

The Annexation of the Transvaal in 1877: The First Boer Reactions

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Abstract: In April 1877 The South African Republic was annexed by the British Empire. This was a part of a wider scheme to unify the sub-continent under the British rule. The story is well known. Many works deals with the motives of Lord Carnarvon and other British decision-makers. Much less deals with the question of immediate Boer reaction, or to be exact, the reasons behind their inaction. This article deals with this problem. Tries to evaluate the attitudes of both, the British and the Boers, and to show why the Transvaal Boers mostly ignored the annexation declaration? This text is just an excursion into field which demands much wider and more detailed studies.

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The Transvaal Annexation and the events leading to it seem, at first sight, to have been thoroughly described and analysed from every possible angle.¹ Yet, there

¹ There are some books and articles dealing with the annexation of the Transvaal and the Confederation Project in the 1870s (De Kiewet 1965; Goodfellow 1966; Schreuder 1980). Of course, every textbook dedicated to the 19th century history of South Africa deals with this topic (see for example: Theal 1919 I: 248-274; Thompson 1971: 289-300; Davenport and Saunders 2000: 202-208).

have appeared new concepts allowing for a new approach to the situation in the region which led to the annexation of the South African Republic in April 1877. For example, in *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, vol. I, Norman Etherington, Patrick Harries and Bernard K. Mbenga proposed a new label for the events taking place from 1877 to 1882 – the “First British War for South African Unification” (Etherington, Harries, and Mbenga 2010: 383). And it is not just a new label but a new way of looking at the events of that period: not just as a series of loosely connected conflicts, but elements of British policy aimed at bringing the whole region under the control of the British Empire. Since the appearance of the above-mentioned publication the term has been used by some scholars (Hovland 2013: 206) but it has not been in any way elaborated on up to this day. This creates an opportunity for looking once again into the events which were a part of this process.

From this perspective, the annexation of the Transvaal on the 12th April 1877 by sir Theophilus Shepstone who was accompanied by 25 soldiers of the Natal mounted police (Goodfellow 1966: 124) is to be viewed as one of those events. Perplexingly interesting part of this event was the reaction of the Boer population to this act. How was it possible to perform an effective annexation with such limited forces at hand? We know that at the border of Natal and the South African Republic there were gathered significant forces (c. 1100 men), but still they needed some time (c. three weeks) to reach Pretoria (Annexation of the Transvaal, 16th April 1877; Goodfellow 1966: 124). Reading textbook accounts of those events one finds out, that authors had problems with description of those reactions, especially those just after the 12th April. As a matter of fact, there is no satisfactory explanation to this lack of opposition on the Boer side.

First of all, in this case we need to take into account many layers of propaganda, both those present at the moment of the annexation and those accumulated later in historiography. When the first-mentioned kind of propaganda is considered another two levels of efforts can be observed. The first one was the creation of an environment favouring the British intervention in the South African Republic and its possible annexation. The second dimension is to be found in the official correspondence of Theophilus Shepstone and his collaborators who tried to create a conviction that the action by Th. Shepstone was an answer to the pleas of local population, and in fact was justified by the internal situation of the South African Republic. The first element was necessary to justify the act of annexation of a recognized independent country. The second was supposed to persuade both official circles and public opinion, British and international, that most of the citizens of the Transvaal in fact welcomed this act and accepted British rule without any significant opposition, and that the lack of reaction, except president Thomas Burgers protestations, was the best proof of the viability of such statements.

In the case of historiography again there is a complex set of attitudes to be considered. On the one hand, the British commentators who wrote immediately after the events generally supported the move as necessary with regard to both particular and general situation in the South African Republic itself and in the whole region, presenting it as a step toward order, progress and modernisation of the Transvaal (Aylward 1881: 223-230; Haggard 1900: 23-86). On the other hand, even very early historians connected with the so-called settler and liberal historiographies, stressed that this move was rush, unjustified, unwise and controversial (Theal 1919: 273-276; Headlam 1936: 464-468; Hattersley 1936: 41-47). But even those critical opinions were expressed in the particular context of creating, or in reality strengthening, the feeling of mistrust between the Boer Republics and the British Empire, which eventually led to the Boer (South African) War of 1899-1902, and which prevented the peaceful cooperation and potential unification of the whole region under the British supervision (Theal 1919: 277-278).

Another dimension of propaganda is connected with the Afrikaner nationalist historiography. Viewed from this perspective the history of Afrikanerdom was a history of perpetual struggle against the British imperialism. In this context the annexation and subsequent events up to the Convention of London were manifestations of the spirit of defiance and the emerging common Afrikaner identity (Reitz and Smuts 1900; Leyds 1906: 3-272). The annexation was to be a turning point which awakened the consciousness of the South African Boers, and led to the rise of solidarity among the Boer communities throughout the whole South Africa (Van Jaarsveld 1961; Muller 1981: 297-327).

In effect the whole incident became mythologised and incorporated into the particular view on South African history as a competition between two settler societies. Therefore it is the more interesting to look at the very event which was in the centre of those historical and historiographical squabbles. What happened in the Transvaal in March and April of 1877? What were the Boer reactions to the annexation? And what was the reason behind those reactions?

On the 27th December 1876 Theophilus Shepstone, accompanied by 25 men of Natal mounted police left Pietermaritzburg for Pretoria, and on 4th January 1877 he crossed the border of the South African Republic. He arrived in Pretoria, the capital of the Republic on 22nd January 1877 (H. Bulwer to Earl of Carnarvon, 10th Jan 1877; Theal 1919: 269). It was the beginning of the period of talks and negotiations with the Transvaal authorities, especially with president Thomas F. Burgers and representatives of the Volksraad. The very arrival of Th. Shepstone was received with suspicion by at least some of the burghers who demanded an explanation why and in what role the British representative came to Pretoria (Th. Shepstone to H. Bulwer, 7th Feb. 1877). Due to Th. Shepstone's presence and

the ensuing negotiations, the presidential elections in the South African Republic, which should have taken place in the end of February of 1877, were postponed by the Volksraad until May 1877 (Theal 1919: 269-270). In the meantime, on 7th February 1877 the BaPedi ruler Sekhukhuni decided to sign a peace treaty with the Republic and accept its suzerainty.² This, in theory, improved the position of president Burgers and the Transvaal, but Shepstone was determined to achieve his goal – the submission of the South African Republic – although he tried to hide his intentions as long as possible, knowing that he could meet with the opposition of at least some of the Boers (Th. Shepstone to H. Bulwer, 7th Feb. 1877).

Eventually, during the negotiations later in March 1877 he had disclosed his true intentions (Th. Shepstone to Th. Burgers, c. 16th March 1877; Th. Shepstone to B. Frere, 3rd Apr. 1877; Goodfellow 1966: 126-127), trying to convince president Thomas Burgers and the Volksraad to accept the idea of British annexation. Seeing that Burgers became more and more obstinate, and other Boer politicians were even more unresponsive to his arguments, Shepstone decided to act and on 12th April 1877 he proclaimed the annexation of the South African Republic by the British Empire (Eybers 1918: 448-453).

Because Th. Shepstone did not manage to convince Transvaal politicians to accept the annexation, this event needed to be explained otherwise. One should remember that in 1852 the British Empire formally acknowledged the independence of Boer communities beyond the Vaal river (Eybers 1918: 358-359), therefore a new reason was needed to justify why the British authorities decided to ignore the Convention and annex a sovereign state. In fact, it was not so difficult, as at least since 1874 when Lord Carnarvon started a policy aimed at the creation of some sort of South African confederation, British official circles and press were conducting a propaganda campaign to show that the Transvaal was a failed state.³

This propaganda was based on two pillars. The first pillar was an argument that South African Republic was unable to exercise a fundamental responsibility of any state, which is to control its territory and population. The main evidence in this case was the Transvaal war with Sekhukhuni, the chief of the BaPedi chieftdom in the eastern part of the Republic (now in the Mpumalanga province).

² The treaty was concluded on the 7th February 1877, but was formally signed by BaPedi chief Sekhukhuni on 16th February 1877. (H. Bulwer to Earl of Carnarvon, 19th Feb. 1877; Delius 1983: 210-211). In this way the main excuse for the British involvement in the Transvaal internal affairs became null and void.

³ In fact missionaries, especially those tied with the British missionary societies, much earlier started a campaign against the Boers, Boer republics and especially the Transvaal. This last was presented as adverse to missionary efforts in the South African interior and obstructing their activities (R. Moffat to G. Grey, 4th Jan 1859; W. Dely to W. Rawstorne, 31st March 1859; A. Tidman to H. Marivale, 12th April 1859).

On 16th May 1876 president Th. Burgers decided to declare a war against the BaPedi to force them to accept the suzerainty of the Republic (Merensky 1899: 311; Mönning 1988: 28). But the war proved to be more difficult than Th. Burgers had expected. The Transvaal mobilised 2000 burghers, 2400 AmaSwazis and 600 other African auxiliaries, the largest force heretofore mobilised by the South African Republic, and in the beginning of July 1876 they attacked the BaPedi. At first the campaign was successful, but the attack on Sekhukhuni chief stronghold on 31st July/1st August 1876 was repulsed by the BaPedi. After this failure most of the commandos withdrew, and then the campaign became a war of attrition (Delius, 1983: 207-209).

The reverse of the Boer forces was presented by the British officials and media as a complete failure. There were even reports that Pretoria itself was threatened (Goodfellow 1966: 113). The Boer withdrawal was pictured as a crushing and shameful defeat. According to the press releases the Transvaal army was supposedly completely routed and Sekhukhuni and his BaPedi were on offense (*Correspondence Respecting the War... 1877*: 101-103), and even the officials shared the opinion that situation was critical. Boer forces were defeated, at least the eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga) was supposedly left defenceless (H. Barkly to Earl of Carnarvon, 25th Aug. 1876). The scale of this threat was blown out of the proportions. The situation was presented as dramatic and even threatening the very existence of the state, the more so, as both the press and the officials were suggesting that this defeat led also to disturbances among other tribes living in the Transvaal (H. Barkly to Earl of Carnarvon, 25th Aug. 1876; *Correspondence Respecting the War... 1877*: 102, 103; Schreuder 2009: 72-73). The truth was that, although this reverse was embarrassing, it had just a local significance.

Besides the hearsays about the supposed threat of Sekhukhuni and of an imminent mutiny of other Transvaal chiefdoms, there were also rumours, spread by the British officials and media, of a possible Zulu invasion of the Transvaal (Goodfellow 1966: 113; Schreuder 1980: 72). They were appearing at least as early as 1875 or even earlier (Memorandum on the Native Question in South Africa, 14th Dec. 1875; *Correspondence Respecting the War... 1877*: 96). An important element of this whole narration was a conviction, that in fact the Transvaal itself, its consecutive rulers and the Boer population as a whole are guilty of this situation. Again both British officials and media used the missionary and official accounts to present the South African Republic policy toward the indigenous population as oppressive. The Transvaal Boers were accused of cruelty toward the Natives, of proliferating slavery and slave trade, and exploiting Africans (Memorandum on the Native Question in South Africa, 14th Dec. 1875; Kistner 1952: 197-278). In this way two streams of anti-Transvaal propaganda were merged: the African threat to the existence of the Transvaal, which endangered the whole region

with the accusation of anti-humanitarian policies which in turn led directly to this situation.

The second pillar of the propaganda was the creation of a narration according to which the white (both British and Boer) population was eager to accept the annexation of the Transvaal by the British Empire. As a result of the Transvaal policies toward the Natives, the existence of the state was supposedly endangered and therefore much of the population was supposedly receptive to the idea of British annexation. This element of propaganda was especially visible during the sir Theophilus Shepstone mission in the Transvaal. From the very beginning, in fact even before its start, he and his collaborators tried to create an impression that a significant part of the citizens of the Transvaal, also Boers, was in favour of the annexation (F. Blandy to Froude, 3rd Aug. 1876; D. Fraser and 49 others to Th. Shepstone, 12th Dec. 1876; H. Bulwer to Earl of Carnarvon, 10th Jan. 1877; Robinson and Gallaher 1967: 61). The goal of this argumentation was to legitimise the planned annexation. Internationally it would prove that even the citizens of the Republic were aware of the dramatic situation of their state. Internally it would be an argument in discussions with president Th. Burgers and the representatives of the Volksraad.

The problem was that the construction of the propaganda campaign was unsophisticated. It possibly could convince somebody without orientation in the situation in southern Africa, Boer Republics and the Transvaal. But for those acquainted with regional policies it was easy to see through this ruse, especially the second part of this propaganda narration. For nearly everybody it was clear that the so-called internal voices supporting annexation came chiefly from the foreign, mostly British and German, population living in the Transvaal (D. Fraser and 49 others to Th. Shepstone, 12th Dec. 1876; Theal 1919: 271, 275-276; Laband 2005: 19). Moreover, during the stay of Th. Shepstone in Pretoria, as already mentioned above, Sekhukhuni decided to sign the peace treaty with the Republic in which he accepted its suzerainty (H. Bulwer to Earl of Carnarvon, 19th Feb. 1877; Delius 1983: 210-211). In this way the cornerstone of the first pillar of the British propaganda was undermined. Even those who agreed that the Transvaal was a weak, backward state with underdeveloped administrative and political structures, and which had problems controlling its own territory and population, had to agree that there was no immediate danger to its existence.

Despite the failure of the propaganda campaign Th. Shepstone decided to annex the South African Republic. However untrue the propaganda statements of the widespread support for such an action were, the fact remains that there was no significant opposition to it, because it is difficult to concede that feeble protests by president Th. Burgers and Transvaal Executive Council (Resolution by Transvaal Executive Council, 11th April 1877; Annexation of the Transvaal,

16th April 1877; Goodfellow 1966: 127) were of any importance. Especially when one remembers that just over a little more than two months earlier, in the very beginning of February 1877, some 400 Transvaal Boers arrived armed in Pretoria to remove Th. Shepstone from the Transvaal, and only the intervention of president Burgers stopped them from arresting the British official (Th. Shepstone to H. Bulwer, 7th Feb. 1877). A similar show of force in the beginning of April 1877, as it seems, could have been enough to remove Shepstone and his 25 Natal mounted police. Of course there were the British forces stationed on the Natal-Transvaal border since February 1877 with a task of supporting Shepstone, if he needed such support. But those forces were limited (a battalion of the 3rd Foot Regiment) to c. 800 men. They were to be augmented by 3 companies (c. 300 men) from the 80th Regiment of Foot, which were belated by the outbreak of an epidemic among the soldiers (H. Barkly to Earl of Carnarvon, 6th March 1877; Goodfellow 1966: 124). Those forces were significant, but there is the question, if the British would proceed with such an invasion in the face of armed opposition of at least a few hundred Boer mounted gunmen? Especially taking into account that there was some opposition to the annexation even among the British decision-makers (Goodfellow 1966: 127). Whatever the answer would be, the fact remains that there was no significant protest or opposition. And so there returns the question – why?

To answer this question one should consider what kind of state the Transvaal was up to 1877. As a matter of fact, the South African Republic was still a state in the making. There is no place here to present the whole history of the Republic since the Sand River Convention of 1852 up to 1877, but still one should take a closer look at the Convention of 1852. It did not give independence to the Transvaal as a state, nor to the South African Republic, simply because they were non-existent at that time. What it did grant “to the emigrant farmers beyond the Vaal River, [was] the right to manage their own affairs and to govern themselves according to their own laws, without any interference on the part of the British Government” (Eybers 1918: 358). The wording of the Convention shows the reality of the Trans-Vaal territories in the beginning of the 1850s. At the time, they constituted few centres of power far removed from each other, divided not just by geography but also by political divisions (Etherington, Harries and Mbenga 2010: 337-338). This situation did not change much during the next 25 years. During the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s there emerged within those territories three or four Boer republics: Potchefstroom (1839), Zoutpansberg (1849), Andries-Ohrigstad (later Lydenburg) (1845) and Utrecht (1854).⁴ Eventually by 1860 all of them were

⁴ In this case, the republic was situated in northern Zululand, but as it was incorporated to the South African Republic in 1860 (Changuion and Steenkamp 2012: 60), it should be listed with other Trans-Vaal Boer states.

formally united in one state – the South African Republic.⁵ But to say “eventually united” is stretching the meaning of the term. In fact, the basic characteristic of the Trans-Vaal territories, understood as a collection of Boer communities far removed from each other and separated by several significant and many more smaller African communities, did not change at all by that date or even later. The 1860 was at best the beginning of the process of unification.

In many works authors draw borders of the South African Republic. Yet, the problem is that most of those borders existed only on paper, and sometimes just in the imagination of those authors (Changuion and Steenkamp 2012: 60-63). But it was not just the problem of external borders, it was, even more, the problem of the real control of the land. The fact was that on the territory of the South African Republic Boer and African communities lived intermixed, and their mutual relations were complex, ranging from conflict to cooperation (Etherington, Harries and Mbenga 2010: 340-341). Moreover, the very character of Boer communities also impeded the consolidation of the state. Typical of them was a strong strain of paternalistic, oligarchic tradition based on quasi-feudal client system, with a firm position of paternalistic military leaders enjoying wide, nearly authoritarian powers and quasi-monarchic leanings (F.H. Orpen to G.Grey, 28th Feb. 1857; Du Toit and Giliomee 1983: 243-246). This was characteristic of all trekker groups but was especially visible in the case of Boer communities in the Trans-Vaal area.

Traditionally we follow the British sources and see the political divisions which were embodied by the religious or rather church divisions between the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk and Gereformeerde Kerk (Doppers) (J.G. Kotzé to G. Grey, 19th Aug. 1855; Brief Sketch of Boer Characteristics, 1st May 1878). But this is an oversimplification. In fact, we may notice that there were different Boer groups or parties which settled in chosen localities often under the leadership of strong patriarchal leaders. In effect, there developed in the Trans-Vaal area a quasi-feudal system in which particular notables had a dominant position in certain territories, such as Zoutpansberg which became de facto a personal fief of the first three Commandants General (Du Toit and Giliomee 1983: 243, 246; Wagner 1980: 319).⁶

Historians usually turn their attention toward the struggle for consolidation of the South African Republic, the internal conflicts, such as the Transvaal Civil War of 1860-1864 or later political squabbles connected with the church divisions and conflicts revolving around external policies of the Republic, which led to the deposition of Marthinus W. Pretorius (Nixon 1885: 30; Davenport and Saunders

⁵ Formally the Constitution of the Republic was agreed upon in 1858, the union with the Lydenburg Republic was concluded in 1859 but ratified in 1860 (Eybers 1918: 363-409, 420-430; Changuion and Steenkamp 2012: 60).

⁶ Those three were Andries Hendrik Potgieter (1848-1852), Piet Johannes Potgieter (1852-1854) and Stephanus Schoeman (1854-1860).

2000: 89-93). This is understandable but misleading. The core of the problem with the Transvaal, as it seems, lies with the question to what extent the state institutions were controlling the internal situation, and if the Boer population identified itself with the state as a whole. The times of the presidency of Thomas Burgers were a proof of the weakness of the Republic's central authorities and their lack of tools to enforce its will. Burgers was elected as an alternative to the traditional Transvaal elites, as somebody from the outside who was not connected with any part of the Republic notables' network and who was not involved in local squabbles. He wanted to transform the Republic into a modern and stable state, or at least more modern and more stable (Nixon 1885: 31; Davenport and Saunders 2000: 93). He endeavoured on several ambitious projects such as the railway to Delagoa Bay (Lourenço Marques).⁷ He tried to use the discovery of some gold deposits made in 1873 in Pilgrim's Rest near Lydenburg in the eastern Transvaal to improve the financial situation (Laband 2005: 15). Finally, he tried to convince Transvaal Boers to a more systematic form of government and taxation.⁸ But all of those initiatives failed. In fact, what may be observed is the ineffectiveness of a newly created law and the impossibility of executing it. The Volksraad was enacting laws but there was no state mechanism to put them into effect, so in practice the state was unable to enforce enacted laws (O. Lanyon to G. Wolseley, 7th Aug. 1879; Report upon Law no. 6 of 1880).

So in the moment of the annexation the control of the state over its citizens and subjects was delusory. Why? This question should be answered by another questions: did Boer communities in the Transvaal need or feel that they need a general political leadership? Did they identify themselves with the Republic? Of course, some of them, such as Paulus Kruger, Marthinus W. Pretorius or Piet Joubert surely did. But most of the Boers not necessarily. As already mentioned, the Boers settled in several dispersed communities, quite far removed from each other, where they were living among their African neighbours. Their mutual contacts were of crucial importance for them and therefore shaped their attitude toward the rest of the Republic.

As it has already been noted, the mutual relations between Boer communities and African chiefdoms were complex. There is no place and need here do describe them in detail, so we will just mention some important examples which illustrate a wider phenomenon. Since the very beginning of the Boer settlement in the Trans-Vaal area they needed to reach some sort of *modus vivendi* with African chiefdoms and communities, and not always the Boers were the dominant

⁷ Especially the line to the Delagoa Bay. The idea initiated by president Marthinus W. Pretorius in 1868 but furthered by president Th.F. Burgers (Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between South African Republic and His Majesty the King of Portugal, Dec. 1875; Goodfellow 1966: 26; Theal 1919: 253-255).

⁸ For the last time just before the annexation (Theal 1919: 269-271; Laband 2005: 19).

side of those relations. In practice, quite often the existence of Boer communities in certain areas was an effect of formal and informal agreements and compromises between the local Boer notables and African chiefs (Etherington, Harries and Mbenga 2010: 341). But of course, there were also conflicts in which the Africans were able to push the Boers out of their territories. As early as 1855 there were mentions that the Boer farmers were forced to abandon their farms especially in more marginal territories of northern, western and eastern Transvaal (J.G. Kotzé to G. Grey, 19th Aug. 1855; Changuion and Steenkamp 2012: 66-72). With the passage of time the situation did not improve, in fact, it sometimes even worsened. There were several cases in which the Boers were forced to leave their farms or to acknowledge the sovereignty of local African chiefdoms, such as the Ndzundza Ndebele or BaHurutshe (Delius 1989: 229; Manson 1992: 91). It shows that neither the Republic nor the local Boer communities were able to effectively control the territory of the South African Republic. It also proves that the borders, both external and internal, were purely fictional. What we may observe in many instances was a situation which might be called a "reverse colonisation," as many of the Boer communities depended on their African allies and sometimes even accepted local chiefs as suzerains (Etherington, Harries and Mbenga 2010: 343).

Moreover, it also shows that the local Boer communities could not count on the support of the state. When in Zoutpansberg in 1865 broke a conflict between the local Boer community and Makhado, a new ruler of VhaVenda, he not only forced most of the Boers to retreat, but also destroyed Schoemansdal, a major village of the region. The local Boers were forced, in April 1865, into laagers. Paulus Kruger, then the Commandant General of the South African Republic, decided to assist the Zoutpansberg Boers, but he managed to mobilise just 500 men, as most of the Boers from other parts of the Transvaal were reluctant to help since they felt no common cause with their Zoutpansberg compatriots (War Office General Staff 1905: 105; Wagner 1980: 328, 329-330). In effect, he was just able to evacuate the local Boers in 1867 and had to accept de facto the independence of this area (Wagner 1980: 328; Changuion and Steenkamp 2012: 70-71). A similar situation played out in the case of the war with the BaPedi in 1876, when after first reverses, a significant part of the commandos from other parts of the Republic, especially the western Transvaal, were unwilling to sacrifice their lives for what they saw as not their cause. So although president Burgers and the War Council (Krygsraad) were able to mobilise significant forces (2000 Boers, 2400 AmaSwazi and 600 other Africans), they were unable to change their reluctant attitude and to convince the commandos to storm the strongholds of the BaPedi, so in effect the war was mostly fought by local forces and mercenaries (H. Bulwer to Earl of Carnarvon, 22nd Aug. 1876; *Correspondence Respecting the War...* 1877: 102-103, 104-106; Delius 1983: 205-208).

These were just two examples which showed the lack of solidarity among the Transvaal Boers and the incapability of the Republic not only to enforce the enacted laws but also to effectively support its citizens against external and internal threats. This most probably led to the conviction shared by many Boers that they do not need any form of general leadership or a central government. They had managed, in most cases, to work out some sort of *modus vivendi* with local African polities, and learned that in need they could count primarily only on themselves and their African allies and clients. Therefore the state seemed for them unnecessary, and this in turn led to the development of indifference toward the Republic and its institutions. This attitude was confirmed by the British administration after annexation (O. Lanyon to G. Wolseley, 7th Aug. 1879; Laband 2005: 33-34). People such as S.J.P. Kruger, M.W. Pretorius or Piet J. Joubert, who had their political ambitions connected with the state as a whole, were opposed to the annexation as it hindered their ambitions.⁹ But most of the Boers did not care about this, they were simply disinterested in the fate of the central government as they did not identify themselves with the Republic. From their perspective the new British regime was not so much different from the Republican one, and they did not suppose or expect that it would influence their everyday lives any more than before. The change of authorities in Pretoria was too far away to care about it. It was characteristic that the insurrection and the war of independence (1880-1881) started only when the British authorities proved able to enforce their laws and regulations on the population at large, as showed the case of Piet L. Bezuidenhout.¹⁰

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⁹ S.J.P. Kruger decided in 1876 to take part in the presidential elections in 1877, and he had very significant chances to win those elections (Extract of a letter by W. Morcom, n.d. [1877]; Davenport and Saunders 2000: 94).

¹⁰ He owed to the administration over 27 GBP of unpaid taxes and therefore was taken into custody and his wagon was put for an auction (Laband 2005: 49-50).

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