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Britain's Role in the Scramble for Africa in the 1880s

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By the close of the nineteenth century, Britain had accumulated a massive colonial territory in Africa. In a practically endless line, it originated from Alexandria in north to Cape Town in south and was eminently characterized in the image of the Rhodes Giant. However, questions arise as to the reasons how the enormous territorial possessions came about, and perhaps most importantly, the reasons why Britain was involved in the scramble that most generations considered as essentially sterile land¹.

Owing to the worldwide inadequacy of world knowledge, the size and capabilities of Africa as a continent were majorly destabilized and simplified. Before colonization, Africa was described by its extensive flexibility concerning movement, authority, and everyday lifestyles. The continent comprised not of closed breeding entities, fortified with exceptional invariable cultures, but of additional liquefied units. Voluntarily integrating foreigners into the community with the prerequisite that they credited its customs, and where the logic of commitment and cohesion went past that of the nuclear family². Pre-colonial civilizations were vastly varied, where they were either nationless, run by the state, or run by empires. Thus, the concept of collectivism was accepted and adapted widely; the land was commonly held and could not be

¹Newbury, C. W. (Colin Walter), 1929-. "*Great Britain and the Partition of Africa, 1870-1914.*" In *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 3: The Nineteenth Century*, Edited By Porter, Andrew N... The Oxford History of the British Empire; 3, 624-50. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

²Flint, John E. "*Britain and the Scramble for Africa.*" In *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 5: Historiography*, Edited By Winks, Robin William. The Oxford History of the British Empire; 5, 450-62. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

purchased or sold, even though other things, like cattle, were possessed independently. Notably, in the societies that were not stateless the daily affairs of the tribe were run by chiefs together with one or more councils. Thus, the annexation of Africa through Europe conveyed numerous methods of government that are still currently noticeable. Before colonization, conversely, there were several forms of control in Africa, alternating from powerful empires to devolved groups of hunters and pastoralists.

The scramble for Africa remained the propagation of differing European prerogatives to the African region through the novel imperialism era, amid the 1880s and the beginning of the Second World War. Half of the final 19th century envisioned the evolution against the casual imperialism of governance and economic and armed influence to that of direct governance. Notably, efforts to arbitrate imperial antagonism, like the Berlin conference conducted in 1884 and 1885 between the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Ireland, German Empire, and the 3rd French Democracy, were unsuccessful in establishing the opposing supremacies' claims definitively³. These disagreements about Africa were amongst the fundamental issues that occasioned the initial World War. Similarly, European countries saw Africa as rich for the taking. Some of these countries even debated that they were also spreading civilization to a region that they considered undeveloped and evolutionary regressive by inhabiting Africa. Specifically, Europe's responsibility was acting as African trustees until Africans were capable of governing themselves.

³ Robin, W & John, E. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography: Britain and the Scramble for Africa*. Oxford Scholarship, 1999.

However, the scramble for Africa was solely driven by commercial welfares. European countries would greatly benefit from the exploitation of the African continent. Besides, the decolonization procedure would expose the biased colonial governance. The leaving foreign supremacies left economies that were intended to profit them even in their absence—for instance, most products such as crops required to be processed overseas. In addition, the leaving authorities left few Africans prepared to control their newly sovereign countries. Africans have become associates of solitary universal civilization categorized by associations and ideologies like illustrative social equality, judiciary, financial transactions, and industrialization for all the unfairness of imperialism⁴. Likewise, Africans their neighbors had to learn these advancements, thus profiting from the benefits.

Since the beginning, the historiography on the part of Britain in the scramble for Africa was a debate between champions for extension and opponents. This phenomenon has continued to be a philosophical influence upon most historians who have researched and written this topic. However, respective cohorts reinterpreted events taking into account the changing issues like the economic despair at the close of the 19th century, Nazism and racially prejudiced theory, world war, African nationalism, and decolonization. However, the progressive issue of the British Foreign and colonial office records was commenced after 1920, which later governed the extent of theoretical studies of the scramble and their complications. The emergence of the British Empire's commissioned companies in the 1890s fashioned several early works. Companies like Imperial British East Company (IBEAC) had succeeded in introducing civilization in nations like Uganda and pleaded for imperial compensation in case the company went into bankruptcy⁵. The initial attempt in 1893 for a comprehensive explanation of the partition by the secretary of the

⁴ Robin & John, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*.

⁵ Flint, *Britain and the scramble of Africa*, 450-62.

influential Royal Geographical Society, Sir John Keltie, was similarly backed up by the previous Consul-General in Zanzibar and director of IBEA, Sir John Kirk, from other company officials, officials of the Colonial office, and Goldie of the Royal Niger Company (RNC). They strongly supported the idea of British expansion in Africa, citing earlier criticism that Britain would lose prized areas within the African continent⁶.

Nevertheless, Leopold's universal position disintegrated promptly into a state scramble impelling Britain to safeguard territories on the West African coastline besides France, also attracting Germany to the scene. In 1871, the German phenomenon was considered an impartial consequence of her amalgamation, industrial development, the exploration for new annexation, plus a longing for reputation, combined with a prevalent desire for conquest. The inclusion of Germany made the scramble an unavoidable rush for Britain and other nations to pin out assertions for the future. However, in Egypt, where Turkey's universal weakness had African effects, Britain applied the diplomatic techniques used in minimalizing European engagement over the Ottoman Empire by the internationalization of its commercial problems. Furthermore, Britain employed two other methods advanced from imperial understanding. The initial approach was taking over from Lord Kimberley by Carnarvon, as Administrator of State for the Colonies, to unite the fractious republics, colonies, and African civilizations south of Zambezi association ruled from an independent Cape Society. The other approach was basically to carry on with private or public support for the work performed by the British commissioners, merchants, missionaries, and ambassadors, which were already in progress from the territories in tropical

⁶ Indakwa, John. *Expansion of British Rule in the Interior of Central Africa, 1890-1924: A Study of British Expansion into Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi*. Washington (DC): 1977.

Africa. An empire like the south Zambezi might not have been cheap, as was demonstrated by the expenditure of West Africa. However, in the coastal territories, fewer taxes on imports and practices of spending chiefs and rehabilitated slavers were required in the scramble. Likewise, partition's social, economic, and political characteristics were noticeable initially in the south of the Zambezi⁷. Access to resources from the late eighteenth century was accustomed to the massive displacement of Nguni-speaking populaces and Europeans' invasive settlement in the struggle for water and land. For example, the Invasion of Natal and acknowledgment of two Afrikaner regions in half-century had applied a system of territorial distinction to the politics of southern Africa along the Orange Rivers and the Vaal but abandoned other marches vulnerable to challenge. The short-lived gold discovery at Tati and the more significant location of diamonds in Griqualand West in the late 1860s adequately validated. The division of mineral resources was agreed upon initially by the British occupation of Griqualand West and a borderline adjusted to the disadvantage of the Griquas and independent State. Also, a reward by Lieutenant-Governor Keate of Natal held back the western Transvaal boundary from lands disputed with the Tswana, leaving an undefended main trade way from the Cape to region north-west of the Limpopo River in 1871.

However, the Crown rule was resorted to when the other techniques were unsuccessful. There were two unsuccessful techniques by the late 1870s, which were demotion and incorporation into an existing colony, used expansively in the Eastern Cape, and, also, methods of clientage association under the consultancy of the Cape High Commissioner, employed in

⁷ Andrew, P & Colin, N. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century: Great Britain and the Partition of Africa, 1870-1914*. Oxford Scholarship, 1999

1868 when Basutoland emanated under British defense and was split with the Free State. Invaded to the Cape in 1871, the Sotho reserved a High Commissioner's representative, devotedly battled in the Phuti escalating in 1879, but dissented against the Cape's demilitarization policy. Additionally, uninformed that they had stopped to be under the subjective control of the High Commissioner, the Sotho arose once further underneath Crown benefaction in 1884, as an illustration of administrative and economic alteration and missionary politicization which Gladstone was obligated to agree as to the initial South African Territory. Similarly, other partition methods commenced persistently within the republics of the two British colonies⁸. Something more than just demographic separation was at stake in this instance. This was an important invention in exclusive proprietorship privileges for colonists supported by political dominance. Where the outlines were demarcated on the plot was a matter of discretion and power. Notably, one of the influences for invading the Transvaal in 1877 was the catastrophe of an insolvent colonist state to implement such independence over a borderline of 1,200 miles lacking the support of Natal and the Cape and the consultancy of the High Administrator. Another argument, documented in the Expatriate Office, was that economic conversion had distorted the political equilibrium between the British and African cultures by expanding mineral and agronomic resources, the extent of cash retributions, and a market in weapons.

On the contrary, the purpose of British legislators all through the period of expansion in Africa after 1870 was attempting to preserve the informal colonialism of free trade. Britain got so directly intricate in establishing recognized empires in Africa while competing with France

⁸ Osborne, Myles and Kent, Susan Kingsley, 1952 May 9-. *Africans and Britons in the Age of Empires, 1660-1980.*, 1 Volume London: Routledge, 2015.

and then Germany⁹. However, the actual scale of British trade with Africa was very small. India remained the accessory in Britain's royal crown and every other imposing apprehension was exposed to upholding the safety of Britain's course to India. Specifically, at the commencement of the century, this had led to the annexation of the Cape Colony and additional colonial expansion in South Africa had been to safeguard the Cape as a long-lasting and stable British proprietorship. Once the Suez Canal, joining the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, was unlocked in 1869, the passage by marine ship to India was halved, and the focus of British imperialist rule shifted to Egypt. This was the British occupation in Egypt in 1882 to defend the Suez Canal course to the East¹⁰. Additionally, this distinct event was more than any other, which set off the European scramble for African colonies. Once Britain occupied Egypt, the country's lifeblood, the Nile, had to be protected, which involved British assurance in controlling Uganda and Sudan.

Elsewhere, the British interests primarily relied on communal subsidizations for posts in West Africa and the reserved initiative of varied British focuses, ministers, unconventional Africans, merchants, and traders warranted publicly by benevolent and commercial intentions. This provision was to partly end the incurred increasing expenditure over 1860 to 1890 of the four West African regions, Sierra Leone, Gambia, the Gold Coast, and Lagos Colony. Notably, this was robust in the 1860s and 1870s when the British merchants faced external competition, reduced prices of commodities, expensive credits to African suppliers, and political instability in

⁹ Prior, Christopher. "Empire Before Labour: The "Scramble For Africa" And the Media, 1880–99." *In The British Labour Movement And Imperialism*, Edited By Frank, Billy, Horner, Craig And Stewart, David, 23-40. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010.

¹⁰ Prior, Empire Before Labor, 23-40.

African markets¹¹. However, at the beginning of the augmented scramble of the 1880s, deliberations concerning trade and transport at Cape and Suez mostly governed the pronouncements to control Egypt's liability and generate authority in South Africa. Thus, the British applied the formula developed in 1881 by the war office to evaluate defense expenses and precedence applied in Africa by Carnarvon's royal commission.

Primarily, Britain was apprehensive about sustaining its positions of contact with India. Thus it's engrossed in Egypt and South Africa. Nevertheless, after these two zones were protected, imperialist explorers like Cecil fortified extra zone to form a railway line from Cape to Cairo. Britain was similarly attracted to the profitable possibility of abundant mineral areas such as the Transvaal, where in the mid-1880s gold was discovered, and in averting further European supremacies, mainly France and Germany, from invading into regions they regarded as their provinces of influence. Similarly, Britain's official dominance over the north-central of the African inland emerged due to the preliminary invasion of the German in the southern province. Certainly, Britain would not allow Germany to take a whole sector of Africa that had partitioned a portion of its informal territory subsequently from the mid-1860s, an occurrence conceived from anti-slave trade movement as of sums of British royal focusses, banyan merchants, living around¹². Peters spontaneously presented the north regions and it was the unceremonious treaty among these reserved entities that fashioned the foundation of the 1886 Anglo-German Boundary Agreement. Besides, the accord was elucidated in the succeeding years to disregard the entities from making invasions in their respective neighborhoods. The expansion of Britain's circle of power in incorporating the region was purely an ordinary significance of its regional nearness. This performance conveyed to fashionable majestic exercise and had secondarily

¹¹ Osborne, Kent & Kingsley, *Africans and Britons in the age of empire, 1660-1980*.

¹² Andrew & Colin, *The Oxford History of the British Empire, 1870-1914*.

remained authorized by Germany previously in 1887. This transpired equally on the justification of the commercial anticipations interested for the individuals occupying the interlacustrine province. Instead of the absent region of the Equatorial and to counteract the prospective danger modeled by way of an aggressive Buganda, a commanding and diplomatically insecure provincial power.

The extremity of the British evangelists presently existent in the empire maintained IBEA's course in the perception of the British communal view, which resolved to relinquish the republic challenging for legislators ardent to evade an additional Gordon occurrence¹³. When the regions were incorporated in the British scope of power, they were associations. However, it remained merely less time before they finally acknowledged colonies and ceremoniously assimilated as stately possessions. Notably, it was believed that the uninterrupted British government of the province would likewise put an ultimate termination to the East African slave trade. There was noticeable increase throughout 1880s and mostly in 1888 in the transportation of slaves. The administrative significance of the phenomenon was the Anti-Slave Trade Forum in Brussels. Mainly, they did this to endorse novel actions beside the domestic slave trade, particularly in funding the building of railways paving the path for the Ugandan Rail and invasion, as supporting the region was rendered economically sustainable. Certainly, it was also even seen as lucrative on interpretation of the conviction that the procedures would leave the anti-slave trade regiment dispensable. Therefore, scramble might be interpreted as a practice of anti-slavery.¹³

¹³ Andrew & Colin, *The Oxford History of the British Empire, 1870-1914*.

Nonetheless, a slight revitalization of slave trading was considered undesirable to a strong grouping of public judgment, persuasive stress groups, and legislators¹⁴. Britain affiliated its domestic and ethical status using the abolition of this menace of humankind. In contrast, the expected collective solidity that was occasioned after concluding the slave trade stayed alleged to be advantageous for profitable growth. On the contrary, through lack of emphasizing authority, British legislators would antagonize not simply the loyalist sections of its people but additionally those persuaded to humanism and profitable initiatives. Colonization was, parenthetically, the trail of minimum struggle, and Africa presented the perfect theatre where exhibition to practice Britain's assurance and recline in philosophical splendor of the supposed principles.

Nonetheless, the invasion of the British Empire in Africa is not chronological mystery. It manifested no incoherence in British rule. Additionally, it fashioned a variety of natural significance of Britain's self-complacency civilizing operation embedded in the Livingstonian doctrines of trade, Christianity, and advancement.

By the late 1880s before, the major regional lines of British impact and control in Southern Africa had already been positioned in a sequence of contests, associations, and assimilations. The resources of African countries and cultures were demarcated regarding directorial control or restricted as self-governing polities where they were not included in Natal or Eastern Cape regions. As a result, the methods of coalition and clientage, as substitutions to subjugation, were extensive and provided the foundation of extra legalistic customs of Crown Association and Territory. They owed more to the extensive use of the jurisdiction of the Cape Governor, as the official leader of two British settlers with illustrative and accountable administrations, or as jurisdictional sovereignty and an envoi in the frontier regions of British

¹⁴ Newbury, *Great Britain and the Partition of Africa*.

power¹⁵. The Transvaal repelled both invasion and informal rule. However, the Free State was more vulnerable to the combination of commercial and economic collaboration presented by the English-speaking Cape and Afrikaans. On the other hand, the northern state was controlled rather than captivated, though Afrikaner and British borderlines with Damaraland, Ndebele land, and Portuguese region were still temporary.

In the novel Imperialism era, through the close of nineteenth century, Britain acquired almost 30% of the African inhabitants underneath its rule, equated to 9% for Germany, 7% for Belgium, 15% for France, and merely 1% for Italy. Additionally, Nigeria only donated fifteen million persons, a number higher than German colonial territory or French West Africa. It remained contradictory that Britain, a dependable promoter of unrestricted trade, arose with not only the biggest foreign territory hailed to its enduring existence in India but additionally the supreme expansions in the scramble for Africa, which mirrored the profitable station at its commencement. On the other hand, in respect of the area inhabited, the French colony was the peripheral conquerors but abundant of their region comprised of the sparsely inhabited Sahara. Governmental domination succeeded the fiscal growth by the expatriate halls augmenting prejudice and nationalism at every predicament to legitimize the expatriate innovativeness. However, pressures among the imperial supremacies resulted in a series of catastrophes, which eventually shattered when preceding competitions and coalitions generated a domino condition that attracted the main European countries into conflict¹⁶. Nevertheless, after everything,

¹⁵ Indakwa, *Expansion of British Rule in the Interior of Central Africa, 1890-1924*.

¹⁶ Uzoigwe, G. N.. *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury*. Ann Arbor (MI): 1974.k

historians and researchers will deliberate on the custom of commercial growth, widespread resentment, and ethnic vulnerability that imperialism left in the world; however, the administrative complications of decolonization are momentous and instantaneous.

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