

A 'New Imperialism'? British Overseas Expansion in Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century: a Historiographical Debate

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Astract:

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the major European powers engaged in a competition for territory in Asia and Africa. This phenomenon was described by more than one author as the 'partition of the world'. Of the powers engaging in the race for colonies, Britain emerged with the most substantial gains. It was in Africa, however, that most European and British colonial advances were made. What characterised the process of imperial expansion as 'new' for Britain was the rapid expansion of formal rule. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a lively historiographical debate had been generated in an attempt to search for explanations of these events as to why Britain participated in the 'Scramble for Africa' in the late Victorian period.

The aim of this paper is to explore these interpretations and theories to explain the British rapid expansion in Africa in the 1880s and 1890s. The earliest political writers like Hobson ascribed this process to economic reasons. Others have placed the British expansion in the context of international relations which

was characterised by European great power rivalry in the wake of German unification in 1870. Another interpretation, expounded mainly by R. Hyam, tended to focus on the importance of British strategic interests in Northern and Southern Africa; A further controversy arose between those who stressed the 'metropolitan' approach which emphasised the primacy of economic forces and political decisions taken at the centre, and those who have sought explanations on the 'periphery' of empire taking account of the indigenous peoples and their reactions to the British, and the role played by the 'man on the spot': administrators and commercial and missionary pressure groups.

Mots clés: the British Empire, the Scramble for Africa, formal rule, historical interpretations.

المخلص :

في العقدين الأخيرين من القرن التاسع عشر، شاركت القوى الأوروبية الكبرى في التنافس على الأراضي في آسيا وأفريقيا. وصفت هذه الظاهرة من طرف أكثر من مؤلف بأنه " تقسيم العالم ". من بين القوى التي شاركت في السباق على المستعمرات، حصلت بريطانيا على المكاسب الأكثر أهمية. في إفريقيا، تم إحراز معظم التقدم الاستعماري الأوروبي والبريطاني. ما ميز عملية التوسع الإمبريالي بأنها "جديدة" بالنسبة لبريطانيا كان التوسع السريع للاستعمار الرسمي. وبالتالي، من غير المستغرب أن يكون قد نشأ حوار تاريخي حيوي في محاولة للبحث عن تفسيرات لهذه الأحداث حول سبب مشاركة بريطانيا في " التدافع من أجل أفريقيا " في أواخر العصر الفيكتوري.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف هذه التفسيرات والنظريات لشرح التوسع البريطاني السريع في إفريقيا في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر. يرجع أوائل الكتاب السياسيين مثل هويسون هذه العملية لأسباب اقتصادية. وضع آخرون التوسع

البريطاني في سياق العلاقات الدولية التي تميزت بالتنافس الأوروبي القوي في أعقاب الوحدة الألمانية في عام 1870. و تفسير آخر، شرحه بشكل رئيسي رونالد هيام، يميل إلى التركيز على أهمية المصالح الاستراتيجية البريطانية في شمال وجنوب إفريقيا. نشأ جدل آخر بين أولئك الذين شددوا على النهج "المتروبوليتاني" الذي أكد على أولوية القوى الاقتصادية والقرارات السياسية التي اتخذت في المركز، وأولئك الذين ركزوا على تفسيرات حول "المحيط" للإمبراطورية مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار الشعوب الأصلية وردود أفعالهم. إلى البريطانيين، والدور الذي يؤديه "الرجل على الفور": الإداريين ومجموعات الضغط التجارية و المبشرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإمبراطورية البريطانية، التدافع على إفريقيا، الاستعمار الرسمي، التفسيرات التاريخية.

Introduction

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the major European powers engaged in a competition for territory in Asia and Africa. This phenomenon was described by more than one author as the 'partition of the world'. Of the powers engaging in the race for colonies Britain, emerged with the most substantial gains. It has been estimated that in the last quarter of the 19th century, Britain added 4,750,000 square miles of territory and 90 million people to its colonial holdings.¹ Her gains included the annexation of the numerous islands in the Pacific, the establishment of British rule in several Malay states in south-east Asia, and the conquest of Upper Burma.

It was in Africa, however, that most European and British colonial advances were made. By mid-nineteenth century, Britain's

¹-G.D.Goodlad,*British Foreign and Imperial Policy, 1865–1919*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p.30.

possessions in the African continent were relatively few and, where possible, she preferred informal influence to the political and financial burdens of direct rule. In South Africa, the Cape of Good Hope had been annexed by Britain following a series of wars with France (the Napoleonic Wars 1803-15). To strengthen its presence on the shores of the Indian Ocean, Britain took Natal in 1843. In East Africa, she pursued its strategic and commercial interests. The area was part of the trade route to India. Before the 1880s, British involvement in the African hinterlands was minimal. In West Africa, business interests had penetrated more extensively. To help manage its commercial activities in this region, Britain relied for the most part upon the collaboration of local leaders. This was empire on the cheap.

However, this situation was reversed during the late Victorian period which witnessed a rapid British expansion of formal rule in Africa. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a lively historiographical debate had been going on in an attempt to search for explanations of these events as to why Britain participated in the 'Scramble for Africa' in the late Victorian period. The aim of this paper is to explore these interpretations and theories to explain the British rapid expansion in Africa in the 1880s and 1890s.

British Imperial Expansion in Africa in Late Nineteenth Century

In 1850, Britain's interests in West Africa were limited to some commercial territories between the Gambia and the Delta of the Niger River. In order to safeguard these interests, especially in palm oil, Britain adopted a policy of accommodation with local rulers who were generally authoritative enough to guarantee this access. Only when this accommodation broke down, annexation resulted to protect British interests. A typical example was Lagos

which was annexed in 1861. Generally, Britain was dedicated to the principle of trade through collaboration with local leaders.¹

What characterised the process of imperial expansion as 'new' for Britain was the rapid expansion of formal rule. After about 1880 the 'imperialism of free trade', as Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson termed it in the 1950s, gave way to more formal control in many parts of Africa.² In 1882, Britain's intervention in Egypt, which was ostensibly to restore stability and re-establish financial probity to a bankrupt province of the Ottoman Empire, turned to a permanent occupation. The Somaliland in East Africa and Bechuanaland in the south were declared protectorates in 1884 and 1885 respectively. In 1886, Sir George Goldie's Niger Company was chartered to secure the Oil Rivers (Nigeria), a preliminary to the establishment of the two Nigerian protectorates thirteen years later. Similarly, the British South Africa Company was granted a royal charter in 1889 to extend British power northwards from Bechuanaland, into what would become Northern and Southern Rhodesia. In 1894, Uganda was declared a protectorate, and one year later Rosebery's cabinet took over direct responsibility for Kenya from the Imperial British East Africa Company. To assume predominance in the whole of the Upper Nile region, Britain conquered the Sudan in 1898. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a lively historiographical debate had been generated in an attempt to search for explanations of these events. Put simply, many commentators had put forward different interpretations as to why Britain participated in the 'Scramble for Africa' in the late Victorian period.³

Historical Interpretations of the Expansion

¹-B.Porter, *The Lion's Share: a Short History of British Imperialism 1850–2004*, Longman, London, 4th edition, 2004, pp.69-70.

²-P.Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*, Longman, London, 2007, p.83.

³-G. D. Goodlad, op.cit., pp. 30-31.

European partition of Africa was not a wholly unplanned affair. Rather ‘creeping partition’ had been going on in Africa for some time in the 1870s.¹ Nevertheless, the speed with which the partitioning process was finally accomplished, after more than 300 years of European coastal activity, does indicate that this was a new and dramatic phase. In the case of Britain, Lord Salisbury who led Britain during the greater part of the ‘Scramble for Africa’, pointed out in 1891: “...the nations of Europe were almost quarrelling with each other as to the various portions of Africa which they could obtain. I do not exactly know the cause of this sudden revolution. But there it is.”² Historians have elaborated different explanations and debated different theories to explain the British rapid expansion in Africa in the 1880s and 1890s. The earliest political writers like Hobson ascribed this process to economic reasons. Others have placed the British expansion in the context of international relations which was characterised by European great power rivalry in the wake of German unification in 1870. Another interpretation, expounded mainly by R. Hyam, tended to focus on the importance of British strategic interests in Northern and Southern Africa. A further controversy arose between those who stressed the ‘metropolitan’ approach which emphasised the primacy of economic forces and political decisions taken at the centre, and those who sought explanations on the ‘periphery’ of empire taking account of the indigenous peoples and their reactions to the British, and the role played by the ‘man on the spot’: administrators and commercial and missionary pressure groups.³

The economic argument for African expansion was advanced by the radical Liberal writer J. A. Hobson in his book

1- J.M.Mackenzie, *the Partition of Africa 1880–1900 and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, Methuen, London and New York, 1983, p.29.

2- Quoted in Lady G.Cecil, *The Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1932, vol. 4, p.310.

³- R.Johnson, *British Imperialism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, p.40.

Imperialism: A Study, first published in 1902. He ascribed British expansion in Africa to domestic economic problems. He believed that the unequal distribution of industrial profits stemming from the capitalist system led to contracting the domestic market. This, in turn, stimulated financiers to turn to the markets abroad in search for investing their surplus capital. Although Africa was not then (by the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries) a lucrative zone for investment except for South Africa following the discovery of diamonds close to Cape Colony in 1869), it certainly provided an important source of raw materials- such as palm oil in West Africa, rubber in Malaya and Cocoa in Nigeria- for British industry. According to Hobson, the need to protect these financiers' investments and interests induced the British government to intervene abroad, opening the way for imperial expansion. One of the purposes of Hobson's critique of empire was to draw attention to the problem of low wages which, he argued, restricted working-class purchasing power by diminishing the field for investment within the local market.

Explaining the British participation in the Partition of Africa as arising from an inherent problem in capitalism which led to capital export seems to have limited application to Africa. Significant amounts of capital were exported to South Africa following the discovery of diamonds close to Cape Colony in 1869, but Africa generally remained the continent receiving less investment than any other right up to WWI.¹ Nevertheless, the greater part of Africa was certainly important as a source of raw materials for British industry. By the late 19th century, this interpretation has a significant validity for West Africa, for example, which was an important source of vegetable oils used in the soap, industrial lubrication and tinsplate industries. The large firm of Lever Brothers on Merseyside built its power mainly on the

¹-J. Mackenzie, op.cit.,p. 31.

palm oil extracted from the West African region, and Liverpool was the port most closely connected with the West African trade.¹ The region was also a leading supplier of rubber for insulation of the new electrical and telegraph wires and for tyres. The area remained a principle rubber source until the development of the rubber plantations in Malaya in the early 20th century.

During the industrial age, there was a growing need for ivory which was needed for the piano and cutlery industries. Europeans, thus, developed more interests in Africa because of the availability of ivory there. The West African region was also important for the chocolate manufacturers, such as Cadbury of Birmingham and Rowntree of York. These companies fuelled demand for Nigerian Cocoa. The latter was introduced to the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1879 and within twenty years it transformed the economy of the region. The availability of such raw materials and others in West Africa (and Africa in general) brought European rivalry to the region (and the continent as a whole). From the early 1880s the growing interests of French and German trading rivals in West Africa led British merchants to demand government intervention. Michael Crowder pointed out that the appeals made by the peripheral British merchants on the British government to protect their interests were in themselves a prelude to the occupation.² Effectively, in 1884 the protectorate of Oil Rivers was established and two years later a royal charter was granted to the Niger Company in response to the intense economic conflicts.

One should be careful not to portray the British government as being ‘manipulated’ by traders and driven by the desire to protect their individual interests. The government’s decision to extend its imperial rule was based on its own assessments of the national needs of British commerce, of the costs of formal

¹ - G.D.Goodlad, op.cit.,p.32.

²-M. Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, Hutchinson, London, 1968, p. 56.

commitments and the ultimate belief that no improvements could be achieved by relying on African agency.¹ The years 1870s and 1880 saw an intense commercial rivalry between the European powers on the west coast of Africa. Every advance by one power was usually counter-balanced by a move from its rival. In the case of Britain, the French protectionist policy (tariffs) posed a threat to Britain's trading interests.² The head of the African Department of the Foreign Office, Percy Anderson, underlined how pragmatic was the British policy in discussing French penetration of the western coast in 1883. He said: "protectorates are unwelcome burdens, but in this case, it is... a question between British protectorates, which would be unwelcome, and French protectorates, which would be fatal. Protectorates of one sort or another, are the inevitable outcome of the situation."³

There was, therefore, much discussion of Africa as a source of raw materials, and the continent was likely to be more significant as a supplier than as a market taking into consideration that Africa's population was small and the possibilities for marketing industrial goods were slight. Needless to say, raw materials had been extracted from Africa for many years without the need for the establishment of formal political control. Again this raw materials-based argument for British colonial expansion cannot fully explain why Britain felt it necessary to participate in the partition of Africa, although there can be no doubt that the pace was quickening and the fears were intensifying at this period.

The British home rule highly favoured 'empire on the cheap' where it held minimal responsibility for administration.⁴ This principle defined the nature of the contact between the

¹-R. Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century 1815-1914 A Study of Empire and Expansion*, the Macmillan Press, London, 1993, p. 226.

²-M. Crowder, op.cit., pp. 58-9.

³- Quoted in R. Hyam, op.cit., p. 227.

⁴-R. Johnson, op.cit., p. 23.

government and the chartered company. The Royal Niger Company, for instance, agreed to take into charge the costs of financing all internal native wars, and the Imperial government, in return, promised to defend the chartered company against the foreign powers. The task of the companies in what they saw as a 'backward' Africa was made easy by the technological advance especially in the fields of transport and weaponry. Industrialisation enormously increased the disparity in power between Britain and the rest of the world and reinforced a latent sense Western racial superiority over these regions which did not experience it.¹ Cecil Rhodes² emphasised this superiority in his claim that "we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race."³ This comment bore a racist attitude towards non-European peoples who were considered as 'barbaric' or 'savage'⁴ and not fit to survive according to 'social Darwinist theory' explained in Darwin's book *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* published in 1859.⁵ Darwin's doctrine of 'the survival of the fitter' was politically interpreted to justify military aggressiveness and the seizure of territory.⁶ In fact, Rhodes' sentiment of arrogance and censoriousness was underpinned by the knowledge that possession of the rapid-firing

¹-G.D.Goodlad, op.cit., p.33.

²- Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902) was a British businessman and politician who served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. As a staunch believer in British imperialism, he put much effort towards his vision of a Cape to Cairo Railway through British territory. He headed the British South Africa Company which was responsible for the establishment of the southern African territory of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia), which the company named after him in 1895.

³-G.D.Goodlad, op.cit., p.33.

⁴- J. Mackenzie, op.cit., p. 35.

⁵-R. Hyam, op.cit., pp. 155-57.

⁶-Ibid., p. 157.

Maxim gun made some African tribes entirely subject to relatively small numbers of European adventurers.

As stated above, despite the fact that Britain wanted a large empire, it wanted it as cheaply as possible. The revival of the chartered companies and the establishment of protectorates as a new form of governance that required less administration were strategies to minimise the Empire's cost to Britain.¹ The first serious British attempt to administer and develop tropical Africa at public expense was made by Joseph Chamberlain upon his arrival at the colonial office in 1895. Chamberlain recognised the need to improve Britain's position in every way possible, and particularly by the development of the new tropical estates. He considered the Niger and Gold Coast hinterlands as 'underdeveloped estates' whose resources needed to be developed and which a progressive imperial government should seek to exploit and improve especially by increasing trade with Britain and opening up new markets. However, his attempts to raise loans for colonial development were thwarted by a parsimonious Treasury. The latter's view was that colonies should be self-financing. In any case, Chamberlain's activities do not help to explain Britain's initial involvement in tropical Africa.

An alternative interpretation on the British colonial expansion in Africa was propounded by D.K. Fieldhouse in the 1950s and 1960s who viewed expansion in the African continent as the projection of European rivalries from Europe into a new context. Supporters of this approach argued that the 'scramble' occurred as a by-product of the friction created by the newly emerged Germanic and Italian nationalisms rubbing against the old-established European states and imperial powers; mainly France and Britain.² Following the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71)

¹-P. Levine, op.cit., p. 99.

²- J. Mackenzie, op.cit., p. 34.

in which France lost Alsace-Lorraine, Germany emerged as a united state and hence wanted to keep up with what other European colonialists were doing. She annexed AngraPequana (German South-West Africa), German East Africa, the Cameroons and Togoland. That was Germany's strategy to establish a balance of power with the older European colonial powers. In the words of Fieldhouse: "imperialism may best be seen as the extension into the periphery of the political struggle in Europe. At the centre the balance was so nicely adjusted that... no major change in the status or territory of either side was possible. Colonies thus became a means out of the impasse."¹

Concern over the new imperial ambitions of Germany in Africa played some part in the calculations of British politicians. Although 'informal empire' had been long preferred by the British and British policy-makers were reluctant to shift to formal control, Britain was later forced to do so to protect its colonies from the German ambitions. Moreover, the need to defend existing territory often resulted in expansion. Britain's annexation of Bechuanaland, for example, was a result of Germany's establishment of the AngraPequana Protectorate on the south-west African coast in 1884. Britain also laid claim to the land lying between Cape Colony and Natal (both British colonies) in order to secure its territories and prevent the German link with the Boer Transvaal republic. "There is a difference between wanting new acquisitions and keeping what we have", the colonial secretary Lord Derby noted, "both Natal and the Cape Colony would be endangered... if any foreign Power chose to claim possession of the coast lying between the two."² The same can be said of what would later become Uganda and Kenya whose administration and development were given to the British East Africa Company in 1888 through a

¹ - Quoted in G.D.Goodlad, op.cit., p. 34.

²-Ibid.

royal charter. This move came as a response to Germany's penetration of the Sultan Zanzibar's dominions.

It is noteworthy that in all this atmosphere of intense rivalry between European imperial powers, the latter were pretty aware to settle down their colonial disputes in a peaceful way. A typical example of this is the 1884-85 Berlin Conference which set out the rules for partitioning territory in West Africa. The Conference did not initiate the Scramble for Africa, but rather brought some form of discipline to a situation that might run uncontrolled.¹ In this way, it gave international recognition to a state of affairs that already existed. The main preoccupation of the member states in the conference (including every major power in Europe, the Ottoman Empire and the USA) was how to draw up formalities for the effective occupation of the coast of Africa. The conference laid down that no new European annexations or protectorates in West Africa would be recognised as valid unless they were accompanied by effective occupation.² Ronald Hyam has explained this compromise between the imperial powers was done at the fear that by staking out increasingly confused rival claims, Europeans might end up in a war against each other.³

The above metropolitan interpretation relates the British expansionist policies to great powers' calculations which, in turn, had some strategic considerations underneath. The 'strategic argument' was originally advanced by Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher in their book *Africa and the Victorians: the Official Mind of Imperialism*, published in 1961. The authors' intention was to offer an explanation to the Partition of Africa. They broke new ground by drawing attention to the influence of crises on the periphery of empire on the decisions of the 'official mind'; a term

¹-M. Crowder, op.cit., p. 62.

²-J. D. Fage, *A History of West Africa: an Introductory Survey*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 165.

³-R. Hyam, op.cit., pp. 230-31.

they used to describe a body of Foreign Office and Cabinet officials. The book starts by alluding to the strategic importance of the maritime routes to India and the East for Britain. Robinson and Gallagher pointed that Britain's need to secure the Suez Canal route to India against the threat posed by Colonel Arabi's national revolt and the French expansionist ambitions provided the driving force behind the annexation of Egypt in 1882. In other words, Britain occupied Egypt and decided subsequently to annex territory on the African east coast out of the strategic need, which R. Hyam described as 'imperative' to safeguard the route to India.¹ According to Robinson and Gallagher, the British 'moved to Africa, not to build a new African empire, but to protect the old empire in India'²

From this action, it is argued, flowed the other events of the scramble for Africa. France, having apparently lost their influence in Egypt, now looked for compensations in West Africa, and so did Germany elsewhere on the continent. In the 1890s, the British need to strengthen their hold on Egypt drew them into the interior aiming at commanding the entire Nile system. It was this consideration that lay behind British involvement in Uganda, the military conquest of the Sudan and the decision to the east African railway. According to this view, the British expansion in Africa was in the main "a gigantic footnote to the Indian empire."³ In *Africa and the Victorians*, it is argued that "from start to finish the partition of Tropical Africa was driven by the persistent crises in Egypt. When the British entered Cairo on their own, the Scramble began; and as long as they stayed in Cairo, it continued until there was no more of Africa left to divide."⁴

¹-R. Hyam and G. Martin, *Reappraisals in British Imperial History*, the Macmillan Press, London, 1975, p. 141.

²- Quoted in Ibid.

³- Quoted in ibid.

⁴-G.D.Goodlad, op.cit., p. 35.

R. Hyam considered the Robinson and Gallagher thesis as novel in that it broke with views of earlier historians who ascribed British expansion in Africa to economic reasons. According to Robinson and Gallagher, economic development was more an effect than a cause for the 'Scramble'. The theory of economic imperialism, first developed by Hobson, puts "the trade before the flag, the capital before the conquest, the cart before the horse."¹ India was economically important to Britain as it accounted for one-fifth of Britain's overseas investment by the 1880s.² Therefore, it is understandable that Britain wanted to protect the trade routes to India and its strategic interests when informal rule broke down.

Africa and the Victorians also underplayed the effect of the pressure groups and public opinion on the decisions taken by the 'official mind'. They noticed that the British, throughout the imperial period, had looked to their strategic role in the world rather than acting simply in response to business lobbying or fluctuations in public opinion which was believed to have little practical influence on policy making.³ The official mind's attitudes towards Africa were barely affected by the external influence of the press, public opinion or lobbyist.

From another respect, the departure of the Robinson and Gallagher thesis from the 'Eurocentric' views of African history was considered by Hyam as a 'valuable' corrective to the explanation which had been put forward by informed contemporaries and participants. They noted that: "Scanning Europe for the causes, the theorists of imperialism have been looking for the answers in the wrong places. The crucial changes that set all working took place in Africa itself. It was the fall of an old power in its north, the rise of a new in its south, that dragged

¹ - Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

² - *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ - R. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

Africa into modern history.”¹ This constituted a radical break with the inherited historiography of the partition of Africa.

Precisely because of this novelty, the Robinson and Gallagher theory has dominated all discussions of the subject in the decades following its adumbration and thus had been regarded as a myth about the partition of Africa and over-ripe for revision. One of the critics is Goodlad who believed that Egypt was not the starting point, as Robinson and Gallagher suggested, that led directly to the scramble in West Africa because the French were angered by the British unilateral action. The French had already made advances in Senegal in 1879 and Tunisia had been captured in 1881. This argument was also supported by A. G. Hopkins in his article “Africa and the Victorians: a Reconsideration” where he gave the example of the French annexation of Porto Novo, which lay between the British colonies of the Gold Coast and Lagos, in April 1882 before Britain’s invasion of Egypt in late 1882.² Similarly, the Belgians under the auspices of King Leopold II had started penetration of the Congo region in the early 1880s independently of British action elsewhere in the continent. Needless to say, Bismarck of Germany also showed interest in Africa during this period.

Another weakness in the theory of Robinson and Gallagher is the over-reliance on Egypt as the ‘trigger’ factor to explain the scramble for Africa, which distorts the perspective of what was happening on the African soil and ignored the other motives for the partition. Indeed, the ‘Egypto-centric’ argument of Africa and the Victorians tried to relate the whole process of the partition, where different European powers were involved, to only one factor or centre. G.N.Sanderson pointed out to the fact that the partition of Africa preceded the occupation of Egypt and that the 1880s

¹-R.Hyam and G. Martin, op.cit., p. 141.

²-A.G.Hopkins, “The Victorians and Africa: a Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt, 1882”, *The Journal of African History*, vol. 27, July 1986, p. 391.

annexations were merely an acceleration.¹ As has been illustrated before, the French moves in Africa were not necessarily related to Egypt. This renders the idea of centrality of Egypt untenable and suggests that the late 19th century imperialism was in many ways 'excentric'.²

Other historians have discounted the interpretation of the partition of Africa as a strategically dominated response to local 'nationalist' challenges. R.Hyam, for instance, considered the partition of Africa as only one part of a larger division of the world.³ Therefore, Robinson and Gallagher's strategic interpretation could not help explain what was going on elsewhere in the world during the same period.

Another point in the thesis of Robinson and Gallagher that was open to criticism was the idea that the calculations behind the British annexations were a by-product of the 'official mind'. Johnson argued that this underplayed the contributions of individuals on the periphery in expanding British rule in Africa.⁴ Individuals like C. Rhodes, Livingstone, Stanley and J. Thomson did play part in encouraging British intervention in Africa. Together, they paved the way for later claims to British territories such as Bechuanaland, Kenya and Uganda. Through their actions and writings, they promoted and popularised the imperialism especially by the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1987, an important variation on this theme was offered by P.J.Cain and A.G.Hopkins who sought to refocus on the metropolis in relation to the social structure of Britain itself. Their interpretation was built around the concept of 'gentlemanly capitalism', a term they used to refer to the values of a commercial

¹-R.Johnson,op.cit.,p.49.

²-Ibid., p. 50.

³-R. Hyam, op.cit., p. 143.

⁴-R.Johnson ,op.cit., p.41.

elite who emulated the aristocracy.¹ Cain and Hopkins were critical of Hobson's economic interpretation which ascribed British overseas expansion to manufacturing interests. Instead, they stressed the political influence of the financial elite based in the City of London and linked with the old landed gentry. The last quarter of the nineteenth century knew a relative decline in manufacturing while the financial services sector continued to develop. Cain and Hopkins argued that the political and financial elites were closely connected because they had common interests including the protection of their investments overseas as well as their political hegemony at home. According to them, the spur to the scramble for Africa was the growing interest of 'gentlemanly capitalism' in the continent. Areas of greatest financial concern such as Egypt and South Africa were the centre of focus for British government where it subsequently established formal rule to protect these financial interests.

Conclusion

On this reading of events and the subsequent explanation, Cain and Hopkins attempted to give a broad interpretation of economic imperialism and locate the driving forces within the metropolis. In doing so, their work has been considered by many historians like R. Johnson as a landmark. However, Cain and Hopkins' claims, especially that of the centrality of the City to imperial policy making have been challenged by a number of historians. In 1998, a substantial review volume entitled *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: the New Debate on Empire* was published. This indicated that the subject of the mechanics of the scramble for Africa is still open to debate among scholars because of the controversies it continues to raise. It has roused widespread debate in the media and has been the subject of

¹-P.J.Cain and A.G.Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688–1914*, Longman, London, 1993, pp.351–96.

much comment on the part of leading politicians and historians in Britain and elsewhere. Needless to say, all historians have agreed that the speed of Britain's grab for colonies in Africa in late nineteenth century marked a remarkable episode in British imperial history and that its implications would be clear by the turn of the twentieth century.

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