09/10/2009

RAJAH BROOKE AND THE VICTORIANS*

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ABSTRACT. *This article examines British elite attitudes towards the career of Sir James Brooke, the English rajah of Sarawak, between 1846 and 1851. It argues that Brooke's early reception as a hero, and the succeeding debates on the principles of his enterprise, were important for three reasons. First, they suggest that the domestic negotiation of imperial issues was influenced much more profoundly by contextual anxieties about the nature of British politics and character, than by considered engagement with conditions overseas and the character of dependent peoples. Secondly, they demonstrate the continued significance of Britain's 'civilizing mission', variously defined, as part of a politics of national identity in this period. Finally, the rejection of the radical challenge to Brooke's suppression of 'piracy' in the Eastern seas underscores the increasing dominance at this time of a more pragmatic, self-interested conception of how native peoples should be handled.*

The British political and literary classes were plagued by anxieties in the late 1840s. It appeared to them that Lord John Russell's Whig ministry was feeble, and that economic dislocation, commercial materialism, and social atomism were propelling

the country towards ruin.[1] The state of parties was disordered, and free trade had yet to fulfil the promises made for it; further afield, Ireland was starving and the continent was in turmoil. Britain's success in avoiding revolution in 1848 would eventually prove one of the foundation stones of a new sense of national self-confidence, but the immediate reaction to the events of that year was far less sanguine.[2] Concerns about elite leadership and about the strength and distinctness of the British character permeated political argument. These preoccupations were particularly clear in debates about the parlous state of Britain's overseas possessions. Riots in Canada and abortive rebellions in Ceylon and the Ionian Islands were succeeded by yet another war in South Africa, while the future of the West Indies continued to hang in the balance. With the repeal of the Corn and Navigation Laws, received rationales for empire were placed under intense pressure; the extravagant, crotchety, and dictatorial Colonial Office under Earl Grey became an easy target for Tories and radicals determined to rein in expenditure and gain political advantage. Arguments about the values Britain should project in its imperial governance and by its interventions overseas thus became a central element in the political and intellectual life of the period. And so, briefly, did James Brooke, the first 'white rajah' of Sarawak.

The anomalous dynasty Brooke established in Sarawak has proven a poor fit for the concerns of mainstream imperial historians, whether 'old' constitutional scholars or 'new' students of culture, society, and ideology.[3] As a result, he has barely featured in the expanding literature on Victorian visions of Britain's global presence. But Brooke fascinated his contemporaries, capturing the imagination of the British political and intellectual elite more powerfully than any other imperial adventurer before Livingstone. *The Times* declared in 1859 that he would 'live in the pages of his country's history as long as English history is read'; in undistinguished mid-century

coming-of-age novels, dreamy seventeen-year-old boys could be found asserting that 'there's one man I think I'd like to be – and I suppose you call him great – I'd like to be Rajah Brooke'.[4] The romance of his enterprise, and the controversy that surrounded it, made Sarawak (for a time) better known back in Britain than many British spheres of influence now considered more significant. By no means the most important of Britain's imperial agents of the 1840s, Brooke is one of the most useful when it comes to understanding the discursive place of the empire in Britain.

This article focuses on Brooke's significance in British public discourse between 1846 and 1851, when he was at the height of his fame. It does not suggest that his enterprise had any significant impact in altering domestic attitudes towards

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* I am very grateful to Jon Parry and Michael Ledger-Lomas for supervising the MPhil dissertation on which this article is based, and for their comments on earlier drafts. I would also like to thank Naomi Imms, Andy Jones, Edward McNeilly, and the two anonymous referees for the *Historical Journal* for their comments. The research was funded by the AHRC.

1 See J.P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 699-728, at p. 706.

2 Jonathan Parry, *The politics of patriotism: English liberalism, national identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 172-3.

3 Brooke usually merits only a brief mention in general histories of the empire; Kathryn Tidrick, *Empire and the English character* (London, 1990), 34-9 is the sole representative of the new wave of imperial historians to allot him much attention. On his role in Sarawak and the eastern archipelago there is a large literature: see e.g. Nicholas Tarling, *Britain, the Brookes, and Brunei* (Kuala Lumpur, 1971); J.H. Walker, *Power and prowess: the origins of Brooke kingship in Sarawak* (Honolulu, 2002).

4 *Times*, 26 May 1859, p. 8; Margaret Oliphant, *The Athelings: or, the three gifts* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1857), I, p. 70.

the British mission, or race, or the government of aboriginal peoples. It argues instead that Brooke's reception illuminates developing ideas about the relationship between the British national character and Britain's global responsibilities, at a time when conceptions of the latter were undergoing extremely significant changes, as well as allowing us wider insights into the political role and importance of imperial questions. In particular it highlights important shifts in the register of humanitarian language in these years. The article also takes issue with some of the assumptions underlying the work of the 'new imperial historians' on domestic British culture, and suggests that it was the political tensions set out above that were the main influence on the course of the debates over Brooke, not carefully-calibrated thinking about racial difference.

First, a brief outline of Brooke's career.[5] Born the son of a wealthy East India Company judge in Benares in 1803, Brooke's career in the Company's army was curtailed by a serious wound he sustained in 1825, and an extended convalescence in England followed. There Brooke dreamed Byronically of 'conquests hardly won', rank, and ultimately greatness, but lamented that they would remain beyond his reach.[6] A growing interest in the Indian archipelago as a site for British commercial and imperial engagement, however, gave direction to his aimless early life. Using his inheritance, he fitted out a scientific and geographical expedition to the region in 1838, which took him to Sarawak in north-west Borneo, a nominal dependency of Brunei. The territory's Malay governor asked for Brooke's aid in putting down an uprising of the indigenous, and apparently oppressed, Dyak peoples, holding out the government of the country as a potential reward. Brooke, convinced of his ability to

[5] The most scholarly biography of Brooke is Nicholas Tarling, *The burthen, the risk, and the glory: a biography of Sir James Brooke* (Kuala Lumpur, 1982).

[6] 'In boyhood days...', c. 1830, Oxford, Rhodes House (RH), Basil Brooke Papers, MSS Pac.s 90, Box 1, File 1, fos. 2-4.

improve the condition of the Dyaks, and keen to encourage British involvement in the region, seized his chance, and brought the rebels to terms in short order. After much wrangling and eventually threats of force he was proclaimed rajah (governor) of the province in September 1841. He immediately set about reforming Sarawak's government, and from 1843 solicited and participated in Royal Navy expeditions against 'piratical' Illanun and Dyak tribes. These were presented as a means of advancing the commercial and civilizational prospects of the region, but they also allowed Brooke to establish an ascendency over the sultan of Brunei, and thus gain the sovereignty of Sarawak. The 1846 publication of his journals made Brooke a hero back in Britain, and the next year, in which he returned briefly to England, saw the culmination of half a decade of negotiations with successive governments: Sarawak was not recognised, but Brooke was appointed KCB, commissioner and consul-general to the sultan of Brunei, and governor of the new island colony of Labuan, just off Brunei.[7] News of a bloody seaborne anti-piracy expedition in 1849, however, provoked a radical and humanitarian outcry. Brooke's critics, prominently the radical MPs Richard Cobden and Joseph Hume, excoriated him as a despot and a filibuster: he was transformed 'from something better than mortal man, into a blood-stained, slaughter-loving monster in human form'.[8] Lord John Russell's government supported him, but Lord Aberdeen's ministry conceded a commission of inquiry into his actions in 1853. Its report offered Brooke qualified exoneration, but could not restore the naval support that had been so vital to his success. Increasingly disillusioned with his

[7] Brooke had been instrumental in winning its cession. On these negotiations see J. Ingleson, *Expanding the empire: James Brooke and the Sarawak lobby, 1839-1868* (Western Australia, 1979).

[8] Brooke to Major Stuart, 15 Feb. 1850, in John C. Templer, ed., *The private letters of Sir James Brooke, K.C.B., Rajah of Sarawak: narrating the events of his life, from 1838 to the present time* (3 vols., London, 1853), II, p. 261.

project, and bitter about his treatment by Britain, he left Sarawak for the last time in 1863. His nephew Charles succeeded him as rajah.

Examining Brooke's reception necessitates touching on the controversy about the place of the empire 'at home'.[9] For two decades the 'new' imperial historians have sought to place metropole and colony 'within the same analytic field', a methodological strategy that has provoked particular debate as it has been applied to domestic British history.[10] Many of the scholars who come under this banner, influenced by 'postcolonialism', argue for the constitutive influence of the empire on every aspect of British life. When they turn to politics, they argue that conceptions of British citizenship, which underlay some of the most significant legislative enactments of the nineteenth century, were heavily influenced by ideas about non-British 'others'.[11] They have been criticised for relying more heavily on inference than is comfortable.[12] Opposing this tendency, and drawing upon an older historiographical tradition, are historians who instead approach visions of the empire as a constructed

[9] See Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, 'Introduction: being at home with the empire' in their eds., *At home with the empire: metropolitan culture and the imperial world* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 1-31.

[10] See e.g. Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the imperial turn: thinking with and through the nation* (Durham, 2003); Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley, 1997); Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A new imperial history: culture, identity and modernity in Britain and the empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, 2004).

[11] E.g. Catherine Hall, 'The rule of difference: gender, class, and empire in the making of the 1832 Reform Act', in Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall, eds., *Gendered nations: nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century* (Oxford, 2000); idem., 'The nation without and within', in Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, eds., *Defining the Victorian nation: class, race, gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000)

[12] Bernard Porter, *The absent-minded imperialists: empire, society, and culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2006 edn), *passim*.

presence in British society, responsive to conjunctural anxieties and traditions of domestic thought rather than possessing transformative power in themselves.[13] Complementary work has examined the imperial pressures on domestic policymakers.[14] The dividing lines between these different approaches, however, are less stark than they are sometimes represented to be – an impression encouraged by different choices of focus, and sometimes obscure language on the 'postcolonial' side – particularly when the more extreme literary-critical studies are left out of the equation. The vast majority of historians agree that, in some fashion, all British approaches to imperial issues drew upon specifically British fears and preconceptions.

Within the particular field of elite politics, however, an approach to imperial (and foreign) issues based on arguments about 'patriotism' and British character was often dominant.[15] This was acutely the case in the late 1840s, and at other such times when concerns about the health of the nation encouraged British commentators to turn in on themselves.[16] In their responses to Brooke, politicians, pamphleteers, and journalists were concerned above all with British responsibilities, and the projection

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[13] Peter Burroughs, 'The Canadian Rebellions in British Politics', in John Flint and Glyndwr Williams, eds., *Perspectives of Empire: Essays Presented to Gerald S. Graham* (London, 1973); Peter Marshall, 'Imperial Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23 (1995), pp. 379-94; Duncan Bell, *The idea of greater Britain: empire and the future of world order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, 2007).

[14] Miles Taylor, 'Empire and parliamentary reform: the 1832 reform act revisited', in R. Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, eds., *Rethinking the age of reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003); idem., 'Joseph Hume and the reformation of India, 1819-1833', in Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein, eds., *English radicalism, 1550-1850* (Cambridge, 2007).

[15] Parry, *Politics of patriotism, passim*.

[16] See Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century', *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history*, 19 (1991), pp. 1-23.

of British character: even when they did indulge in discussion about the racial characteristics of the Dyaks, or sophisticated analyses of Bornean politics, it was Britain's political and ethical duties towards the race or the region that were always uppermost in their minds. The meaning of the Dyaks for British manliness or citizenship was never an issue. Other contemporary controversies about imperial officials who had used violence against indigenous peoples played out in a similar way: such figures became significant at home only when they could be appropriated to wider ideological or party battles.[17] The rest of this article looks at the meaning of Brooke during his heroic period and that of the radical assault, before making some broader suggestions about the significance of the episode.

I

Brooke was lionized between 1846 and 1849 primarily because his achievements offered a catharsis to British elites concerned about the state of their national character and global mission. Potential heroes are often seized upon as indicators of a nation's moral potential when narratives of national decline predominate; the more so in the age of Carlyle.[18] Since 1840 Britain had lost thousands of troops in the disastrous retreat from Afghanistan, seen the Niger expedition fail abjectly, and been responsible for appalling blunders in the colonization of South Australia and New Zealand, while the West Indies continued to decline. Some extreme free traders advocated the scaling back of Britain's imperial commitments, as they were commercially useless and led to unproductive

[17] See below, pp. 17-18.

[18] Geoffret Cubitt, 'Introduction: heroic reputations and exemplary lives', in Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren, eds., *Heroic reputations and exemplary lives* (Manchester, 2000), p. 20.

entanglements; but the characterisation of the mid-century as an era of anti-imperialism has long been debunked.[19] Most educated Englishmen remained committed to the empire and the elevated conception of Britain's world role that it underpinned, and in Brooke found a vindication of their assumptions. Brooke's popularity also stemmed from the impression that he was promoting Britain's commerce. The Dutch-dominated Eastern Archipelago had assumed a new significance for Britain in the mid-1840s because of the opening of the China trade in 1842: naval bases and coaling stations between Singapore and Hong Kong became immediately necessary, and Brooke seemed to offer a ready-made position in the region, rendered tenable by his vigorous efforts to suppress piracy.[20]

The level of renown these considerations won for him was apparent during his visit to England in 1847-8. In addition to his knighthood and official appointments, he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society, the freedom of the City of London, an honorary D.C.L. at Oxford, and membership of numerous elite companies and clubs. He was popularly acclaimed at award ceremonies, with crowds spilling out of function rooms.[21] His portrait was painted by the fashionable Francis Grant, and the engraving widely advertised.[22] He dined with Victoria and Albert, and

[19] John Galbraith, 'Myths of the Little England era', *American Historical Review*, 67 (1961), pp. 34-48.

[20] Numerous books about the region were published in these years, including Frank Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian archipelago* (London, 1848); J.A. St. John, *Views in the Eastern archipelago: Borneo, Sarāwak, Labuan, &c. &c. &c.* (London, 1847).

attended a swathe of high-society parties and levees, making a deep impression on luminaries like Clough, Macaulay, and Samuel Wilberforce.[23] The most important part of the visit for Brooke, however, was the time spent cloistered with ministers discussing policy towards the Indian archipelago: these years represented the high point of British support for his enterprise, even though the government's attitude towards Sarawak always remained ambiguous.

Brooke's profile had been established by the first instalment of his journals, published in January 1846.[24] His enterprise was naturally of interest to provincial merchants, but his main constituency was the educated, metropolitan elite.[25] Regional and Irish newspapers tended only to reproduce articles about Sarawak from the London press, while Brooke was almost completely ignored by working-class papers, satirists, lyricists, artists, and cartoonists.[26] He was not, then, an imperial hero in the later-nineteenth-century mould. Partly this was to do with the empire's lack of popular appeal in these years; partly it was due to the aims of Brooke and his

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[21] *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 18 (1848), pp. xxvi-xxix; *Times*, 30 Oct. 1847, p.7; *Times*, 26 Nov. 1847, p. 3. At Oxford Brooke was cheered loud enough 'to deafen any decent hearing man': Charles Grant to Mary Grant, 28 Nov. 1847, RH, Brooke Papers, MSS Pac.s 90, vol. 10, fo. 20.

[22] *Times*, 26 Mar. 1849, p. 9.

[23] Henry Keppel, *A sailor's life under four sovereigns* (London, 1899), pp. 58-9, 65, 70; [Blanche Clough], *The poetry and prose remains of Arthur Hugh Clough* (2 vols., London, 1869), I, p. 117; G.O. Trevelyan, *The life and letters of Lord Macaulay* (2 vols., London, 1878), I, pp. 310-11; Samuel Wilberforce, *Speeches on missions*, ed. Henry Rowley (London, 1874), p. 243.

[24] Henry Keppel, ed., *The expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. Dido for the suppression of piracy: with extracts from the journal of James Brooke esq. of Sarāwak* (2 vols., London, 1846). The journals reached their third edition early in 1847.

[25] For mercantile opinion see e.g. *Bristol Mercury*, 11 Dec. 1858, p. 2.

publicists. They were focussed on rousing the kind of opinion that could influence government policy towards the Indian archipelago, and win at best recognition and at least more naval support for Sarawak. Such opinion, in their mind, was centred in London and on elites who expressed their views in parliament, in pamphlets, in newspapers and in periodicals.[27] Brooke was insistent from the early 1840s about the importance of keeping his enterprise before the government, influential public figures like Fowell Buxton, the mercantile body, and the press.[28] Negotiations with the government were led by Henry Wise, Brooke's agent, whose own narrowly commercial and financial vision for Borneo jarred with Brooke's more expansive aims, but who was initially an effective advocate for Sarawak.[29] The publication of the journals, however, was less a planned step in this campaign than a result of the simple enthusiasm of Brooke's pirate-chasing ally, the naval captain Henry Keppel, to see them before the public: Brooke was modest about their literary merit and doubtful about the interest they might hold for a wider audience.[30] But his friends at home realised their potential impact. Wise insisted on suppressing their first impression because it included a narrative of the apparently cold-blooded execution of a pair of Dyak chiefs, and because Brooke's criticisms of the Dutch had the potential to embarrass the government: he wanted to protect Brooke and his own commercial interests.[31] The success of the end product justified his intervention.

Not everyone was immediately impressed by Brooke's achievements, however. At Singapore, where there was discontent about his attitude towards their traders, many questioned whether the colonizing of Labuan was a 'job' and whether Brooke's attacks on the 'pirates' were self-serving or unnecessarily violent.[32] Back in Britain, naturally enough, the radicals Cobden and Hume took up this criticism of the extravagant Labuan establishment, while the anti-slavery radical George Thompson

went further and attacked Brooke's anti-piracy expeditions as 'indiscriminate massacres'.[33] The overwhelming majority of British readers, however, accepted uncritically and with relief Brooke's narrative of his emotional commitment to the cause of Dyak welfare and civilization,[34] his altruistic motives and financial disinterestedness,[35] his dedication to British expansion,[36] and the many improvements he had made in the trade, government, and morals of Sarawak. His achievements were formidable. He had transformed the head-hunting population of Sarawak into peaceful and industrious subjects, and ended the blight of slavery, without using unnecessary violence.[37] He had created 'an opportunity such as never occurred' for the introduction of Christianity among receptive heathens, and encouraged the mission sent to Sarawak in 1847.[38] For liberals and Peelites, in using free trade to promote civilization and religion, he had further proven that it was a mutually profitable enterprise.[39] And he had suppressed piracy, which was a barrier to industry and liberty, and an affront to Britain as a commercial and humane country.[40] He posed no threat to British values: the idea of a 'white rajah' was not seriously interrogated, standing as a romantic novelty, rather than a prompt for discussion or reflection.

The people over whom Brooke was exercising his rule, the Dyaks, never came across very clearly in writing about his enterprise. Missionary propagandists, naturally enough, painted them in a positive light, as physically superior to their Malay oppressors, disposed to agricultural labour, and virtuous in their social feelings.[41] As was the tendency at this time, their proclivity towards head-hunting was explained not on the basis of racial characteristics but as the result of vicious government, something the application of British principles would soon do away with; even the piratical instincts of certain tribes – a vice from which the Sarawak Dyaks under Brooke were happily exempt – were held to bode well, as they indicated physical

vigour and a desire among to better their condition. Certainly the Dyaks were not expected to fade away in the face of European advance; this would be impossible, indeed, as it was a principle of Brooke's to keep European involvement in their society to a minimum. In domestic discourse, then, they had more of the hardy dignity of the Maori than the degraded impotence of the Australian aborigines. They were in a state to receive British civilization, as the improvements Brooke had already made in their society proved.[42] This was the key fact, however; deeper ethnographic interest in the Dyaks awaited developments in scientific thinking about race.

Much more important was the way Brooke offered reassurance about the benefits of British rule, and exemplified Britain's superiority over other European states. He embodied the best points of the national character, as a man 'essentially British, in as much as he practices our national virtues'.[43] England alone, 'by the spirit of her people, and the influence of her institutions,' was fitted to produce a Brooke.[44] His success proved the dictum that 'no nation can colonise like the English', confirming that the innate vigour and imperial capability of the English national character was intact.[45] The matchless potential of British imperial rule was underlined by contrasts between Brooke's achievement, based on British principles of rule, and the decadent, despotic, and effete (and, where it was appropriate to mention, protectionist) regimes of the Dutch and the Spanish in the East Indies, and with the incapacity of native rulers, who in Sarawak eagerly desired Brooke to take over.[46] Brooke's recourse to the threat of his ship's guns in winning his rajahdom was rarely mentioned. His rule thus exemplified a benevolent, humanitarian, civilizing vision of Britain. The Tory clergyman George Croly maintained that Brooke had renewed a

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43 [Samuel Phillips], 'Mr Brooke of Borneo', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 59 (1846), pp. 356-66, at p, 347.

44 *Colonial Church Chronicle*, Nov. 1847, p. 166.

benevolent tradition of British exploration, by which voyages to new regions were expressly devised to carry benefits to native peoples; the liberal Conservative Lord Ellesmere similarly asserted that Brooke's work had almost by itself 'associated the British name with the protection of the weak, the suppression of tyranny and outrage, the emancipation of the slave, and the civilization of the savage'.[47] At a time when British commitment to the 'civilization' of native peoples appeared to be waning, in the face of its costs and increasing enthusiasm for settler self-government, Brooke's self-funded enterprise helped preserve an exalted view of the national mission. His career, then, also spoke to contemporaries who otherwise tended to disapprove of colonial violence and imperial expansion. Harriet Martineau, for instance, detested British misrule in India and Afghanistan, but saw Brooke's presence as 'a pure blessing to the people of Borneo'.[48] The anti-slavery and peace campaigners Henry Richard and Joseph Sturge initially shared her admiration; David Brewster, who would preside at the 1851 Peace Congress, compared Brooke's extirpation of piracy to the emancipation of the slaves in its virtue and importance.[49] To such individuals, Brooke's vision of a more enlightened form of engagement with less advanced races, based on the infusion of only a very small European element into their societies and an exclusive focus on native welfare, was enormously appealing. It contrasted with George Grey's efforts to civilize the South Australian aborigines and the Maori by promoting intermixture with European settlers, but, on the evidence provided by Brooke's journals, the Sarawak system appeared to be much more effective.

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45 Marryat, *Borneo*, p. 95; [Anon.], 'Borneo', *British Quarterly Review*, 14 (1848), pp. 261-92, at p. 262.

46 *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, 21 Mar. 1846, p. 180; [Francis Egerton], 'Borneo and Celebes', *Quarterly Review*, 86 (1848), pp. 340-359, at p. 344.

Brooke thus seemed to benefit Britain's imperial and commercial interests at the same time as he advanced the cause of religion and alleviated the suffering of oppressed races. His enterprise vindicated the assumption, which had become increasingly hard to sustain, that in British hands civilizational, commercial, agrarian, and religious 'improvement' went together. That he was fulfilling Britain's providential duty to extend Christianity and civilization also allowed hopes to be entertained that God would continue to vouchsafe domestic prosperity.[50] A variety of new visions for Britain's Indian archipelago policy, advocating an increased territorial or at least commercial presence in the region, followed from these readings of Brooke's achievement, and from his portrayal as a new Stamford Raffles.[51] These usually started with the development of Labuan, which was intended for use as a trade depot, coaling station, and base for the suppression of piracy, but in some cases scaled up to the colonization of Sarawak or even substantial portions of Borneo.[52] Expectations for the trade of the region were visionary, and few doubted that Britain would soon be its paramount power; Sarawak would be the cradle for religion and civilization, on the British model, over a large portion of the globe.[53]

II

During the rajah's sojourn in England, the Dyak 'pirates' – the Serebas and Sakarran tribes, residents of rivers and tributaries near Sarawak – had intensified their depredations.[54] With the government's approval, Brooke renewed his campaign against them early in 1849. This effort reached its peak on the 31st July, when a combined force of British and Company ships, and a native squadron, engaged a

Serebas fleet. Congreve rockets, grapeshot, and the paddle-wheels of the *Nemesis* steamer were used to their full fatal effect: early reports talked of '1,500 or 2,000 barbarians, who in an incredibly short space of time were blown to atoms'.[55] Later estimates put the number at between 500 and 800. Even after follow-up attacks on 'pirate' villages, there was only one British casualty – who had shot himself accidentally.[56] The Singapore courts awarded £20,700 in head money, a bounty paid for each pirate killed or simply involved in a given action, to the naval men involved.

Accounts of this engagement reached England in November. It brought the creeping doubts felt by some about Brooke's enterprise into full expression, and for other appeared to undermine everything he had previously been held to stand for. Made the subject of fire-breathing leaders in the radical *Daily News*, which had long been suspicious of Brooke, this 'massacre' arrested the attention of Richard Cobden and Joseph Hume. The confidence of these radical MPs was high in the wake of Corn Law repeal and the 1848 revolutions, and their agitations on constitutional and financial questions had reached a pitch.[57] They and their allies George Thompson, T.P. Thompson (who had himself led a failed expedition against Arab pirates), and John Bright aimed to promote peace, economy, and free trade: they were thus predisposed to oppose what they saw as violent, expensive, and ultimately purposeless colonial militarism.[58] Since 1840 they had criticised British conduct in Afghanistan, China, and New Zealand.[59] None of them argued for the dismantling of

the empire, however: rather, they wanted to see that it was well-conducted and looked after the interest of indigenous peoples.[60] Despite William Molesworth's earlier criticisms of British expansion in the Indian archipelago, the parliamentary leaders of the Colonial Reform movement did not join in the assault on Brooke; their main concern was with the failings of the domestic branch of the colonial administration, and with settler self-government.[61] Only in a few scattered articles was Brooke presented as another 'rank Colonial Office job'.[62] The radicals did at least draw support in their crusade against Brooke from the representatives of Exeter Hall, in particular the Aborigines' Protection Society and the Peace Society.[63] In parliament, the press, and at public meetings, these groups and their sympathisers vilified 'Murderer Brooke, Slaughterer Brooke, Exterminator Brooke, Pirate Brooke'.[64] Their campaign was helped along, but not prompted, by Brooke's turncoat agent Wise; Brooke's dissatisfaction with Wise's presumptuousness, narrow commercial obsessions, and scheming, and Wise's anger at Brooke's seeming obstructiveness and breaches of promise, had led to their connection being severed in 1848.[65] Disappointed and bitter, Wise became the evil genius of Brooke's opponents, passing them a steady stream of private information.[66]

The campaign against Brooke ran alongside debates on other imperial crises. The most relevant of these were the controversies over the conduct of Lord Torrington and the radicals' erstwhile political ally Henry Ward in having bloodily suppressed inchoate uprisings, in Ceylon in 1848 and the Ionian Islands in 1849 respectively. In both cases the radicals charged that the errant governors had contravened British constitutional practice by prolonging the use of martial law, and committed terrible acts of violence against innocent people; Britain could not stand before the world as the custodian of liberty as long as such deeds went uncensured

and unpunished.[67] The attempt to get up an agitation over the Ionian Islands died a speedy death, partly due to Hume's misjudged parliamentary tactics, but the Ceylon campaign was supported by the Tories, elicited a Select Committee, and ran until the session of 1851, though it ended in Torrington's exculpation. The length and relative success of that campaign was down to its utility as a strand in the onslaught against the Colonial Office, particularly thanks to Grey's botched attempts to influence the Committee, and with criticisms of Whig exclusiveness, facilitated by Torrington's family relationship to Russell.[68] The Brooke episode did not have the same resonance with wider political themes, which helps explain why the assault on him failed to pick up as much support from non-radical politicians and publications, even though the issues Brooke's conduct raised about colonial violence and law were similar to those expressed in the Ceylon debates.

In the mind of Brooke's accusers, however, the charges against him were just as serious. Brooke had degraded Britain's good name by using advanced military technology against barbaric, but otherwise harmless, tribesmen.[69] There *were* pirates that posed a threat to British commerce in the Indian archipelago, but the Serebas were innocent of the charge.[70] The Dyaks engaged in inter-tribal warfare, but did not attack British shipping; British functionaries therefore had no business slaughtering them.[71] The only difference between the 'pirates' and Brooke's protected Sarawak tribes, in fact, was their allegiance. But the debate was about much more than the definition of 'piracy', or the character of the Dyaks. It was clear that Brooke had not made an innocent mistake. He had lied about the nature of his enterprise to attract

British political and naval support, and used the excuse of spreading 'civilization' to consolidate his personal rule and justify massacres. He was swayed by motives of self-gain and self-aggrandisement, not philanthropic feeling for the natives.[72] Moreover, he had neglected his official responsibilities at Labuan and become implicated in trading speculations. Brooke's journals were thus transformed from documents of heroism into 'puffs preliminary', cynically designed to stir up Exeter Hall, full of cases of 'palpable homicide', and obviously rewritten with an eye to

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[26] Though for some indications of working-class support for Hume's campaign see *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 13 Mar. 1853, p. 1; *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 27 Mar. 1853, p. 6.

[27] Brooke to Templer, 21 Oct. 1845, in Templer, *Brooke letters*, II, pp. 107-8.

[28] Brooke to Templer, 22 Aug. 1842, and 12 Oct. 1842, in ibid., I, pp. 209-10, 217-18.

[29] Brooke to Templer, 13 Apr. 1843, in ibid., I, pp. 249-51.

[30] Though most of the editing was done by William Jerdan, proprietor of the *Literary Gazette*: R.H.W. Reece, Introduction to Henry Keppel, *The expedition to Borneo of HMS* Dido (Oxford,1991 edn), p. xiii:.Brooke to Templer, 2 Jan. 1845, Brooke to Keppel, 4 Jan. 1845, in Templer, *Brooke letters*, II, pp. 49-52.

[31] Reece, Introduction to *Dido*, pp. xiii-xiv. The second instalment of the journals did include the excised passages, which in the event raised little comment: Rodney Mundy, ed., *Narrative of events in Borneo and Celebes, down to the occupation of Labuan: from the journals of James Brooke esq., rajah of Sarāwak, and governor of Labuan* (2 vols., London, 1848).

[32] *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* (Singapore, 1848), p. 496; Tarling, *The burthen*, pp. 107-8.

[33] *Hansard*, 101:311-14, 21 Aug. 1848; 105:1065-73, 1 June 1849.

[34] E.g. Mundy, *Borneo and Celebes*, I, pp. 195-6, 238, 265-6, 272, 325.

[35] E.g. Keppel, *Dido*, I, pp. 262-4.

publication.[73] Brooke stood in the line of the vicious satraps of Eastern empires, the praetors and proconsuls of Rome, and the bloodthirsty Spanish conquistadors.[74] He was no hero, but a sad illustration of the corrupting effects of irresponsible power.[75] In the head-money claim, finally, there was further proof of the fact that force in conquest and commerce always led to great expense and higher taxes.[76]

The campaign against Brooke revolved around the repercussions of his career for the British character and the nation's imperial responsibility. This focus was

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[36] E.g. Mundy, *Borneo and Celebes*, I, p. 276; II, pp. 7, 26. In his private correspondence, however, Brooke was open about the possibility of applying to other European countries for aid: Brooke to Templer, 22 Mar. 1843, in Templer, *Brooke letters*, I, pp. 239-41.

[37] J.A. St. John, 'Mr. Brooke, governor of Labuan, and Rajah of Sarawak', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 22 (1847), pp. 580-99, at p. 594.

[38] Charles Brereton, *An address with a proposal for the foundation of a Church mission-house, and school, at Sarāwak* (London, 1846), p. 16.

[39] E.g. [H. St. John], 'Dangers of our new settlement in the Indian archipelago', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 15 (1848), pp. 650-8, at p. 651.

[40] *Times*, 19 Feb. 1846, p. 5.

[41] Brereton, *An address*, p. 7.

[42] [J.A. St. John], 'The diffusion of Christianity', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 37 (1846), pp. 494-528, at p. 505.

[47] [George Croly], 'The navigation of the Antipodes', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 62 (1847), pp. 515-33, at p. 515; [Francis Egerton], 'Borneo – Eastern archipelago, &c.', *Quarterly Review*, 78 (1846), pp. 1-23, at p. 3.

[48] Harriet Martineau, *The history of England during the thirty years' peace: 1816-1846* (2 vols., London, 1849), II, pp. 514-5. See also [Harriet Martineau], 'Rajah Brooke', *Westminster Review*, 6 n.s. (1854), pp. 381-419.

[49] Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London, 1864), pp. 529-30; [David Brewster], 'Mr. Brooke's *Journals of a residence in Borneo*', *North British Review*, 9 (1848), pp. 432-471, at p. 471.

encouraged by the response to the continental revolutions of 1848, as part of which the idea of a distinct national character had begun to exert a firmer grasp on contemporaries.[77] Brooke, it was charged, had abused the power entrusted to him by the nation; if the public did not have moral force enough to repudiate his conduct, Britain could no longer represent itself as the paragon of morality and magnanimity, nor maintain that 'it was the peculiar character of Englishmen to protect the weak

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50 [W. Francis Ainsworth], 'James Brooke, Rajah of Sarawak', *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 81 (1847), pp. 474-83, at p. 483.

51 [Egerton], 'Borneo – Eastern archipelago', pp. 3, 14.

52 [Anon.], 'Commercial relations of the Indian archipelago', *Fraser's Magazine*, 34 (1846), pp. 379-91, at p. 379; Peter Laurie, City of London meeting, report in *Times*, 30 Oct. 1847, p. 7; G.F. Davison, *Trade and travel in the far East* (London, 1846), pp. 293-7.

53 E.g. [W. Francis Ainsworth], 'The expedition to Borneo', *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 76 (1846), pp. 365-9, at p. 368; Brereton, *An address*, p. 15; [Croly], 'Navigation of the antipodes', p. 523.

54 Brooke to Lord Palmerston, 13 Sept. 1848, 6 Mar. 1849, in *Piracy (Borneo). Copies or extracts of any despatches relating to the suppression of piracy off the coast of Borneo*, Parliamentary Papers, 1850 (122) [1197] [1265], fos. 5-7.

55 *Times*, 26 Nov. 1849, p. 4.

56 Joseph Hume, in *Hansard*, 112:1301, 12 July 1850.

57 Oliver MacDonagh, 'The anti-imperialism of free trade', *Economic History Review*, 14 n.s. (1962), pp. 489-501, at pp. 493-4; Norman McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in politics, 1846-1857', in Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and institutions of Victorian Britain: essays in honour of George Kitson Clarke* (London, 1967).

58 For T.P. Thompson and the pirates see Michael J. Turner, *Independent radicalism in early Victorian Britain* (Westport, 2004), p.6; for Thompson's views of the empire see ibid., ch. 7.

59 Miles Taylor, *The decline of British radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 173-5.

60 Imperial experience influenced the views of Hume and T.P. Thompson – both had spent time in India, while Hume had been to the Ionian Islands and Thompson governed Sierra Leone

against the strong'.[78] Imperial functionaries and the home government would be encouraged to act without regard to morality or the public interest. Moreover, Brooke's actions might affect Britain's credit among the nations of Europe. As the Peace Society asserted, 'there is not an instance in which we have deviated from the sound principles of public justice… that it has not been instantly quoted in

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61 Molesworth, in *Hansard*, 100:828, 25 July 1848.

62 *Spectator*, 17 Aug. 1850, p. 783.

63 After Hume had prompted them via a letter in the *Daily News*: Tarling, *The burthen*, p. 124.

64 'Sarebas', letter in *Daily News*, 11 Feb. 1850, p. 5.

65 Henry Wise to the Earl of Malmesbury, 26th Apr. 1852, RH, Brooke papers, MSS Pac.s 66, fo. 3; Brooke to Mundy, 18 Feb. 1850, Templer, *Brooke letters*, II, pp. 264-8.

66 See e.g. *Printed extracts of letters between James Brooke and Henry Wise, for the use of Members only*, 1851, RH, Brooke Papers, MSS Pac.s 66, fos. 1-2.

67 For the Ionian Islands see *Hansard*, 113:175-83, 23 July 1850; 113:976-1005, 9 Aug. 1850; for Ceylon see (among other debates) *Hansard*, 117:6-98, 27 May 1851.

68 Cf. R.W. Kostal, 'A jurisprudence of power: martial law and the Ceylon controversy of 1848-51', *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history*, 28 (2000), pp. 1-34, who sees the debates as more about fundamental political principles.

69 *Christian Times*, 14 Dec. 1849, p. 1193.

70 Joseph Hume, *A letter to the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Malmesbury relative to the proceedings of Sir James Brooke, K.C.B., in Borneo* (London, 1853), pp. 16-17.

71 Cobden, in *Hansard*, 108:665, 11 Feb. 1850; 111:302, 23 May 1850.

72 Hume, in *Hansard*, 113:109, 22 July 1850.

73 *Christian Times*, 21 Dec. 1849, p. 1209; 'An East Indian', letter in *Daily News*, 11 Feb. 1850, p. 3; *Daily News*, 13 Dec. 1849, p. 4.

74 [Anon.], 'The Borneo slaughterings', *Eclectic Review*, 26 n.s. (1850), pp. 137-57, at p. 138.

75 *Herald of Peace*, Feb. 1850, p. 435.

76 Cobden at the Peace Congress, report in *Times*, 29 Nov. 1850, p. 3; Cf. [W. Francis Ainsworth], 'Mr Brooke's latest journals', *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 82 (1848), pp. 512-

justification of some foul deed perpetrated at Vienna or Naples'.[79] Cobden cited Austrian newspapers that were presenting Brooke's atrocities as worse than those of Haynau, and many among Brooke's opponents drew attention to a letter by the Spanish minister which highlighted Brooke's deeds in extenuation of the executions in Cuba of fifty American filibusters.[80] This was unacceptable. The second main issue for Brooke's opponents was the illegality of his actions. They insisted that the rule of law at home was not safe if the same legal principles and standards were not applied wherever Britain possessed authority, in every region and over every race, a point stressed in particular by Gladstone, one of the few non-radicals to speak up against Brooke in parliament.[81] It was abhorrent that 'lesser' races could be destroyed with impunity, provided that they were weak enough and far enough away.[82] Finally, Brooke's opponents argued that he had misconceived the nature of Britain's civilizing mission. Many insisted that the interests of civilization and humanity could never be secured by the destruction of human life; even those who believed that violence could ultimately bring progress maintained that it was better to leave distant races alone.[83] Encouraged by their still-optimistic assumptions about the capacity of other races and a continued belief in the missionary project, they argued instead that barbarians could be reclaimed by kind treatment and religious teaching, as Bishop Selwyn had proven in New Zealand.[84] Unfortunately this pacific, benevolent humanitarianism was better suited to the 1830s than the late 1840s.

15, at p. 512. One of the results of the radical campaign was a reform of the head-money legislation.

77 Peter Mandler, *The English national character: the history of an idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 59-69.

78 *Colonial Intelligencer*, 2 n.s. (1850), p. 364; David Urquhart, in *Hansard*, 118:474, 10 July 1851; Cobden, in *Hansard*, 118:499, 10 July 1851; quotation from Henry Richard, in *Herald of Peace*, Mar. 1850, pp. 461-2.

Brooke's opponents were comprehensively defeated in parliament and vigorously attacked in the press. Hume's two Commons motions for inquiry in 1850 and 1851 were negatived 169-29 and 230-19 respectively, and defences of Brooke cheered to the rafters.[85] Critics suggested that such large majorities were achieved by packing the House, but this was clutching at straws: when Brooke returned to England to defend himself in 1851, MPs, merchants, prominent public figures, and noblemen attended in force the public dinners arranged in his honour.[86] Because of the scale of the controversy Brooke and his friends were impotent to shape public opinion, though they did their best to supply sympathetic MPs with information to refute the radicals.[87] Ministers were committed to protecting Brooke because the Foreign and Colonial Offices had approved his actions, but opposition and independent members supported him just as vigorously.[88] They all agreed that the 'pirates' posed a genuine threat to British, or at least native, commerce, but their arguments went much further. Many argued that, for the sake of the efficiency of the imperial administration, colonial functionaries charged with delinquency should always be given the benefit of the doubt.[89] Brooke's earlier reputation also worked to his advantage. Several of his parliamentary defenders insisted that his character was so upright that the charges against him could be dismissed out of hand, and be put down to Wise's malevolence.[90] His enterprise remained of enormous value in expressing the character of the country: Grey maintained that Brooke's enterprise of bringing civilization to Borneo was 'a policy that it became a great country to pursue'.[91] England, echoed Keppel, 'as a country set against slavery, devoted to civilization, aggrandized by commerce, glorified by Christianity', ought naturally to continue to support Brooke's work.[92]

It was necessary to be realistic, however, about the handling of violent natives. A reaction against the benevolent, man-and-brother humanitarian enthusiasm of the 1830s had been gathering strength as the West Indies began to decline economically, and was boosted significantly by the failure of the Niger expedition in 1841. Earlier evangelical assumptions about the universal brotherhood of man were losing ground: the organ of the extreme wing of that church party positively supported Brooke's actions as just retribution for unacceptable crimes.[93] Thomas Carlyle, fresh from ridiculing the 'nigger-philanthropists', failed to muster any sympathy for the 'Sarāwak pirates' in the face of more pressing social problems at home.[94] Brooke's defenders raged that with their armchair philanthropy, their 'white skins... and undeniable cravats', the radicals displayed an abject want of manliness, and a misconception of the harsh realities of world power.[95] '[P]rofessional talkers', they cared only about their own notoriety.[96] Their humanity exhausted itself on criminals, and ignored those who suffered from villainy.[97] Men on the spot, endeavouring to destroy a practical evil, could not allow their operations to be compromised by such theoretical carpings on the other side of the globe.[98] When a sailor who offered 'ocular proof' of the existence of pirates in the Eastern seas hijacked a public meeting of the Aborigines' Protection and Peace Societies, chaired by Joseph Sturge, Brooke's defenders felt themselves entirely vindicated.[99]

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93 *Record*, 24 Dec. 1849, [p. 4]; 7 Feb 1850, [p. 8].

94 Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-day pamphlets* (London, 1850), p. 46.

95 Brooke, quoted in *Daily News*, 21 Dec. 1849, p. 4; Captain Alexander Campbell, letter in *Times*, 2 Feb. 1850, p. 6.

96 *Times*, 3 Apr. 1850, p. 5.

97 [Anon.], 'Rajah Brooke and Borneo', *Chambers' Papers for the People*, 5 (1850), p. 26.

98 *Atlas*, 2 Feb. 1850, p. 73.

Brooke's defenders also insisted that it was he who had grasped how Britain could best fulfil its global mission. True humanity meant ending piracy by whatever means availed, not only to stop the immediate evil, but also to facilitate the dissemination of peace, civilization and Christianity in the future.[100] Even if the Serebas did not attack British ships, they crippled the commerce of the archipelago,

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99 *Times*, 31 Jan. 1850, p. 8; and leading article, 2 Feb. 1850, p. 5.

79 *Herald of Peace*, Jan. 1850, p. 432.

80 At the Peace Congress, report in *Times*, 29 Nov. 1850, p. 3; *Examiner*, 13 Sep. 1851, p. 577.

81 John Bright, in *Hansard*, 111:299, 23 May 1850; Gladstone, in *Hansard*, 118:490, 10 July 1851.

82 Hume in *Hansard*, 118:439, 10 July 1851.

83 *Colonial Intelligencer*, 2 n.s. (1850), p. 350; [Anon.], 'Events of the month', *Eclectic Review*, 27 n.s. (1850), pp. 105-117, at p. 115.

84 *Daily News*, 7 Jan. 1850, p. 4; *Christian Times*, 18 Jan. 1850, p. 41.

85 *Hansard*, 112:1326, 12 July 1850; 118:503-4, 10 July 1851. For cheering see Horace St. John, *The Indian archipelago; its history and present state* (2 vols., London, 1853), II, p. 340.

86 *Colonial Intelligencer*, 3 n.s. (1852), p. 362; *Times*, 5 June 1851, p. 4; Templer, *Brooke letters*, III, pp. 300-41.

87 John Grant to Charles Grant, 18 Feb. 1850, 20 May 1850, RH, Brooke Papers, MSS Pac.s 90, vol. 13, fos. 1-2, 34-5; Brooke sent Templer 'many crushing Cobden documents': Brooke to Templer, 29 Apr. 1850, in Templer, *Brooke letters*, II, p. 289.

88 For ministerial approval see Lord Palmerston to Brooke, 23 Apr. 1850, in *Correspondence respecting piracy in the Eastern Archipelago, and the proceedings of Sir J. Brooke*, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53 [1599], fo. 3.

89 Henry Drummond, in *Hansard*, 113:117-8, 22 July 1850; Alexander Baillie Cochrane, in *Hansard*, 118:483, 10 July 1851.

90 E.g. Alexander Baillie Cochrane, in *Hansard*, 112:1314-5, 12 July 1850; Henry Drummond, in *Hansard*, 111:296, 23 May 1850; 112:1310-14, 12 July 1850.

91 *Hansard*, Lords, 110:489, 18 Apr. 1850.

and hence the region's capacity for progress. The doctrines of Brooke's opponents amounted to abandoning the tribes of the Eastern archipelago to mutual extermination.[101] Britain's schemes of colonizing and civilizing the world depended on using the advantages that its superior ingenuity gave the nation in its contests with the natives of the East.[102] The bishop of Calcutta, and most moderate missionary journals, supported Brooke's anti-piracy activities for these reasons, encouraged by his staunch support for the Sarawak mission.[103] Those who defended Brooke shared a vision of British character best expressed by the man himself: he knew 'no way to advance civilization and secure the safety of commerce, except by the punishment of those hardened and lawless tribes', and he appealed to the 'strong sense of my countrymen', that they would not 'cry peace when there was no peace', and that they would recognize 'that might and power should rule in this world occasionally'.[104]

Should that power had be bounded by law? The majority of Brooke's defenders shared the assumption that the actions of British officials overseas had to be measured by domestic standards of justice. They worked hard to establish that the Serebas were pirates, and thus legally condemned. Even Palmerston in his defence of Brooke dwelt on the rights of belligerents and the international laws of pursuit and surrender.[105] Brooke himself adopted similar language, asserting that 'it is a law of nations that the powerful should protect the innocent from the guilty'.[106] In some quarters, however, a different perspective was gathering strength. The *Standard* insisted that every people but the Jews had had to be brought within the first stage of civilization by force and terror, and that Brooke's actions were therefore fully

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92 Henry Keppel, *A visit to the Indian archipelago, in H.M. ship Maeander: with portions of the private journal of Sir James Brooke, K.C.B.* (2 vols., London, 1853), II, p. 40.

100 E.g. Thomas Headlam in *Hansard*, 118:464, 10 July 1851; J.A. St. John, 'Defence of Sir James Brooke's policy', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 27 (1850), pp. 286-97, at pp. 286-7.

justified.[107] A number of Conservative publications criticised the idea that standards of justice could be worked out from abstract theories and applied universally, as they constantly accused their Liberal opponents of attempting to do both in Europe and in the empire. The ferocious *Atlas* insisted that the inconstancies of 'oriental' races like the Dyaks meant that 'to apply to such a people generally the common rules of European judicature, would be an act of the simplest folly'. The same logic was applied to Ward's conduct in Cephalonia.[108] Such racial-civilizational chauvinism would become increasingly widespread in the years to come.

A final vignette underlines the early penetration of these illiberal assumptions, and how they could be tied up with religious ideas. The Christian Socialist leaders Charles Kingsley and John Ludlow dissolved their friendship over Governor Eyre, as is well known, but the issues that separated them in 1865 were already quite fully articulated in 1849. Kingsley's fierce first letter on the subject of Brooke, which declared that the Dyaks were less than human and deserving of extermination, has been discussed before, but Ludlow's response has gone unregarded.[109] Kingsley, who went on to concoct a project with Thomas Hughes to buy Brooke a steamer, had asked Ludlow, 'do you believe in the Old Testament? Surely, then, say, what does the destruction of the Canaanites mean? If *it* was right, Rajah Brooke was right. If he was wrong then Moses, Joshua, David were wrong.'[110] Ludlow pointed out in response, albeit not in so many words, that such a view went against their mentor F.D. Maurice's teachings. He asserted that Christ's advent had imposed new standards of morality since Old Testament days, and as such that 'the voices of every one of us if we be Christians, ought to be raised against such fearful rooting up of the wheat with the tares'. Brooke's career was a sad example of what the possession of power in a 'mere Jewish spirit' in modern times invariably produced.[111] In his next letter Ludlow

could not bear to discuss Brooke any longer, but did mark his disagreement with Kingsley's belief in the possibility of 'civilization by blood'.[112] Little changed in these men's assumptions and beliefs between 1849 and 1865; only the context in which they were expressed made the dispute more serious.[113]

The public controversy over Brooke was exhausted after Hume's second motion of 1851. The old radical continued his attack by writing letters to newspapers and to government departments, but his attempts to bring on another Commons motion in 1852 failed. Brooke, equally, found it near-impossible to excite British interest or investment in Sarawak after 1851. Hume's private lobbying did eventually pay off in the shape of the 1854-5 commission of inquiry, conceded by Aberdeen's ministry as a quid pro quo for radical support, which might have been expected to turn heads once more towards Sarawak; but it sat in Singapore, and only a minimal amount was heard about it back in Britain.[114] Grey had to tell Brooke's supporters that neither Parliament nor the public would be interested in their friend any longer because of the situation in the Crimea.[115] Brooke accepted that he had moved beyond the tumult of English feeling and faction.[116] The loss of his official appointments, and the decision of the British government once again not to offer Sarawak protection in 1857-8 – despite Brooke addressing public dinners in most of Britain's major commercial centres – meant he was no longer subject to any public oversight.[117] The abject failure of Labuan to meet expectations also helped to keep the Eastern archipelago out of public view.[118] By the 1860s Brooke was living quietly in Devon, thanks in part to a nostalgic 1859 public appeal which had raised nearly £9,000.[119] After his death in 1868, Dean Stanley offered to bury him in Westminster Abbey, and A.R. Wallace and James Froude praised the system of government he had established.[120] Gladstone was the most prominent of the few voices that held to the

negative interpretation of Brooke's career, returning to it as an example of national bad faith in the disputes on the Bulgarian atrocities in 1877.[121] But Brooke's time as a significant symbol of Britain's international morality and world role had passed.

III

What, then, can we learn from this episode? What do the reactions of early Victorian elites to Brooke suggest about how they related to their nation and their empire? Two main points emerge.

First, Brooke's reception suggests it was not the case that, as some historians have argued, the British made no emotional investment in empire in these years, nor that visions of the empire among the educated classes encompassed only imperial trade and the settler colonies.[122] With the advent of free trade and under pressure from intermittent economic depression, elite visions of the empire shifted during the 1840s from a focus on anti-slavery and aboriginal wellbeing to concentrate on the political rights of the white inhabitants of the settler colonies. But it is clear from responses to Brooke that a positive conception of Britain's governing and civilizing mission among non-white peoples remained a significant component of the intellectual make-up of the Victorian elite in the late 1840s and early 1850s, and – with significant differences of approach and emphasis – a subject of consensus for politicians and commentators of all political persuasions. When Brooke presented his sovereignty to the public as a *fait accompli* it was automatically assumed that he did so as a representative of the nation, that his achievement was something in which to take pride, and that Britain should support him and (probably) continue to expand its non-

white empire, which would confer commercial advantage at the same time as it advanced religion and civilization. Despite recent problems in the empire, and the acknowledged incapacity of Britain's colonial administration, Brooke's reception demonstrated a tenacious belief in the superior imperial capabilities inherent in the British character, and a continued investment in a 'civilizing mission'.[123] Brooke, in symbolising this, might be considered the flawed prototype for later 'mythical heroes of empire' like Livingstone and Gordon.[124]

The early panegyrics on Brooke's career masked changes in conceptions of imperial responsibility since the 1830s, however, that were brought into the open by the radical assault on his enterprise and his 'massacre'. As early as 1845, in some contexts, commentators had begun to remark that 'the morbid feelings of Fowell Buxton's aera have passed away', but the Brooke controversy made this clearer than ever.[125] Most of the political establishment professed to regard the pacifistic radical prescriptions for Britain's world role as potentially dangerous crotchets. They agreed that it was part of Britain's mission to spread commerce, religion, and civilization, and that if this could be managed peacefully then so much the better, but otherwise it should be done with a firm hand. The aspiration towards universal harmony was unrealistic, and for a few murderous savages to die for the greater good was something to be celebrated, not lamented. This shift is familiar in its outline, but the reaction to Brooke supports the view that it was already well underway during the 1840s, encouraged in part by long-term developments in South Africa and the West Indies, rather than being prompted by the great imperial crises of the 1850s and 1860s.[126] The nature of the response to Brooke equally suggests that the Indian Mutiny and the Jamaican Rebellion did not, except in terms of scale, encourage a qualitatively new type of domestic engagement with imperial crises, nor import

entirely new concerns onto the domestic political stage. These later, more famous crises were approached in much the same way as that over Brooke – through the prism of domestic understandings of religion, national character, responsibility, and mission, and involved the expansion of many of the same ideas. Given that, and given the early penetration of illiberal assumptions about dependent peoples, their impact in transforming understandings of race and empire would have been limited.

Secondly, the Brooke episode brings out some of the ways in which imperial issues functioned in political argument in these years. Nineteenth-century fears about the potentially harmful effects of the empire on the structure of domestic politics and society are well known; it is less familiar to look at imperial debates as arenas in which participants were arguing about the correct set of 'British' values to be projected to the public and to the world, as Jon Parry has recently done with regard to liberal arguments about foreign affairs.[127] Politicians constantly worked to construct narratives in which they stood for inclusive British patriotism and their opponents for narrow sectional agendas or self-interest: questions of empire were particularly apt to be treated in this way, and as in the case of Ceylon to be assimilated to party battles, because they were distant from the day-to-day concerns of the British people. It is therefore necessary to be quite specific about how contemporaries conceived Britain, and in particular how those conceptions were coloured by particular conjunctures of political ideas, in order to be able to understand their visions of the British empire from year to year. It is certainly too crude to conceptualize imperial debates in these years in terms of anti- and pro-imperialist bodies of opinion, as there is still a tendency to do in some quarters. Radicals constantly attacked the conduct of imperial policy, but they did not reject empire; their visions for how Britain should behave in its possessions were simply different.[128] Both Brooke's critics and his defenders,

recognizing that his actions bore upon British character and politics 'in no ordinary degree', were concerned to use him to support their own visions of what properly British values were, abroad as at home.[129] The structure of domestic political argument at this time cannot therefore be fully understood without close attention to such apparently minor and exotic controversies.

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101 [Anon.], 'Rajah Brooke and Borneo', p. 7.

102 Earl Grey, in *Hansard*, Lords, 120:485-6, 18 Apr. 1850.

103 Daniel Wilson, quoted by Thomas Headlam, in *Hansard*, 118:466-8, 10 July 1851; *Colonial Church Chronicle*, Aug. 1851, p. 46; reports of the meetings of the Borneo Church Mission, *Times*, 22 June 1850, p. 6; 25 July 1851, p. 8.

104 *Singapore Free Press*, 10 Sept. 1849, quoted in *Colonial Intelligencer*, 2 n.s. (1850), p. 365; dinner at Fishmonger's Hall, report in *Times*, 5 June 1851, p. 4.

105 *Hansard*, 118:490-4, 10 July 1851.

106 Templer, *Brooke letters*, III, p. 322.

107 *Standard*, 19 Apr. 1850, [p. 2].

108 *Atlas*, 27 July 1850, p. 472.

109 Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian frame of mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 212-4; Ronald Hyam, *Britain's imperial century, 1815-1914: a study of empire and expansion* (London, 1976), p. 350.

110 Charles Kingsley to Thomas Hughes, 30 June 1853, 14 July 1853, in F.E. Kingsley, ed., *Charles Kingsley: his letters and memoires of his life* (2 vols., London, 1877), I, 369-70; Charles Kingsley to John Ludlow, 14 Dec. 1849, Cambridge University Library (CUL), John Ludlow Papers, Add. MSS 7348/5.

111 Ludlow to Kingsley, 15 Dec. 1849, CUL, Ludlow Papers, Add. MSS 7348/6.

112 Ludlow to Kingsley, 21 Dec. 1849, in ibid.

113 Ludlow's response was the more intense in 1865 because he knew of black Jamaicans who were forming co-operatives: N. Masterman, *John Malcolm Ludlow: the builder of Christian Socialism* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 195.

[114] Disraeli had wanted to grant the commission during Derby's ministry to secure the radicals, and Aberdeen carried out his plan: Tarling, *The burthen, the risk, and the glory*, pp. 152, 170-1.

[115] Earl Grey to Templer, 24 Jan. 1854, RH, Brooke Papers, MSS Pac.s 90, vol. 16, fos. 9-10.

[116] Brooke to Templer, 6 Jan. 1855, RH, Brooke Papers, MSS Pac.s 90, Box 1, File 2, fo. 12.

[117] Report of a deputation to Lord Derby, *Times*, 1 Dec. 1858, p. 12.

[118] See e.g. Henry Labouchere, in *Hansard*, 146:907-9, 3 July 1857.

[119] *Times*, 9 May 1859, p. 5; 11 May 1859, p. 5; 26 May 1859, p. 8.

[120] *Spectator*, 18 July 1868, p. 846; A. R. Wallace, *Australasia* (London, 1879), pp. 367-76; J.A. Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (London, 1888), p. 154.

[121] *Hansard*, 234:428, 7 May 1877; 234:727-8, 11 May 1877; 'Piracy in Borneo and the operations of July, 1849', *Contemporary Review*, 30 (1877), pp. 181-198.

[122] Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people? England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 566, 572; Bernard Porter, *The absent-minded imperialists: empire, society, and culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2006 edn), pp. 107-8, 112-13.

[123] See e.g. [J.A. St. John], 'The English in Borneo', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 37 (1846), pp.63-105, at p. 70.

[124] John MacKenzie, 'Heroic myths of empire', in his ed., *Popular Imperialism and the military* (Manchester, 1992).

[125] *Spectator*, 21 June 1845, p. 589.

[126] For the early decline of the 'old' humanitarianism see Andrew Bank, 'Losing faith the civilizing mission: the premature decline of humanitarian liberalism at the Cape, 1840-60', in Martin Daunton, ed., *Empire and others: British encounters with indigenous peoples, 1600-1850* (London, 1999), pp. 364-7 and *passim*: for the older view see Christine Bolt, *Victorian attitudes to race* (London,

1971).

[127] Parry, *Politics of patriotism*.

[128] See e.g. Michael J. Turner, '"Raising up Dark Englishmen": Thomas Perronet Thompson, Colonies, Race, and the Indian Mutiny', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 6 (2005).

[129] George Foggo, *Life and adventures of Sir James Brooke, K.C.B.* (London, 1853), p. 5.