



Imperial geopolitics in Africa: imperial geopolitical perspective behind the scramble and petition of Africa.

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Abstract: Africa is one of the most vulnerable continent in the world date backed to the period of colonialism and imperialism. Since the coined of the term geopolitics, Europeans were busy re-writing world geography in their quest for territorial expansion and world hegemony. This research seeks to explore and evaluate the imperial geopolitical doctrine behind Africa's scramble and eventually colonialism by European. It appears that most of the writings of imperial geopolitician has greatly influence European governments for massive territorial expansion. Mackinder, Ratzel and other writers of the time were inspired by Darwin evolutionary and rule of nature theory. They see the world as chaos and only those who are fit enough will survive. Again, this theorists were also influence by industrial revolutions in Europe and the need to create new markets and trading partners lead to the scramble for African territories. This paper attempts to approach the scramble and petition of Africa from the perspective of imperial geopolitical discourse (territorial expansion).

Keywords: Africa, imperial geopolitics, colonialism, hegemony, scramble and petition, Berlin conference.

Introduction

In their bid to discover new territories in the 19th to early 20th century, the European began to explore Africa and other parts of the world. In the mid-1800s, on the eve of European domination of Africa, African peoples were divided into hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups. These groups spoke more than 1000 different languages. Politically, they ranged from large empires that united these diverse groups to independent villages.

The European had established contact with sub-Saharan Africa as early as 1450s. However, the European faces lot of resistance and challenges at the beginning. They could not penetrate the interior part of Africa because of the changing flow of the river and the fear of deadly diseases. The process of the invasion, occupation, and domination of

African territory by European powers start from 1880-1914. In about 1880, Europeans only controlled 10% of the continent of Africa. In 1913, at the end of "Scramble for Africa," (only 33 years later) Europe controlled almost all of Africa.

Africa has been one of the vulnerable continents in the world and this can be traced back to the era of colonialism. This was the period when European powers were struggling for territories in Asia, Americas, and of course Africa. This paper seeks to critically analyze the imperialist geopolitical thinking or imagination at the time towards the scramble for Africa. The research shall also critically assess Mackinder's Darwinism view of geopolitics and how it contributes or influence on the petition of Africa in the Berlin conference of 1884-85.



During the industrial revolution in Europe, lots of finished goods were produced and there was a need for new markets to sell these goods. This put pressure on most of the European countries which coupled with competition for hegemonic position in the world and hence the genesis of imperialism. This paper will explore the critical imperial geopolitics behind the scramble for Africa and its impact.

This research also attempts to critically analyze imperialist thinkers of the time who view geopolitics as western imperialism that deals with the relationship between physical earth and politics. This imperialism was vividly clear in Africa which this paper seeks to explore. Many writers during this period believed that territorial expansion is all that matters and thus neglecting critical issues. Geopolitics after the Second World War took in the form of imperialist expansion and ideological struggles. However, geopolitics goes beyond this traditional believe of the relationship between earth and politics.

The classical and neo-classical geopolitics is all about political and economic imperialism. Most of these thinkers such as Mackinder and Ratzel were influence by Charles Darwin theory of evolution. Friedrich Ratzel was greatly influenced by social Darwinism and argued in his book "political geography" that state is a living organism engaged in a struggle for survival with other states. He further argued that like a living organism, the state needs constantly to expand or face decay and death. However, this bias and politically motivated ideas were trying to justify the Germany territorial expansion at the expense of inferior states more so Africa (Agnew, 2003).

This beliefs, combined with Charles Darwin's New Science and the warping of the statement "survival of the fittest" by social Darwinism, encouraged the view that Europe was going down into the so-called Dark Continent to raise up and civilize the savage natives. Nothing could be more paternalistic or racist in outlook; however, as odd as it may seem, imperialism is thus associated with the liberal view of the perfectibility of man.

Against this background, this paper attempts to explore and critically analyze classical and neo-classical geopolitics behind the colonization of Africa and the lasting impact of imperialism. Important political geographers thoughts shall be discuss with relation to the scramble and petition of Africa. The paper is qualitative in nature and uses secondary sources from academic geopolitical journal, books, articles, reports etc. this paper is divided in to three parts. This first section deals with the classical and neo-classical school of thought on the scramble of Africa. The second part assess the critical imperial geopolitics and its effects on the continent. And finally, the paper is concluded on some policy recommendation.

Classical and Neo-Classical Geopolitical Imagination In Relation To the Scramble for Africa by Imperialists

Colonization of Africa by European countries was a monumental milestone in the development of Africa. The Africans consider the impact of colonization on them to be perhaps the most important factor in understanding the present condition of the African continent and of the African people. Therefore, a close scrutiny of the phenomenon of colonialism is necessary to appreciate the degree to which it influenced not only the



economic and political development of Africa but also the African people's perception of themselves.

The earliest classical geopolitical writings were informed by imperial preoccupations and social Darwinist anxieties about the survival of states and empires. Writing in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the German writer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) expressed some of the dominant trends in classical geopolitics including racial and environmental determinism (Dodds, et. al, pp2). Colonialism in Africa was influenced by the geopolitical imagination of classical and neo-classical geopoliticians such as Mackinder, Ratzel, and Bowman etc. Friedrich Ratzel like many, was influenced by social Darwinism and argued in his book "political geography" that state is a living organism engaged in a struggle for survival with other states. He further argued that like a living organism, the state needs constantly to expand or face decay and death (Agnew, 2003). However, it appears (he) is trying to justify the Germany territorial expansion at the expense of inferior states. It appears that the aforementioned claims were politically motivated and made Africans believe that the ideology of imperialism was good for Africa.

During the early part of 19 century, imperial geopolitical imaginations influence the foreign policy decision of the so-called big super power states. Between the 1870s and 1900, Africa faced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual conquest and colonization. At the same time, African societies put up various forms of resistance against the attempt to colonize their countries and impose foreign domination. By the early

twentieth century, however, much of Africa, except Ethiopia and Liberia, had been colonized by European powers (E. G. Iweriebor

<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-colonization-of-africa.html>).

The European imperialist push into Africa was motivated by three main factors, economic, political, and social and thus the classical and neo-classical geopolitical imagination. It was developed in the nineteenth century following the collapse of the profitability of the slave trade, its abolition and suppression, as well as the expansion of the European capitalist Industrial Revolution. The imperatives of capitalist industrialization—including the demand for assured sources of raw materials, the search for guaranteed markets and profitable investment outlets—spurred the European scramble and the partition and eventual conquest of Africa. Thus the primary motivation for European intrusion was economic and political which could be traced to modern geopolitics. As it is a trite that who controls the world economy controls the rest of the world and thus the hegemony status.

Controlling the vast resources and the British Empire around the world was Mackinder's main concern. Mackinder warned that traditional sea powers such as Britain were under threat from new land-based powers that might, with the help of new transport technologies such as the railway, be able to mobilize their populations and resources in a decisive manner. Intrigued by the historic significance of migrant empires such as the Mongols, Mackinder divined a future possibility based on new great powers (such as the latter day Soviet Union) using what he



termed the 'heartland' to project power over the European continent. Vast quantities of coal, oil, gas and other minerals, transported from Africa by railways, would quite literally empower those who controlled the heartland. In his famous epithet, Mackinder warned that 'who rules East Europe commands the Heartland (Kearns, 2011). Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island. Who rules the World-Island commands the World' (Mackinder 1919). As a keen observer of global political machinations, Mackinder feared that either Germany or Russia has this strategic advantage (www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com ww2009).

Africa, "the oldest of the continents, containing the earliest remains of man, and the birthplace of the European civilization", (Jane, 1889: 42). As Africa was mostly unexplored since late nineteenth century, and most of the people in this continent were categorized into hundreds of ethnic groups with different languages, they were also less developed and usually depended much on manual ways of production other than using technically advanced machines as that of the western societies (A.Siad, 2014:1).

The political impetus derived from the impact of inter-European power struggles and competition for preeminence. Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, and Spain were competing for power within European power politics. One way to demonstrate national preeminence was through the acquisition of territories around the world, including Africa. The social factor was another major element. As a result of industrialization, major social problems grew in Europe: unemployment, poverty, homelessness, social displacement from

rural areas, and so on. These social problems developed partly because not all people could be absorbed by the new capitalist industries. One way to resolve this problem was to acquire colonies and export this "surplus population." This led to the establishment of settler-colonies in Algeria, Tunisia, Gambia, Ghana, South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, and central African areas like Zimbabwe and Zambia. Eventually the overriding economic factors led to the colonization of other parts of Africa.

The industrial revolution in Europe puts more pressure on their governments to control and influence states beyond their boundaries. They wanted to control African territories and their raw material in order to sustain their eco-political hegemony in the world. Historically, political geographers have engaged with the state in three ways: maximizing state power; to maintain and manage its territorial existence; and to actively resist and question its spatially manifested actions. Many geographers at this time believe in state power. They argued that state is the most important actor in international politics which I arguably agreed. However, this traditionalist views tries to justify the extension for power by nations and sees international system as a competition and conflict as such countries needs power to ensure dominant position in international arena.

Charles Darwin's New Science and the warping of the statement "survival of the fittest" by social Darwinism, encouraged the view that Europe was going down into the so-called Dark Continent to raise up and civilize the savage natives. Nothing could be more paternalistic or racist in outlook (same views were echo by Mackinder on the superiority of Anglo-Saxon race); however, as odd as it may



seem, imperialism is thus associated with the liberal view of the perfectibility of man.

In the late 19th century, race has been an important element of geopolitical vision. This can be traced to the Neo-Darwinism which hold on to the biological world view. For Mackinder geopolitical realities were amalgam of the biological inheritance of race, the environmental influence and the imperial strategies (Kearns 2003:182). Mackinder does see Anglo-Saxon as being civilization to the world. Mackinder thought that African would take centuries to adapt to the Anglo-Saxon civilization, but not knowing that civilization originated in Egypt and Egypt is in Africa. Anglo-Saxon were considered superior and the fittest in the cultural context. This aforementioned claim clearly indicates that the scramble and petition of Africa was indeed due to the classical geopolitical imagination which the Europeans believed that Africa was a Dark-Continent that needs to be civilized and enlightened. Mackinder highlight three types of alliance or association. The first was a vertical relation between superior and their colonized peoples. This people (African) were thought of incapable being independence. These states were considered weak and were better off under British rule. The British could defend them against internal rebellion and from other dominant powers. The British colonies in Africa, India and other parts of Asia were vivid examples.

The two largest colonial powers in Africa were France and Britain, both of which controlled two-thirds of Africa before World War I and more than 70 percent after the war. The period from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s marked the

zenith of imperial rule in Africa. The formalization of colonial rule was accomplished at the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 when all the European powers met and partitioned Africa, recognizing each other's share of the continent. The conference was called to reach agreement on imperial boundaries so as to avoid any future conflict among European powers. Following World War I, Germany, as a defeated power, was deprived of all her colonial possessions, which were parceled out to the victorious allies as trust territories under the League of Nations' mandate system.

Geopolitics is concerned with how geographical factors, including territory, population, strategic location, and natural resource endowments, as modified by economics and technology, affect the relations between states and the struggle for world domination. Classical geopolitics was a manifestation of inter imperialist rivalry and emerged around the time of the Spanish–American War and the Boer War. It constituted the core ideology of U.S. overseas expansion articulated in Alfred Thayer Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890), Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Frontier in American History" (1893), and Brooks Adams's *The New Empire* (1902)—as well as in Theodore Roosevelt's "Rough-Rider" policies (J.B. Foster, 2006).

After the Boer war (1899-1902), the British Empire fragility and weakness was surface to the whole world. This made imperial geopoliticians such as Mackinder to identified politicians who argued that imperialism was vital to national survival and that an imperial nation needed also to attend to domestic reform, thereby promoting national efficiency. Mackinder developed his



geopolitical theories under the shadow of the questions raised by the Boer War (Kearns 2011:38).

The imperial geopolitics and the scramble and petition of Africa: its effect on the continent.

The scramble for Africa is dated 1884-85 by historian, including Crowther (1968). It involved formal, round table conference, and protracted discussion involving Britain, France and Germany, to contend for African territories and resources. This was held in Germany, Berlin and hence "the Berlin Conference".

Power and wealth were the perennial characteristics of Europe in the nineteenth century, especially after the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850). Fundamental changes took place in Europe, especially in England, where new technology and the industrial production increased. Therefore, the need of cheap labor and raw materials increased as well. Consequently, the Berlin Conference took place in November 15, 1884 until February 26, 1885 in order to redraw the political boundaries of Africa by occupying it. The Africans representatives were not part of the conference. The partition of the "Dark Continent" was viewed by Europeans as a game of chance because the European statesmen chose its colonies according to who want what and why.

This continent provided what was needed of raw materials, labor force, regional power and what later became a geopolitical competition. Imperialism is divided in two different types of rule. The direct rule where for instance, France, Great Britain and Belgians centralized administrations where the indigenous authorities did not have key positions in

the administrations and thus subordinate to the Europeans. The indirect rule is where the Africans rulers cooperated with the Europeans; the local rulers were integrated into the colonial state. One feature strongly present in the scramble is the distribution of power between the European colonizers. Similar to how the United States of America introduced the "land of opportunity" and how people raced to claim land (Winks, et. al, 2005).

From a neo-classical perspective, Stephen Waltz describes domestic politics as "an intervening variable between the distribution of power and foreign policy behavior". For example, after the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, which resulted in the unification of Germany, Germany was still a new state and its domestic politics, controlled by the German Chancellor Otto van Bismarck, put pressure on the state to expand and gain more power for nationalistic purposes and keep the unification strong. Consequently, during the scramble for Africa, Germany acquired colonies in Africa such as Cameroon, Ghana, and Togo (in the early stage but was out by France and British later).

Similarly, King Leopold II of Belgium in 1876 decided to colonize Congo, a state where the Europeans had an eye on it and craved to acquire it which created tensions among them, for its richness and natural resources to increase Belgian power and influence. The other European powers interested in Africa, namely Britain, France, Portugal, and Germany, feared this expansion and regarded it as a threat to the balance of power in the continent (Winks, et. al, 2005). As a result, the Conference of Berlin was held in 1884 in an attempt to redistribute the power between the colonizing nations.



Eventually the Conference of Berlin ended with Britain having Uganda, Sudan, Egypt, Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria, Botswana, Rhodesia in Zimbabwe and Zambia. France had Mauritania, Chad, Gabon, Senegal and the Republic of Congo, and especially Mediterranean states such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria which were balancing strategic territories because they had access to the sea.

Thus it was the interplay of these economic, political, and social factors and forces that led to the scramble for Africa and the frenzied attempts by European commercial, military, and political agents to declare and establish a stake in different parts of the continent through inter-imperialist commercial competition, the declaration of exclusive claims to particular territories for trade, the imposition of tariffs against other European traders, and claims to exclusive control of waterways and commercial routes in different parts of Africa.

This scramble was so intense that there were fears that it could lead to inter-imperialist conflicts and even wars. To prevent this, the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck convened a diplomatic summit of European powers in the late nineteenth century. This was the famous Berlin West African conference (more generally known as the Berlin Conference), held from November 1884 to February 1885. The conference produced a treaty known as the Berlin Act, with provisions to guide the conduct of the European inter-imperialist competition in Africa. Some of its major articles were as follows:

- The Principle of Notification (Notifying) other powers of a territorial annexation

- The Principle of Effective Occupation to validate the annexations
- Freedom of Trade in the Congo Basin
- Freedom of Navigation on the Niger and Congo Rivers
- Freedom of Trade to all nations
- Suppression of the Slave Trade by land and sea

This treaty, drawn up without African participation, provided the basis for the subsequent partition, invasion, and colonization of Africa by various European powers (<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-colonization-of-africa.html>).

Various specific reasons dominate the scramble for Africa; however, the motives includes:

Economics: The economic potential of empire, as Britain and Spain had been proving for centuries, was unquestionable. Empire could insulate the mother country from dangerous booms and busts in the economic cycle by keeping markets open and exclusive. Mercantile policies could increase revenues and natural resources could shore up the treasury.

Geopolitics: Some of these areas were strategically important for maintaining trade routes to Asia or maintaining refueling station for a world- wide navy. The Horn of Africa, the southern tip of the continent, and the west- African coast were all strategic locations for world control. Inside the continent, territory was important for its location. Great Britain, hoping to link Cairo in the north with Cape Town in the south, wanted north-south dominion; therefore, all the



territory between those two points gained strategic value.

Nationalism: To report back home and throughout Europe that one nation acquired thousands of square miles of territory and millions of captive populations enhanced the prestige of that state throughout the world and for its own people. To be a victor in the imperial game meant great national pride and, thus, the improvement of the ruling party back at home.

Liberalism: The liberal tradition of Europe emphasized not equality, as we do today, but self-improvement and the perfectibility of man. This belief, combined with Charles Darwin's New Science and the warping of the statement "survival of the fittest" by social Darwinism, encouraged the view that Europe was going down into the so-called Dark Continent to raise up and civilize the savage natives. Nothing could be more paternalistic or racist in outlook; however, as odd as it may seem, imperialism is thus associated with the liberal view of the perfectibility of man.

Conclusion

The imperial geopolitics owed great depth to the work of Ratzel and Mackinder. The contributions made by this outstanding scholars was huge for us to critically understand the imperial geopolitical thinking. Writer of this time were highly influence by social Darwinism theory of evolution. As a result, influence states to concentrate on expansion and competing for hegemony in world politics. This saw great European nations to scramble for lands in Asia and Africa.

The scramble for Africa was both geopolitics and geo-economic. This lead to boundary delimitation among European

nations in Berlin. The imperial geopolitics at the time deals with maximizing the powers of the state. This same sentiment is shared with the realist school of thoughts in international relations. This imaginations is link and assess within the context of African colonization by the dominant European powers. This paper advance the opinion that, African needs to re-write their own geopolitics and acknowledge the fact that each African country has its own geopolitical advantage that's need to be explore to the benefit of its citizen.

According to Doyle, the European countries were required to expand in order to access resources, labor, capital and another means of production to maintain their liberal empires. The under consumption in metropolitan economies caused imperialism.

To sum up, critical geopolitics, classical and neo-classical geopolitics are concerned with the relationships among different continents. Africa and Europe are dissimilar regarding their economic system, culture, race and domestic politics (Goldstein, et. al, 2008). Yet through the exercise of power that was more strengthen after the Industrial Revolution in Africa, Europeans managed to convince the world that imperialism does not always have negative connotations on the native communities in Africa. It however brought "civilization" and "development" beyond Europe borders to another continent that they think needs help. It had left a lasting impact of the vulnerable African continent.

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