

## **THE PARTITION OF AFRICA:**

### **Fifteen Causes of the PARTITION**

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was an unprecedented expansion of European colonization in Africa, the so – called “Scramble for Africa.” By 1914 all Africa, except Ethiopia and Liberia, had been partitioned. Why did this partition take place and why did it occur in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rather than earlier?

The Partition was caused by a complex combination of factors:

- (1) A wave of aggressive nationalism and imperialism swept across Europe following the formation in 1870 – 71 of two large new nation – states, Germany and Italy, both of which were eager to acquire colonies to increase their status and influence in international affairs. Since France and Britain already had colonies, nationalists in Germany and Italy wanted colonies too.
- (2) Desire to restore national prestige propelled France into the race for colonies in Africa. France’s armies had been completely defeated by Germany in the Franco – Prussian War of 1870 – 71 and had lost the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. France wanted to regain prestige by acquiring colonies and possibly also gain through a large overseas empire the manpower needed to wage a future war of revenge against Germany.
- (3) Political and diplomatic strategy among the European powers was another key factor in the partition. For example, France occupied Tunis largely out of fear that Italy might otherwise occupy the North African coast. Similarly, Britain invaded Egypt in 1882 to put down Arabi pasha’s nationalist revolt mainly to retain control over the Suez Canal and protect its important sea route to India. Britain decided to remain in Egypt because she feared the growing power of Russia and was afraid that the Russian fleet might enter the Mediterranean from the Black Sea. In addition, the German Chancellor Bismarck wanted

African colonies to use as pawns in his diplomatic chess game in Europe.

- (4) Many military officers, especially in France and Britain, also put pressure on European governments to acquire African colonies. There wasn't enough fighting in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for European military officers seeking glory and rapid promotion, and they consequently pressed for colonial wars. These officers also felt that because of the lack of modern weapons among Africans, fighting there was less dangerous than in Europe. In French military men such as Buegrand, Faidherbe, De Brazza and Gallieni sought expansion of the France Empire in Africa. In Britain soldiers such as Wolseley, Kitchener, and Lugard pushed for expansion of the British Empire in Africa.
- (5) Government in Europe was also strongly influenced by public opinion, the press and colonial societies to seek colonies in Africa.

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### **The Main Theories:**

The main theories are economic, political, diplomatic and psychological:

### **Introduction:**

### **Economic:**

Germany, Belgium and France wanted to catch up with Britain in industrialization hence there was great competition for raw materials and markets. Contrary to this need, in fact Africa never became of great trading importance to Europe (for example trade with Africa remained about 5% of Britain's overseas trade) but in the 1860s many had an exaggerated idea of the economic potential of Africa based on travelers like Stanley in the Congo and Barth in the Western Sudan.

There was competition for raw materials and conflict with African middlemen as two traders pushed into the interior and therefore had to seek help from home governments. The growing trend was moving away from free trade to protectionist policies for example in France.

There was need for places to invest surplus capital though this only happened in Egypt and South Africa and for the latter the discovery of Kimberly diamonds in the 1860s and the Rand Gold fields in the 1885 raised hopes for further possibilities of minerals in Africa.

### **Political:**

Italian and Germany unification in 1871 resulted in the emergency of other major powers thus upsetting the balance of power which in turn led to great rivalry and instability in international affairs. There was therefore need for room of conquest and this was competitive as others would seek a few advantages on any expansion outside Europe.

There was also need for prestige especially for France after losing Alsace and Lorraine. There was need for man power to avenge humiliating wars for example the Franco – Prussian war, hence French occupation of the vast Sahel region which was marginal.

There was need to protect strategic points for the security of the sea routes that is for Britain, to India Via the Suez Canal and Cape (Egypt and South Africa).

### **Partition into epochs, that is, acceleration after 1875:**

#### **Initially, there was indifference caused by:**

1. Preaching of free trade in Britain by the Manchester School.
2. Repeal of common laws in 1846 and,
3. End of navigation Acts in 1849.

In 1852 Benjamin Disraeli expressed that colonies were “milestones around our necks,” “Little Englanders,” thus a burden to the mother country and Britain was better off without them and they will eventually fall like ripe fruit from a tree.

This was the basis of conventional policy in South Africa 1852 and 1854, with independence of Transvaal and Orange Free State recognized.

K. Fieldhouse argues that was a reputation of a pattern from Asia and the Pacific. In Africa there was an increase in the number of countries taking part and an increase in the tempo with which the partition was being done.

### **Influence of Technology Advances:**

This greatly facilitated penetration of new areas abroad. Scientific advances enabled administration of large and distant areas. The discovery of quinine helped to combat malaria to the explorers and helped them to push forward into the interior. This was also necessitated by the abolition of the slave trade and attempts at finding new profitable items of trade.

Steam – power (Steamships) enabled transportation of coal, peanuts, palm oil etc from Africa to Europe at handsome profit.

Victorian belief of white superiority and their mission to civilize millions of Africans for their own good and even to be forced through original script water.

### **Economic theory: J. A. Hobson and Lenin:**

Overproduction and under consumption led to stiff market completion in Europe. There was need to dump their good in Africa in return for raw materials.

It was the Anglo- Boer War in particular, with its overtones of mining capital involvements that gave a sinister new connotation to the World of imperialism.

J.A. Hobson was convinced that machinations of the Rhodes controlled markets had been responsible for the war. In his book Imperialism he attempted to show that new colonies that had been taken in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not be justified from an economic point of view that they had been had business for the country. They was however good business for a small group of capitalists who through their control of newspapers and other means had hoodwicked the public into supporting colonial expansion.

Hobson argued, that between 1/5 and 1/6 of Britain's trade came from export trade, therefore it was possible to stimulate the home demand to absorb

exports though at lower prices and that public money would not be used to add useless areas of the world to the British empire.

“The distinctive features of modern Imperialism for the commercial stand point is that it adds to our empire tropical and sub-tropical regions with which our trade is small, precarious and unprogressive” although he noted exceptions of huge companies, Cartels and financial manufactures and use of public funds to administer and develop backward areas.

“The Economic taproot” of imperialism was overproduction according to Hobson, therefore is not point of investing the profits form their operations in expanding production. There was a surplus of “glut of capital” and the capitalists put pressure on the government to take over new areas where they could invest and sell products. According to Hobson the reason for the capital glut was over saving. The wealthy could not use all their money, therefore the solution was redistribution of wealth which would raise the level of consumption and if no more production, there would be no glut of money or goods. He reflected to people like Rhodes as “parasies of imperialism.” “They were essentially parasites upon patriotism and they adopt themselves to its protecting colours.” (Thus Christianity, Civilization, slavery etc.)

Lenin: “Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism.” He reasoned that wages of labourers were kept down into near starvation. This also meant less ability to purchase which in turn led to decline in home profits thus encouraging capitalists to pressure for imperialisation from government for higher interest profits and contrary to fear of taxes and possible regulation, free traders like George Goldie (Lower Niger) C.A. Vermich a French merchant (in Guinea) and Adolph Woemann with his Steamship Company (Liberia, Gabon & Cameroon) were not keen for quatal assistance.

### **Strategy – Politics and International Rivalry:**

Economic considerations were subordinated to political and strategic motives. Thus the major powers were preoccupied with the questions of national security military power and prestige, so the Scramble was an outcome of fears and rivalries in Europe.

David Thompson says that the new imperialism had a temper uniquely masterful and remorseless brooking no obstacles and purposefully assertive.

The naked power politics of the new Colonialism were the projection on to an overseas screen of the interstate frictions and rivalries in Europe.”

Robinson R.E. and Gallagher J. *Africa and Victorians* Macmillan (1961).

“What dividend, when and where would go forward was their traditional conception of world strategy” as they saw the strategic importance of Egypt and the eastern part of Africa far outweighed the more promising commercial prospects in West Africa – overpopulation in Europe, therefore there was a need to settle people in Africa though this could be said to be fallacious as climate in large parts of Africa was unsuitable for Whites Settlements.

That is why Britain initially occupied South Africa, Eastern Africa and along the coast. Political considerations against Bismarkian bargaining of territories in diplomacy.

Racialism, this a feeling of white superiority and their might to dominate Africa. Growth of nationalism for example Italy and new Germany thus a need to prove their greatness – all this used to account for the scramble for Africa.

Robinson and Gallagher – detail: West Africa 1882 – 1889

Without the occupation of Egypt, there is no reason to suppose that any internal scrambles for Africa either West or East would have begun when they did. There seem to have been no fresh social or economic impulses or imperial expansion which would explain why the partition of Tropical Africa should have begun in the early 1880s.

In so far as these men (British statesmen of the time) possessed any coherent view of the situation in Tropical Africa, it was the view sometimes of Cobden sometimes of Palmerstone and the mid – Victorian imperialism of free trade.

As in Gladstone’s first ministry they still concurred in looking at Tropical Africa as a third rate adjunct of the British economy which might be worth the exertion of coastal influence but did not justify the effort of administration inland- they were non – of them likely to plant the flag in the middle of the African bush in fit of mind. For decades, all the European

governments concerned with the coast of Africa both east and west had totally agreed not to allow the petty quarrels of their traders and officials to become occasions for empire.

Since 1880, a French firm had been established in the oil rivers but they were plenty of British firms as well. As late as 1882, the British and French governments saw no reason to upset the old coast arrangements for territorial self denial.

It was the British invasion of Egypt which shattered this system because it shattered the general Anglo – French collaboration. When France came out in open opposition to the new regime in Egypt towards the end of 1882, she began to cast around for ways of putting pressure on London.

There was plenty of scope for pin tricks in West Africa and these now began in earnest. Two French firms were on the lower Niger trading not only at the coasts but pushing into the interior the alarming feature of this activity was that the French consular agent in the river was now hard at work making treaties as far upstream as the Kingdom of Nupe and alone Benue.

### **Nationalism and imperialism:**

A alternative view by Jean Strangers in journal of Africa History Vol 3 No. 3 (1962).

Leopold II's undertaking with Africa had not at its outset been of a political nature. This does not mean that the King from time to time had not contemplated political maneuvers but they remained at the level of projects without much weight. The motivating idea – the programme, in the correct sense of the word – of Leopold II lay elsewhere.

It consisted in organizing the commercial exploitation of Central Africa. The chief objectives were to set up trading posts and establish a great commercial enterprise. It was only in 1882 that he was forced to change his plans.

He had to face a danger, Brazza who was about to plant the French Flag in the regions of the Congo where Leopold II wanted to penetrate and even in regions where outposts of the *Cote d'Ivoire* had already been established. The only way to stop Brazza and prevent his annexations was to plant

another flag before his which would also be symbol of political power hence forth Leopold II's aim was to acquire sovereignty but all this beginning in 1882 was only repercussion of the policy of Brazza and of his intentions attributed to him.

In our search of his first move (triggering the scramble) ought we not in fact turn towards France? It was France indeed which initiated what must be considered the two fundamental moves in the Scramble. The first was the conclusion of the Brazza – Makoko Treaty and still more its ratification in 1882.

The second was the protectorate policy inaugurated in Western Africa in January 1883. In making Brazza's cause triumph in the Congo in bringing back this victory for France, revenge was at the same time taken on England.

This is where we turn to the question of England. But from an angle which Robinson and Gallagher had not perceived. After the blow which the humiliation the Egyptian occupation had caused, French public opinion instinctively looked for a way to compensate for British success. It needed the French success.

It was at this point that the Congo offered itself "it is for us," wrote a Parisian newspaper, "The best and sweetest revenge for the disappointments that we have been subjected to," with the ratification of the Brazza- Makoko treaty in the autumn of 1882, political acquisitiveness came to Central Africa. It was the decision taken by France that truly released these acquisitive proceedings.