

Compare the patterns of British imperial expansion in the early part of the nineteenth century with those of France

By the end of the Napoleonic period, the disparity between British and French interests overseas was marked. Where France over the previous century had held major possessions in North America and India, along with profitable plantations in the West Indies and a handful of Indian Ocean archipelagos, only St-Louis in Senegal and some minor Caribbean possessions were still hers after the Congress of Vienna. British overseas interests on the other hand were extensive, in Canada, India, Australia, much of the Caribbean and other strategic islands across the world's oceans. In the light of this disparity, it becomes obvious why Britain throughout much of the nineteenth century already saw her interests as being much more global than the more European ones of France. Trading patterns even before the disruption of the Continental System of 1807-12 reflected this global perspective. Europe's share of British home-produced exports fell from 82% in 1700-1 to 74% in 1713-7 to 40% in 1771-2 and finally to 33% in 1803-7; imports from Europe declined from 68% of the total of imported between 1700-1 to 47% 70 years later.¹

Perhaps because of this difference in situation by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain and France looked at the world outside Europe in different terms from each other. For the British, questions of trade and finance continued to be the primary concerns of external policy. As Adam Smith said 'The maintenance of the monopoly has hitherto been the principal, or perhaps more properly, the sole end and purpose of the domination which Great Britain assumes over her colonies.'² Indeed, it is sometimes questioned as to how far Britain maintained any commitment to the idea of imperial expansion after the decline of the need for mercantilism after the Napoleonic settlement left her as the sole significant industrial and commercial power in Europe. The loss of the Thirteen Colonies, had not led to the loss of American trade - as had been feared, and it called into question the necessity for continued imperial holdings in other old settlement colonies such as Canada. Yet the ruling élites in Britain also maintained their interest in the profits of overseas trade - 64.9% of imperial and 55.2% of overseas investment over the course of the nineteenth century came from London and the Home Counties. In France, on the other hand, commercial interests never managed to exert any sort of control over the national viewpoint, not least because of the very small size of the commercial sector. The maintenance of protection as a normal course of trade policy - dominated as it was by the need to create an industrial base for her own domestic economy as well as continued commerce in foodstuffs and hand-made luxury goods with her European neighbours - did not allow time to seriously consider the consequences of overseas expansion.

Experience of colonial intricacies for example in India convinced many commercial Englishmen that free-trade in cheap and established British manufactures would ensure that 'foreign nations would become valuable Colonies to us, without imposing on us the responsibility of governing them' - a responsibility which brought costs with it.³ Some radical free-traders went further to suggest with Richard Cobden that trade acted 'on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe - drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace.'⁴ Crucially, however, those benefiting most from free trade abroad included those in the very highest governmental offices as well as lower down the social hierarchy. In France on the other hand, the lack of official backing for commercial ventures, all the less for foreign ventures, meant that the impetus for expansionist

¹ Cain & Hopkins: *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* p.88

² Cain & Hopkins: *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* p.234

³ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.3

⁴ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.6

claims came from a different direction. It was not surprising that in Algeria 'the first civil governor who really was a civilian' was Albert Grévy, whose term of office (1879-81) came fifty years after the colony was first claimed. Army Generals such as Bugeaud, Desmichels, Clauzel and Pélissier had consistently exceeded their authority in pursuing French claims in Algeria, in the way that Binger and most obviously Lyautey would continue to do elsewhere in the world.

Strategic considerations preceded any trading urges in most parts of French expansionism to 1870, following on the speech of Guizot to the National Assembly in 1842. He said 'I am inclined to believe, in general, that it is little benefiting the policy and genius of France to essay new and great colonial establishments at a great distance from our territory... What is indispensable, is to possess at points on the globe which are destined to become great centres of commerce, sure and strong maritime stations to serve as support for our commerce.'⁵ This served as justification of seizures of *points d'appui* such as Gabon (1839), Mayotte (1841), Tahiti (1842) & Grand-Bassam (1842). Later on, similar establishments were made at Ouidah in Dahomey (1851) & New Caledonia (1853). In all of these small *points d'appui*, the volume of trade remained small, though their use in projecting French force to other parts of the world did remain a consideration. It was only in 1883 that Jules Ferry was legitimately able to claim that 'Colonial policy is the daughter of industrial policy. In rich states where capital abounds and accumulates rapidly, export is an essential factor in public prosperity. The field of action for capital, like the demand for labour, is measured by the size of the foreign market.'⁶ French trade until then was simply not strong enough to compete with the quality and price of British manufactures, and even re-exports of British colonial products. The French conquest of Algiers as an example was in no way connected with trading considerations, but was a makeshift expedient for internal political consumption, carried out by a government in difficulty seeking the prestige of a military victory. The French minister of war wrote in 1827: 'it would be a useful distraction from political trouble at home' and would allow the government 'to go to the country at the next election with the keys of Algiers in its hand.'⁷ Even then the knowledge of the continuing military expense that possession would entail convinced the government to return Algiers to the Ottomans in exchange for 'a slight increase in the territory over which France has been sovereign for several hundred years.' Only the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy itself in 1830 prevented more progress on this idea.

For Britain on the other hand, trading considerations did indeed have a very large bearing on the attitude the government took towards various parts of the world. The strength of British commerce which forced France to remain protectionist allowed Canning to say in 1824 'Spanish America is free and if we do not mismanage our affairs she is English.'⁸ Between 1815 and 1880 £1.187bn of overseas credit had been accumulated, of which only one sixth was in the Empire, while stocks in white-empire projects e.g. railways, performed on average up to 30% better than similar investments in the UK before 1880, though worse afterwards. Governmental ambivalence to this internationalisation of British national trade can be seen in the reaction of the Governor of the Straits Settlement in 1840 who said 'If persons knowing the risks they run, owing to the disturbed state of these countries, choose to hazard their lives and properties for the sake of large profits which accompany successful trading, they must not expect the British Government to be answerable if their speculation proves unsuccessful.'⁹ On the other hand, it was Palmerston's view in 1860 that 'It may be true in one sense that trade ought not to be enforced by cannon-balls, but on the other hand trade cannot flourish without security, and that security

⁵ Aldrich *Greater France* p. 94

⁶ Aldrich *Greater France* p. 98

⁷ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.5

⁸ ECHR Aug 1953 p.8

⁹ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.5

may often be unobtainable without the exhibition of physical force.’¹⁰ Robinson and Gallacher thus conclude that ‘British policy followed the principle of extending control informally if possible and formally if necessary. To label the one method “anti-imperialist” and the other “imperialist” is to ignore the fact that whatever the method British interests were steadily safeguarded and extended.’¹¹ Yet as with France, formalisation of imperial control often signified that in the often exaggerated view of British representatives on the ground - diplomats, traders, missionaries & settlers - the existing informal arrangements had failed to guarantee the levels of security needed to protect British interests. The hand of the Foreign Office, as for that of the Quai d’Orsay in Paris, was often forced by the independent military actions of their local representatives. Thus it was that semi-formal control - as with the system of residents in Malaya from the 1870s, earned the comment from the Colonial Secretary that ‘this new phase of colonial policy needs very careful watching.’¹²

In the early part of the nineteenth century, both Britain and France did use their colonies to some extent as over-spills for their own metropolitan territories. Australia for instance was initially populated largely by transported convicts, as were some of the Caribbean islands. Algeria received 14,000 political prisoners in the aftermath of the 1848-52 upheavals both by the Republican government and by Napoleon III. However, there was a great difference in the treatment of the different colonies across the world when it came to their use as places of voluntary settlement for the metropolitan population. France - which suffered through war and agricultural difficulties a reducing population, had very few surplus members of the society to become settlers in her new lands. The size of the French population in Algeria was less than half of the total number of Europeans from the first seizure of the colony until the automatic naturalisation of other national groupings in the 1890s skewed the figures in her favour. The total number of emigrants to Algeria in the 1840s was 142,000, of whom 108,000 returned to France. Over the first thirty years, the European population increased from 25,000 to 280,000 - which remained less than 10% of the total population of the colony including the Muslim natives whom they dispossessed. As for the British Isles, the situation is very different, with over 1 million emigrants in the 1850s alone - mostly to United States, but also to old colonies. Between 1812 and 1914, 20m British people emigrated of which the greatest number went to the United States, and 70% in total went outside the Empire. However, their destinations were overwhelmingly the old settlement colonies, where the cooler and more temperate climates made it possible to engage in pursuits such as agriculture which were substantially similar to those practised at home (e.g. wool, timber, hides etc.) Industrial and economic self-development in these colonies was spurred on by the immigration of skilled workers, who helped construct railways and the mines which propelled the gold rushes affecting Australia and later South Africa. This is not to say that settlers did not go to more tropical areas as well, to found plantations in new products, especially in the 1850s with the development of tea in Ceylon, and coffee and indigo in India. However, plantation economics only worked when there remained profitable markets for the primary products which they grew, and when full land-use made native-workers dependent for labour on working the plantations. An example of this is the steady decline of the planter elite in the West Indies sugar trade - whose return to England effectively prevented the development of self-government in the Caribbean. The patterns of British expansion in people and money showed that migrants and investment did not necessarily coincide. White colonies such as Canada and Australia were prime recipients of both British immigrants and capital; Argentina & Brazil took British capital, but the prime pattern of immigration was from Southern Europe, not from the British Isles; Chile is an example of a third

¹⁰ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.11

¹¹ EcHR Aug 1953 p.13

¹² Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.60

type of country, which remained dependent to a large extent on British capital investment, but which received virtually no migrants from any part of the world.

Yet the biggest difference between the French colonial experience and the British one came in the questions of treatment of the native populations and in self-government of colonial possessions. The deliberate policy of early French settlement in Algeria was to plant rural settlers on the land in Algeria, and to give all settlers the capacity to be self-sufficient. The rural population of Algeria increased from a small base of 15,000 (14% of the total European population) by 1847 to 208,000 (44% of the total) by 1896. The need to provide land from these *colons* required the confiscation of land belonging to tribes fighting against the French, *cantonment* of tribes on fractions of their former territory and seizing of uncultivated land. In 1851-61, for instance, 343,387ha was delimited, of which 61,363ha fell to the state.¹³ The clear intention was the French *mission civilisatrice* to use settlement to assimilate the Arab population to the French way of life. The early nineteenth century saw similar attempts at cultural imperialism on the part of the British, especially in non-white colonies such as India. William Wilberforce as an example said 'Let us endeavour to strike our roots into the soil by the gradual introduction and establishment of our own principles and opinions; of our laws, institutions and manners; above all, as the source of every other improvement, of our religion, and consequently of our morals.' Thomas Babington Macauley argued that to anglicise India, it was necessary to produce an anglicised middle class 'who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in colour and blood, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.' Sir George Grey in the Cape Colony in the 1850s hoped by settlement 'to change inveterate enemies into friends' by releasing the Africans from 'the tyranny of their chiefs' and introducing them to western, Christian ways¹⁴

However, British attempts at assimilation were all but destroyed in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-8. Principled ignorance of local cultures led Lord Roberts to note that 'the affair betrayed an incredible disregard of the natives' religious prejudices.' Disraeli in Parliament complained that 'Sir, of late years a new principle appears to have been adopted in the government of India...one which would destroy nationality.'¹⁵ A rebel broadsheet similarly complained that 'It is well known that in these days all the English have entertained these evil designs - first, to destroy the religion of the Hindustani army and to make the people by compulsion Christians.'¹⁶ Yet even though the British had not attempted this latter charge, it was nonetheless true that the reforms implemented in India to anglicise it had all degraded at least one section of the Indian community - the Muslim elite by the introduction of English language, literature and science; the artisans could not cope with the unprotected competition with English manufactures; higher Hindu castes felt humiliated by equality before the law - as one Brahmin said 'when you are sued by a mean labourer, or a male or female servant, you are summoned without investigation to attend their Court, and are thus dishonoured and degraded.' Most disruptive of all was the introduction of land ownership and money rents, which uprooted entire village hierarchies even as they attempted to make the rural economy more efficient. Thus it was noted that the areas and peoples who revolted against the British in India exactly matched the areas who had seen the greatest numbers of foreign innovations imposed by the East India Company government. The experience of the Mutiny decisively changed the outlook of British colonial administrators, who returned to the view of John Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay in 1826, who said 'We may be compelled by the character of our government to frame some institutions, different from those we found established, but we should adopt all we can of the

¹³ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.31

¹⁴ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.56

¹⁵ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.31

¹⁶ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.31

latter into our system.¹⁷ Post-Mutiny Indian government concentrated on courting the 'natural' leaders of the Indians, who if they could be 'attached to the state by timely concessions...and obtain a share of power and importance, it will constitute a strong support to the existing government.'¹⁸

In French Algeria, the initial military-led governments likewise considered the primary aim to be the maintenance of law and order, based on the loyalty of the natives to the new régime. Yet crucially, this was based not on including the traditional local nobility, but instead in seeking to whittle it away in order to replace it with the loyalty to the new French order. The most obvious agency the French administration produced to receive this loyalty - and who in the words of Macauley 'may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern' were the *bureaux des affaires arabes*, acting as intermediaries between the French command and the native chiefs. Yet they rapidly became in the eyes of the natives the real government, since their competence was universal: soldiers, administrators, judges, inspectors, technical experts etc. Yet although they played a valuable role in making the native population submit to French authority and defending the tribes, as Bugeaud put it, "against rapacity and injustice" - the *bureaux arabes* represented only the interests of the native population against that of European settlers. This proved so divisive that on several occasions, the Directorate of Arab Affairs was accused in parliament of siding with the natives, and was duly censured by the government.¹⁹ For the army and the settler community, the attitude remained that of Prince Napoléon-Jerôme (Minister of Algeria), 31 Aug 1858 who said 'We are confronted by a hardy perennial, a strongly-rooted national identity which must be eradicated by assimilation.'²⁰ Later, Governor de Gueydon (1871-3) sought 'not to perpetuate the national identity of the natives...but rather to break down the resistance of Arab society.'²¹

An essential difference in the attitudes of settlers in British colonies and in French Algeria was that French public demanded consistently that the *mission civilisatrice* required French colonies to remain integral parts of France - an ideal shared for more material reasons by the settlers themselves. A typical *colon* comment said 'It is vital to legislate the incorporation of Algeria as an integral part of its territory. Neither the press nor the settlers must rest without winning this point.'²² Yet there was an essential difference between the meaning of the concept of assimilation in *colon* circles and in metropolitan France. In France itself it was believed that the purpose of assimilation was foremost to draw the Arabs into French civilisation and eventually fuse the two races in Algeria. For the settlers, assimilation referred only to the *colons* and naturalised Europeans, and in the Algerian context gave French citizens extra rights in excess of those in metropolitan France, far greater than the rights of their native subjects. Thus when the Ordinance of 27 September 1847 extended to Algerian communes the French law of 1837, the *maires* of Algerian communes were paid for by taxpayers who were not citizens i.e. the Arab population. Napoleon III broke with the previous policy which 'sententiously advanced to assimilate the Arab population, but having no other result but its exploitation, and the sacrifice of its most cherished institutions to our interests.'²³ General Hanoteau (officer of the *bureaux arabes*) described the situation by saying 'What our settlers dream of is a bourgeois feudalism in which they will be the lords and the natives the serfs.' Yet innovations such as the creation in 1841-2 of a French system of justice in which only French metropolitan law was applied did

¹⁷ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.18

¹⁸ Bernard Porter: *The Lion's Share* p.40

¹⁹ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.24

²⁰ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.35

²¹ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.53

²² Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.26

²³ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.39

appeal to the civilised nature of French justice. It was not heeded in metropolitan France that this suppressed the jurisdiction of the Muslim judge under Islamic law, and signalled the destruction of Muslim institutions. As Lannes de Montebello said: 'What could be more legitimate than to oblige the convenience of 2.5m Arabs to give way to the higher interests of 40m French?'²⁴ For the nationalist Prevost-Paradol: 'it was necessary to bring in laws designed exclusively to favour the expansion of the French colony, leaving the Arabs to fight, as best they could, on equal terms, in the battle of life.'²⁵

Assimilation and integration as a policy was deliberately advanced in Algeria by settlers looking to gain the advantages which French nationality brought with them. *Communes de plein exercice* were introduced 1881 to be fully equivalent to those in France, yet they survived 'by eating *indigène* - Jules Ferry commented that 'as far as the native is concerned, the *commune de plein exercice* is daylight robbery' - left without any supervision by the administration, the French mayors arranged the budget solely for the benefit of the Europeans while taxing the natives as they pleased. Yet although *colons* welcomed all French laws in the fields of political representation and justice, they were nevertheless quite prepared to argue for self-government to avoid proposed direct taxation and military service 1875 by invoking the special needs of a colony. The double standard of wanting relief from military rule yet a guarantee of state support marked settler rule in Algeria for many years. In the British colonies of settlement, it was both British policy and colonial wishes to see this divergence solved - by the introduction of a form of limited self-government. Grey, the Colonial Secretary in 1846 expressed this policy by saying 'circumstances now imperatively demanded the acceptance of self-government in communities with adequate population, wealth, social stability and political experience.'²⁶ The attraction in the words of Robinson & Gallacher was that 'responsible government, far from being a separatist device, was simply a change from direct to indirect methods of maintaining Britain's interests.' As Grey mentioned, the key criteria were wealth, social stability and political experience - essentially political reform in the non-white colonies was as terrifying an idea for the British as democracy in the House of Commons. The American example had proved that economic interests were not at threat, even though within 3 years of self-government, Victoria and NSW had adopted democratic voting procedures & Canada had adopted protectionist tariffs. Yet self-government for British colonies also addressed the need for state support in defence matters which the French settlers in Algeria could only resolve by total integration. The retention of imperial defence by Britain - who paid 1860-1912 £1.14 per head on defence (37% of government expenditure) while the colonies only paid 12p per head - freed up large amounts of colonial capital for profitable self-development which London investors could also share in.

²⁴ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.45

²⁵ Ageron *Modern Algeria* p.45

²⁶ Cain & Hopkins: *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* p.238