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Cecil Rhodes: From Bread-and-Butter Question to Precursor of Racial Colonialism and Apartheid in South Africa

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Abstract

This study is an exposition of how Cecil John Rhodes, a British investor, colonial statesman and administrator advanced from his thesis of 'bread butter question' to become a pillar of colonial adventurism in South Africa. The Study adopts historical method and depends solely on secondary sources of data which include scholarly textbooks, journal articles, official reports, workshop papers as well as internet sources. The finding is presented qualitatively and analyzed using content analysis technique. The study argues that the racial inclination of Rhodes was a major push factor for transiting from his initial 'bread and butter' justification for British colonial imperialism to the conception that the British being a superior race have the mandate to subordinate and civilize the Black African race. It was this same racial superiority complex that prompted Rhodes to see in Africa, as an inferior race to conquer and subordinate prompting him to unleash one of the most brutal violent colonial campaigns of subjugation of South Africa which was funded with the wealth from his large gold mines and firms in South Africa. The study further revealed that Rhodes in connivance with the British government colonized South Africa and substantial part of Southern Africa economically, socially and politically while laying a strong foundation upon which the apartheid regime thrived.

Keywords: Bread-and Butter Question, Precursor, Racial Colonialism, Apartheid, Imperialism.

Introduction

Cecil Rhodes is a principal protagonist in colonial imperialism who played a leading role in colonial exploitation of South Africa in what is presently known as South Africa and Zimbabwe. As an investor and businessman acquired a gold company known as the Beers, obtained a British Royal Charter, established the British South African Company (BSAC). As a colonial administrator, Rhodes became a Member of Parliament and Prime Minister and later colonized Zimbabwe.¹

Rhodes came to South Africa on a visit to his brother, Herbert in Natal during his post high school period upon the belief that his migration to Africa presents better business opportunities than staying back in England. As expected, he had good returns from his Kimberly diamond diggings investment of three thousand pounds which he borrowed from his aunt. He became an astute businessman growing De Beers Mining Company and later, the British South Africa Company. Rhodes had established big business and flourishing ventures in South Africa to the extent that even when he left for further studies in England, he still returned to further his business and colonial interests in South Africa.²

When he left the diamond fields in 1873 for Oriel College in Oxford, Rhodes still had the orientation of “bread and butter” as justification for British colonial imperialism, but since after his enrolment and graduation from Oxford, Rhodes returned a changed personality and orientation. His justification for colonial imperialism changed to the notion that the main *raison d’être* for the British adventure in Africa was to bring civilization to a dark continent occupied by inferior race. It is a puzzle that Rhodes who came to Africa to better his lot turned round to engage in brutal colonial onslaught against the very place and people that not only provided him with succour, but brought him to fame as one of the greatest merchants and colonial administrators of his time. There were suppositions that Rhodes’ latest view, and justification and inclination towards racially-oriented brutal colonialism became strong when he met and associated himself with scholars like John Ruskin, Rochefort Maguire, and Charles Metcalfe, who greatly influenced his British hegemonic ideology.³ To this end, the study aims at unraveling the underlying reasons for the shift in orientation of Rhodes from survivalist approach to British colonial adventure in South Africa to that of racial, hegemonic and horrendous

approach, which saw to the brutalization of the people and forced labour in the South African colony.⁴ For proper exposition of the subject matter, the following themes are discussed: concept of colonial imperialism; theoretical framework; the humble beginning of Cecil Rhodes; a recap of his bread-and-butter question; his racial supremacist influence and new justification for colonial imperialism; Rhodes' expeditious conquest and colonization of Southern Africa; setting the stage apartheid policies in South Africa and concluding remarks.

Concept of Colonial Imperialism

Whereas imperialism denotes an all encompassing and wide range economic, social and political influence, domination, subordination and imposition of the will, whims and caprices of a stronger nation over the weaker countries. Colonialism in the chain of imperialism is, but a stage in the history of imperialism, which involves direct territorial, political, economic and social control of the colonized people by colonizing state by establishing colonies.⁵ From the foregoing, colonialism emerged as a subset of imperialism going by its trajectory. In colonial imperialism, there is a marked physical occupation of overseas territories

and visible extension of power and dominance over the colonized people. Thus, the establishment of colonies provides tangible geopolitical benefits, which includes: access to vital resources, military bases and trade routes. These colonial territories were acquired to serve the economic and military interests of the colonizing state. In the process of pursuing its economic interests and benefits, the colonial state also pursues the policy of reordering the social fabrics, belief system and cultural practices of the colonized people. This often leads to imposition of tangible religious and social norms of the invading colonial powers, which ultimately denigrates and obliterate the socio-cultural and political structures of the colonized people.⁶

For Africa, there are three significant stages of imperialism: trade imperialism, colonial imperialism and neo-colonial imperialism, which is the latest stage. At the first stage, imperialist interest was limited to trade domination spanning trade in goods, human and cash crops imperialism following the end of the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade with slave trade. At this stage, the Europeans did not show interest in expanding their sphere of influence so far African rulers in the coastal areas were ready to supply slaves

from the interior (as long as European traders were at first not interested in expanding into the interior of Africa.⁷ The second stage was the colonial imperialism which was precipitated by the stiff competition amongst the European countries, high demand for agricultural and other primary products. In the case of South African colony, it involved settler colonialism whereby the Europeans settled many of its citizens in the colony.⁸ The last stage represents the ephemeral flag independence but indirect political and economic control of the erstwhile colonies through the established structures such as the local elites, multinational cum transnational corporations, the Bretton Woods institutions, World Trade Organizations, foreign aid and the likes. This explains why Kwameh Nkrumah described it as the last stage of imperialism characterized by nominal independence without real economic autonomy⁹ as exemplified by the post-apartheid South Africa where both the metropole and the white settlers are still in control of the economy.

Theoretical Framework: Dependency Theory

The Dependency theory was propounded in the 1960s as an antithesis to the

Modernization theory of colonial imperialism. Modernization theory refers a body of theory that assumed prominence between the 1950s and 1960s with a focus on how the poorer countries could develop by following the trajectory or uniform trail of development of the advanced capitalist countries.¹⁰ A prominent proponent of the theory, W.W. Rostow proposed that all societies who must modernize must pass through five stages in the sequence of drive towards development: traditional society, precondition to take-off stage, take-off stage, drive to maturity, and age of high mass consumption.¹¹ Modernization theorists also argue that obstacles to development are embedded in internal factors, which when removed and embrace western-oriented processes, the developing countries would modernize.

The Dependency theory on the contrary, takes a North-South relational view and associates the underdevelopment of the developing countries to the skewed and exploitative relationship between the two, which tilts against the latter. Also referred to as the Dependistas, they assert that the difficulties in development are solely caused by internal (endogenous) factors of the countries or region in question, but as a result

of external structures imposed by the developed onto the less developed.¹²

Raul Prebisch laid the foundation for Dependency Theory in the late 1950s while serving as the Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America¹³ which was amplified by Andre Gunder Frank who in response to the Modernization theory propounded his Dependency theory having observed that the world's nations have been divided into a dominant core of wealthy nations and the satellite poor nations whose key role in the system is to provide cheap labour and raw materials to the core. Furthermore, the benefits accruing from this skewed relationship go almost entirely to the rich nations making them progressively richer and more developed, leaving the poor nations impoverished, having drained away surplus resources to the core countries.¹⁴ Other key proponents of Dependency theory emanating mainly from Latin America and Africa include: World System theorist's Immanuel Wallerstein, Herique Cardoso, Paul Baran, Daniel Offiong, Walter Rodney, Theotonio Dos Santos, Osvaldo Sunkel, Franz Fanon, Samir Amin etc.

Sunkel, Santos, Dingson, Bruce and Harvey. are in agreement that colonial imperialism has created two distinct economic classes in

the world economy viz-a-viz the developed North, and the underdeveloped South, the wealthy and poor countries whereby the poor states are not only impoverished, but are structured to be economically dependent on the rich states, hence creating a relationship of dependency and not interdependency leaving the dependent states with some appellations such as Third World, South, Periphery, Underdeveloped and less developed part of the world.¹⁵ From the foregoing, this relationship has created a historical chain of the tripartite imperialism: trade imperialism, colonial imperialism and neo-colonialism, unleashing underdevelopment in these poor countries.¹⁶

The Dependency theory is best suited for this study in that it vividly explains the colonial imperialism in South Africa. Cecil Rhodes's initial justification for colonial imperialism in South Africa is in tandem with the concerns raised by the Dependency theorists. Prior to the supremacy and hegemonic mentality of Rhodes, his confession was that the colonial imperialism was borne out of "bread and butter" question and the bid to avert an imminent civil war in London. This expresses how Rhodes left England for South Africa as a mere high school leaver with little or no funds to become not just a wealthy merchant

and industrialist in South Africa, but was also one of the most influential British colonial imperialists whose wealth aided to prosecute costly wars of conquest and domination of the entire Black Southern Africa. While he and other British imperialists became wealthier from the mines of South Africa, the aborigines became impoverished. Rhodes prodded the building of British Empire of South Africa while under-developing the people, thereby justifying the Dependency theory's dictum of the "development of under-development" as expressed by Frank.¹⁷ The Dependency theory's notion of core-satellite, centre-periphery were all-embracing in South African situation, because the settler European people created within South Africa, developed economic areas (representing the core) and leaving the rest of the areas inhabited by the Blacks underdeveloped (representing the satellite)¹⁸ perpetuated through dual laws and policies which latter metamorphosed to apartheid policy.

The Humble Beginning of Cecil Rhodes

Cecil Rhodes was born in England on 5th July, 1853 and his father was the vicar of Bishop's Stortford. His father could afford to train two of his sons to Elton College and Winchester College respectively, however he

sent Cecil, his third son to local grammar school due to a weakness of the lungs. Thus, instead of sending him to the university, his family decided that the best option was to join his brother Herbert in Natal, South Africa in 1870 due mainly to the beneficial effects of a sea voyage and a better climate in South Africa. The young Rhodes who was just 17 years when he arrived South Africa on 1 September 1870 to join his brother who worked on a cotton farm, believed the business opportunities in his new settlement would be more promising. When diamond became the reigning business after a long work in cotton fields, Rhodes and the brother moved to Kimberly in 1871, which at the time was the centre of mining in Natal. Even when his brother left, Rhodes remained in Kimberly out of sheer determination.¹⁹ where he later flourished.²⁰

Little by little, Rhodes rose from the background of a diamond speculator to category of persons with ideas that would rule the diamond industry, which he began by partnering with C.D. Rudd to form De Beers Mining Company in 1880. When he eventually met with the German Alfred Beit, the latter helped him (Rhodes) to expand his sphere of influence to the extent that he brought all the De Beers mines under his

control. De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., later acquired Kimberley's assets for more than £5 million (\$25 million), as a kind of compensation to the aggrieved shareholders. As time went on, Rhodes took control of other lesser mines and by 1891 De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., owned 90 percent of the world's production of diamonds. In addition to that, Rhodes gained a large stake in the Transvaal gold mines, after which he established the Gold Fields of South Africa Company in 1887. The two major companies owned by Rhodes's enshrined in their articles of association provisions that allow them to finance northward expansion schemes.²¹ This was how Rhodes, typical of European imperialists, came to South Africa as a mere high school leaver with little funds to do business, bought up enormous plots to emerge one of the largest diamond producers, monopolizing production where he must have raised funds to commence and complete his degree at Oriel College, Oxford.²² In fact, he became so wealthy and a very influential figure in South Africa and home country, Britain. Little wonder, van Waarden and Leuven²³ portrays an image of a "a self-made man" from a modest background that was migrated to Africa due to ill health, where he prospered from diamond and gold mining.

The above explains why Rhodes was initially honest on why the British embarked on the imperialist mission, which was a question of bread and butter. His declaration before his journalist friend, W.T. Stead said it all on the real motif of British imperialism in Africa which was to solve the immanent social and economic downturn in Britain as reported in Lenin²⁴ (1916; 1950) and cited in many other sources, thus:

I was in the East End of London (a working-class quarter) yesterday and attended a meeting of the unemployed. I listened to the wild speeches, which were just a cry for 'bread! Bread!' and on my way home I pondered over the scene and I became more than ever convinced of the importance of imperialism ... My cherished idea is a solution for the social problem, i.e., in order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesman must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread-and-butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists.²⁴

The above as confirmed by Chamberlain express the intertwining relationship between imperialism and 'the social question' at home.²⁵ In the real sense, the British, Rhodes in particular came to South Africa to better himself due to the economic gloom and spike of the 1870s in Britain.

Racial Supremacist Influence and Rhodes's New Justification for Colonial Imperialism

In what could be termed Cecil Rhodes' years of innocence soon gave way for racial inclination in the process of time, especially on his return from England after his studies coupled with his new found capitalist wealth and orientation. As observed by Hilton,²⁶ once Rhodes began to consolidate his control of the diamond fields at Kimberly, he found time to take a degree course in Classics at Oriel College, Oxford. He went on to assert that Rhodes education in Classics and persistent interest in Ancient History played a significant role in shaping his later imperialist propositions and ideals as well as the role he played in the colonial pillaging of South Africa.

Rhodes was partly influenced by the works of Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, and Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman*

Empire which he read in his spare time while in the diamonds field.²⁷ At Oxford, Rhodes was highly influenced by John Ruskin's inaugural lecture, which reinforced his own attachment to the cause of British imperialism. Ruskin's lecture projected a strong justification for empire, referred to as "Imperial Duty".²⁸ Rhodes also embraced the idea of creating a 'secret society' of British men that could lead the world, and extend their tentacles across all corners of the globe with the spirit of the Englishman,²⁹ confessing his imperial vision of the British-ordained superior race and God-given or manifest destiny to rule with disdain, subjects of British colony. The Rhodes' reflection of Eurocentric imperialism ideology of the Anglo-Saxon superior (or the Whiteman as the "first race") to other races epitomizes the nineteenth-century accession to Social Darwinism which is embedded in evolutionary theory of natural selection and the superiority of the white race over people of colour.³⁰ This erroneous belief in the superiority of the white people became Rhodes' utility instrument to rationalize the colonization of South Africa as well as perpetuate systemic racism against its aborigines.

It was based on these ideals that Rhodes envisaged a British Empire of “a ribbon of red, demarcating British territory, which would cross the whole of Africa, from South Africa to Egypt”, which includes dream of constructing a Cape to Cairo railway.³¹

Rhodes’s Expeditious Conquest and Colonization of Southern Africa

Armed with the new orientation of racialized form of imperialism and fallacious motif of civilizing mission of the imperialists to inferior and uncivilized African race, Rhodes became a “standard racist” projecting the notion that bringing black Africans under British colonial rule is the best for the former.³² Having created the myth of racial superiority which served to justify his aggressive pursuit of material wealth, national glory in ruthless and reckless as well as callous disregard for the aboriginal Africans whom he perceived to be lesser humans;³³ Rhodes effectively deployed a very harsh, but racially-oriented labour system through which he created huge supply of labourers for his gold mine out of the natives he had rendered landless.³⁴ Flint painted a proper picture of Rhodes colonial aggressiveness that created the economic base of apartheid.³⁵

As an astute imperialist, he delved into politics in 1881 and stood for an election to the parliament of the Cape Colony and became a Member of Parliament in the Cape Colony.³⁶ Between 1890 and 1896, Rhodes became a prime minister of Cape Colony. During his period as prime minister, Rhodes wielded his political power to grab land from black Africans via the Glen Grey Act as well as hiking the financial requirement for voting under the Franchise and Ballot Act from a relatively low £25 to a whopping £75 thereby inhibiting the black from participating in elections.³⁷ As part of his reckless actions, Rhodes connived with Dr. James Raid to secretly invade the Transvaal Republic in December 1895. However, this action which was unauthorized contributed to his political downfall. As the action went amiss, he was forced to step down as prime minister. Whereas, the intent of “Jameson Raid” was to relieve the English community of Johannesburg of their plight and quicken the creation of a South African Federation, on the contrary, it compounded the tensions that led to the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), four years after.³⁸

The height of brutal colonization was exhibited by Rhodes in his quest to extend his

sphere of influence north towards Matabeleland and Mashonaland, in present day Zimbabwe through the British South African Company (BSAC) which was incorporated on October 29, 1889 by a royal charter. The BSAC was authorized to create its own political administration coupled with a paramilitary support in order to protect settlers from the locals, because it was not meant to depend on taxpayers' funds.³⁹

Cecil Rhodes was able to convince the British Government to grant BSAC the charter to expand northwards in order to achieve his imperialist goals. A major means of achieving the above feat was by extensive exploitation of African labour essentially through the application of hut taxes, which required Africans to look for wages.⁴⁰ Armed with the British Government charter Rhodes and his cohorts decided that both Matabeleland and Mashonaland were under their control and should be subdued to avert obstruction to his plans of extending the British Empire. However, when Rhodes received the news that Lobengula would not put up any opposition to his entry into Matabele and Mashonaland, he called off the planned attack.⁴¹ On 13 September 1890, Rhodes's BSAC carried out another invasion, though without resistance and occupied

Mashonaland and settled at Salisbury, present day Harare, hoisting the Union Jack as a mark of a British territory. However, in 1893, the BSAC eventually clashed with the Ndebele leading to the brutal killing of thousands of the Ndebele Impis and Lobengula's escape after burning down of his capital having found out that he could not face the war which Rhodes sponsored with £66, 000, sophisticated weapons and mercenaries. These conquered territories were named Southern and Northern Rhodesia in honour of Rhodes, which are presently named Zimbabwe and Zambia.⁴²

Scholars described the ferocity and brutal manner of Rhodes' wars of occupation as use of extreme violence, looting, outright negligence of international standards of warfare, utilization of collective reprisals on civilians, "scorched earth policies and starvation tactics,"⁴³ savage warfare,⁴⁴ act of 'merciless ferocity' by settler militias,⁴⁵ which resulted in the looting of cattle on a large scale, destruction of grain farms and grain stores and settlements even as the company set up a Loot Committee and set up loot kraals in Bulawayo and elsewhere. For instance, in July 1893, a column of more than 300 from Bulawayo burnt 20 kraals, captured grain and killed a 'considerable' number. It

was further estimated that about 20,000 Africans died, especially in segregated camps, though Bernart presumed that more than 20,000 African died of the military campaign and conquest by BSAC.⁴⁶ Scholars have counted the loss of cattle experienced by Ndebele kingdom looking at estimated number of cattle before and after the invasion of BSAC in 1893. For Ranger, before the BSAC's invasion, Ndebele possessed close to 280, 000 cattle while Sykes (1897) estimated they possessed about 250,000.⁴⁷ After systematic looting by BSAC,⁴⁸ the BSAC retained 33,000 (45 per cent) leaving only 74,000 (55 per cent) for Ndebele natives.⁴⁹

Part of the colonial exploitation of Ndebele people was introduction of taxes and ensuring that these taxes are paid in grain or livestock while labour was also extracted from the people forcefully through punitive measures⁵⁰ such as flogging, burning down villages and confiscating livestock. Besides, the BSAC's siege mentality and racial prejudices prompted them to parcel out Ndebele lands and cattle⁵¹ resulting to grabbing over 1,000 large farms around Bulawayo and restraining the natives from their land. This shrank the natives' status, income and attributes,⁵² food and livestock.⁵³

Setting the Stage for Apartheid Policy

Through the imperialist activities of Rhodes via British South African Company, the native Southern African people were heavily exploited by means of signing dubious treaties with various African chiefs, forced labour, gunboat expeditions, annihilation, forced taxation, forceful expropriation of native land, farm and livestock possessions, obnoxious legislations etc; and these were ingrained in racial prejudice of British superiority and African inferiority laying a strong foundation for the discriminatory apartheid policies in South Africa.⁵⁴ Ostensibly in the construction of apartheid was Rhodes' role in restricting the vote for the Black people in the Cape Colony. Prior to Rhode's incursion the Cape was granted representative self-government in 1853 with a non-racial qualified franchise whereby, all men irrespective of race from the age of 21 and above were eligible to vote provided they occupied a property of a certain value or satisfied a minimum salary structure.⁵⁵ However, Rhodes prodded the administration of then prime minister Sprigg to impose some major limitations to above provision in 1887, and excluded land held in communal or customary tenure from the property qualifications for the franchise, because very

few whites held their land in this manner while most Africans in the Colony fell victim of such land holding. Secondly, Rhodes's brazen racial prejudice saw him throwing his full support to the ill-fated racially inclined Masters and Servants Amendment (Strop) Bill (1890), proposed by the Afrikaner Bond, that would allow flogging of black servants found guilty of breaking contracts.⁵⁶ He also supported racially segregated locations for Africans in Cape Town. At least the pavements remained open in Cape Town, although Africans were barred in 1894 from using them in the new colonial town of Bulawayo, recently founded by Rhodes and Jameson.⁵⁷

Prime minister Rhodes prodded the drafting and passing of the 1892 Cape Franchise and Ballot Act. This new law raised the property qualifications and introduced an educational qualification. This applied to all voters (men only) but had the effect of excluding a higher proportion of black people. The aim was to curtail the black franchise,⁵⁸ which implies promotion of racial disenfranchisement. Again in 1894, Rhodes conceived the Glen Grey Act which was targeted at pattern of landholding for the black population. Referred to as "native act for Africa" by Rhodes which applied only to particular

districts where there is high concentration of black people. The Glen Grey Act also introduced councils that were financed by additional tax on Africans. This could be likened to the foundation laying for the apartheid Bantu Authorities Act (1951) and ingrained national policy of segregated local authority system, which came to its zenith during the apartheid era in South Africa. Again, this ultimately became the foothold for the 1913 Land Act, and the various attempts to create and codify the Bantustans (areas set aside for black people to dwell).⁵⁹ The Glen Grey Act (1894) was also enunciated with a major priority to mobilize African workers to work in European farms and mines in view of labour shortages. Labour tax on every adult African man was imposed as a key mechanism to resolve the labour issue. Though the implementation of the labour tax was short-lived, because Rhodes lost his position soon after it was imposed, however, it laid the foothold for the enactment of a poll tax in 1925 by Hertzog.

Conclusion

The study has in earnest shown how Rhodes transited from a humble beginning and bread and butter question to embrace racial prejudice that saw to his embrace of

modernization perspective of Africa as racially inferior to the superior Western race. This explains why Rhodes championed one of the worst colonial expeditions and administration that laid the foundation for the latter-day apartheid policy. In fact, Rotberg summarized Rhodes's unbridled support for "segregationist" measures without which policies in the Cape could have taken a different turn: he did not only have penchant for advocating restrictions on the black franchise, but was deeply involved in a punitive Strop law, a tax for African men only, mapping out locations for African people in Cape Town, creation of segregated local government system, coercive compounds for black workers, amidst other racially restrictive labour practices under his employment.⁶⁰ All these punitive colonial practices set the pace for the later day apartheid policies in South Africa. It will not be out of place to assert that Cecil Rhodes was the author and founder of apartheid policies in South Africa owing to his racial orientation that was ridden in superiority mentality of the whites as against the perceived inferiority of the blacks. Little wonder he has been revered by his compatriots as colonial statesman.

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