

In what ways were the patterns of British and French expansion overseas changed after 1870?

The third quarter of the nineteenth century saw an expanding European society in all fronts, with the physical movement of millions of emigrants overseas, rising populations at home, increasingly assertive national governments and spectacular economic growth. Where Britain for example had exported £164m worth of goods in 1860, by the turn of the century this had increased to £291m, a 77% increase. France increased her export trade also, from £91m in 1860 to £164m by 1900, and increase of 80%. Imports from overseas had increased even more rapidly, with Britain seeing a 249% increase and France a 236% increase over the same period of time. The growing interdependence of the world economy can be seen by the similarly large and growing figures for trade with the other states of Europe and wider afield. Yet the emerging triumph of the industry, which had created workshops for the world out of the Great Powers, also caused intense trauma in the existing and traditional bases of the European economy. Agriculture for example bore the brunt of the change in consumption patterns. Luxury and colonial goods from overseas increasingly replaced the established patterns of food-production in Europe, and threatened the continued dominance of the European landed aristocracy. Although the end of the mid-Victorian boom caused Britain to see a deceleration in the rates of GDP growth after 1870, this was most obvious in the agricultural sector. Agricultural output suffered absolute falls in both the 1865-82 and 1889-99 periods, not least from the fact that from the 1860s, the application of new world-wide systems of food transport and technology allowed cheap cereals to flood in from the USA and Russia. The competition in Britain was too much for many old farmers, who saw the price of wheat fall by half in 30 years. The gross value of arable land fell from £104m in 1867-9 to £62m in 1894-1903, and agriculture declined from one fifth of national income in 1850 to one sixteenth in 1900.¹ There were some causes for optimism in the agricultural sector, since demand for pastoral and meat-products remained and increased as the nation's cities grew in size, population and importance. However, there remained a pressing need for Britain to import almost half of all her foodstuffs, a balance of payments deficit sustained only by the belief that she could always export more manufactured goods in order to pay for the food. Even before Joseph Chamberlain became a committed protectionist, he was able to say in 1888 that 'if tomorrow it were possible, as some people apparently desire, to reduce by a stroke of the pen the British Empire to the dimensions of the United Kingdom, half at least of our population would be starved.'²

For France, there was similar trauma in some parts of the farming sector, even if the relative lack of industrial development made the government look with a more sympathetic eye at the demands of the farm lobby. The advent of phylloxera in French vineyards, for example, allowed Algeria to develop a significant trade in wine-production on its own. In 1878 there were 15,000ha of vines in Algeria, a figure which grew to 110,000ha by 1890 and by 1903 a total of 167,000ha had been reached. By 1930, 50% of Algeria's export earnings came from wine-related products. Yet in this part of New France, the aspirations of colonial theorists and functionaries for a self-sustaining agricultural economy increasingly failed. The rural European population ceased to grow after 1906 - and declined from 34.6% of total to 28.6%. Small settlers found themselves less and less able to compete against *latifundia* based on export crops, and the proportion of the European population earning wages crept up from 38% in 1914 to 43% in 1930. Colonisation dried up with expansion of estates, leaving landholding as a purely commercial venture of a class of European businessmen - before it was officially wound up in the 1930s. Likewise the proportion of Europeans living in Algeria's towns increased from 60% in

¹ Cain and Hopkins: *British Imperialism 1688-1914*

² Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.80

1860 to 65.4% in 1906 to 71.4% in 1926.³ The small-holding agricultural bases of both Britain and French Algeria had proved unable to compete in the world market which was being taken over by the cheap food-production possible on the vast farms of Russia and the Mid-West of the United States.

In both Britain and France, these trends were recognised, and there was considerable concern at the potential of other countries to overtake them in terms of trade and resources. The general European population rise in the second half of the nineteenth century had left France with only 3 million more people than the 36m she had started with. When this was compared against the 46m Germans - a 28% increase on 1850 in addition to their new political unity, the diplomatic threat from over the Rhine appeared chronic. Yet the Russian population had increased by 85% over these fifty years from 60m in 1850 to 111m by 1900.⁴ If the populations of rapidly-developing countries such as Russia and the USA continued to rise at the rates they had managed previously, this would soon erode the power and influence of the European Great Powers. However, the threat to the old order came not only through the potential in terms of manpower and natural resources but also in the demonstrable industrial development taking place in Central and eastern Europe. Germany's exports between 1880-1900 rose from £142m to £231m - by 63%. This is in comparison to just 23% on the part of Britain and 18% for France. Germany's imports over the same period rose by 107% at a time when Britain managed a 27% rise and France imported 10% less than she had done in 1880. More importantly, the growth sectors in the German industrial economy matched the growth sectors in the world economy. Textiles, iron, coal, steel and engineering still dominated the British industrial landscape in 1914 as they had done in 1850, and there was very little technical innovation or movement into new areas such as chemicals or electricals. In 1870, Britain still produced one third of the world's manufactured goods, but only one seventh by 1914 - worse in key areas like steel.⁵ Therefore despite Britain's extraordinary success in the nineteenth century, a century she finished with a visible trade still worth twice that of her nearest European rival, there were unmistakable signs that the dominance was soon to be over. As Froude said 'If the United States and Russia hold together for another half century, they will at that time completely dwarf such old European states as France and Germany, and depress them into a second class. They will do the same to England, if at the end of that time England still thinks of herself simply as a European State.'⁶ This feeling of threat from the success of rival countries was matched in France, where books were published such as that of Démolins entitled *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons?* Jules Lemaître wrote in *Le Figaro* in 1890 'What stands out from this exposé is...is the immense social, political, commercial, industrial, financial and moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race; also, it is our weakness, our misfortune and our worthlessness which stand out.'⁷

Yet interestingly, this feeling of being imminently superseded did not depend on the pursuit of free trading policies or not. A Royal Commission reported in 1886 that 'We are disposed to think that one of the chief agencies which have tended to perpetuate this state of things is the protectionist policy of so many foreign countries...The surplus production which cannot find a market at home is sent abroad, and in foreign markets undersells the commodities produced under less artificial conditions.'⁸ On the other hand, in France, Jules Ferry said 'The protectionist system is a steam engine without a safety valve if it does not have as a corrective and auxiliary a

³ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.62

⁴ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.75

⁵ Cain and Hopkins: *British Imperialism 1688-1914*

⁶ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.82

⁷ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.41

⁸ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.79

sane and sound colonial policy.⁹ What both nations did increasingly agree with was the fact that the answer to the economic threat lay in overseas possessions. Froude's warning was that 'They will do the same to England, if at the end of that time England still thinks of herself simply as a European State.'¹⁰ Twenty years earlier, John Ruskin had said in 1870 'That is what England must either do, or perish. She must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able.' Colonies remained without doubt useful primarily for their economic potential. As Eugène Etienne said 'It appears clear that the sole criterion to apply to every colonial enterprise is its degree of utility, the sum of advantages and profits flowing from it to the métropole.'¹¹ Auguste Billiard added in 1899 'That which it behoves us to introduce into our colonies are neither philosophical theories nor social institutions of a contingent value, but simply our manufactured products.'¹² More cynically, Jules Blois said in 1903 'The Englishman hasn't the false pretension to be loved; he wishes to be comfortable and to "make money". His goal has been attained.'¹³

Colonies were without doubt still seen as valuable additions to the metropolitan economy insofar as they were some of the chief primary producers for British and French industry, and markets for re-exporting the finished products. It was only natural for politicians in the metropole to wish to integrate them further to aid this metropolitan economy. Joseph Chamberlain had already said 'if tomorrow it were possible, as some people apparently desire, to reduce by a stroke of the pen the British Empire to the dimensions of the United Kingdom, half at least of our population would be starved.'¹⁴ Yet the Tariff Reform for which he was most notorious later on was described by a London newspaper in 1875 which said 'It is strange, after thirty years of silence, to hear - issuing as it were from the tomb - assertions and fallacies... which most people supposed were buried beyond hope of resurrecting.'¹⁵ 1881 saw the foundation of the Fair Trade League, campaigning for an imperial *Zollverein*. Tariff Reform was nevertheless crucified at the 1906 elections in Britain at precisely the time when it was criticised in France for patently failing to deliver the prosperity and guaranteed markets which Jules Ferry had predicted. Yet despite the failure of mercantilist doctrine to deliver results, international competition for colonies simmered on throughout the end of the nineteenth century. Although Bismarck had previously said 'I will have no colonies. For Germany to possess colonies would be like a poverty-stricken Polish nobleman acquiring a silk sable coat when he needed shirts'¹⁶ - it was he who hosted the Berlin Conference of 1884, in which Europeans with inaccurate maps carved out the destiny of much of Africa. Acquisition of colonies became a competitive business in its own right, much to the annoyance of Britain. Her hand-wringing at the dirty business was expressed by the *Manchester Guardian* which said 'It is not the habit of the English people to set out with their eyes open on a career of conquest and annexation. The conquests which we make are forced upon us.'¹⁷ Whether reluctant or not - viscerally opposed even in the case of Gladstone - Britain was fully complicit in the Scramble for Africa, even if she could quibble about the differences between genuine colonies, protectorates and spheres of influence.

British Acquisitions 'in the interests of security' included in this period most of the surrounding states of India. Pawns in the Great Game such as the Afghans - whose brief resistance in 1878-80 was only interesting because of the possible Russian threat - accepted a protectorate, as did Baluchistan, and the more intransigent Pathans, Waziris, and Chitralis. Upper Burmah was

⁹ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.134

¹⁰ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.82

¹¹ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.136

¹² Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.134

¹³ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.44

¹⁴ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.80

¹⁵ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.79

¹⁶ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.76

¹⁷ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.111

incorporated directly into Indian empire 1885-6. More genuine British interests were only really at stake in the continuing question over the security of the British route of India, an interest formalised by the government's 1875 purchase of Suez canal shares. So important was it to Britain that Gladstone invaded in 1881 in the wake of French intervention and an internal uprising led by Arabi Pasha, even if they avoided the formal structures of a protectorate. However, increasingly it became obvious from examples such as this and others such as Griqualand West in 1871 and Bechuanaland in 1885 that British interests in formalising colonial holdings were led by strategic and not commercial reasons. There was no significant British stake in Transvaal which was annexed in 1877 although sovereignty was returned to the ungrateful Boers in 1881. There was no direct commercial reasons for formalising control over the Great Lakes area in East Africa - the failure of the commercial company attempting to make this happen proves conclusively the emptiness of continued insistence that British holdings were acquired for reasons of securing trade, as they had before. French acquisitions in this period make even less sense in many ways. Apart from Indochina, very few of the areas acquired by the French after 1880 had any commercial value whatsoever, while places like Chad, Niger and Upper Volta remained merely drains on the French national budget. Much of West Africa was formally colonised by the same people who explored them for the first time, as was the case with Binger in Côte d'Ivoire and Upper Volta, and with Foureau and Lamy's expedition to Niger in 1898 which contained 263 African troops, 14 French officers and 1000 camels. The stand-off at Fashoda in Sudan in 1898 shows the great change which had certainly come over British colonial administrators and also those in France, for whom the acquisition of a colony was firstly strategic, and only later could be made to pay.

The acquisition of Tunisia in 1881 as a protectorate signalled quite openly to the rest of the world that France was very willing to see differences between colonies, protectorates and spheres of influence. In other words, like Britain, France was also interested in extending its colonial grip while nevertheless hardly spending any money in doing so. As Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary in 1874, said with regard to South Africa 'The advantages of Federation are very obvious. Federation would greatly improve and cheapen the administration of affairs in almost every branch and greatly lessen the probability of a demand for aid in the shape of Imperial money or troops.'¹⁸ More gratuitous examples exist of Gladstonian frugality with public money leading to business ventures with track records being granted administration rights over their territories. Rajah Brooke was installed in Sarawak by the incorporation of the North Borneo Company in 1881 - allegedly without Gladstone realising this. In October 1889, Cecil Rhodes approached the British Government asking for the incorporation of South African Company in what would be subsequently called Rhodesia. This private-sector imperialism convinced even the anti-imperialist Chancellor Sir William Harcourt, who said in 1892 'even Jingoism is tolerable when it is done on the cheap.'¹⁹ An attempt by the Royal Niger Company to incorporate in 1881 was thwarted, but in the Berlin Conference of 1884, it was allowed to administrate the area now known as Nigeria, even though a trading monopoly on the Niger was expressly forbidden. Ironically, while one of the lessons learnt from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was to abolish commercial companies from having a conflict of interest between their economic activities and the welfare of the people under their control - yet when it was in the government interest to ignore this in return for imperial control free of charge, they were perfectly willing to forget the Indian experience. When the East African Association promised to occupy the Lakes (and the source of the Nile) for Britain, it was incorporated - yet it was a commercial failure ultimately requiring governmental intervention.

¹⁸ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.96

¹⁹ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.105

The late nineteenth century also produced a great number of changes in the attitude of colonial rulers towards the natives who with the expanding empire were greatly increasing in number. For many, the increasing numbers of non-Europeans, ignorant as they were of the traditions and culture of Europe, produced an increasingly racist attitude. Some colonial administrators warned of the effect large numbers of non-Europeans would have on the stability and integrity of the areas newly under European control. The Governor of Cape Colony said in 1871 'I cannot satisfy myself of the justice or humanity of handing over this large native population to the uncontrolled management of a Legislature composed of those whose habits, interests and prejudices are so entirely different.'²⁰ Yet as Europeans explored further into Africa, and as they took over more and more parts of the non-European world, encountering different and exotic societies, the less the British in particular were prepared to admit native capacity for self-government. As one English writer said in the 1890s, 'It is suicidal for Europeans to admit that natives can do anything better than themselves. They should claim to be superior in everything and only allow natives to take a secondary or subordinate part.'²¹ Even the explorers who discovered new tribes in the African interior grew to appreciate less and less the existing cultural structures. As one wrote 'The African's nature is as plastic and impressionable as a child's - a blank sheet whereon we may write at will, without the necessity of first deleting old impressions.'²² The situation had grown to such an extent that even newspaper editorials could comment in 1884 that 'All coloured men seem to be regarded as fair game. The principle is that no-one has a right to any rule or sovereignty in either hemisphere but men of European birth or origin.'²³ In France, the discovery of as yet unknown peoples prompted an increased interest in a 'scientific' study of race. The results of these studies, of course, emphasised the innate superiority of their authors, and the denigration of black culture, in terms of hereditary and thus natural tendencies. Alfred Fouillée wrote in 1896 regarding the impossibility of altering genetic differences that 'Unite a Bushman and a European woman and the struggle of antagonistic elements, instead of existing among diverse individuals, will be transported to the character of the one and same individual. You would have a personality divided against itself, incoherent.'²⁴ Gustave Le Bon wrote in 1889 that 'each people possess a constitution as fixed as its anatomical characteristics.' His ideas suggested that races acted as Spencer's social organisms, and there were four types of race: primitive, inferior, intermediate and superior. Since these were hereditary, one 'must consider as dangerous chimeras all our ideas of assimilating or Frenchifying any inferior people. Leave to the natives their customs, their institutions, their laws.'²⁵

It was impossible to ignore this racist aspect of colonial theory in France. Certainly it had always been present in Algeria, and attempts to genuinely assimilate the native Arab population into French society had traditionally met with resistance. An example was the application of Ferry's 1883 legislation on education which met with 'a general cry of indignation' and the *communes* refused to fund 'this costly and dangerous experiment.' As they said 'If education were widespread, the unanimous cry of the native would be, Algeria for the Arabs.' Certainly in 1890 only 10,000 Muslim children - a mere 1.9% of those of school age - attended public or private French schools.²⁶ Yet interestingly, despite the increasingly racist attitude of French people at home to the non-Europeans they controlled, in the colonies themselves another policy entirely was attempted. After Jeanmaire was director of education (1884-1908) the figure of Muslim

²⁰ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.57

²¹ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.71

²² Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.72

²³ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.111

²⁴ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.64

²⁵ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.68

²⁶ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.75

schoolchildren had risen to 33,397 (4.3% of Muslim children) and by 1929 60,644 (6% of Muslim children). Also, French colonial theorists were looking at the style of imperial possession used by their European rivals with approval for ways to improve their own relations with the native population. Chailley-Bert said regarding the Dutch East Indies that the Dutch governed with 'a certain bonhomie resulting from intelligence and indulgence which has enabled them to understand the native mentality'²⁷ Cultru said that 'The English allow their subjects to govern themselves because that is how they themselves are governed... And we French, we follow a similar natural tendency when we apply to Africans and Asians the wisely detailed mechanism of an administration thanks to which a Frenchman in France can't light his cigar without exposing himself to two or three kind of infraction of the law.'²⁸ When French administrators on the ground tried these methods of pacifying and governing native populations, they too found that they succeeded better than the crude and monolithic policy of assimilation which had prevailed up to that point. Gallieni said 'Nothing is more damaging... in colonial affairs than preconceived formulas, imported principles, which, based most often on European ideas, do not apply to the environments, situations or occasion for which one had wanted to adapt them.'²⁹ Association and alliance with native rulers was successful, even if in the words of Lyautey 'To adopt the policy and administration of the protectorate signifies: to maintain as much as possible in their entirety native governmental machinery, institutions and customs; to use the traditional leaders, to let them control the police, the administration - even justice - and the collection of taxes, under the simple control of a single agent residing close to the chief.'³⁰ Albert Vignon added that 'a protectorate is the science of administering the natives by the intermediaries of their natural leaders.'³¹ It was not surprising that the large number of French acquisitions after Tunisia in 1881 followed this pattern.

Finally, expansion was finally gaining popularity in the home countries, thanks not least to the heroic activities of explorers such as Brazza in Congo whose exploits were published in *Le tour du monde* in 1883-5. British explorers were similarly feted. Livingstone became so famous that Henry Stanley was sent by a New York newspaper in order to track him down. In Britain, it was becoming more apparent that the idea of Empire could also be harnessed for domestic political purposes, as Disraeli proved after his Crystal Palace speech of 1872 and the Royal Titles Act shortly afterwards, granting Queen Victoria the title of Empress of India. Reverses suffered abroad also aroused British public pride, examples being the response to the murder of Gordon in Sudan and the British defeat at Majuba by the Boers 1881, both of which rebounded to the cost of Gladstone, whose reluctance to support the imperial project appeared suspect. The high point of British imperial pride undoubtedly occurred at Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. The pomp and display of imperial power was extremely popular in Britain, even though the implications abroad were more complex. As Lord Curzon said 'I never spent five minutes inquiring why we are unpopular. The answer is written in red ink on the map of the globe.'³² Empire never became popular in France until the beginning of the 20th century, when its exoticism was harnessed for cultural projects. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's books *Courier du Sud* & *Vol de Nuit* were at least partially set in Africa, while René Maran's *Batouala* in 1921 won the Prix Goncourt. However, empire was never as omni-present in France as in Britain due to the few number of settlers who ever went there, even though events such as the Paris-Dakar automobile races served to popularise it.

²⁷ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.37

²⁸ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.45

²⁹ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.116

³⁰ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.118

³¹ Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.130

³² Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.125