

Imperialist parallels then and now

Part I New Imperialism 1884-1913

"Imperialism as we see, implies the use of machinery of government by private interests, mainly capitalist, to secure for them economic gains outside their country."

John Atkinson Hobson, 1902*

A Democrat insert

We are being bombarded with books, papers, radio and TV programmes, and events to mark the First World War. The bulk of this material concentrates on the war and carnage in the trenches. Our objective is to put a different point of view.

Introduction

In the period leading up to 1884 in what could be called 'old imperialism' consisted of British, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and other empires spread around the planet. The "New Imperialism" period included the "Scramble for Africa" which had as its main objective in the 19th and 20th centuries to make a profit and still is in the 21st century.

The **Berlin Conference which met from 1884-85** can be seen as the formalisation of the "Scramble for Africa". The conference ushered in a period of heightened colonial activity by European Powers and was a sort of gentlemen's agreement not to fight militarily with each other to minimise expenditure. Simultaneously they eliminated most existing forms of African autonomy and self governance based on tribes and embryo nations. The participants in the carve-up were – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, and the Ottoman Empire.

Although invited the USA didn't participate. It was not in a position to mount expeditions and preferred to not give the conference further legitimacy.

The powers at the conference just sat down and literally partitioned Africa between themselves including the use of straight lines on the map some of which still exist today. They gave themselves the 'right to conquest'. African races, tribes and nations were deliberately not invited to the conference.

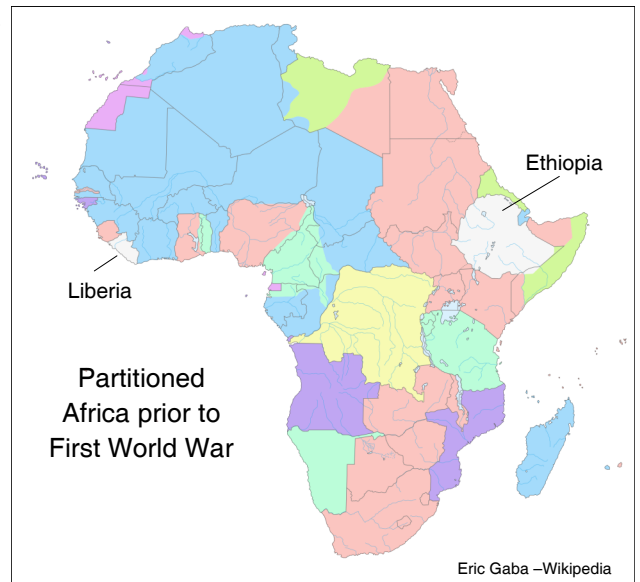
The agreement thrashed out was the General Act:

- * To gain public acceptance that the primary purpose of the conference was ending of slavery by Black and Islamic powers and the prohibition of slave trade in their respected spheres.
- * The Congo Free State was confirmed as private property of Congo Society ensuring this was the private property of King of the Belgians Leopold II.
- * 14 signatory powers entitled to free trade in Congo Basin and Lake Niassa.
- * Niger and Congo Rivers made free for ship traffic to ship out raw materials.
- * The Principle of Effective Occupation to stop powers setting up colonies in name only was limited to the African irregular coast but colonial powers claimed rights over lands in the interior by establishing a base on the coast. This caused disputes. This principle was heavily contested between France and Germany at the conference. Germany was late on the scene whereas Britain had already established itself on huge territories.
- * Any new acts of possession of any portion of African coast had to be notified to all signatory powers.
- * Marking regions or 'spheres of influence' each European power had an exclusive right to "pursue" the legal ownership of land in the eyes of the other European powers.

* John Atkinson Hobson: *Imperialism, A Study*: 1902 and 2010



Berlin Conference - note wall map and 'observer'



Partitioned Africa prior to First World War

Eric Gaba - Wikipedia

	British
	French
	German
	Portuguese
	Belgian
	Spanish
	Italian

Benign impression of imperialism for public consumption

Using a broad brush approach the activity in the New Imperialism era after the Berlin Conference by the four major European powers in Africa was as follows.



British Empire

Prior to the 'New Imperialism' era the British Empire consisted of dominions, larger colonies and protectorates which included British India, Burma, Australia, Canada, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Transvaal, British West Africa, Cape Colony, Malaya, Malta, New Zealand.

A number of these colonies were controlled by chartered companies within the Empire.

The British East India Company formed in 1600, and later with its own private armies, occupied and from 1757 ruled large areas of the Indian subcontinent until the Crown took over in 1858 and into the era of the British Raj.

The Imperial British East African Company became bankrupt and British government took over responsibilities including finishing the railway, moving a ship in kit form to Lake Victoria using slavery.

Royal Niger Company was the foundation of Nigeria.

These companies set up refreshment stations on the coast for shipping and as bases to launch deep into the then unknown interior of Africa

For example Gibraltar was a long standing strategic base for the Royal Navy which increased in importance with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The Canal which could be used by any country played a key role in the colonisation of Africa.

Aden in Yemen was a territory secured in 1839 by a company landing Royal Marines to stop pirate attacks on shipping to India. Aden was used to replenish with water and later for coal and boiler water.

A British objective in Africa was to link vertically from Cairo to Cape Town. Cecil Rhodes the arch imperialist wanted to link northern and southern colonies first with a telegraph line and then a railway to aid movement of goods and materials for import and export, and troops to quell resistance. Britain had become the 'Workshop of the World' through further expansion of markets and funded by exploitation with a large surplus value. For this

purpose British capitalism needed further lands in Africa to export finished goods to the continent and take out raw materials including metals not available in Europe, and harvest gold and diamonds.

During the period 1652-1795, the Dutch East India Company mainly farmers, known as Boers, settled in southern Africa and set up the Orange Free State and South African Republic in the Transvaal. In 1877 to expand northwards the British attempted to annex the Transvaal by force in the first Anglo-Boer war but the Republic won. Transvaal was discovered to have gold around Johannesburg.

Twenty years later in the second Anglo-Boer war from 1899-1902 the British army fought both the Transvaal State and Orange Free State. Having lost military battles the Boers resorted to a guerrilla campaign. In retaliation to gain outright control the British used a 'scorched earth' policy and concentration camps in which 30,000 farms were burnt down, 27,927 Boers died in 45 of these camps of whom 22,074 were children under 16 and a further 14,154 Black Africans. They died of starvation, disease and exposure tantamount to murder. Two of the commanders of the British Army included Haig and French who would oversee the devastation in different fields in Europe.



French military
Expedition in
Africa

French Empire

The French Empire consisted of Algeria, Indo-China and French West Africa. The objective in Africa was to link up possessions on an east-west line compared with the north-south British objective. This was partially achieved in north west Africa in several ruthless expeditions and military campaigns joining up territory from the north coast, west coast and central Africa Congo.

France made local agreements in the region around Djibouti to gain a foothold in East Africa and complete the east-west objective. An expedition was carried towards Fashada to meet up with an expedition from Brazzaville in the Congo. This was a diplomatic and military failure for France as it met a naval force led by British Empire builder Lord Kitchener who had arrived earlier at the end of the White Nile. This was a contributory factor which led to the Entente Cordiale and alliance between France and the UK in 1904.

By 1902 France had the largest area of land in Africa but was second to the British Empire in subjugated populations.

Belgian Empire

After solving the last mystery of Africa to locate the source of the Nile, and finding Dr Livingstone, explorer Henry Stanley returned to Europe in 1878. In doing so he revealed the potentials of tropical Africa.

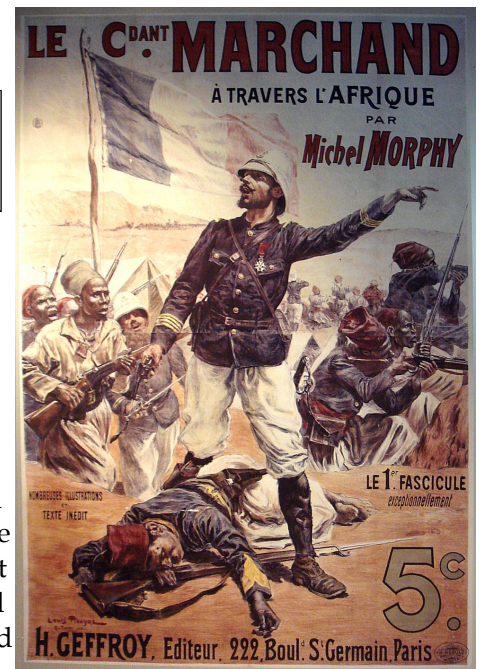
Stanley was lauded across Europe. He lobbied the rich and powerful tirelessly with his theme of the boundless opportunity for commercial exploitation of the lands he had discovered or, in his own words, to "pour the civilisation of Europe into the barbarism of Africa".

"There are 40,000,000 naked people on the other side of the rapids", Stanley wrote, "and the cotton-spinners of Manchester are waiting to clothe them... Birmingham's factories are glowing with the red metal that shall presently be made into ironwork in every fashion and shape for them... and the ministers of Christ are zealous to bring them, the poor benighted heathen, into the Christian fold."

Failing to obtain British backing, Stanley made a five year contract with the King of Belgium, Leopold II. Belgium had only been a state since 1830.

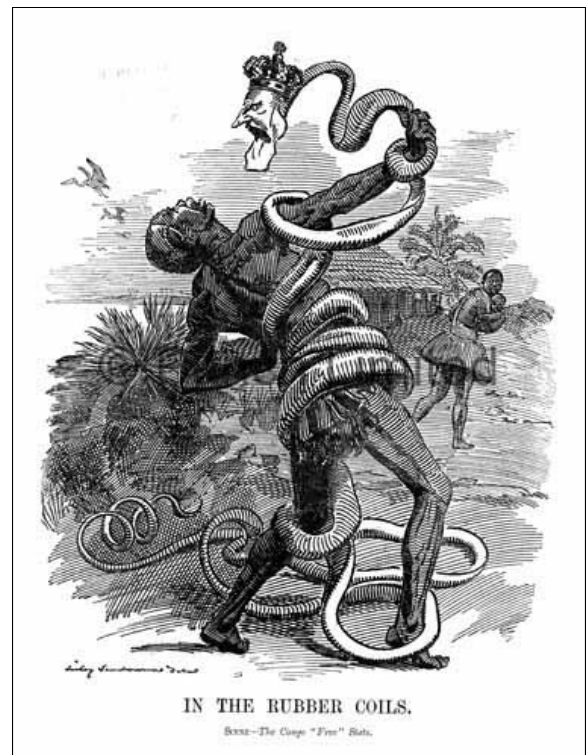
However, once back in Africa, Stanley was informed of the magnitude of Leopold's real ambition: to set up a chain of trading stations and secretly carve out: "... a new State, as big as possible, and of running it. It is clearly understood that in this project there is no question of granting the slightest political power to the Negroes. That would be absurd." King Leopold II purchased privately the Congo using military force.

The methods of exploitation to extract first ivory and then rubber out of the Congo involved a living hell in which millions upon millions died or were killed. This involved the use of slavery, starvation, mutilation and murder. Eventually the public outcry forced the Belgian government to take over the colony by buying it from King Leopold II!



A "Section Chief" in the building of the Dakar-Niger (River) Railway, pushed by African workers, 1904.

Part of French drive for an east-west link of French colonies.



Cartoon in *Punch* 1906 by Linley Sambourne



"Even if it hasn't brought in much profit and there are no better quality goods on offer, at least we can use it to set up a bone grinding plant."

Caricature of 1904 genocide in socialist satirical paper *Der Wahre Jakob* (1906).

German empire

Germany had no African Colonies until after 1884 so started late and was seriously disadvantaged in the 'scramble for Africa'.

In 1884 German South West Africa was initiated as a station by a merchant trader. Resistance to German occupation resulted in Germany transporting 14,000 troops to put down local peoples by using concentration camps and inmates as slaves. This post dates the British camps in South Africa. The Herero people were ordered to leave the 'country' or be killed. They retreated into a desert where the German soldiers prevented the use of water holes and supplies by these Herero and Nama peoples. This was the 1904 genocide which exterminated the Herero nation.

The colony of German East Africa was initiated by the German East Africa Company in 1884. The Sultan of Zanzibar objected to the territory being turned into a German protectorate. But, in what is known as 'gun boat diplomacy', the arrival of seven German battleships with guns aimed at the Sultan's palace 'persuaded' him to agree. A little later the Abushiri widespread revolt of Arabs and Swahilis against the occupation in 1888-89 was suppressed by a joint Anglo-German blockade involving the Royal Navy.



German battleship used in 'gunboat diplomacy' to build the Empire

Empire	Colonies		Area sq miles	Population
	Africa	World	Africa	Africa
British	12	50	3,437,000	53,078,000
France	8	33	33,373,010	23,053,000
Germany	4	13	930,760	14,200,000
Belgium	1	1	900,000	30,000,000

Areas and populations are estimates by JA Hobson



Observations and Conclusions

By 1902 90% of all land that made up Africa was under European control. The United Kingdom had the largest empire and navy with a network of overseas coaling stations to service the navy. The British Empire was coloured pink on world maps. The French also coloured their empire in pink.

The strategic rivalry and sometimes co-operation between the UK, France, Germany and other European powers is a large part of imperialism with many strands, twists, turns and alliances in build up to WW1.

Resistance to the imperialists in Africa was put down in draconian policies and exercises using starvation, mutilations, slavery, genocide and concentration camps. This did not go unnoticed in the nations of Europe and exposure in the days before radio and a developed public telephone system.

The use of the scorched earth policy and concentration camps were exposed by Emily Hobhouse who travelled to South Africa to investigate and exposed them in the media.

Part of the agreement after the Boers surrendered was that the Union of South Africa would be carried out under white rule which lasted until two decades ago. The German Empire saw the use of British policies in South Africa as a weakness and expressed support for the Transvaal Boers via the 'Kruger telegram'. This is one thread of the growing tension between the European powers.

Most of the former colonies of European powers have been and are still shackled to the European Union through the former Lome and recent Contonou Agreements. These are one sided agreements where economic conditions are imposed similar to the policies in force in the EU including restrictions on public sector borrowing. As part of the Agreement they have had to open up their economies and markets to competition, privatisation, neo-liberalism and interference with internal affairs.

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**Printed and published by
Democrat Press
PO Box 46295
London W5 2UG**