retain every inch of land they have got, and perhaps, sir, they intend to secure a few more inches” (Vindex, 1900: 642). By this point in his life Rhodes was a skilled orator, and he ended this portion of his speech with a final flourish:

“I have often stated it, but if you were to go up in a balloon, how ridiculous it would appear to you to see all these divided States, divided tariffs, divided peoples; the Almighty made them one, and it is our work to also unite them [...] But if I go to Egypt I want to leave behind me a union of States that shares in that, a union of young men who can give their lives to the development of these unknown countries” (Vindex, 1900: 644).

Although the outbreak of the Boer War in October 1899 and Rhodes' death in 1902 meant he did not live to see the railway progress to Tanganyika, Rhodes' speech aptly summarises the core arguments I have advanced in these two chapters. Only

Rhodes could transcend the limits of space and time by 'going up in a balloon' and seeing the reality of the world as it really was, and thus how it should be changed for the better. The change that Rhodes strove for was adding "every inch" (or every "acre", as he put it in the Confession) of land to the British Empire that was humanely possible, and it was only through the British Empire that states, tariffs, peoples, and the "unknown" expanse between the "North and South of Africa" could be united in benevolent government. What's more, there seems to be little doubt that had he lived beyond 1902 Rhodes would at some point have completed the railway, linking it up with the railway system at that point being constructed through the Sudan under the watchful eye of Lord Kitchener. Yet it was not to be. Rhodes' last words are often misquoted as the dictum 'so much to do, so little time.' Whether he said those words or not, they perhaps epitomise his paradoxical despair at his own imperial and existential failures when in reality few if any contributed more to the project of colonialism and imperialism than he did.

In this chapter I have argued that, after the failure of the Jameson Raid in 1895, Rhodes turned his attention to the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Using the proposal he sent to the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain as a guide I have argued that he equated the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway with the production of a transcontinental space of circulation which would facilitate and encourage the movement of labour and resources across African space while restricting the possibilities of unrest and slavery, simultaneously 'civilising' the continent and lifting Africa out of its previous inertia. Rhodes' Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism was thus exemplary of the wider doctrine of transcontinentalism I analysed in Chapter Two, privileging the railway as a technology which projected British power across space and which, under the justification of a discourse of civilisation, produced the spaces of circulation intrinsic to the expansion of the British Empire in Africa. And yet, as I have repeatedly stressed throughout these two chapters, Rhodes' transcontinentalism was equally situated within specific social, spatial, and intellectual contexts and was far from autonomous of the spaces and places within which he articulated it. Researching Rhodes has convinced me of the growing insistence of historical geographers that the best way to study ideas and their transformation across space and place is to embed them firmly within the long

tradition of biography. This enables us to connect “internal motivations of past lives and the external factors that shaped them” (Hodder, 2017a: 2), the “big” and “commanding” with the “little things” (Thrift, 2000: 384), and the prophetic geopolitical vision with its mundane, everyday articulation without denying the importance of either/or. This is of relevance not just for showing how transcontinentalism emerged, but for critical geopolitics’ research agenda more widely.

In the next chapter I will show how some of Rhodes’ associates, many of whom have been discussed in these two chapters, attempted to continue his work of constructing the Cape-Cairo Railway. In doing so, they carried his doctrine of Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism forward beyond his death. And although they failed, analysing their justifications for the necessity of the railway’s completion demonstrates the extent to which Rhodes’ Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism continued, albeit unsuccessfully, after his passing.

Chapter Eight – After Rhodes: the Cape-Cairo Railway and reawakening Africa, 1902-1930

8.1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters I analysed Cecil Rhodes' attempts to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway, and how his Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism connected to the geopolitical vision that he had articulated in his Confession of Faith in 1877. In this chapter I move away from a biographical, chronological approach to a thematic one, tracing additional components of Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism that are not strongly evinced by Rhodes' biography. To do so I turn to the individuals who attempted to complete the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway, and the arguments they advanced for doing so, after Rhodes' death. Prominent among these was Robert Williams, Rhodes' friend and fellow railway capitalist who did more than anyone to continue the railway after his death (see Hutchinson and Martelli, 1971, for details of Williams' life). Under Williams' stewardship, the railway progressed not through German East Africa but through the Belgian Congo after abundancies of copper were discovered at a small site called Katanga. As planned it reached the coal fields of Wankie the year after Rhodes' death, in 1903, before bridging the Victoria Falls in 1905. In 1906 it reached Broken Hill and, almost exactly five years after Rhodes' passing, entered the Belgian Congo in 1907. It was thereafter extended into Belgian colonial territory to Elizabethville in 1910, and the final link was made between Elizabethville and Bukama in 1917 (see Figure 6.1). The railway was never continued past this point and thus never connected with the system of Sudanese and Egyptian Railways as intended. After the defeat of Germany in the First World War, the distinct lack of British capital to finance any further work effectively killed off any possibility of the railway being completed. The Second World War and the subsequent acceleration of decolonisation confirmed the demise of the project, and the project still stands uncompleted today.

In this chapter I want to properly deconstruct one aspect of transcontinentalism that has only been gestured at so far. A key aspect of transcontinentalism was the geopolitical construction of specific places as the naturalised and commonsensical extremes of continental space. This was important because this in turn produced an

imaginary of the space between these points, and thus the space to be covered by a transcontinental railway, as firstly profoundly and irrefutably *uncivilised*, and secondly as the *entirety* of a given continental landmass. In Chapter Three I discussed how Thomas Chenery imagined and narrated Europe and India as two great civilisations, enabling him to argue that if the Euphrates Valley Railway was completed the entirety of the space between them would be civilised despite the fact the sleepers and rails of the railway would be at most a few dozen inches wide. In this chapter I confront this scratching of the civilisational surface fully, demonstrating how the entwinement of the civilisational and naturalised geopolitics of the Cape-Cairo Railway was shaped by this feature of transcontinentalism.

In order to do this, the chapter is split into two main sections. The first section demonstrates how those who argued for the completion of the Cape-Cairo Railway after Rhodes' death invoked a very specific geopolitical imaginary of Africa to underpin their arguments. They narrated Egypt and the Cape as two bastions of civilisation occupying the natural and geographically determined 'extreme' longitudinal ends of the continent, separated by an uncivilised, lifeless, and inert expanse of African space. My argument is that this very specific imaginary of African space combined with the discourse of the civilising rails to allow the Cape-Cairo Railway to be spoken of as that which would civilise the *entirety* of the continent, precisely because the *entirety* of the continent was equated with the sum total of the space between Egypt and the Cape. Put simply, because the Cape-Cairo Railway was envisioned as connecting the two 'extreme' and opposite ends of the continent, themselves bastions of civilisation separated by African wasteland, this enabled the railway to be spoken of as a project that would civilise the *entirety* of the continent, not just the ten miles either side of the tracks that Jefferson (1928) defined as constituting the spatial extent of the corridor of civilisation.

In the second half of the chapter, I demonstrate how this imaginary of Africa as lifeless and inert was reflected in the language used by the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents in their arguments for the railway's completion. Like Rhodes, they equated the civilisation of Africa with the production of a transcontinental space of circulation, whereby natural resources would be extracted and made mobile, labour would be diffused across African space, and the slave trade would be finally eradicated. I focus in

this chapter not so much on that which would be circulated because it largely mirrored the arguments that Rhodes put to Chamberlain in 1898. Instead, I concentrate on their descriptions of railways as the arteries and veins that would pump lifeblood throughout African space, and more specifically on their frequent metaphors of the Cape-Cairo Railway as the future trunk, backbone, or spine of the African continent. Their arguments epitomised this feature of transcontinentalism because they imagined African space as entombed within nature and with no history or other noteworthy characteristics of its own. It thus required railway technology to be regenerated and linked to the civilised world. Ultimately they argued for the Cape-Cairo Railway as the backbone of Africa connected via multiple branch lines to the east and west coasts, which I argue was tantamount to the insertion of a circulatory system into the continent and the quickening of its spaces and peoples into sentient life.

8.2. The two extremes of Africa

In this section I explore how the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents imagined the continent of Africa. My argument is that they narrated a very specific imaginary of African space which constructed Egypt and the Cape as the civilised opposite ‘extremes’ of the African continent, and the space between them as an uncivilised, inert expanse of “bottomless abyss where everything [was] noise, yawning gap, and primordial chaos” (Mbembe, 2001: 3). The first sub-section of the chapter explains precisely how they imagined Egypt and the rest of Africa as civilised and uncivilised respectively, while the second sub-section turns specifically to the Cape.

8.2.1. *Egypt and Africa*

The clearest exposition of the African imaginary among the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents was given by Robert Williams in an address to the Central Asian Society on April 5th 1922. The title of Williams’ talk was ‘The Cape to Cairo Railway: From the Point of View of African Development’. Williams deliberately began his talk by expressing his gratitude that the Central Asian Society should be interested in the development of Africa in the first place. However, as he continued, this interest was completely rational, “for the first explorers of Africa were undoubtedly Asiatics, and to this day practically

the whole of Northern Africa is peopled by races of Asiatic origin" (Williams, 1922: 1).

Consequently,

"[h]ad the great Sahara and Libyan deserts (an impenetrable ocean of sand extending across the continent from east to west, and 1,000 miles in width) not blocked the way, the central and southern parts of Africa would, in all probability, not have remained centuries behind the rest of the world in civilization" (1922: 1).

Williams (1922: 2) then proceeded to give a brief introduction to the Asiatic 'discovery' of the African continent, an introduction which ends:

"My whole desire is to point out that whereas Asia is the home of very ancient civilization, Africa – with the marvellous exception of Egypt – is a continent, for the most part, as yet, uncivilized, and even in those regions civilizing influences have been for some time at work she is as yet only in the dawn of her development" (1922: 2).

In the very first sentences of his talk, Williams captures the core features of how the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents collectively imagined Africa. Firstly, he argues that 'the central and southern parts of Africa' have no history, no culture, and no civilisation whatsoever. These parts of the continent, as Williams puts it, are centuries behind the rest of the world in terms of civilisation and the continent is therefore completely devoid of any sort of civilisational influences or possibilities. Secondly, Williams narrates Asia as the home of a 'very ancient civilisation' which, in sweeping westwards, was the first to colonise and occupy Northern Africa. The first vestiges of African civilisation were thus provided by the colonisation of Asiatic peoples into the northern regions of Africa; primarily Egypt, but also other parts of the northern Mediterranean coastlines. Thirdly, Williams narrates the southern boundaries of Egypt as delimited by the vast Saharan and Libyan deserts. These formed natural geographical barriers to the spread of Egypt's civilisation to the rest of the continent. This threefold and intertwined rendering of Egypt in relation to the rest of African space was enormously significant because it ontologically cleaved Egypt away from Africa, representing Ancient Egypt in particular as a small part of the history of civilisation which, in turn, separated it from the *historyless* reaches of the rest of the continent.

Importantly, for Williams and many of the other Cape-Cairo Railway proponents this narration of Africa formed an instrumental and essential 'backstory' and justification for the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway. It was a necessary context that had to be

explained before any discussion of the railway could gainfully proceed. Moreover, Williams was by no means alone in narrating Africa in this way. For instance, one of the commenters on Williams' address was Sir Edgar Bonham-Carter, a barrister and administrator in Iraq and Syria after the formation of those countries in the wake of the First World War. According to Bonham-Carter,

“the Egyptians, racially, can hardly be regarded as Africans. Whatever their origin – a matter, perhaps, more in dispute than any other racial question – at least we know they have been very largely affected by Arabian blood. Also they are Mohammedans, and possess a civilization which is largely Arabic in character whereas the Southern Africans are in a much lower state of civilization” (in Williams, 1922: 16-17).

This line of argument reflected a range of historic anthropological and racial debates about the origins of European civilisation and the history of Egypt. Young (2005: 111-132) has shown how numerous 1830s and 1840s European and American racial theorists attempted to scientifically prove the Asiatic origins and character of Egyptian civilisation to demonstrate that any notion of black or 'negro' civilisation was fundamentally oxymoronic, thus justifying the essential superiority of white man over black. Moreover, Said (2003: 86) has observed that such arguments conflated 'ancient' and European history, “supplant[ing] Egyptian or Oriental history by identifying itself directly and immediately with world history, a euphemism for European history.” Said's criticism was levelled at those who sought to portray Egyptian history as part of the history of (Western, European) civilisation, something that denied, firstly, that any of Egypt's history belonged to Africa, and secondly that Ancient Egypt was connected in any social or cultural way to the rest of the African continent (see also Trafton, 2004: 143). In the arguments of the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents the process was similar: Egypt might be part of Africa geographically speaking, but it made no sense to draw connections between it and the rest of the continent in any other way.

These arguments did not just appear in the meetings of the Central Asian Society. For instance, P.E. Lewin (1911: 863), writing in Leo Weinthal's *African World and Cape-Cairo Express* on the topic of the Cape-Cairo Railway in 1911, echoed these sentiments when he defined Egypt as “the crumbling civilisation of the ages that meets the West at Alexandria”, ostensibly drawing the imagined connection between Asia and Europe (or the West) via the pivot of Egypt. Leo Weinthal, meanwhile, discussed Africa and Egypt in

these terms in a piece on the ‘Economic, Commercial, and Industrial Development’ of the Cape-Cairo route in his five volume collection.²¹⁴ Weinthal argued that in Egypt “some of the earliest records of human endeavour” are to be found “in a remote antiquity beyond the reach of the keenest research”.²¹⁵ Weinthal’s story of trade in Africa thus began when “the first pioneers ventured the bold journey that led them from the Asiatic cradle of the human race to tap and traverse the African road of riches”; what he later described as “Egypt’s ancient glories”.²¹⁶ Furthermore, he summarised that “[a]ncient history begins at the northern end of the [Cape-Cairo] route, where once the chief commercial centre of the world hummed with activity while only the primitive Bushman roamed the unmade garden of the Cape Peninsula.”²¹⁷

These writings simultaneously worked to narrate Egypt as an ancient place of culture, history, and civilisation *in Africa but not of Africa*, while describing the rest of the African continent as barren, empty, uncivilised, and devoid of any kind of notable historical or cultural characteristics; a continent therefore “where all developments are effected by penetration from the coast towards the interior.”²¹⁸ Furthermore, these representations also work to position Egypt as the cultural and historical ‘northern extreme’ of the African continent, both figuratively and metaphorically at the pinnacle of African civilisation. They construct Egypt as a centre of civilisation and prosperity, pollinated by the history and culture of the Asiatic settlers with whom it shares an essential blood lineage, and gazing down upon the rest of Africa, geographically part of it but simultaneously an ontologically separate cultural and historical realm. Although the evidence for this is anecdotal, it would also appear Rhodes discussed Africa in this way. According to his architect Baker, Rhodes at one time or another discussed the possibility of a civilisational connection between Rhodesia and Egypt: “[h]e clung to the belief [of] its historical connection with an early civilization linked directly or indirectly through Arabian or other sea-faring race with Egypt, if not indeed with Phoenicia.”²¹⁹ One of Maund’s reminiscences also remembers Rhodes as pondering deeply a line from Marcus

²¹⁴ *SCCRIV*, 3-5.

²¹⁵ *SCCRIV*, 3.

²¹⁶ *SCCRIV*, 4.

²¹⁷ *SCCRIV*, 5.

²¹⁸ *SCCRIV*, 403.

²¹⁹ ‘Reminiscences of Cecil Rhodes’ (note 145), 16.

Aurelius' *Mediations*. Aurelius described Asia and Europe as corners of the universe, to which Rhodes' apparently mused "[w]hy did he leave out Africa? [...] Mauritania, Numidia, Carthage and Egypt were important to the [Roman] Empire. I am sorry he left out Africa."²²⁰

Egypt was thus imagined as a great and historical civilisation ontologically separate from yet geographically part of the continent of Africa. Below it sat a massive expanse of uncivilised, undeveloped space. The next sub-section turns to the other end of the continent, and explores how the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents envisaged the Cape in their writings.

8.2.2. The Cape

The idea of the Cape as a second bastion of civilisation occupying the southern extreme of the African continent was significant in the production of an imaginative geopolitical link between it and Cairo. The characterisation of Egypt and the Cape as respectively the northern and southern extremes of Africa therefore constituted a geopolitical imaginary denoting two bastions of civilisation which had rather unfortunately been placed at opposite ends of the continent. This was intrinsically naturalised, in that the positions of Egypt and the Cape as the extreme opposites of Africa were presented as essential and irrefutable geographical facts rather than geopolitical and historical constructions.

Thus Robert Williams, in his overview of the Cape-Cairo Railway in the first of Leo Weinthal's five volume set, began by writing "[t]he subject of this article is the railway route that will connect *the two extremes of the African continent*, which are nearly 5,000 miles apart in a direct line."²²¹ The notion of two extremes here is not just in terms of their imagined geographical location furthest from a central point (wherever that might be), but also in terms of their exceptional and unusual difference from the rest of the African continent. In his influential 1911 book, *The Railway Conquest of the World*, F.A. Talbot (1911: 139) likewise talked of "the two extreme points of the African continent"

²²⁰ Papers of E.A. Maund: 'Marcus Aurelius - How he influenced Rhodes' Character', Mss. Afr. s 229/4/11/172-185 [178].

²²¹ *SCCRI*, 105 [emphasis added].

in the context of the railway, while in his contribution to Weinthal's volumes the Lieutenant-Colonel H. Marshall Hole discussed "the possibility of connecting the extremes of Africa by a chain of railways".²²² Many of the other Cape-Cairo Railway advocates stated, in a most matter of fact way, versions of these words in their writings.²²³ They therefore captured the dual positions of Egypt and the Cape as the northern and southern extremes of the continent while emphasising the geographical distance between them. Egypt and the Cape were constructed as the geographically essentialised north and south extremes of the continent, separated by 5,000 miles of unhistorical, undeveloped African space.

The process through which the Cape was naturalised as the second bastion of civilisation occupying the southern extreme of Africa is different to that of Egypt, and was stimulated by three historical developments that the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents connected to the African continent. Firstly, successive maritime voyages around the Cape of Good Hope established it as the point marking the geographical division of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans; the point when the sailor stopped moving south and began to move east. These voyages began a process of establishing the Cape in the European geopolitical imagination as somewhere that had been in contact with civilisation and thus had history; distinguishing it from Africa. Thus, the later settlement of the Cape by the Dutch and British was underpinned by an imaginative demarcation between the Cape and the rest of Africa. The advocates of the Cape-Cairo Railway typically preceded their arguments by discussing the importance of these voyages. For example, in his piece entitled 'Economic, Commercial, and Industrial Development' discussed previously, Weinthal traced a direct line from the Asiatic colonisation of Egypt to the supposed circumnavigation of Africa by the Phoenicians under the rule of Necho II of Egypt around 600BC, and thence onwards to "the Dutch and English [opening] up the extreme southern African terminus."²²⁴ Although Egyptologists now doubt that this circumnavigation actually took place (see Lloyd, 1977: 148-154), Weinthal's insertion of it into his narrative can be interpreted as an attempt to establish a common cultural and

²²² *SCCR II*, 25.

²²³ I have only found one example where it is acknowledged that the Cape is not the southernmost point of Africa, when George Beet wrote of the "early linking up of a mighty continent, *virtually* from its most southerly to its most northerly point" [emphasis added]. See *SCCR I*, 669.

²²⁴ *SCCR IV*, 5.

civilizational ancestry between the Asiatics, the Phoenicians, and the Dutch and British. In portraying European settlement at the southern extreme of Africa as simply the latest effort by a lineage of superior civilisations to fundamentally observe and thus *know* the African continent, Weinthal reproduces the teleological trope that the only significant historical movements in Africa are those that come externally from superior civilisations. Significantly, in this case these movements focus on the Cape, beginning to distinguish it from the rest of Africa as having had some sort of historical and cultural connection to Egypt and Europe.

Weinthal's narration was characteristic of the standard historical context given to discussions of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Robert Williams, in a different address given to the Royal African Society on April 21st 1921, echoed these sentiments by discussing a second maritime rounding of the Cape by a civilised people. Before this, however, Williams (1921: 1) argued of the railway that its story "is so closely connected with the political history of Africa that I must give you some very brief survey of this history as far as time will allow." He then discussed the Portuguese navigators of the 1400s, and more specifically Bartholomew Diaz, the famed Portuguese explorer who rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1486. Williams (1921: 2) then mentioned a second Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama, "who, adventuring still further [than Diaz], explored the East African coast in 1498." Diaz and da Gama were for Williams (1921: 2, my emphasis) "*the first to make Africa known to Europeans.*" This mode of narration portrays the history of the Cape as the history of European movements around and towards it. My argument is that, as also evidenced by Weinthal, this narration worked to historicise and naturalise the Cape as a place, similarly to Egypt, *in Africa but not of Africa*. Further, the pinpointing of the Cape as *the place to be rounded* also began to establish it as the extreme south of the African continent.

The second important historical development in the Cape was the founding of a Dutch colony at Cape Town in 1652, which began the material development of civilisation at the southern extreme of Africa. This started with the formation of the Dutch colony and the establishment of agriculture. As Boyden (2004: 7) has noted, agriculture was

“a pivotal point in the history of the interplay between human culture and living systems. Farming was the essential precondition underlying, and making possible, the development and maintenance of civilisation, with all its benefits and blemishes.”

This was an important point stressed by the Cape-Cairo Railway advocates in narrating the history of the civilizational development of the Cape; what the cotton and tobacco exporter W.H. Scherffius described as “[t]he first and greatest essential in the development [...] of the many facilities of civilization”.²²⁵ Farming thus took the position of the first vestige of civilisation at the Cape. The Cape Colony grew gradually as the extent of the Dutch farming operations spread inland after the establishment of a settler colony in the mid eighteenth century. George Beet described how by 1785 “the farmers could not be controlled or restricted from enlarging their ranges or moving farther back into the wild.”²²⁶ For Beet, therefore, there was a dynamic whereby the extension of farming operations simultaneously amounted to the penetration of settlement into the ‘wild’, and concurrently the unrolling of civilisation into the vacant, untamed spaces of Africa. Leo Weinthal painted a picture of this early development in his musings on the history of trading and industrial progress in South Africa. “In those days”, Weinthal wrote, “there was no adequate industrial basis on which to support a large volume of trade”:

“In place of the one present complex and highly developed commercial system there existed the 'Coast houses,' then advancing towards their palmiest days, with a thin network of small general stores throughout the country, and an army of peripatetic 'traders,' carrying miscellaneous stocks from farm to farm by means of the slow-moving ox-wagon. The trade was done mainly by primitive methods of barter, with an enormous multiplication of profits, the farmer giving his produce in exchange for merchandise, while the storekeeper and 'trader' paid their debts by passing the produce they collected on to the 'Coast houses,' who in turn covered their imports by shipping it to London.”²²⁷

Weinthal’s picture was in other words one of a gradual development of civilisation based upon the movement of traders across networks of farms and ‘primitive’ circuits of exchange among farmers, traders, and storekeepers, and the gradual progression from this lowly, embryonic structure to a ‘complex and highly developed commercial system’. Similarly, Charles Metcalfe (1916: 5), giving a lecture to

²²⁵ *SCCRIV*, 353.

²²⁶ *SCCRI*, 232.

²²⁷ *SCCRIV*, 7.

the Royal Geographical Society on November 29th 1915, argued that the Dutch settlers of Cape Town were

“very slow at extending their farms inland but they did push the Huguenots into the Drakenstein Valley, some 30 miles from Cape Town, which was then on the outskirts of the civilized area, and from that time onward the farms were gradually extended inland”.

After the occupation of the Cape Colony by the British in 1806,

“[g]radual settlements were made from that time on all along the coast from Cape Town to Natal. But no settlements were made beyond the mountain barrier until the few irreconcilable Boers broke away and trekked to the Orange Colony and the Transvaal, and the ox-waggon remained the only means of transport" (Metcalf, 1916: 5).

Metcalf's arguments, alongside those of Beet, Weinthal, and others, gesture towards three important points. Firstly, they portray the Cape as the hubris or point of origin of material European civilisation in southern Africa. While the advocates of the Cape-Cairo Railway made reference to the maritime feats of the Phoenicians and the Portuguese maritime explorers in their narrations of the Cape, the settling of the Dutch constituted no less than a landing of civilisation at a place that was already, and would continue to be, understood as the southern extreme of the African continent. The establishment of the first farm at the Cape can therefore be interpreted as the first bubble of civilisation in southern Africa. Secondly, this bubble was represented as gradually but consistently moving outwards from Cape Town into the 'wild' spaces of the African interior, and can be understood in the context of what Foster (2005: 306), after the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, terms “a ‘spatial story’ – in which enlightened imperialism was constantly moving outwards, pushing back the frontiers of darkness.” Thus the Cape was represented as the place, or ‘base camp’, from which this enlightened European civilisation began to flex northwards into the dark and unknown spaces of Africa. Thirdly, in the accounts of both Weinthal and Metcalf there is the notion that the everyday movements of civilisation were technologically mediated, specifically by the ox-wagon, but also hindered by the steep plateaus that separated the Cape and the coastal areas of Southern Africa from the interior.

The technologically mediated nature of civilisation was the third and final historical development that naturalised the Cape as the southern extreme of Africa and

the southern terminus of the railway. The railway was fashioned as but the latest in a long line of technologically mediated movements into African space. As George Beet argued in Weinthal's volumes, "the present story of the Cape-to-Cairo Railway would be incomplete without some reference to those two very useful and dignified forerunners of the locomotive, the wagon and the coach."²²⁸ In particular, Pirie (1993: 319) has noted that the ox-wagon has long been mythologised for the role it "played in the penetration of the interior by white settlers", and in Beets' and others narration there emerges a teleological and technologically mediated movement of European civilisation into the interior of Africa from the Cape. As Beet put it, "[i]t was due entirely to the magnificent co-operation and trustworthiness of the great ox-wagon that those early Europeans of the Cape found it possible to unravel the innermost secrets of Africa."²²⁹ "Previous to the coming of the railway," Beet continued, "they might have been aptly termed, 'the backbone of the country'", anticipating as he did so the biological underpinnings of the railway that I will discuss in the next section.²³⁰ Beet went on to detail a history of the penetration of Africa by the European ox-wagons. He began this story in 1655, and narrated how the first party that moved into the interior of the country did so to learn as much of the country as they could, meet some of the inland tribes, and search for mineral deposits. This narrative moved through the 1700s and to the occupation of the Cape by the British in 1795, before it became a permanent British possession.

Beet's account was supplemented by that of the multitalented Manfred Nathan, who contributed a piece to Weinthal's volumes on the Boer Voortrekkers. Nathan argued that

"the movement of the Boer pioneers from Cape Colony, northwards towards the interior of South Africa, covering the decade beginning in 1836, and known as the Great Trek, is the most important political and social movement in the history of Africa south of the equator."²³¹

Both Beet and Nathan therefore correlated technological development with the geographical extent to which European exploration in southern Africa occurred. Beet

²²⁸ *SCCRI*, 227.

²²⁹ *SCCRI*, 228.

²³⁰ *SCCRI*, 229.

²³¹ *SCCRI*, 219.

wrote that in 1663 “[t]he original wagons used for these pioneers journey were probably imported complete from oversea”, because the initial ‘Cape tent wagon’ was identical to a type of wagon in common use in the Netherlands.²³² However,

“[t]he South African rivers and sandflats necessitated, however, higher wheels, and, for the longer journeys, a general enlargement of the vehicle, but the original model remained unaltered in all other respects down to the days of iron axles and patent breaks.”²³³

As a result, for approximately 30 years after the establishment of the Cape Colony progress was made no further than 100 miles inland. From around 1750 “the building of the ox-wagons for transport purposes had become a staple industry of the Colony” which, in turn, stimulated the encroachment of the Dutch settlers as far as Graaff Reinet, approximately 370 miles to the north east of the Cape, by 1785.²³⁴ Beet then progressed onto the ‘buck-wagon’ which had an average rate of progress of around three miles per hour, before ending his story with the Rinderpest of 1896-1898, which killed at least 90% of the oxen in southern Africa and left thousands of wagons abandoned along with their quarry. Summarising his tribute to the ox-wagons, Beet affirmed that

“[t]hese transport riders traversed enormous distances, virtually abolishing the wilderness, and with their wagons and sturdy trek oxen were prime factors in drawing South Africa into the circle of the world’s activities and interests” (see also Metcalfe, 1916: 4-5).²³⁵

Through the movement of the ox-wagon, therefore, the Cape became connected to the world (in both the sense of trade, and in the sense of ontologically *heaved away* from the historyless African continent) and the wilderness of the African interior was abolished. These themes were continued as the ox-wagon was replaced by the railway in the mid nineteenth century.

8.2.3. Summary

In this section I have argued three interrelated things. Firstly, Egypt was imagined by the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents as a bastion of civilisation occupying the northern

²³² *SCCRI*, 229.

²³³ *SCCRI*, 231.

²³⁴ *SCCRI*. 231.

²³⁵ *SCCRI*, 233.

extreme of the African continent; a place of history and culture placed in complete contrast to the rest of Africa. Secondly, African space between Egypt and the Cape was constructed by the Cape-Cairo proponents as an uncivilised, ahistorical, and perennially underdeveloped space that had resisted all attempts by civilisation – whether Egyptian or European – to placate it. Finally, the Cape was constructed as the southern extreme of Africa and a second, although different, bastion of civilisation on the African continent through its gradual colonisation by Europeans, both in an epistemological and material sense. The positioning of Egypt and the Cape as the northern and southern extremes had the effect of constricting the continent of Africa, with two bastions of civilisation at opposite ends of a completely dark centre; gazing wistfully and longingly across the dark, unknown interior towards one another. However, there was also a positioning of the Cape as a ‘base camp’ for a series of technologically mediated movements of civilisation northwards into the interior. This began with the ox-wagon, the coach, before finally moving onwards to the railway in the mid-1800s. Civilisation, history, and culture were deemed as steadily moving northwards as technologies improved and were utilised. Thus Weinthal was able to argue that ancient history began in Egypt, but that

“[m]odern history, however, must reverse the old order by beginning at the southern terminus, where was born the immense commercial movement out of which grew the pressing necessity for the Cape-to-Cairo scheme.”²³⁶

It was also why, as an anonymous contributor to Weinthal’s volumes shrewdly observed, the transcontinental railway “is always spoken of as ‘Cape to Cairo’ and not ‘Cairo to Cape’.”²³⁷

This construction of Egypt and the Cape as the extreme, civilised ends of the African continent was a crucial feature of transcontinentalism. It enabled transcontinental railways to be thought of as projects that would civilise *entire* continents, firstly because the space between those two points was constructed as the *entirety* of continental space, and secondly because it enabled this entirety of continental space to be designated as intrinsically *uncivilised*. In the next section I will argue that for the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents such as Weinthal, Williams, and their associates, the construction of Egypt, the Cape, and the rest of Africa in these ways were

²³⁶ *SCCRIV*, 5.

²³⁷ *SCCRIV*, 190.

pivotal to how the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway could be equated to the fantasy of civilising the entirety of Africa. The Cape-Cairo Railway was imagined as civilising the entirety of the continent precisely because the entirety of the continent was imaginatively constructed as the space between Egypt and the Cape. Any railway between these two points would simultaneously traverse the entirety of Africa.

8.3. Quickening the whole into sentient life: civilisation and circulation

“The project which will bring to Africa and her people from north to south, from east to west, Progress, Civilisation, Prosperity, and Peace” (Weinthal, 1920: np).

As I argued in Chapter Two and in my analysis of Rhodes in the previous chapter, there was a causal connection between railway construction and the civilisation of space. This was not only apparent in Rhodes’ attempts to civilise the entirety of the African continent, but also in wider discussions of railway construction and its role in the development of the Cape Colony. In 1889, for instance, Charles Metcalfe and the Major F.I. Ricarde-Seaver wrote an article in *The Fortnightly Review* where they argued for the enlargement of the British imperial sphere of influence in southern Africa. Almost as an addendum, they offered a suggestion as to how the countries within British South Africa could be “civilised and developed.” “The chief means”, they contended, “plainly is the iron way: this is the great civiliser, the great developing force of the nineteenth century” (1889: 361). Underpinning such assertions was the belief that technologically mediated civilisation would teleologically continue to unroll itself into the vacant and uncivilised African interior via the ‘base camp’ of the Cape, facilitating an unravelling, overcoming, and ‘opening up’ of the African wilderness. In 1910, the geographer H.J. Peddie (1910: 195) put it thusly:

“The 'Dark Continent' is now being rapidly opened up to civilisation and commerce. As the pages of [the Scottish Geographical] Magazine show, roads and railways are being pushed into the interior in all directions, and the rivers are also being utilised as highways through it, and are evidently destined to play a very important part in the development and material prosperity of the Continent.”

Closely connected to these ideas were important tropes concerning the railway as a subjugator of nature, as a technology tasked with lifting Africa out of its purely inert, unconscious, natural state. Philosophically, technology has often been defined in terms of its binary opposition to, and subordination of, nature, specifically through its position

as “[a]n artificial extension of the innate tendency possessed by all living beings to gain mastery over their environment” (Lem, 2013: 4). Freeman (1999: 44) has demonstrated how the railway in particular both instigated and symbolised a Victorian war with and eventual triumph over nature; they enabled, in the words of the populist reformer Lord Brougham, “an almost perennial conquest over the power of nature.” Nature was thus tamed, pacified, and controlled by humanity through technological means. In Agnew’s (2003: 94) words, this was a reversal of the eighteenth century era where “[h]umanity had lost control of its destiny [and] nature ruled in affairs of state.”

In Africa, the subjugation of nature by technology was connected to widespread understandings of the continent and its peoples as existing in a state of pure nature, tethered to and subservient to their environment and unable to develop any noteworthy levels of commerce and civilisation for this reason. The geographer Harry Johnston provided the strongest articulation of this in a lecture he gave before the Royal Geographical Society on February 24th 1915. Positioning Europe against the uncivilised world, by which he meant Africa, Asia, and South America, he observed that these continents (or, more accurately, Europeans’ experience of them) had been consistently characterised by malarial fevers and germ diseases. This was, he argued,

“the principle reason why the population of those continents [has] remained very sparse in volume as compared to Europe – Europe, in which man first began to ask the why and wherefore of his martyrdom, and to turn against Nature with every intention of taking the law into his own hands” (Johnston, 1915: 289).

Here Johnston gestured to the emergence of reason and the development of the scientific and philosophical qualities which enabled (European) ‘man’ to pose questions about his own consciousness, tying this inextricably to a turning against nature and a subordination of the ‘law’ of nature to the law of humanity. This then was contrasted to the hitherto unchallenged dominance of nature over the affairs of African life. The wider topic of Johnston’s address was the potential changes in the political geography of Africa that would be engendered by different outcomes of the First World War, and was delivered in the immediate aftermath of the commencement of unrestricted U-boat warfare and the advancement of German forces into Russia. However, while this context acutely shaped the content of Johnston’s talk, he still speculated that, should it be decided in Britain’s favour, capital would be invested not into armaments “but into the

warfare against hostile and grudging Nature [in Africa]." Furthermore, he continued, "in this struggle our most potent arm is the railway [...] there is no agent so pacifying as the railway" (Johnston, 1915: 291).

This was a theme also prominent in Rhodes' plans for the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway. It is well known that Rhodes deliberately wanted the railway to bridge the gorge of the Victoria Falls, and the huge waterfall occupied a unique place in the Victorian imagination at the turn of the twentieth century. McGregor (2003: 172) has observed that by 1900, and largely because of Rhodes, the Falls were imaginatively "placed as a stop over on the Cape to Cairo axis" in the British popular imagination. Simultaneously, the Falls were rendered the quintessential zenith of Africa's natural state, a turgid combination of latent beauty, innocence, and majesty that had previously been locked away from Europe's prying epistemology. Railway technology was imagined as the means through which the Falls would be unlocked, tamed, and domesticated for the economic, imperial, and leisurely benefits of the triumphant colonial settler (McGregor, 2003). In his letter that Grogan used as the foreword to his book, Rhodes wrote that he "should like to have the spray of the water over the carriages" as the railway bridged the Falls.²³⁸ This is important because, as one of Rhodes' associates made clear in 1916, "[t]here were other points where the gorge of the Zambesi could have been crossed at less expense and in easier conformity to the limiting grades of the railway, facts which were clearly demonstrated at the outset by the engineers" (Freeman, 1916: 168). Thus the railway and its bridge, which when built in 1904 was to span 500 feet and sit 400 feet above the water (Christy, 1924: 332), represented the conquering of Africa's most secluded and secretive natural wonder. Not only this, the practices of spectatorship and observation that the railway carriage afforded is consistent with wider colonial tropes that sought to frame and display African nature for the leisurely consumption of the European tourist (Schivelbusch, 1986). Through the railway, therefore, Rhodes and his followers intended to tame the wild waterfall and domesticate it as an object of colonial curiosity and leisure.

²³⁸ 'Rhodes to Grogan', (note 189).

Railway technology was thus imagined as a pacifying, subjugating force that became a vassal for European and more specifically British fantasies concerning the need to emancipate Africa from its entombment within an uncivilised and intrinsically natural existence. To the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents, the only way of civilising the African continent and its peoples was through railway construction, and especially a transcontinental railway stretched between the two points of pre-existing civilisation that were naturalised as the northern and southern extremes of the continent. Thus for Metcalfe the Cape-Cairo Railway was “the iron track that must ultimately join the Cape with Cairo, and carry civilisation through the heart of the dark continent!”²³⁹ Weinthal (1920: np) finished a 1920 speech to the Empire Club of Canada by arguing that “[w]hen the construction of [the] northern and southern links of the Cape-Cairo Route is decided upon – darkest Africa – land of mystery – will be so no longer.” P.E. Lewin (1911: 864) asked

“[h]ow many are there in England who realise what this narrow iron road driven into the heart of Africa means to the Dark Continent? It is a pledge and an earnest of European civilisation. The wonderful development that has taken place in Africa within the last fifteen years is quite as much a moral and intellectual awakening as a commercial penetration. To millions of African natives the Cape-to-Cairo Railway and its subsidiary lines represent the first contact with civilisation after ages of degradation and slavery. They are the visible sign of the new order”.

However, as with Rhodes it is evident upon closer inspection that the discourse of civilisation was equated with the desired production of Africa as a transcontinental space of circulation. Freeman (1999: 48) has suggested that

“[t]o talk of railroads and the conquest of nature is, of course, to see nature as external. But nature does not exist independently of man: it is a social construction. What the railroad became part of was thus a transformed nature and, more particularly in the eyes of Marxist commentators, a nature tied to the imperatives of capitalism. Putting it slightly differently: the human mind had discovered nature’s secrets and was converting her material resources into productive usefulness.”

The secrets of Africa, as Freeman calls them, were described in terms of scintillating discoveries of mineral deposits and natural resources: most often the alluring shimmer of gold and diamonds, but no less important were resources such as coal, cotton, and rubber. These mineral deposits Robert Williams (1917) referred to as the ‘Milestones of African Civilisation’ in an address to the Royal Colonial Institute in 1917, whereby “these

²³⁹ *SCCRI*, 99.

discoveries had led the Cape to Cairo Railway step by step northward, and thus formed veritable milestones marking the progress of civilisation into the interior of the Dark Continent” (Williams, 1921: 14). The South African Minister of Railways and Harbours, Henry Burton, concurred in July 1918 that “the direction and the course of our railways has been dictated [...] by the pressing necessity of getting the quickest possible route first to the diamond fields [at Kimberley] and afterwards to the goldfields” (Burton, 1918: 3). Like Rhodes, and as the quote by Lewin recognising the commercial and anti-slavery imperatives of the railway demonstrates, the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents equated the construction of the railway to the production of a space of circulation, where resources and labour would be accelerated across African space while the uncivilised horrors of the slave-trade were exterminated.

This was best demonstrated by the disagreements between Alfred Sharpe, whose ideas were discussed in the previous chapter, and several other of the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents over the future route they believed the railway should take. Sharpe insisted that the smoothest and most efficient pathways for extracting and circulating the mineral resources of Central Africa were lateral railways stretching to the coasts, which would therefore run “*not to Cape, nor to Cairo*” (in Bigland et al, 1920: 107). Sharpe was criticised for this belief by many of his associates. For instance, Henry Wilson Fox, the Conservative MP and founder of the Empire Resources Development Committee, expressed in a 1920 address to the Royal Geographical Society that

“in regard to both the limited question of the utility of an extension to Rejaf, and, more generally, to the value of the central north-and-south trunk system as a whole, I regret to find myself in complete disagreement with the views which have been expressed in a recent paper by so high an authority as Sir Alfred Sharpe” (Fox, 1920: 94).

Meanwhile, Robert Williams, Leo Weinthal, Charles Metcalfe and others continued to maintain that the transcontinental line was necessary for the efficient circulation of resources and other goods across African space. What is noteworthy here is that Sharpe was the only one of these proponents who believed that a north-south transcontinental railway was not essential for the production of an efficient space of circulation atop the African continent. In his 1921 book he went into minute detail on the different routes, distances, and economic calculations affecting future railway construction. Williams,

Weinthal, Metcalfe, and Fox maintained, on the other hand, that the transcontinental trunk line was indispensable.

I argue that Sharpe was thus one of the only naysayers of the Cape-Cairo Railway because he was not engulfed by the idea that Africa was an inert, slumbering continent that biologically required a specific *trunk* or *backbone* as the focal point of a functioning circulatory system to be revitalised into economic and political life. To the proponents of the Cape-Cairo Railway, their arguments were based not on economic calculation but on the assumption that the continent of Africa required this ‘trunk line’ or ‘backbone’ in accordance with the naturalised geopolitical imagination of space for any system of circulation to be created. Just as Berlin-Baghdad and its subsidiary branch lines would produce a transcontinental space of circulation which would ensure the vitality of the new German Empire, the Cape-Cairo Railway was imagined as the focal point of a railway system that would connect Africa to global flows of labour and resources and awaken the continent from its previous entombment within nature. Moreover, the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents often expressed this in explicitly biological language. Railways were frequently described as providing ‘life’ or ‘lifeblood’ to the African continent. Robert Williams (1922: 8) argued to the Central Asian Society the following:

“To a steady development of [Africa’s] commerce and her industries we must look for the ultimate means by which she can, in Livingstone’s words, ‘be introduced into the body corporate of nations.’ The great iron highways we are building the arteries through which will pulse the new life to which Africa is rapidly awakening.”

Recalling Schivelbusch (1986), Africa was detached from the health and vitality provided by circulation, and was thus diseased, inert, and unconscious. The famed African explorer David Livingstone, to whom Williams was referring, used the words *body corporate of nations* to signify the civilised economic and political relations between states, where “no one member of which can suffer without others suffering with it” (quoted in McCracken, 2012: 39). Williams therefore evoked an imagery of joining the continent of Africa to the circulatory systems of the civilised world through railways, which would simultaneously act as the arteries through which lifeblood would be circulated around Africa itself. Charles Metcalfe (1916: 16-17) referred to the African railways in a similar manner, stating that they would be “great arteries going north and

south through the continent [...] connected with the coast on all sides by a network of railway veins.”

These discussions took on a more distinctive form when the Cape-Cairo Railway was specifically discussed. Languages of arteries and veins largely gave way to languages of backbones, spines, and trunks. As I have been arguing, this language all had a particular effect – it granted to the Cape-Cairo Railway a controlling and providential role in the civilisation of the African continent. It positioned ideas of limpness, dormancy, and slumber against the implantation of structure, awakening, and cardio/muscular/skeletal strength and energy. It was not, as Bishop (2002) has suggested of the Alice Springs to Durban railway in Australia, that these metaphors represented or strengthened the image of the body of the nation. In Africa, there was *no body* to be strengthened; the construction of the Cape-Cairo Railway was instead that which would create Africa anew, quite literally providing the *infrastructure* that would lift it out of its former enclosure and disconnection from the rest of the world. Ewart S. Grogan, in his 1900 book on his walk from the Cape to Cairo, argued thusly:

“No other system than the through connection would have the same wide-ranging influence for the same expenditure; and the start that its completion will give to radiating enterprise is incredible. *It is but the vertebral principle in Nature, and applies as surely to a continent as to a worm*” (Grogan and Sharp, 1900: 318, my emphasis).

Grogan’s extraordinary comment exemplifies my argument, and illustrates the importance of the intermixing of civilisational and naturalised modes of geopolitical and technological reasoning to understanding the centrality of circulation to the Cape-Cairo Railway advocates. His argument was not based on any economic calculations (sound or otherwise), but on the assumption that the inert and lifeless Africa simply required a backbone to be reinvigorated with political and economic life. Only the through connection, linking the northern and southern extremes of the African continent, could serve as the spine or vertebrae of Africa and thus ensure the establishment of a continent-wide space of circulation. The final culmination of the Cape-Cairo Railway as backbone was the role it would subsequently play in linking up the lateral railways, stressed so strongly by Alfred Sharpe, and the centre of the continent. This affixed backbone, as Grogan (and Sharp 1900: 318) continued, would be “the vertebrae and spinal cord which [would] direct, consolidate, and give life to the numerous systems that

[would] eventually connect the vast central high-road with the seas.” The Cape-Cairo Railway was in fact the first step to the building of a consolidated system of African railways, whereby the transcontinental line would be the directional and governing entity enabling prosperity and civilisation to circulate throughout the continent via a network of lateral railways, ‘ribs’, ‘branches’, or ‘veins’, as they were often called, between the main line and the coasts.

In Weinthal’s volumes, the British businessman Owen Philipps captured this best when he envisaged a

“central line of railway running through the heart of Africa from North to South, with laterals branching out East and West to the Coast. *It resembles the insertion of a nervous system into an inanimate body, quickening the whole into sentient life, so that the vast territories of Africa may be vitalised with activity and industry.*”²⁴⁰

The civilisation of the African continent, which could only be achieved through constructing a railway between the naturalised extreme ends of the continent, thus essentially meant the creation of a transcontinental space of circulation. Although the conflation of the biological, technological, and geopolitical took a variety of forms and vocabularies (circulatory system, nervous system, skeletal system, etc.), the notion of circulation, understood via Kapp (1877) and Schivelbusch (1986), best encapsulates how the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents envisaged the construction of the railway. In fact, I would argue that the concept of circulation found its essential expression in the Cape-Cairo Railway. The railway would constitute the backbone of a transcontinental space of circulation, whereby the mobilities of natural resources and labour would be accelerated. It would also fulfil the more intangible fantasies concerning the enlightened spread of civilisation, the conquest of nature, and the reversal of history’s millennia-long neglect of the continent. Yet as Sharpe recognised, the dreams of civilisation and circulation had little relationship to any material function a transcontinental railway could conceivably perform. The railway was never finished precisely for this reason – while Metcalfe, Weinthal, and Williams argued for its necessity, the economic turmoil that followed the First World War ensured the railway would never reach its destiny of Cairo. The arguments of the Cape-Cairo Railway proponents therefore stand as little more than testimonies to Rothstein’s perceptive comment – that men during his lifetime

²⁴⁰ *SCCRIV*, 187 [my emphasis].

were engulfed by an uncontrollable passion to bring together the uttermost ends of a continent, quite irrespective of rational motives.

8.4. Conclusions

On February 22nd 1930, a 44 page supplement on the Cape-Cairo Railway appeared as an enclosure in *The London Illustrated News*, edited by none other than Leo Weinthal. In it Weinthal and his contributors attempted, one last time, to argue for the necessity of completing the Cape-Cairo Railway. Their arguments covered much of the same ground that I have been discussing in this and the previous two chapters – civilisation and circulation for the benefit of the British Empire. By 1930, Robert Williams had retired to Aberdeenshire, where he would pass in April 1938, Harry Johnston had died in 1927, and Weinthal himself died in August 1930. With them died the doctrine of Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism. Very little is known about Weinthal's life, but it is clear that after the editing of his five volume set during the First World War he took over Rhodes' mantle. The publication of the supplement and his death in 1930 represented the end of efforts to finish the Cape-Cairo Railway. There is no evidence that after 1930 it was ever taken up by anyone else, and there is no evidence that their arguments reached as far into the British government as Rhodes had with Chamberlain. In July 1927 the Liberal MP for Anglesey Robert Thomas asked parliament "whether construction [of the railway] is now in progress at any point; and whether any definite period has been laid down for its completion?" The reply – that "[n]o project for a railway from the Cape to Cairo is at present under consideration" – remains true to this day.²⁴¹

Nonetheless, in this chapter I have demonstrated a final, important feature of transcontinentalism – the construction of places (in this case the Cape and Egypt) as the naturalised, geographically determined extreme ends of continental space. Egypt was imagined as ontologically distinct from yet geographically within the African continent. The Cape, on the other hand, was imagined as the place from which European civilisation would inevitably and teleologically unroll itself into African space, a process which began with the ox-wagons of the Boer Voortrekkers before eventually taking its final form with the railway. Egypt and the Cape were thus rendered two bastions of

²⁴¹ *Hansard 5th*, 209 (25 July 1927), 822.

civilisation at opposing ends of the African continent, even though longitudinally speaking they are not. This enabled the space between them to be imagined not only as lifeless, inert, dormant, and fundamentally uncivilised, but also as the entirety of the African continent itself. The continent was compressed and truncated, and as a consequence the possibility of a railway stretching between the Cape and Cairo was concomitantly a railway that would civilise the entirety of the continent as it did so. The civilisation of the African continent was, however, tantamount to the creation of a space of circulation that I more fully analysed in the previous chapter with Rhodes. The Cape-Cairo Railway proponents in this chapter replicated Rhodes' arguments while explicitly connecting its construction to the insertion of a circulatory system (or vertebrae, or nervous system, as Grogan and Phillips put it respectively) into the previously inert and empty continent, quickening it into sentient life. Africa would consequently be hoisted out of its previous state of pure nature, connected to global flows of labour and resources, and hoisted up the 'stream of Time' in which it had previously languished at the bottom.

As well as epitomising the doctrine of transcontinentalism, these three chapters constitute the first critical history of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Together, they are the first attempt to properly lay bare the geopolitical and technological underpinnings of the Cape-Cairo Railway. Its actual construction, along with its minute political and economic details, have been touched upon elsewhere, but these chapters add a different perspective on the railway that not only deepens our understanding of it, but also works to undermine and correct Tabor's (2003) exoticised history. These chapters also demonstrate a new way of comprehending the life and work of Cecil Rhodes. In the previous two chapters I have argued that Rhodes' ideas can be fruitfully analysed in relation to geopolitics and the modern geopolitical imagination, and by taking methodological lessons from historical geography it has been possible to offer a new perspective on one of the numerous points of contention within his biography, namely his changed relationship with Germany after his visit to Berlin. These chapters not only therefore demonstrate and analyse Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism, but also contribute to a deeper and more thorough understanding of Britain's imperial and diplomatic history that has not hitherto been studied with proper reference to geopolitics.

In the following and concluding chapter, I broaden the focus away from the Baghdad and Cape-Cairo Railways and turn back to transcontinentalism. I summarise and distil the main arguments and contributions of the thesis, propose future areas of research, and offer some final thoughts as to the importance of this thesis to our understanding of the world and our place in it.

Chapter Nine – Conclusion

9.1. Summary of arguments and contributions to knowledge

In this thesis I have identified, explained, and analysed what I have termed the doctrine of transcontinentalism. To conclude, this chapter firstly summarises the core aspects of my argument, restating the core features of transcontinentalism and how they have been evinced in my archival research into the Baghdad and Cape-Cairo Railways. It secondly identifies and sketches out three further areas of research relating to transcontinentalism that it would be worthwhile to pursue. Lastly, I offer some final thoughts to end the thesis in its entirety.

In this thesis I have argued that transcontinentalism was a geopolitical and technological doctrine that had its foundations in the Napoleonic Wars but only fully manifested itself from the late 1880s to the end of the First World War. I have argued that transcontinentalism was a geopolitical and technological doctrine defined primarily by three interconnected components; 1) the projection and territorialisation of state power across continental space, 2) the spread of civilisation across continental space, and 3) the extension, reproduction, and transformation of the state and its spaces of circulation across continental space; through the construction of transcontinental railways. All of these three features were different at different times and places, and were not immune from the shifting spatialities and places within which, and through, they were manifested. However, transcontinentalism was fundamentally underpinned by the relationship between the civilisational and naturalised geopolitical imaginations that entwined in the late nineteenth century on the one hand, and discourses of railway technology as a tool of state land-power projection that would usurp the previously dominant modes of British sea power, as a technology of European civilisation, and as a technology enabling and extending the circulation of the 'lifeblood' of the biological, naturalised state. Transcontinental railways were thus equated with the insertion of transcontinental spaces of circulation into continental space, an insertion that would simultaneously civilise and territorialise state power across the entirety of a given continent. In the last analysis, therefore, the political and economic advantages that would accrue for the power in command of a transcontinental railway would engender

nothing less than the establishment of that state's global hegemony to the detriment and ultimate eradication of its rivals.

In Parts Two and Three of the thesis I have traced transcontinentalism through two British examples – firstly the reaction and responses to the construction of the Baghdad Railway by the British Empire, and secondly through a structural biography of Cecil Rhodes and his associates' attempts to construct the Cape-Cairo Railway. Both of these examples are different, and both railways have evinced certain aspects of transcontinentalism more prominently than others. Britain's response to the Baghdad Railway was premised primarily on the railway as a tool of German military and economic power projection, which during the First World War became entangled with the naturalised geopolitical discourses of a perennially growing German state with a biologically 'inbred' need for territorial expansion. It was underpinned by the shifting balances between land- and sea-power, the notion of relative ascent and decline, and as an inevitable consequence did not display the civilisational aspects of geopolitics demonstrated most strongly in Part Three. The reason for this was simple; civilisation was a discourse of colonial and imperial legitimacy, and therefore would have served as a justification for, rather than a reason to oppose, Germany's attempts to construct the railway. However, as I underscored in Chapter Three certain British writers such as Thomas Chenery foregrounded the civilisational aspects of the Euphrates Valley Railway, indicating how a railway between Europe and India (regardless of who was to build it) could be associated with civilisational geopolitics. Thus the overland route to India embodied transcontinentalism but with specific geographical, cultural, political, and national differences between the European powers.

The Cape-Cairo Railway, on the other hand, was from the British perspective illustrative of the doctrine of transcontinentalism *par excellence*. It evinced all three core features of transcontinentalism, although geographical and imperial differences and relations shaped the ways in which they were expressed at different times and places. To begin with, Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism emerged from Johnston's Cape-Cairo 'idea', as a doctrine of projecting and territorialising British power across the entire north-south expanse of African space. Cecil Rhodes, as I have shown, expressed this most prominently in his application to the British Colonial Office in 1898 for support in

building the railway. Rhodes equated the railway with the projection of British power, the civilisation of African space, and the creation of a transcontinental space of circulation atop its inert, unproductive and dormant expanse. However, with the establishment of German East Africa and his visit to Berlin in 1899, Rhodes accepted the necessity of his all-red Cape-Cairo route not actually being all-red, incorporating Germany within his wider geopolitical vision. From that point onwards, Cape-Cairo transcontinentalism ceased to be about the transcontinental territorialisation of British power and, as I have shown in Chapter Eight, became centred on the twin imperatives of civilisation and circulation. In the arguments of Weinthal, Metcalfe, Williams and their contemporaries I have argued we have seen the core of transcontinentalism – the insertion of a transcontinental material network of circulation into the vast nothingness of African space, an insertion that would simultaneously civilise the entirety of the continent by virtue of the space between Cairo and the Cape being constructed as the entirety of the continent.

In identifying the doctrine of transcontinentalism, this thesis contributes to three different broader strands of literature. Firstly, this thesis is a contribution to what Butler (2001) and Williams (2005) have termed technogeopolitics, a nascent but growing body of critical geopolitical scholarship that examines how technologies and technological projects are shaped by, even as they shape, geopolitical imaginaries and visions of space. By arguing for the centrality of railway technology to the doctrine of transcontinentalism, and to the geopolitically inflected obsession with enabling (or preventing) the construction of railways across transcontinental space, I have demonstrated it is no longer tenable to see technology as a “unidirectional force which is kept to the side [of geopolitical scholarship] because of lack of knowledge of the technology or because its incorporation would be too messy” (Butler, 2001: 637). This thesis has consequently offered a corrective to the work of scholars such as Agnew (2003) and Ó Tuathail (1996), who gesture towards the importance of railway technology but do not fully substantiate or analyse its effects. It has also offered a different perspective to that of Hugill (1995; 1999) regarding the historical relations between technology, geography, and geopolitics, one that does not privilege social and economic relations of capitalism and is able to examine the linkages between

technology and geographical assumptions, designations and understandings underpinning world politics.

Secondly, this thesis has offered a framework through which to understand the attempts of imperial powers to project and territorialise power across continental space in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As I outlined in Chapter One, the Cape-Cairo and Baghdad Railways were just two of various transcontinental railways that were at least partially constructed from the 1850s onwards. The Trans-Siberian Railway, the American and Canadian transcontinental railways, and even less obvious examples such as the French Trans-Saharan Railway could all be studied as manifestations of transcontinentalism in a rapidly transforming technogeopolitical world – as expressions of the threefold imperative to project and territorialise power across space, civilise entire continental landmasses in accordance with the civilising mission, and produce transcontinental spaces of circulation in and through which labour, resources, and other objects could be given motion and transported. This is a contribution that builds upon Meinig's (1993; 1998) previous studies of the geopolitics of transcontinental railway in America but which offers a new lens through which such railways could be analysed and understood. Of course, more research and synthesis would be required to demonstrate the extent to which these railways reflect the transcontinentalism I have analysed across this thesis. I will say more on this in the following section.

Lastly, by explaining the doctrine of transcontinentalism and placing it within the context of geopolitics and historical geographical literatures this thesis has contributed to our understanding of British imperial and diplomatic history. While transcontinentalism itself is a new perspective on British history, there are five specific contributions I want to draw out. Firstly, this thesis has demonstrated the necessity of seeing Britain's diplomatic reaction and responses to the Baghdad Railway in the wider historical perspective of the changing balances between land- and sea-power and the shifting geopolitical imaginations of the long nineteenth century. Historians such as Chapman (1948) and Wolf (1973) begin their histories of the railway in the late 1880s, but I have shown that the roots of Britain's concern with the overland route to India must be traced to the Napoleonic Wars and to the entwined geopolitical and technological transformations of the Euphrates Valley Railway schemes, the political and

economic relationship between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, and the tensions between railway and naval power projection. Secondly, my analysis of R.W. Seton-Watson, the arguments for the creation of a South Slav state as a barrier to Berlin-Baghdad transcontinentalism, and the naturalised geopolitical logic of buffer states is a contribution to our understanding of the wider reconstruction of Europe's political geography after the First World War. More research would be needed to fully substantiate this, but it would appear that British support for the creation of Yugoslavia, while certainly stimulated by genuine principles of self-determination, cannot be understood if examined in isolation from fears over the potential establishment of a German railway empire from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf.

The third contribution the thesis makes to the study of British imperial and diplomatic history is through its approach to the life and work of Cecil Rhodes. As I have noted throughout, Rhodes has been the subject of numerous biographies and studies, but none have connected the development and solidifying of his imperial ideology to the wider geopolitical contexts of the late nineteenth century. I have argued that Rhodes' thought can be usefully conceptualised as a geopolitical vision premised on the ontological separation of subject and object. Thinking about Rhodes from this angle, and placing his geopolitical vision within the social, intellectual, and spatial contexts from which it emerged, offers a new way of understanding not only his ideas, but also his multifaceted and multifarious exertions in the service of the Anglo-Saxon race and the British Empire. Fourthly and relatedly, by foregrounding the transformative impacts of space, place, and interpersonal relations I have produced a new understanding of the changing of Rhodes' perspective towards Germany. As I demonstrated in Chapter Seven, Rhodes' sudden shift from Germanophobe to Germanophile has puzzled historians, but I have argued that by utilising historical geographical approaches we can more completely grasp how Rhodes' experiences in the places and spaces of Berlin with the Kaiser fundamentally altered his world view. Fifthly and finally, Part Three of this thesis can be thought of as the first critical history of the Cape-Cairo Railway which properly places Rhodes and his associates' attempts to build the railway in their geopolitical, imperial, and technological contexts. The Cape-Cairo Railway has been much mythologised

(Tabor, 2003), but this thesis has offered a step towards a more nuanced and thorough understanding of its conception and partial construction.

9.2. Future Research Directions

From these conclusions, I think there are three prominent avenues of research that would be worthwhile to explore. First and foremost, work needs to be carried out into the emergence and development of transcontinentalism outside of the British context, and concomitantly into what these different empirical studies could say back to, or fundamentally challenge, the conceptualisation of transcontinentalism that I have been arguing for in this thesis. More archival research, for example, could be undertaken into the German (as I initially intended) and Ottoman experiences of constructing the Baghdad Railway, and the Russian experience of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Methodologically, such work could follow a similar course to the one I have undertaken here, exploring the interlocking interests of practical and formal geopolitical elites (statesmen, geographers, explorers, capitalists, and so on) and the ways in which they connected the construction of transcontinental railways to imperial state power and the production of spaces of circulation atop continental space. This would help unpick the national, cultural, and political specificities of the civilised and naturalised technogeopolitical imaginaries in each case, something which would help refine (or, as I would hope) add new components of understanding to the doctrine of transcontinentalism as a whole.

Secondly, because transcontinentalism was ultimately a doctrine of the territorialisation of imperial power across space it will be necessary to understand how it was recognised, understood, and resisted. As noted previously in the thesis, to many post-World War One British writers the Baghdad Railway was an evil tool of German imperialism designed to dominate and enchain the Ottoman Empire into a transcontinental empire, but their worries were based more on Britain's own imperial angst than any moral or intellectual opposition. Contrarily, recent work in geography has emphasised how a range of anticolonial, socialist, and anarchist movements constructed alternative geopolitical imaginations in response to the dominant nationalist, imperial, and colonial discourses of the period under consideration in this thesis (e.g. Kearns,

2009; 2014; Springer, 2013). Ferretti's (2013; 2017a; 2017b) work on the historical geographies of anarchism, scholarship on pacifist internationalisms (Ferretti, 2016; Hodder; 2015; 2017b), and wider work on the historical geographies of peace and non-violence (Megoran, 2011) are beginning to demonstrate how disparate groups of radicals forged alternative visions of being in the world in direct opposition to doctrines such as transcontinentalism. This prompts the question: was transcontinentalism disputed and resisted, and if so how? I am uncertain if anarchists like Kropotkin and Reclus ever mentioned it, but there is scope to explore here. For instance, the 'Memorandum on German War Aims' noted how some German socialists opposed Berlin-Baghdad, contending that "any annexation of fresh territory would make the war a war of conquest instead of a war of defence".²⁴² Exploring some of this opposition could help us critique and undermine the logic of transcontinentalism.

Finally, to veer away from transcontinentalism I hope this research will contribute to a more incisive critique of the relationship between technology and geopolitics in both historical and contemporary registers. One of the things that first attracted me to this topic was a comment by my undergraduate supervisor on a draft of the analysis chapter of my dissertation. In it I briefly discussed the Baghdad Railway in the context of geopolitics in the Balkans during the First World War. His comment was that I needed to 'read, or at least cite, Mackinder' in the relevant paragraph. This puzzled me. At the time, I was not aware Mackinder had said anything remotely relevant to the Balkans or the Baghdad Railway in his work. I therefore interpreted the guidance as to cite Mackinder "in a strategy to bolster authority and add a false sense of profundity to writing that otherwise lacks both theoretical rigour and political and geographical nuance" (Megoran, 2004: 355). This is perhaps reflective of the way critical geopolitics has treated technology, as a subsidiary component to supposedly more important and timely analyses. Yet others such as the neoclassical geopolitics writers Deudney (2000) and Dolman (2002) have explicitly drawn upon Mackinder's theorisation of the relationship between geography and technology to guide their work. Dolman (2002: 75) in particular has considered the Lagrange Liberation Points, positions in space where the gravity of the Earth, Sun, and Moon cancel each other out so that an "object

²⁴² Intelligence Bureau, 'Memorandum' (note 105), 11.

fixed at one of these points (or more accurately stated, in tight orbit around one of these points) would remain permanently stable, with no expenditure of fuel.” An object at a Lagrange Point thus has a fixed relation to the Earth and Moon. Dolman (2002: 75) hints towards the “imaginatively intense” possibility of a space weapon of some kind being stationed at a Lagrange Point, fulfilling most completely Virilio’s (2002: 53) description of orbital weapons as having the “traditional attributes of the divine: omnivoyance and omnipresence.”

And yet I see no real engagement by scholars of critical geopolitics with questions of how Mackinder’s theorisations of technology are folded into neoclassical geopolitical reasoning (Kearns, 2010; MacDonald, 2007; Megoran, 2010a). Of course, scholars such as Shaw (2013) and Gregory (2011) have repeatedly critiqued the US military’s increasing use of UAVs and aviation technologies in war, and Duvall and Havercroft (2008: 757) have suggested “space weapons under the control of a single state logically constitute a new structure of imperial power through the counteracting forces of centralisation of sovereign power and deterritorialisation of sovereignty.” Yet in critical geopolitical engagements with neoclassical thinking I see little focus on technology, which Deudney (2000: 80), for his part, explicitly conceptualises as that which determines “the velocity and volume of violence available in particular material contexts”. If, as Dalby (2010: 281) has argued, a key part of critical geopolitics’ research agenda should be about “challenging how contexts are constructed to justify violence”, there is a need to unpick and critique how the military and geopolitical logics that I have argued were so central to the doctrine of transcontinentalism manifest in the technologically mediated desire to control, subjugate, and ultimately destroy in an era of late-modern war. Put differently, foregrounding and critiquing the use of technology needs to be a central part of how we disrupt deterministic statements like Dolman (2012: 78) has made in his more recent work:

“When we have this mind-set and apply the tenets of traditional realist and geopolitical theories that have survived millennia in their basic forms, the unavoidable conclusion is that the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are on a collision course for war.”

Pursuing all of these three avenues is something beyond my own capabilities, but if my work contributes in some small way to a wider examination of transcontinentalism and the relationship between geopolitics and technology it will have been worth the effort.

9.3. Final Thoughts

Throughout the planning, (re)writing, and editing of this thesis, I have worried much about that age-old and pivotal question – why is what I’m doing important? Even after I worked through and persuaded myself that the doctrine of transcontinentalism was not just something my stressed and sleep-deprived mind had conjured out of nowhere, I asked myself that question. Why is transcontinentalism important? I have argued in this thesis that it is important because it identifies and helps us understand and conceptualise a strain of geopolitical and technological thinking that was prevalent in different forms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thus contributing to, and partially subsuming, the work of historians into the national and imperial backdrops to transcontinental railway construction. I have also argued that it is important because it contributes to wider debates in critical geopolitics on the agency of technology in shaping geopolitical imaginaries and visions of space. Finally, I have argued it is important because, almost as a by-product, conceptualising and thinking with transcontinentalism generates new and variegated understandings of different aspects of Britain’s imperial, diplomatic, and geopolitical history.

I think I have done all of those things, yet the question still nagged at me. But then I went back and read Schivelbusch’s (1986) book one more time. In the final analysis, transcontinentalism is important because it was in many ways the final manifestation of the deeply burning nineteenth century desire to achieve mastery over time and space before the rise of aviation technology. The continents were identified as continents, and imagined as the largest continuous blocks of land in the world. They were eventually *known*. They were increasingly mapped, charted, photographed, and surveyed. Parts of them were colonised. As Rhodes put it in the Confession, by the late nineteenth century humanity knew the size of the world and its total extent. Transcontinentalism emerged out of that impulse to master space and time, to extend the frontiers of humanity across the entirety of *terra*, to mould and conform space and

time to its own designs. Transcontinentalism was born of the urge to know, control, and master all of the land on the surface of the earth. Geopolitics was its motivation and railway technology was its means. The entwining of the two furnished its opportunity, and resulted in the attempted territorialisation of state power on a previously unprecedented scale. It is for this reason this thesis is important, because it contributes to our understanding of that which is still with us today, our seemingly fundamental desire to know, and subsequently master, the entirety of the cosmos.

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