

Be(ing) Prepared: Girl Guides, Colonial Life, and National Strength

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*This paper seeks to bridge a gap in feminist critique of gender and empire with regard to the founding of the Girl Guide movement in 1909. In contrast with previous studies of the Boy Scouts, which have briefly considered Guides as a mere derivative organisation, it suggests that the formation of the Guides, and printed material such as the first handbook *How Girls Can Help Build Up the Empire* (1912), were grounded in notions of the part which women, and girls specifically, could play in the imperial project. This paper proposes that, although tempered by an emphasis on raising children in order to prevent the “degeneration” of the British race, the Guide handbook permits increased non-domestic activity for Edwardian girls, which is justified by aims of preparing for home defence in case of foreign attack and for life in the colonies.*

The late-Victorian and Edwardian period saw the formation of a number of youth movements with imperial aims within Britain. While most of these, such as the enduring and internationally popular Boy Scouts, were created for boys, there was a place for girls within the imperial project. Their role was presented as just as vital to the maintenance of the Empire, if not more so, as that of the boys who were trained for front line military defence. However, despite the uniqueness of the Girl Guides’ ‘character training’ for girls, the Guide movement has been critically ignored or briefly considered only as a mere derivative of the Scouts¹ and its founding handbook regarded as ‘essentially a rewritten version of Scouting for Boys’.² This ignores, in fact, significant changes which were made to the scheme and its original handbook, *The Handbook for Girl Guides or How Girls Can Help Build the Empire*, in order to make the movement suitable for Edwardian girls. Some sections of *Scouting for Boys*³ (SFB) were indeed reproduced verbatim in the Guides’ handbook; however, most of the content was altered or replaced by entirely new sections on matters deemed relevant to girls that reveal how girls’ contribution to the Empire had to substantially differ from that of boys.

In her introduction to the 2004 edition of SFB, Elleke Boehmer suggests that its conjunction of colonial disorder and play (characteristic of late-Victorian children’s literature) invites a reading of the text as children’s literature.⁴ I will take a similar approach in my reading of the *How Girls Can Help Build the Empire*⁵ as a literary text that demonstrates the part which girls were being prepared to play in aiding the Empire. I will argue that the original handbook documents a unique period in the movement and in girls’ culture that was rapidly superseded: in 1918 a new, substantially revised handbook was published, which omitted much of the imperial sentiment of its predecessor.

Lieutenant-General Robert Baden-Powell collated the material for SFB from a variety of sources, such as extracts from adventure novels, newspaper cuttings, and travel writing.⁶ The views of Samuel Smiles, the author of *Self Help* (1859), and imagery derived from Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Books* (1894–5) and *Kim* (1901), as well as the public school code, ‘muscular Christianity’ as represented in the writing of Charles Kingsley (which entwines athleticism, religious belief, and the

ability to control one's surroundings), popular imperialism, and social Darwinism were immediate and easily detectable influences.⁷ SFB was initially sold in six illustrated fortnightly parts from 15 January 1908 for 4d [pence], before it was collected in a single edition in May of the same year for 2s [shillings]. Primarily intended for use by pre-existing movements such as the Boys' Brigade, SFB was nevertheless still affordable (even if not 'cheap') for middle class and working class boys and girls, who in some instances may have pooled their money to buy it. This is borne out by the fact that contrary to Baden-Powell's original plan, thousands of children began working from the text themselves without adult instruction: a number of girls formed their own 'Girl Scout' patrols in England, Scotland and even as far away as New Zealand.⁸

There are conflicting historical perspectives as to whether or not Robert Baden-Powell tolerated these unofficial female members.⁹ He was nevertheless forced to confront the issue of girls within his movement at the Crystal Palace rally of Boy Scouts – the first large Scout rally – held in September 1909. A group of girls who had formed their own Scout patrols – who had not been invited – attended the rally anyway, purportedly wearing Scout hats and carrying staves.¹⁰ However small, the contingent was sufficient to impact upon Baden-Powell for one month later, in October 1909, the Boy Scout Headquarters Gazette noted that all applications from potential girl members should be forwarded to headquarters. According to the official history of the Girl Guides written by the eventual Chair of the Guides' World Committee, Rose Kerr, 'new arrangements' were being made.¹¹ These 'new arrangements' meant that girls could no longer become Scouts. Six thousand girls had already registered as Scouts, and by the time Agnes Baden-Powell assumed control of the Guides they numbered 8000.

The Scout name, however, was not deemed suitable. The new organisation feared attracting unfavorable public opinion about girls participating in the same scheme, arguing that this had the potential to upset the boys and derail the intent to 'toughen' them – or instill manliness – away from the supposed softening influence of their mothers. The new name, which was taken from the famous Gurkha regiment of Guides in India, was not, however, welcomed universally by the former 'Girl Scouts'. Moreover, the name change was not only confined to that of the movement, but also extended to the patrols within it: the Guide handbook provides suggested floral examples such as "Violets", "Fuchsias", and "Bluebells".¹² The official history of the Guides notes the thoughts of one of the Girl Scouts of the 1st Mayfair Troop who perceived a symbolic alteration in the level of adventure and excitement with the shift from animal names to those of flowers: "When Guides first started, we refused to join them, for having been Peewits and Kangaroos, we thought it was a great come down to become White Roses and Lilies-of-the-Valley!"¹³

The decision to use a different nomenclature for the female branch of the Scouts is significant in itself, yet the connotations of each word are also important. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, from the sixteenth century onwards, the term 'scout' has been used to refer to one who is 'sent out to obtain information', and may particularly reference a military scout who reports the position and strength of the 'enemy' to an awaiting body of soldiers.¹⁴ The use of 'scout' then imbues the boys' movement with a militaristic quality, and inherently suggests that there is a need for a widespread network of citizens across the country that will perform a similar function to the military scout in protecting the nation from outside attack. The word 'guide' has its origins in the fourteenth century with reference to a person who 'leads or shows the way, especially to a traveller in a strange country'.¹⁵ It also has an alternate definition as a person who directs the conduct of others. In contrast with the active role of the scout in protecting the waiting troops with his information, the guide has a subservient role in directing others in unfamiliar territory, or, in its other sense, a guide directs others in their actions. While there is a degree of passivity inherent in the term 'guide' in comparison with 'scout', the connection with the Gurkha regiment of Guides in India also forms an association between the Girl Guide and the imperial Other, who was often feminised. This renaming was thus symbolic of the need to transform Scouting in order for it to become a socially acceptable movement for girls. As I shall suggest, the Victorian middle-class doctrine of separate spheres, which created both an ideological and often actual physical division between the male world of industry and activity and the female world of the home, still exerted an influence on the formation

of Guiding and Scouting schemes in the early twentieth century. While the Guide movement, with its physical training and outdoor adventure components, did not restrict the activities of girls to the domestic, those activities that it came to encompass were largely predicated upon caring for others, child-care, and moral responsibility and guidance.

Robert Baden-Powell's sister, Agnes, who became the first president of the Guides, moulded SFB, the cornerstone of Scouting instruction, into the Guide handbook. She did this through the removal of certain sections deemed unsuitable for girls and the addition of more appropriate tales of female bravery, inspirational poems, and instruction for good mothering and effective nursing. Just as the name of the movement for girls itself was altered to suit gender ideology that situated women as moral guides rather than active defenders of Britain, similarly the text that had served for the Scouts was not considered suitable for the Girl Guides because the express aims of each movement, and the motivations behind them, differed. The implications of the lingering Victorian conception of separate spheres upon the two movements are not, however, drawn out in most existing Scout and Guide histories.

Allen Warren and Richard A. Voeltz have begun to analyse the differences between the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts.¹⁶ Their studies have, however, focused upon the history of the movement utilising Association reports and the 'Girl Guides' Gazette', rather than on *How Girls Can Help Build the Empire* (printed as *How Girls Can Help Build Up the Empire* on the front cover) itself in any great detail.¹⁷ Lauren Tedesco notes some differences in levels of skill required for boys and girls to complete the same badges in her study of the differences in the SFB text as it was filtered through the handbook for British girls to the American version *How Girls Can Help Their Country* (1913). Her specific focus on the American Girl Scouts leads her to suggest that the militaristic tendencies of Scouting made it attractive to girls who may have otherwise been uninterested in a group whose main focus was perfecting sewing and cooking skills.¹⁸ Nevertheless, as Tedesco focuses on the American Girl Scouts movement, which did not adhere to the lines drawn between the sexes via name and uniform changes,¹⁹ as in British schemes, the social and cultural history of Edwardian England in the aftermath of the Boer War and the impact of the 'New Woman' upon the doctrine of separate spheres, particularly with relation to Empire and the perceived ills of racial degeneration, is not brought to bear in her analysis.

The Victorian ideology of separate male and female spheres (the public and the private) alluded to earlier was advanced in John Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies* (originally delivered as a lecture in 1864). It provided an influential view of the domestic sphere as a sacred place in which women could exert her 'true queenly power'.²⁰ The concept of the 'household Queen' does not, however, necessitate a subservient, passive woman ('As if he could be helped effectively by a shadow, or worthily by a slave!'),²¹ but one who can complement her husband by drawing upon her 'feminine' qualities. Crucially, the notion of woman as guide to men is important in Ruskin's schema: 'But how, you will ask, is the idea of this guiding function of the woman reconcilable with a true wifely subjection? Simply in that it is a guiding [*italics in original*], not a determining function.'²² It is man's preserve to engage in adventure and war: 'But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, — and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision'.²³

The mutually exclusive, if complementary, traits embodied by each sex, gesture toward why schemes for the 'character training' of boys and girls for the benefit of the Empire were inevitably different, with men suited to engage in battle but women to serve as their moral guides. When situating male and female functions in a national perspective, a man's duty is to maintain and advance 'the defence of the state' while a woman's duty is to assist its 'ordering', 'comforting' and 'beautiful adornment'.²⁴ Additionally, and importantly for a scheme with a focus on physical activity such as the Guides, Ruskin's view of the private sphere determines that physical training is a vital prerequisite for a woman's mind to be filled with the knowledge that will assist her in aiding 'the work of men'.²⁵ Girls should receive a similar education, with the same degree of seriousness, as a boy, but it must be 'differently directed', as her command of knowledge need not be progressive but 'general and accomplished for daily and helpful use'.²⁶ The regal, powerful situation of the household 'queen', while distinct from the widely discussed 'Angel in the House' conception of

domestic femininity, needs also to be contrasted with a different vision of femininity, the late nineteenth century figure of the New Woman.

Both Anna Davin²⁷ and Sally Ledger²⁸ argue that the New Woman was construed as a threat to the national need for women to raise a strong, virile British race. The New Woman was both a figure of popular culture, including fiction, and a feminist ideal. She was usually presented as educated, financially independent, was not necessarily married or a mother, championed the causes of suffrage and rational dress, and was strongly associated with increased physical activity, most visibly cycling. The New Woman can be situated as the antithesis of a domestic, maternal ideal, and consequently as a challenge to accepted gender boundaries. While the Scouts and Guides were not constituted until after the close of the Victorian era, arguments which focused upon the need to ensure the health of the British 'race' continued to champion the ideal of the domestic angel, and were promoted by those who had been raised in the mid-Victorian period when the concept of separate spheres was firmly entrenched. In the popular imagination, the New Woman who sought education and employment was sometimes figured as shirking the social and moral responsibilities of motherhood (neglecting her 'queenly' domestic situation) and concomitantly veering dangerously toward masculine traits.

The need to direct young girls and women to a renewed focus on domestic tasks and childcare is made manifest in the 1904 report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration.²⁹ The Committee was convened in 1903 in response to the number of men who were rejected for service in the Armed forces during the Boer War (1899–1902) due to physical inadequacies. Its stated intent was to determine the health of the populace, the causes of physical deterioration, and identify methods for the prevention of such deterioration. The report calls for girls and mothers to receive 'systematic instruction' with regard to infant feeding in order to ensure that infant mortality rates continued to fall, and also for the promotion of organised games and 'methodical physical exercise in the open air' for schoolchildren. The desire to improve the physical strength of British children had importance for several imperial concerns: preparation for war and maintaining 'racial purity' (stemming fears about the population growth of the working classes at home and miscegenation in the colonies). Two of the central aims of Guiding, namely the production of 'good mothers' and physically healthy girls, can therefore be viewed in light of wider social concerns about physical degeneration impacting upon subsequent generations (notably in the writings of Herbert Spencer)³⁰ and maintaining white racial superiority. The foundations of British imperialism rested upon the belief that the Anglo-Saxon race should carry its values and moral codes to lands where 'inferior' peoples resided. Benjamin Kidd's famous text *Social Evolution* (1894) posited a 'rivalry' of races, with Anglo-Saxons deemed ideally suited to carrying 'humanitarian' principles around the world.³¹ Ensuring that physical and moral deterioration did not erode this supremacy was entwined with imperial notions of spreading civility across the globe. We can, nevertheless, figure the moment in which Baden-Powell conceived of the Scouts and Guides as informed not only by an imperial desire for a physically and morally strong race, but also by the need to reaffirm women's suitability in the domestic sphere (including ensuring the strength of sons and husbands) and for 'caring' employments such as nursing and teaching.

The developing pedagogy surrounding the growth and extension of girls' formal education provides another useful cultural context in which to consider the Guides. In a collection of practical writings intended for teachers compiled by three noted Victorian headmistresses in 1898, *Work and Play in Girls' Schools*, Jane Frances Dove (headmistress of Wycombe Abbey School) authors a chapter on the subject of 'Cultivation of the Body'. The connection of physical health with moral health within the Guiding scheme clearly had antecedents in the developing girls' school curricula of the late-Victorian era, as suggested by Dove: 'It is indeed truly awful to reflect on the number of bad habits, that is, moral faults, that may be induced and fostered in those under our charge by neglect of suitable health condition.'³² Dove further observes that the body and morality are not only connected, but are important for the Empire:

I think I do not speak too strongly when I say that games, *i.e.*, active games in the open air, are essential to a healthy existence, and that most of the qualities, if not all, that conduce to the

supremacy of our country in so many quarters of the globe, are fostered, if not solely developed, by the means of games.³³

The provision of some form of outdoor education to exercise the body was therefore a high priority in the minds of those who sought to 'improve' British citizens. The Guiding scheme encompassed a series of outdoor activities, including woodcraft, camping, and an extensive range of games, as well as focusing on maintaining health through cleanliness, temperance, and first aid. The drive to stall national deterioration particularly sought to combat ill health in the lower classes who were not as likely to benefit from the burgeoning growth of physical education in more exclusive girls' schools. Agnes Baden-Powell, in her foreword to the novel *Terry the Girl-Guide* (1912), displays concern that, without participation in a scheme such as Guiding that stressed the need for physical education, girls of the lower classes were not being improved physically and morally: 'The pursuits appeal to all classes, not only the well-to-do, but also the less favoured girls who have no hockey or cricket or concerted games to lead them to a sense of honour, fair-play, and unselfishness.'³⁴

The scheme is predicated upon combating moral and physical degeneration in citizens of all classes through training girls' bodies and characters without compromising their 'womanliness'. Accordingly, in order to maintain the strength of the Empire, it was suggested in the Guide handbook that girls must not consider those of other classes as enemies, but that girls of all classes must band together. This sentiment is enshrined in the fourth of the ten Guide 'laws' which notes that a Guide must be a 'friend to all, and a sister to every other Guide, no matter to what social class the other belongs'.³⁵ The defence of Britain requires all of its citizens to form a united front: 'Remember, whether rich or poor, from castle or from slum you are all Britons in the first place, and you've got to support Britain against outside enemies'.³⁶ This construction extends to a metaphor of the nation as a brick wall: if one brick 'rots' or 'gets out of place' (representative of the moral and physical degeneration which the text seeks to counter), this places excessive strain upon the others and weakens the structure.³⁷ After noting the moral and physical decadence that is the result of girls being allowed to 'run to waste' for lack of training in good citizenship, a solution to these ills is proposed in the handbook:

As the only step to counteract these evils among the women of the future, we suggest the 'Girl Guide training,' a scheme for games and badges which gives the girl something good in place of what is bad, in a form which really does appeal to them, and attracts the worst [type of girl]...and turns them the right way.³⁸

The Guiding scheme was partially inspired by the success of camps that Robert Baden-Powell conducted for factory girls, which are praised for their potential to quickly improve the character and discipline of the girls who attend them.³⁹ Indeed, Agnes Baden-Powell suggests that the methods of Guide training are attractive to all girls, but are especially so for the girls who are deemed to need it most: 'the girls of the factories and of the alleys of our great cities, who, after they leave school, get no kind of restraining influence, and who, nevertheless, may be the mothers, and should be the character trainers of the future men of our nation'⁴⁰ The underprivileged girl also serves as a site where fears about inadequate mothering were directed in Robert Baden-Powell's early conception of Guides. He states that he wants to attract, and thus 'raise the slum-girl from the gutter'⁴¹ in order to give all girls the ability to be better mothers and Guides to the next generation. The inclusion of girls of all classes in unified pursuit of the greater national good also coalesced with an intent to counter the health issues that resulted from an urbanised lifestyle and perceived 'idleness' by encouraging activity and employment.

The handbook begins with a foreword by Agnes Baden-Powell which declares that Guides is an organisation for character training like the Boy Scouts, but that it differs in detail: 'Its aim is to get girls to learn how to be women—self-helpful, happy, prosperous, and capable of keeping good homes and of bringing up good children'⁴² Reproducing the idea of separate but complementary spheres, the scheme is underpinned by the belief that 'every girl can be of use' to the 'great British Empire', regardless of how unlikely it may seem that 'mere girls' could aid such a powerful entity.⁴³

The focus upon the girl, particularly the working class girl, and the contribution she could make to the future of the Empire is made explicit in the choice of song lyrics by Philip Trevor:

What will you do for England,
Dear Little English maid?
You may be poor, weak, and obscure,
Still you can lend your aid.
It matters so much to England
What you will try to do;
You can if you will, make her greater still.
It lies, little child, with you

In a child's small hand lies the fate of our land.
It is hers to mar or save;
For a sweet child, sure, grows a woman pure,
To make men good and brave
We English shall ne'er kiss the rod,
Come our foes on land or sea,
If our children be true to themselves and to God,
Oh! Great shall our England be.⁴⁴

These lines directly address the girl reader, entreating her to assist the nation regardless of her social status. The location of Britain's future success in the hands of girls rests upon the construction of women as shaping the men who make history through motherhood: 'Britain has been made by her great men, and these great men were made great by their mothers'⁴⁵ The specific role of girls is constructed as perhaps even more important for the Empire than that of boys, for girls will direct the lives of the nation's future leaders and soldiers:

The girls of the nation have the moulding of the men of the future. This great Empire is entrusted to their care, and what it will be in the future is just what the girls try to make it. Girls have great power and influence, and can serve their country even better than men can, by forming the minds and characters of the children.⁴⁶

The section of verse by Trevor also provides a concise example of the connection between imperialism and the ideology of motherhood, with its construction of girls as the nation's future women who will nurture men brave enough to fight off potential invaders of Britain. For the future prosperity of the Empire, the handbook aims to educate girls to have the skills to produce healthy and useful children—the future men of England—as well as to be suitable companions and household managers for men in the colonies. This notion of raising good citizens or 'fit and proper subjects' who will develop the Empire is presented as vital lest 'some other nation will take it from us'.⁴⁷

As I have suggested, this strand throughout the handbook demonstrates the perception of widespread physical degeneration after the weakness displayed by the British men who presented to fight in the Boer War. In *SFB*, Robert Baden-Powell lists a range of physical indicators that reflect poorly on the British male, from a drop in average height from 1845 to 1895 of four inches, to the number of men weighing under seven stone twelve pounds rising from forty-four in every thousand in 1900 to seventy-six per thousand in 1905.⁴⁸ The fear that poor health care was causing a rise in preventable deformities and inducing physical deterioration among the British population, which served as a threat to its military strength and to the protection of Britain itself in the event of invasion, also permeates the Guide handbook. Other statistics provided on British men who presented for service demonstrate how dramatically poor health affected Britain's ability to gather a military force: in Birmingham out of 1900 men who presented, 1000 were not in sufficient health for the Army; in Manchester 1800 out of 2500 were not fit to be enlisted.⁴⁹ Without reservation, Robert Baden-Powell attributes the primary cause of the threat to the nation that physical weakness posed as poor mothering and neglect: 'Much of this decadence is due to ignorance or supineness of mothers, who have never been taught themselves.'⁵⁰

While the section on 'National Deterioration' was deleted from *SFB* in 1911, it was still included in the first Guide handbook in 1912.⁵¹ Yet the specific connection of work for the Empire and maintaining levels of national health through nursing and the care of children and husbands is added:

These and many other similar reports show that much PREVENTABLE deterioration is being allowed to creep in among the rising generation, largely owing to ignorance on the part of parents and of the children themselves.[...] since most of these cases of physical decay are preventable, they open to instructors a field for doing work of national values. Girls can therefore do a great work for the country by learning the rules of health, by practising them personally, and by applying them to the care of children in their own homes, and by teaching them to others.⁵²

Life in the colonies or on the frontier was idealised as an opportunity for healthy and active lifestyles, attributing to nature the potential for a cure for British physical *and* moral deterioration. Urbanisation was blamed for the wholesale decay of the nation's youth – to take an example from the handbook itself, idleness that would lead to death in the wilds of the world did not necessarily spell the end of a loafer in a town.

The notion of national weakness further inflamed the fear that the heart of the Empire might be unable to withstand outside attack unless its future citizens were trained to improve their physical and moral strength and to ensure that their children learned to do so as well. The 'Notes to Instructors' section argues that the 'degeneration of character' that Guides seeks to counter is the result of both moral and physical decadence.⁵³ The perception of the domestic sphere as a feminine one in which women 'guide' their children and husbands morally (and ensure their physical strength) is still evident in these early-twentieth century texts. An example of the national reach of power of the woman in the home is made in the suggestion that girls need only turning in the right direction in order to ensure the future of Britain:

This splendid material is being allowed to run to waste—nay, worse than that, it is allowed to become harmful to the nation simply for want of training, for want of a hand to guide them at a crisis of their lives when they are at the crossroads where their futures branch off for good or evil.⁵⁴

It is not only poor health care manifesting as physical deterioration that is at the root of the weakening of Britain, but also insufficient familial instruction in how to be good citizens who contribute to society.

The initial pamphlet prepared by Robert Baden-Powell in 1909, 'Girl Guides: A Suggestion for Character Training for Girls' expands the suggested focus for girls on the domestic out of necessity for the Empire: 'in a Colony, a woman must know how to do many things which she finds done for her at home in civilization.'⁵⁵ The supporting function that girls performed for their male relatives in the colonies, which justifies the increased range of physical activities they may undertake, is further developed in the handbook:

What do girls want with tying knots and tracking and camp cooking? people sometimes ask us. They are all agreed that it is useful for boys, who may go out to Africa, Canada, or Australia, and knock about and have to know how to find their way in the wilds [...] But do not girls too sometimes emigrate? and does not fate occasionally carry girls off to distant lands, where their brothers are farming or their husbands are digging for gold?⁵⁶

The final section that provides 'Hints to Instructors' cautions: 'We endeavour to show the girl that her own sphere is the best, and that her place is not as the rival to men, but as the complement or helpmate'.⁵⁷ Yet this place grew to encompass activities outside the domestic sphere, given the perceived needs of the Empire in light of fears of physical and moral degeneration and susceptibility to outside attack upon Britain. The intent to prepare girls to support national defence, and to build white populations in the colonies, motivated this increased activity, but also coalesced with the somewhat divergent ideology of maintaining 'womanliness'.⁵⁸ One Christian figuration of womanly contribution to empire, not unique to the Guides and frequently touched upon in the previous thirty

years in the popular Religious Tract Society periodical the *Girl's Own Paper* (particularly with regard to India and nursing in South Africa),⁵⁹ was as a 'civilising agent' in the colonies.

There were a number of uniformed organisations for British girls prior to the official establishment of the Guides in 1910. Julia Bush identifies the role that groups founded in the late-Victorian era, such as the Girls' Friendly Society (1874), Primrose League (1883), British Women's Emigration Association (1884), and Victorian League (1901) played in complementing male Empire-building activities such as exploration, trading, and soldiering.⁶⁰ The unique female contribution these groups tapped into was a civilising function, which would enable the carriage of British behaviour into its colonies. As Ledger suggests, the combination of notions of imperial destiny and racial superiority with the idea of refined English motherhood produced the concept of the English woman as a 'civilising agent'.⁶¹ Social Darwinist discourses injected concerns about evolution and racial strength or quality (such as increasing the birth rate, and positing a relationship between the health of children and national strength) into social and political debates. Davin has established the unique way in which women were charged with a form of racial responsibility as well as serving as moral guides through motherhood.⁶² By playing upon notions of racial superiority in order to situate Indian women as backward and unable to improve their own circumstances, as well as through interaction with social Darwinist discourses that placed British women as responsible for racial elevation, feminists were able to carve out a place for women in the imperial project.⁶³ This place consisted of using their unique suitability to raise Indian women, for instance, from their comparatively 'inferior' social position. We can see the way in which the Guide handbook taps into these civilising discourses in its portrayal of the British Empire as an 'enormous prosperous realm...with the sea for its streets' which has 'a sacred duty to carry light into all the dark places over the whole world'.⁶⁴

Aside from missionary work, British girls could contribute to the 'civilising' project by the simple act of assisting in populating the colonies. Both *SFB* and the Guide handbook (with slight rewording⁶⁵) suggest that while the Empire has 400 million fellow subjects, the territories are 'there, but the people [with reference to British citizens] are only coming. The white population of all these Colonies only amounts to a little over a quarter of the population of our crowded little island'.⁶⁶ It is stressed that Scout and Guide training aids boys and girls individually and the Empire as a whole by preparing them to succeed if they go to live in a colony. It supposes that many girls will relocate to the colonies in order to raise them into prosperous countries, and that Guides' training 'will come in very useful to you there'.⁶⁷

This expectation is made clear in the duties of a Girl Guide, which are the subject of the first 'Camp Fire Yarn' (intended to replicate the tone of a friendly fireside chat): 'to be prepared to help your country', 'to be brave', 'to be womanly', 'to be strong' and 'to live a frontier life if necessary'.⁶⁸ Specific training in the skills required for subsisting in the colonies is nevertheless limited to occasional references to conditions in particular countries and is a secondary strain to general preparedness in nursing and child rearing. Girls are instructed how to navigate via the stars in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres to enable them to find their way in a 'strange country' by night or day.⁶⁹ They are also encouraged to familiarise themselves with natural resources for maintaining hygiene, so that when 'in the wilds of the jungle' and unable to buy toothbrushes, they can use a dry, frayed stick.⁷⁰ Girls will need to know how to be self-sufficient—how to milk a cow, cut firewood, cook the food, wash clothes, act as a nurse and 'defend yourself for your life, and many other things which you are inclined at home to leave to others'.⁷¹

The ideal of juvenile femininity presented encourages capability in support of male activities. Under the heading 'Guides of the Future', the handbook describes the way in which 'high principled women' can be of assistance to their husbands as sympathetic advisers, and as aids in carrying out their work. With sufficient preparation for that duty, girls are informed, 'in various ways women can be the guides of men'.⁷² It is girls' duty to learn to be the aids of men to enable colonial populations of British emigrants to flourish. They can achieve this by developing an interest in men's pursuits, being able to make all of their clothes, prepare food from scratch, and teach the native 'boy' how to cook and wash the family's clothing.⁷³ A life in an unfamiliar part of the Empire that supports the

actions of the nation's brave men is presented as a satisfying one as well as a service to Britain: 'To a true-hearted girl who wishes to make a man happy, there is bliss in an African hut'.⁷⁴

Living in civilisation is figured as a barrier to true preparedness for colonial life or rescue work, unless extra action is taken, such as via the Guiding scheme. In a 1909 article on 'Girl as Scouts'⁷⁵ in *The Girl's Realm*, the difference in tracking skills between a colonial girl and one who has always lived in England is contrasted. The article describes a patrol whose poor tracking skills meant they were unable to find another group of girls even though the group was hiding close by:

...but presently the search party was joined by a young girl who had lived on a farm in South Africa, and had learnt a good deal about this branch of scouting. When she arrived she detected the tracks at once in the grass, short though it was, and hard, too, as the ground was, and she led her companions in a minute to where the patrol was in hiding. There are numbers of English girls who have never been out of their native country who become quite as proficient in tracking as the young girl in question, after a few months' training in scouting.⁷⁶

Given that most girls reading the handbook were located in Britain, attempts are made to formulate a relationship between civilisation and the wild such that girls could hone their skills in natural pursuits in a city or town environment: becoming adept at woodcraft can be practiced in London through a visit to the zoological gardens and natural history museum while those in the country should visit a farm.⁷⁷ Reading the tracks of men, horses, or bicycles in a town is compared with following the foot tracks of animals in a more natural environment.⁷⁸ One Guide patrol in Cumberland is admired for their skill at constructing a hospital out of doors. This is discussed in the context of perhaps even having to bandage up the enemy in a real situation, lending a sense of real preparation rather than play to the making up of beds in the grass. Preparation for trekking through 'uncivilised' environments is also encouraged in Britain through conducting a mock trek through 'Central Africa' during which each Guide will carry her kit and food in a bundle on her head, as the patrol constructs a bridge over a stream, or paddles a raft across a lake.⁷⁹ These suggested activities, along with dozens of others related to observational skills, planning journeys, path finding, signalling, drills, and simple games and exercises, worked to support two imperial tasks: to improve the strength and health of British citizens and to prepare them for life in the 'uncivilised' reaches of Empire. Both pursuits were motivated, I have argued, by discourses of national degeneration which proliferated in the early twentieth century when the Scouts and Guides were initiated.

The life of *How Girls Can Help Build the Empire* as an instructive text read by girls was a short one. In 1918 a new, substantially revised Guide handbook was published, which omitted much of the imperial sentiment of its predecessor. It was the product of a post-war era in which late Victorian and Edwardian fears about the physical and moral degeneration of the British 'race' had dissipated, and attitudes about the activities of respectable women outside the domestic sphere had relaxed. During World War One, Guides were encouraged to help their country in non-military ways such as via the Red Cross, St John's Ambulance, relief committees, the Soldiers and Sailors Help Society, undertaking cooking and needlework for hospitals, and caring for children while their mothers worked.⁸⁰ Voeltz argues that the Guides grew rapidly after the war thanks in part to their actions serving with the Voluntary Aid Detachments, which demonstrated their abilities, and favourably swayed public opinion about the concept of the Guides.⁸¹ Not only had the prevailing sense altered of what constituted acceptable behaviour for girls, but the Guide movement had itself altered, with Robert Baden-Powell resuming administrative control in 1915 from his sister, and a rapid growth in membership (from less than 40 000 in 1914, quadrupling to over 160 000 in 1921)⁸². These changes shifted the Guides' *raison d'être* permanently, with training programs shifting closer toward those received by boys, as anxiety about what constituted suitably 'feminine' behaviour subsided, rendering this early period in Guide history a fraught and complex – and thereby highly instructive – one for the study of girlhood and empire.

Notes

Thank you to my PhD supervisor, Dr Clara Tuite, for her detailed comments on earlier drafts of this article. I am also grateful to Dr Richard Fulton for his willingness to share his knowledge on the subject of readership, class, and periodical affordability and to the two anonymous referees for their constructive feedback.

¹ John Springhall, *Youth, Empire, and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940*, Croom Helm, London, 1977, p.130.

² Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement*, Pantheon, New York, 1984, p.11.

³ Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (1908), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

⁴ Elleke Boehmer 'Introduction', in Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p.xxx.

⁵ Agnes Baden-Powell and Sir Robert Baden-Powell, *The Handbook for Girl Guides or How Girls Can Help Build the Empire*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, 1912.

⁶ Boehmer, p.xi.

⁷ See, for instance, Hugh Brohan's *Mowgli's Sons: Kipling and Baden-Powell's Scouts*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1987; and for the relationship between 'muscular Christianity' and Empire, James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995.

⁸ Rose Kerr, *The Story of the Girl Guides*, The Girl Guides Association, London, 1932, p.59;

G.H. Swinburne, *Among the First People, 1908–1936*, Girl Guides Association of Australia, Sydney, 1978, p.7.

⁹ Allen Warren suggests Baden-Powell was anxious about letting girls into the Scouting scheme for fear of compromising its aim to encourage 'manliness' ("Mothers for the Empire"? The Girl Guides Association in Britain, 1909–1939', in J.A. Mangan (ed.) *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1990, p.101). Official 'historian' and former International Commissioner Rose Kerr portrays Baden-Powell as having 'hardened his heart' against girls participating in Scouting activities because it may have subjected the scheme to ridicule, but when he saw a troop of 'Girl Scouts' arrive at the Crystal Palace rally 'his heart melted within him' (p.12). In contrast, biographer Tim Jeal cites Baden-Powell in the first Boy Scout pamphlet in 1907 to suggest that he, initially at least, felt that Scouting could be the basis for valuable training for girls (*Baden-Powell*, Hutchinson, London, 1989, p.469).

¹⁰ Springhall, p.131.

¹¹ Kerr, p.28.

¹² Baden-Powell and Baden-Powell, p.25.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁴ 'Scout', def. 2a, *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

¹⁵ 'Guide', def. 1a, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁶ Richard A. Voeltz, 'Adam's Rib: The Girl Guides and an Imperial Race', *San Jose Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1988, pp.91–99.

¹⁷ While Voeltz does note that the early handbooks 'are far more useful in gaining an impression of the Girl Guides' (p.91) than official histories and pamphlets, his references to them are, however, scant.

¹⁸ Lauren Tedesco, 'Making a Girl into a Scout: Americanizing Scouting for Girls', in Sherrie A. Inness (ed.) *Twentieth-Century American Girls' Culture*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1998, p.22.

¹⁹ See Tammy M. Proctor, 'Scouts, Guides, and the Fashioning of Empire, 1919–1939', in Wendy Parkins (ed.) *Fashioning the Body Politic*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2002, p.132.

²⁰ John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered at Manchester in 1864*, Smith, Elder, and Co., London, 1865, p.122.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp.124–125.

²² *ibid.*, pp.145–146.

²³ *ibid.*, p.127.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.178.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.154.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.160–161.

²⁷ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 5, 1978, p.20.

²⁸ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1997, p.18.

²⁹ *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration: Vol. 1 Report and Appendix*, Cd. 2175, HMSO, London, 1904.

³⁰ In an essay on physical education in *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (1861), Williams and Norgate, London, 1896, p.132, Herbert Spencer connects individual physical strength with racial superiority: "Thus far we have found no reason to fear trials of strength with other races in either of these fields [war and commerce]. But there are not wanting signs that our power will be presently taxed to the uttermost ... Already thousands break down under the high pressure they are subject to ... Hence it is becoming of especial importance that the training of children should be carried on, as not

only to fit them mentally for the struggle before them, but also to make them physically fit to bear its excessive wear and tear.'

³¹ Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution*, Macmillan, London, 1894.

³² Dorothea Beale, Lucy H. M. Soulsby and Jane Frances Dove, *Work and Play in Girls' Schools by Three Headmistresses*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1898, p.416.

³³ *ibid.*, p.398.

³⁴ Agnes Baden-Powell, 'Foreword', in Dorothea Moore, *Terry the Girl-Guide*, London, Nisbet & Co, 1912.

³⁵ Baden-Powell and Baden-Powell, p.40. There is contradiction on this issue, however. Instructors are advised that girls should form patrols within the same class 'in order to preserve girls' manners'. They should '[l]et birds of a feather flock together' (p.457).

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.418.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.447.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.461.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.vii.

⁴¹ quoted in Kerr, p.29.

⁴² Baden-Powell and Baden-Powell, p.vii.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.34.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.15.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.24.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.411.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.408.

⁴⁸ Robert Baden-Powell, p.184.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.335. PLEASE CONFIRM IF THIS REFERENCE IS TO SFB OR HOW GIRLS.

⁵⁰ quoted in Kerr, p.30.

⁵¹ Warren, p.240.

⁵² Baden-Powell and Baden-Powell, p.320.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.447.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ quoted in Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880–1915*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, p.123.

⁵⁶ Baden-Powell and Baden-Powell, p.94.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.456.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.22.

⁵⁹ See, for example, A Zenana Missionary, 'Girl Life in India', *The Girl's Own Paper*, vol. 6, no. 279, 1885; Emily Dibdin, 'Child-Wives', *The Girl's Own Paper*, vol. 21, no. 1134, 1901; Anon. 'Log of Voyage to the Cape: And Diary of Army Nursing in South Africa', *The Girl's Own Paper*, vol. 21, no. 1078, 1900; 'Girl Volunteers for South Africa', *The Girl's Own Paper*, vol. 23, no. 1151, 1902.

⁶⁰ Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, 2000, p.407.

⁶¹ Ledger, p.67.

⁶² Davin, pp.9–14.

⁶³ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1994.

⁶⁴ Baden-Powell and Baden-Powell, p.407.

⁶⁵ see *ibid.*, p.406.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.274.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.406.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.16.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, pp.27, 282.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.326.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.24.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.376.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.235.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ While the girls are referred to as scouts by the author in the article title, a 'scout-mistress' named Miss Fenn of the Finchley Guides is quoted extensively, and she notes that the girls are referred to as 'guides' by the 'scout-master, Mr Osborne'. Walter T. Roberts, 'Girls as Scouts', *The Girl's Realm*, vol. 12, 1909, pp.338–339.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 338.