

A Comparative Study: British and French Attitudes and Policy in West Africa ~1880-1940. A difference in practice as well as in theory?

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Abstract: This essay aims to provide a comparative study between British and French aims attitudes and policy in West Africa in the years 1880-1940. Previous research in this area has often neglected the differences between attitude, colonial theory and practice, taking differences in British and French colonial rule in West Africa as given without exploring them further. However, the colonial reality was more complex. Differences between British and French rule, seemingly apparent at first become less clear, challenging long held assumptions. My research demonstrates that British and French motives for colonisation of the subcontinent were very different as were their attitudes and ideologies, in particular in the way they believed the colonies should be governed. However, this did not translate into large differences of policy in practice. While theoretically, British policy followed a minimalist ‘indirect model’ and the French an ambitious ‘direct model’, both colonisers were faced with the same restrictions and issues of governance: a lack of initiative, resources and administrators necessary to promote substantial development within the colonies. Ultimately and understandably, both powers settled on the strategy of maintaining the colonies as self-sufficient and as beneficial to the coloniser as possible. Thus, whilst British and French policy and administration in its origins and inception began from disparate starting points, due to their mutual constraints, over time their practices converged and by 1940 had become remarkably similar.

Introduction

In this essay I will explore British and French colonial attitudes and how they shaped and influenced their respective colonial policies during the first period of colonialism in West Africa (1880-1940). This first period was critical for it marked the transformation from small scale, limited involvement, usually confined to the coast to the large expansive framework of formal empires and the subjugation of existing pre-colonial powers. The second period of colonial rule spanning from the 1940s to the 1960s and independence, due to its very different nature will not be discussed.¹

West Africa serves as an ideal case study to compare British and French colonialism as their colonies were arranged in a ‘chequerboard’ fashion along the coast. Principally the countries involved in this study will comprise of the Afrique Occidentale Francaise (AOF), Nigeria, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone.

¹ Cogneau, Dupraz, and Mesple-Somps, ‘Public Finances in Colonial West Africa: British and French Compared’.

British and French colonialism has left a lasting legacy shaping not only their former colonies in West Africa, but also both colonial powers themselves. Although the period of British and French colonialism in Africa was relatively brief, the effects have not been insignificant. One striking legacy of colonialism can be clearly seen in the neat but artificially drawn modern day borders of West Africa. English and French remain the official languages of the region, while many West African descendants now live in both Britain and France. Although these legacies are the most visible, the economic, political and social impacts have had perhaps even more profound and long-lasting effects in shaping our world today.

This essay will describe, compare and explain British and French motives for colonisation, but also importantly their attitudes and ideologies. The essay will then analyse how these in turn shaped their respective policies not only in theory but also in practice. It is important to bear in mind that given the complexity of the topic, the controversies that exist, the duration of the period in question, the vastness of the geographical area of West Africa and the great many peoples of the region, there will be generalisations.

In addressing the question posed, I will argue that while original aims and motives of the British and French may have been very different, both colonisers on the ground suffered from a lack of initiative with a systemic absence of sufficient investment and funding needed to promote real development. Ultimately and understandably, both powers pursued the strategy of maintaining the colonies as self-sufficient and beneficial to the coloniser. Therefore, while British and French policy in their origins were very different, the reality became that by 1940 respective policy in practice had become remarkably similar.

Attitudes and Ideology

The change in the balance of power between Europe and Africa from the beginning of the slave trade in the early 17th century until its abolition was nothing short of transformational. This can be attributed more than anything else to the result of the Industrial Revolution. According to Chamberlain, “Europe had undergone an industrial revolution and Africa had not. For the first time in history there was an enormous gap, economic, technological and military, between the two continents with the balance entirely in Europe’s favour”.² Both the British and the French had long-standing interests in West Africa, largely to do with profitable trade, now in primary materials including palm oil, but also gum and wood. While the British and the French had different motives for colonisation, ultimately it was only a matter of time before imperialist expansionist policy would appropriate the subcontinent.³

While Britain was not opposed to a benevolent and developmental policy, colonisation largely depended on the defensive and reactionary move to defend her informal assets and markets. It is particularly significant that in Britain there was mostly apathy and disinterest with regards to holding a formal responsibility in West Africa for most of the 19th century, exemplified by the parliamentary committee recommendation in 1865 to relinquish all territories in the region except for Freetown as a strategically important port.⁴ For all scientific and altruistic interests Root explains, “The value of West Africa...depends

² Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*. p.3

³ Chamberlain.

⁴ Chamberlain.

absolutely and entirely upon its trade”.⁵ As Gallagher and Robinson also explain, Britain’s empire was not a ‘territorial empire’ but a ‘trading empire’ and trade with West Africa was profitable, especially as an outlet for manufactured goods: the value of exports rising from £340,000 in 1860 to £855,000 in 1883.^{6 7} Most trade took the form of palm oil, used as machine lubricant for textiles in return for hardware, metals firearms and spirits.⁸ What forced the British to formally colonise West Africa was principally as the result of the Berlin Conference of 1884.⁹ The conference, called to discuss the engagement of European powers in Africa stipulated that European territories had to be ‘effectively occupied’, meaning that colonisers were compelled to assert their presence, providing a *de facto* spark for the ‘Scramble for Africa’. To protect their interests, it was necessary for the British to convert the largely informal empire in West Africa to a model of a more formal empire with minimal effort as possible, preventing the likes of the French among others, interfering in areas of British influence. Gallagher and Robinson affirm that this was a reactive and defensive move likened to the occupation of Egypt of 1882.¹⁰ This is not to say that other factors were not important, however trade played the preeminent role for the British in West Africa. This clearly manifested itself in the initial British approach to policy from 1880-1940: minimal interference and responsibility, and essentially doing things on the cheap.

In contrast, the French motives for colonisation were not reactive but proactive. The powerful pro-West African lobby of the 1870s and 1880s headed by Jules Ferry and Bernard Jaureguiberry believed that expansionism could provide compensation for the humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, including the loss of the Alsace-Lorraine. West African control would also complete “the old dream of a north west African empire”.¹¹ In practical terms French colonisation of West Africa promised huge increases in territorial gain and political control, bringing a sense of prestige, with the discovery of new markets. This unfounded belief in the idea of limitless wealth of the inner Sudan, referring to the interior of West Africa, predicted enormous economic gains from the believed 80 million strong population.¹² This lucrative market could thus serve as an area for ‘constructive exploitation’ and an outlet for manufacturers suffering from the economic depressions in Europe during the 1880s and early 1890s. There was also an eye to provide soldiers for potential future conflicts, particularly with Germany.¹³ Furthermore, this would bring an opportunity for French civilisation to be brought to the subcontinent. As Conklin explains the French had a strong belief in their republican superiority forming a large basis for justification of French policy.¹⁴ While many called the project an unnecessary distraction from the real issues in Europe, the general consensus was that West African expansion would serve to rebuild the broken French state, through the exploitation of natural resources and promoting the French idea of ‘mission civilisatrice’.¹⁵

⁵ Root, ‘British Trade with West Africa’. p.41

⁶ Gallagher and Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’.

⁷ Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*. p.58

⁸ Chamberlain.

⁹ Chamberlain.

¹⁰ Gallagher and Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’.

¹¹ Newbury and Kanya-Forstner, ‘French Policy and the Origins of the Scramble for West Africa’. p.261

¹² Newbury and Kanya-Forstner.

¹³ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

¹⁴ Conklin.

¹⁵ Newbury and Kanya-Forstner, ‘French Policy and the Origins of the Scramble for West Africa’.

Both British Victorian and French Republican attitudes and ideologies were clearly very different, especially with regards to extent of intervention deemed necessary to accomplish their ambitions. However, there were a number of things that they generally believed and held in common. Knowledge of the interior of West Africa and indeed Africa as a whole was largely non-existent and the nature of its mystery was illustrated by the name of the 'Dark Continent'.¹⁶ The slave trade also left a more sinister legacy in forming the preconception of a backward and underdeveloped continent. The dehumanising nature of the trade in forming prejudices was further affected by the debate over the slave trade, both ways unintentionally cutting the same way in the image of the African.¹⁷ While slave traders justified the trade due to African's 'primitive' and 'subhuman' nature, liberating them from the God-forsaken continent, abolitionists presented the African as a 'noble savage', who although capable of improvement was at present like a child; weak and unable to care for himself.¹⁸ Clearly these ideas promoted the notion of an inferior race and culture, believed responsible for the lack of development, stuck in a stage of 'savagery' and 'barbarism' and far from civilisation. Explanations for this 'backwardness' could, for example be found in 'Social Darwinism' and 'Tropical Abundance'. So entrenched was the belief in Africa, the continent "never emerging from the state of barbarism" and "without a history", as noted by Sir Bartle Frere and the explorer Samuel Baker that great discoveries such as the Bronzes at Ife in 1910 and the remains of the Great Zimbabwe in 1868, were dismissed as creations of Hamitic tribes.¹⁹ Enlightenment thinking and the subsequent repudiation of Europe's often-brutal past further separated Europeans from Africans, resulting in a fundamental inability to understand African ways of life.²⁰

British confidence in its Victorian ideals was at its zenith during the mid 19th century. Indeed, Britain was the most powerful nation on earth with an incredibly large and powerful empire. As a result, they believed they had responsibility and a commitment, while not as clear cut as the French, to uplift the native to take on and to adapt to Victorian ideals and values. There was also something of a feeling of an unprecedented challenge in Africa where according to Cain and Hopkins, the unknown continent "had reached its lowest possible levels" through "economic backwardness" and moral "degeneration".²¹ Africa was seen as an ultimate test of British supremacy. Synonymous with the improvement of Africans were pioneering ideas of freedom, manifesting themselves in the global crusade to eradicate slavery. Although the West Africa Squadron from 1808-67 focused on ending European slavery, towards the end of the 19th century slavery continued within the subcontinent and it was felt that it needed to be eradicated.²² Instead of 'barbarism' and slavery, the image and ideals proposed included the introduction of law and order, commerce and Christianity, thereby creating civilisation for the native, and uplifting them to a more tolerable level.²³ The stress on these three factors of civilisation were mutually dependent and civilisation would be incomplete without them.²⁴ This development would not only be beneficial to the European but ultimately most beneficial to the native who in British eyes were given a way out of the mess that they had created. The British unlike the French laid great importance on the work of missionaries and

¹⁶ Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*.

¹⁷ Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent'.

¹⁸ Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*.

¹⁹ Chamberlain. pp.3-4

²⁰ Chamberlain.

²¹ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*. p.334

²² Ferguson, *Empire*.

²³ Ferguson.

²⁴ Porter, "'Commerce and Christianity': The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan".

missions to spread light into the 'Dark Continent', spreading the 'Word of God' while also introducing Victorian values such as duty, modesty, hard work and proper behaviour. The work of these missionaries was seen as an essential precondition to co-operation with Africans for the greater good, whether by trade, or colonisation.²⁵ Missionaries, however, did often unintentionally promote the view of the dark and 'savage' continent', often in order to further justify their presence and secure funding from their benefactors, while rationalising unexpectedly slow progress.²⁶ Yet it is important to consider that the British never had any remote intention of assimilating Africans. This drew parallels with the rigid Victorian class system of the time and often extreme racial beliefs. While there was a nominal respect and tolerance for local custom, tradition and religion, there was also the deliberate separation and detachment of the colonial authorities from the natives. Africans were not expected to develop along on the same lines as the British, instead developing along their own institutions, if possible, with minimal interference from the British.²⁷

The French sense of ideological superiority stemmed from their belief in their culture in general, but in particular from their republican ideals and values.²⁸ This is what would largely separate them from Africans. The French were driven by the belief in the ideals of the Revolution of 1789, with the confidence that these revolutionary ideas were universal and had an obligation to be carried beyond her borders to all of mankind. In contrast to the British approach of cursory tolerance and respect for the local customs, language and culture, the French liberal and republican approach led to an outward rejection of 'backward' African culture and institutions. There was the belief that Africans at the time were too primitive to rule themselves yet were capable of being uplifted along the economic political and cultural lines of France.²⁹ The belief in the limited capacity of native Africans and the superiority of the universal republican values, scientific method and efficient administration would ultimately form the basis of French advocacy for their 'mission civilisatrice', embodied in the ideas of 'assimilation' and 'association'. Where possible, 'assimilation' would be the enacted, the process whereby the African would develop along a centralised system and French lines to become French. However, what constituted becoming French was a highly contentious issue and was never fully defined, remaining largely ambiguous. Where this could not be enacted, 'association' would be the preferred model of choice, involving the evolution of the African along his own lines, while more gradually accepting French ideas and values. Consequently, an African who had accepted French liberal ideas, abandoning his previously 'savage' way of life, had in theory the opportunity to become a French citizen. Along with the commercial and moral progress it was also seen as necessary to resist and eradicate corrupt and undemocratic tyranny in the form of pre-colonial chiefs who they saw as parallels to the French monarchy. Liberal republicans also had a deep mistrust of arbitrary and clerical institutions, especially towards missionaries, and, although French missionaries did exist, British missionaries were far better funded, centrally and privately and were more widespread.³⁰ However, for all French rhetoric of its liberal republican values and theories of 'assimilation' and 'association', in reality, neither were ever really pursued on the ground and remained more of a façade to French colonial rule.³¹

²⁵ Porter.

²⁶ Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent'.

²⁷ Njoh, 'Colonial Philosophies, Urban Space, and Racial Segregation in British and French Colonial Africa'.

²⁸ Conklin, 'Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914'.

²⁹ Lewis, 'One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy'.

³⁰ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

³¹ Lewis, 'One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy'.

Colonial Policy and Reality

Aims, attitudes and ideology did have important effects on theories and the initial approach to colonial policy. While the British were predominately focused on trade with a minimalist approach, the French were after a more ambitious target of creating something of a formal grand empire, with measures such as ‘assimilation’ and ‘association’ pursued until 1914 and 1940 respectively.³² One would, as such expect the reality of policy as many historians have done, to be one of polar opposites. The French would impose a system of ‘direct rule’ with a closely controlled and well-funded regime with ambitious targets, while the British would impose ‘indirect rule’ with a ‘night watchmen state’ including minimal spending and responsibility.³³ However, if one looks under the surface it is clear to see that their colonial policies were, in reality much more similar than one might expect. It is more plausible to argue that although the systems were different in kind, they only resulted in limited differences on the ground.³⁴ This can be attributed largely to the French failure to deliver on its more impressive colonial justifications and aims, who in reality often spent even less than the British, who themselves had no illusions of the minimalist approach they enacted. Ultimately the mutual resemblance stemmed from the lack of funding and investment, coupled with the expectation of the colony to be self-sufficient and a provider for the coloniser. Therefore, in comparing colonial realities, the differences become rather more unclear.

French policy in West Africa was largely based upon the colonial system imposed on the colony of Algeria after its conquest from 1830-57. The French like in Algeria believed that West Africa and its inhabitants did not know civilisation and needed to be civilised. Similarly, West Africa like Algeria was a vast expanse, with land not easily exploitable and a population that could not be intimidated or ignored. In order to enlighten the population West Africa would become embedded in French civilisation through ‘assimilation’ and ‘association’ with the improvement of living conditions and the emancipation from tyranny of pre-colonial feudal masters.³⁵ British policy in West Africa was largely based on what was to become known as Fredrick Lugard’s Dual Mandate of 1922. This ‘indirect’ approach included the mandate to the people, promoting trusteeship welfare and the advancement of the colonial people along with the mandate to the rest of the world to develop Africa’s resources making them available for use. This ultimately meant rule maintained at a minimal cost, with the delegation of power to local powers and institutions, retaining merely the essentials of authority.³⁶

The administrative structure and relationship with existing institutions seemed to be polar opposites between the British and French, yet in reality they shared more similarities than differences. Theoretically British ‘indirect rule’ involved the delegation of responsibility and power to pre-existing or newly appointed complaint systems of governance. This was firstly

³² Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

³³ Cogneau, Dupraz, and Mesple-Somps, ‘Public Finances in Colonial West Africa: British and French Compared’.

³⁴ Frankema and van Waijenburg, ‘Metropolitan blueprints of colonial taxation? Lessons from fiscal capacity building in British and French Africa, c. 1880-1940’.

³⁵ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

³⁶ Ferguson, *Empire*.

and arguably only ever really carried out in the northern territories of Nigeria, where for almost the entire period nearly all responsibility was delegated. In these indirectly ruled states, the emir or chief's role was the collection of taxes with the maintenance of law and order. Seen as an effective method of governance it was soon imposed to various degrees within other parts of British West Africa. Synonymous with the delegation of responsibility of authority was the nominal respect of African culture, traditions and language which was often encouraged more than the adoption of British culture. British district officers were also encouraged to learn at least one local language. Nevertheless, there was a limit of tolerance and the colonial administration did have the power to put an end to practices deemed 'antisocial' or 'against the public good', which was deliberately left ambiguous. There was also the insistence on suppression of the slave trade, substitution of equitable tax systems for arbitrary impositions commonly practiced and the abolition of cruel punishments.³⁷ In contrast, French 'direct rule', under the federal system of the AOF, established in 1895 aimed to achieve something very different. French colonial policy would largely come from the capital, Dakar and without if possible, any interference or meddling from local authorities. Pre-colonial forms of power such as chiefs and emirs were largely suppressed, with their positions becoming mere figureheads, seen as feudal, despotic and deeply corrupt.³⁸ These colonial mouthpieces would often be made scapegoats for unpopular policies such as the 'corvée de prestation' (forced labour) or direct taxes. Moral and material progress it was believed could only be achieved through the removal of these existing, feudal systems of governance. Unlike the British where the District officer would be on more equal terms with the chief, the Commandant de Cercle was entirely superior and held powers of dismissal.³⁹ This eradication of pre-colonial forms of governance was most prominent under Governor General William Ponty (1908-1914), and although some nominal powers were preserved in the following period, in reality traditional chiefs had no more power than previously.⁴⁰

However, both the British and especially the French, contrary to their ideals, could not always translate these theories of policy into reality. One important reason was the extent to which the colonial powers had to rely on co-operation with native intermediaries in the form of translators, agents and pre-colonial forms of power in order to maintain some sort of hegemony and order in the region. British and French personnel in West Africa, of which a large number usually remained in the metropole by 1940 numbered only 40,000 including women, children and family members.⁴¹ The British and French administration were thus severely understaffed and under-equipped to rule over a combined population of over 30 million and out of a matter of necessity, the majority of tasks on the ground had to be run by these often unknown but often very powerful native agents of the administration.⁴² This is something often overlooked, yet very significant as these translators, agents and middlemen of all nature could use the ignorance and unfamiliarity of the colonial authorities to their advantage. Often the lack of restraint, checks and balances also led to abuses of power both in British and French territories. It was not uncommon for colonial officials to co-operate with local authorities and chiefs for corrupt and scandalous purposes including acquisitions

³⁷ Whittlesey, 'British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa'.

³⁸ Conklin, 'Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914'.

³⁹ Crowder, 'Indirect Rule—French and British Style'.

⁴⁰ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

⁴¹ Whittlesey, 'British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa'. p.367

⁴² Osborne, "'Circle of Iron": African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa'.

of property, slaves and wives. This without doubt was happening on a large scale as, for example nearly a third of prisoners during the 1890s in the AOF were former employees of the state, imprisoned for abuses of power.⁴³ Although the impression is given that French chiefs were slaves of the administration while British emirs chiefs were autonomous and could do what they pleased, this is ultimately misleading. Like under the French, chiefs under British rule were also absolutely reliant on their power from their superiors, the colonial authorities and could be dismissed at any point such as for poor governance or a lack of loyalty. Chiefs and emirs were also used by both the British, and not only the French in many instances to carry out unpopular schemes such as forced labour, and direct taxes.⁴⁴

The different ideological approach to education, healthcare and citizenship also promised very different results, yet in reality ended up delivering similar outcomes. It is implied that the British, at least initially did not place much emphasis in this area for little of significance is mentioned in early official documents. The French, however, considered these areas for development as a central part of their ‘mission civilisatrice’.⁴⁵ Healthcare and science were seen as an essential condition for the uplifting of Africans, helping them to abandon backward and regressive beliefs, traditions and systems of governance. Education was particularly stressed in importance, seen as one of the first steps to naturalizing the African and adopting the French language culture and republican values. Perceived African attributes of laziness, lavishness and vanity were replaced by conscience, duty, respect and an understanding of private property. The final stage of any African in his journey was citizenship. Staying true to their republican and liberal values, citizenship could be granted to any African, provided that they could demonstrate: West African birth and residence, a position in the colonial administration, knowledge of French, good financial standing and moral rectitude, no criminal record, no history of bankruptcy and, most importantly a devotion to the ideals of republican France.⁴⁶ Introducing these three areas of policy however were by no means straightforward, considering problems with introducing western concepts to native populations as well as the chronic lack of funding. It is therefore not surprising that not just with citizenship, but with education and healthcare results were markedly underwhelming compared to their stated objectives.

Surprisingly the British, except for citizenship which was not offered almost certainly made more progress with regards to education and healthcare. Medically, some substantial improvements had been made. For example, recorded infant mortality rates decreased from 300 per 1000 from 1910-20 to 100 per 1000 from 1940-50 in both territories.⁴⁷ However, other ambitious attempts such as the French pursuit to eradicate malaria in the AOF were unsurprisingly unsuccessful.⁴⁸ Lack of significant improvement largely lay in the lack of personnel, both French and British. For example, there were only 100 French doctors in 1912 and only 188 in 1930 in the AOF, and even including a far larger number of African auxiliaries this number was astonishingly low considering a population of around 15 million by 1940.⁴⁹ Though figures are hard to obtain on the British side it is probable that they would be similar in number if not slightly higher. French educational figures were also

⁴³ Osborne. p.42

⁴⁴ Crowder, ‘Indirect Rule—French and British Style’.

⁴⁵ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

⁴⁶ Conklin.

⁴⁷ Monga and Lin, ‘The Economics of Colonialism in Africa’. p.14

⁴⁸ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

⁴⁹ Conklin. pp.70 and 222

unimpressively low with only 62,000 primary school children attending schools, a figure surpassed by the combination of British state schools but primarily the better funded mission schools which had become commonplace.⁵⁰ The French education system was more extensive than that of the British and a few Africans even studied at universities in France. However, unlike in the more basic yet more widespread British system, many French received no education at all. Finally, figures for French citizenship were very small. By 1940 the number of naturalizations in the AOF stood at just 80,000 calling in to question whether Africans were ever intended to become French citizens.^{51 52} As Conklin points out, “the same system could not by definition produce French speaking interpreters and clerks and efficient peasant farmers; nor could it simultaneously introduce the French language and even a limited knowledge of French instruction; and prevent Africans from aspiring to equality with the coloniser”.⁵³ It would thus be more conceivable to suggest that in the minds of the colonial administrators, Africans would remain as ‘sujets’, assuming the role of an ‘homme d’utile’ with the same duties, but not the rights of a citizen, still under the control of the repressive ‘code d’indigénat’.⁵⁴ Although, French policy was in theory, far more extensive and ambitious than that of the British in areas of health, education and citizenship, their results were ultimately equivalent if not inferior.

An insight into the differences between British and French rule can also be gained by comparing colonial revenue and spending, for these may give the best illustration of the implementation of policy in practice. One would expect the French to spend far more, focusing on a more developmental manner, in accordance with the ‘mission civilisatrice’. Surprisingly colonial revenues and spending of the British are equal, if not higher than of the French.⁵⁵ This clearly turns the notion of British ‘indirect rule’ and French ‘direct rule’ on its head. Admittedly, there were considerable differences in tax collection. The British gained up to 70% of their revenue from indirect taxes in the form of custom and import duties, which was easy to manage and enforce while keeping state-societal conflicts to a minimum. Taxation was largely confined, therefore to areas of commercial activity, and the Government of the Gold even refused to levy direct taxes. The French however, probably due to the region’s comparatively smaller wealth and weaker commercial activity, turned to direct taxes relying for 70% of revenue in this way. This was often met with resistance from local inhabitants and collection was consequently more problematic.⁵⁶

However surprisingly, considering that British involvements were at first more reluctant, direct investments into British colonies were greater than to French colonies with (in £1913) £4.80 per head in British territories compared to £3.30 in the AOF by 1940.⁵⁷ Perhaps this can be explained by British investment being more commercially orientated, however it pours cold water on the assumption that there would be more investment in French than British

⁵⁰ Gardinier, ‘The impact of French education on Africa 1817-1960’. p.77

⁵¹ Conklin, ‘Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914’. p.439

⁵² Mann, ‘What Was the “Indigénat”? The “Empire of Law” in French West Africa’.

⁵³ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*. p.139

⁵⁴ Asiwaju, ‘Control Through Coercion; A Study of the Indigénat Regime in French West African Administration, 1887-1946’.

⁵⁵ Cogneau, Dupraz, and Mesple-Soms, ‘Public Finances in Colonial West Africa: British and French Compared’.

⁵⁶ Frankema and van Waijenburg, ‘Metropolitan blueprints of colonial taxation? Lessons from fiscal capacity building in British and French Africa, c. 1880-1940’. p.388

⁵⁷ Monga and Lin, ‘The Economics of Colonialism in Africa’. p.8

colonies. In terms of colonial government spending, results are similar, yet if one takes out Nigeria from the equation which was arguably the only really orthodox 'indirectly' ruled British colony, British figures for spending are in fact often higher than French colonies. Furthermore, the figures suggest that the differences within the respective colonial systems were more significant than the differences between them. This also gives weight to the idea that 'direct' and 'indirect' methods of rule would have been employed, not only in British colonies but in the AOF as well. Government spending in 1925 (in £1913) at £1.30 in the Gold Coast far exceeded the £0.25 of Nigeria while the extraordinary difference in gross public revenue for Senegal at £1.08 and Niger at £.0.05 gives strong evidence to this claim.⁵⁸ Distribution of expenditure also held more similarities than differences. Proportions of spending were both relatively similar, sharing 40% of expenditure on infrastructure, 25% on administration, 10% on production support and 5% on security. Interestingly British spending proportions for education and health were marginally higher than the French, standing in contrast to initial British and French ambitions by 1940. British proportions for spending stood at around 6% for education and 8% for healthcare by 1940 while French stood at 4% and 7% respectively.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, British and French colonialism seemed from the outset to be opposites, if not very different, clearly demonstrated by their original motives for colonisation. The British transformation from informal to formal empire was reluctant, in fact reactive and defensive, in order to protect markets and interests in the region. The French, by contrast were much more proactive in seeking to carve out a grand West African Empire; exploiting its perceived riches while spreading its vision of civilisation.

Although both the British and French judged African society as 'backward', 'barbarian' and 'in need of uplifting' there were considerable difference in how this would be achieved. The British attempted to achieve this through the eradication of slavery and adoption of Victorian ideals: law and order, commerce and Christianity, using missionaries whilst maintaining nominal respect for African traditions and customs. Coupled with a sense of detachment this naturally led to ideas of minimal interference and intervention culminating in Lugard's Dual Mandate of 1922, outlining 'indirect rule' and the expectation of the development of African society strictly along African lines. Commercial interest would also take precedence, supporting the model of a 'night watchmen state'. The French on the other hand, believed firmly in their liberal republican principles of the 'mission civilisatrice', with the duty to uplift Africans by imposing these principles. Culture more than race was deemed unacceptable and ultimately could not be tolerated. Instead Africans would develop along French lines culturally, economically, cultural and politically ultimately becoming an 'evolué' or Frenchmen, taking the forms of 'assimilatory' and 'associatory' policies. Although what constituted becoming a Frenchmen remained ambiguous, undoubtedly developmental and interventionist styles of governance were required, including large scale spending on infrastructure, education, healthcare and welfare.

Interestingly and significantly, however, these distinctly different British and French visions on how these colonies should be run did not sufficiently translate into large differences in

⁵⁸ Frankema, 'Colonial Taxation and Government Spending in British Africa, 1880–1940'. pp.35-36

⁵⁹ Frankema. pp.35-36

policy on the ground. Both the British and the French ultimately had to rely mainly on the use of intermediaries in the administration in order maintain control, for there were simply not enough colonial administrators and resources needed to carry out all required functions of the colonies. The French for all their dislike of local customs realised that emancipatory measures were unrealistic and problematic. Health and education although stressed by the French as essential areas for development, were often overlooked and were performed better by the British who subsidised mission schools and hospitals. The pursuit for assimilation through French citizenship, stressed as the ultimate goal and the last stage of development should also ultimately be classed as unsuccessful, as the French responsibility in making Frenchmen correlated to only a very small number of Africans becoming naturalised. Colonial revenue and spending too gives us a clear demonstration that British and French spending was remarkably similar, and often surprisingly higher in British colonies; these including developmental infrastructure such as schools and healthcare.

Clearly therefore, British and French colonialism had more in common than in difference. One could argue that British policy was more or less consistent with its original aims and attitudes, with the indirect improvement of lives of Africans and the maintenance of a minimal state, required to facilitate the continuation of trade. The French policy intentionally or unintentionally did not or could carry out the highly ambitious aspirations of the 'mission civilisatrice' which, considering the lack of resources given to achieve such a task was understandable, resulting in a well-meaning and genuinely believed façade for French rule.⁶⁰

Although colonial motives and attitudes were very different at the outset, both the British and the French in reality suffered from an absence of investment and funding needed to promote real development in the colonies. Ultimately, both powers settled on the strategy of maintaining the colonies as self-sufficient and as beneficial to the coloniser as possible. It is therefore remarkable yet in many ways not really so surprising that that British and French colonial policy and administration by 1940 had become in practice broadly similar, sharing more aspects in common than in difference.

⁶⁰ Lewis, 'One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy'. Lewis remarks that while there was an "undeniable moral grandeur" in these republican ideals, critically "What was wrong with assimilation was not that it was illogical, unrealistic, or impossible, but rather that no serious effort was ever made to carry it out". p.29

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