Imperial Britain and Culture Promotion:
an Exception in Europe
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Abstract:

Efforts at controlling both the political and economic fields in British colonial policy were not manifested in the cultural sphere. The latter was mainly left to the missionaries until 1934. The British conception about cultural domination as a means of influence was an exception in Europe. Unlike some other European powers, the British Government did not believe in committing itself directly to a cultural enterprise in the colonies. The British state supported the missionaries in their efforts to impose British values overseas and assisted various governmental and non-governmental institutions such as the Victoria League, West African Students Union and Aggrey House to protect educated colonial students from subversive propaganda which could threaten British imperial interests, after the First World War. Direct and active involvement with culture promotion for influential purposes was not formulated until 1934, when an important cultural organization, the British Council, was created to be officially charged to undertake British cultural relations with foreign countries and to promote British culture overseas, particularly in British spheres of influence.

Keywords : Imperial Britain, Culture - Promotion, Church Monopoly,Laissez- Faire Policy, Education, Colonial Policy.

ملخص:

إن الجهود الجبارة التي بذلت من طرف الاستعمار البريطاني لفرض سيطرته على كل من المجالين السياسي و الاقتصادي في المستعمرات البريطانية لم تسجل في المجال الثقافي الذي ترك للمبشرين إلى غاية فترة ما بين الحربين. لم تكن الحكومة البريطانية لتفرض قيمها الثقافية بطريقة مباشرة لأن ذلك لا يليق بإمبراطورية عظيمة مثل بريطانيا و لكنها ساعدت جمعيات

حكومية و غير حكومية مثل فكتورية ليف، أفري هوس و نقابة طلبة غرب إفريقيا و ذلك لحماية طلبة المستعمرات البريطانية من أي بروباغندا ثقافية أجنبية قد تهدد مصالحها الاستعمارية. بالفعل فإن الاهتمام المباشر بنشر الثقافة للتأثير لم يظهر جليا حتى سنة 1934، حيث أنشأ المركز الثقافي البريطاني ليكون المسؤول الرسمي عن العلاقات الثقافية البريطانية مع الدول الأجنبية لنشر الثقافة البريطانية عبر البحار و خاصة في مناطق التأثير البريطاني.

هدف هذا المقال مناقشة بعض الأسباب التي منعت الحكومة البريطانية من استغلال ثقافتها و السيطرة و كذا بعض الأسباب التي دفعتها إلى الرجوع عن موقفها هذا، الذي طالما كان فريدا من نوعه مقارنة بالقوى الاستعمارية الأوربية الأخرى مثل فرنسا و ألمانيا و إيطاليا.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الإمبراطورية الإنجليزية، نشر الثقافة، احتكار الكنيسة، سياسة دعه يعمل دعه يمر، التعليم، السياسة الاستعمارية،.

Introduction

While Britain's European counterparts, like France for instance, seemed to have always consciously considered the official spread of her culture almost a sacred duty and had for a long time undertaken cultural work, more openly as an important dimension of her colonial and foreign policies, Britain appeared less obsessed with cultural nationalism, left the essential components of her culture – language, literature, the arts, architecture, horticulture, sports – to their advocates. This official decentralized attitude was clearly manifested in British colonies where the promotion of culture was mainly the responsibility of missionaries through religious and educational activities. But, international and internal

developments Britain experienced after the First World War imposed a new attitude. Thus, British officials put an end to their aloofness, entered officially the field of cultural diplomacy.

The objective of the present paper is to discuss the main factors behind British different manifested attitudes towards culture – promotion at a time Britain's European Counterparts like France, Italy, Germany, for instance, were leading developed cultural policies they founded and consolidated during the nineteenth century.

To highlight the peculiarity of the British case, it is interesting to refer to another European power, namely France, the pioneer of the field of cultural diplomacy.

I-Britain/France and Culture Promotion

During the colonial era, to make whole generations speak French, France ignored the national languages and patois of her colonies in her system of education. On the other hand, Britain did not attempt to transform her territories into "English" nations as far as political and social organisation and cultural identity were concerned. Indeed, the British acknowledged the political and social structures which they found upon arrival. They made little attempt at changing the traditions, customs and institutions they met in an authoritarian way. The contrast in attitude between the two approaches may be thus summed up in this analysis of a specific case :

> In Egypt England had an army, the French an idea. England had educational control – France a clear educational philosophy. Because the French did have

such an organised philosophy
and the English did not, the
French pen had proved mightier
than the English sword.[1]

If we want to be less epigrammatic than the author of this passage, we will state that, in a situation of dominance the side that leaves long-lasting impact is not the physically, politically coercitiveone : the one that lures you into accepting its philosophy and way of life (or cultural), not the one that ignores you or forces you to take in or to follow its path. The First induces you to respect him ; the second to fear. Respect lasts ; fear does not.[2]

Indeed, during the colonial era France and Britain had different approaches as regard their policy towards the peoples they had colonised. The major trend practised by France was that of assimilation which advocated 'identity between colony and the mother country though the nature of this identity varied from one exposition to another'.[3] Thus, natives were given French citizenship and achieved metropolitan status. Britain's approach embodied indirect rule which advocated the non-existence of 'identity between such divergent culture as those of Europe and [the colonies]'.[4]Accordingly, the metropolitan power had to rule its subjects through their own institutions, considering these the ones best befitted them.

The British policy of indirect rule was totally different from the French policy of assimilation which led France to develop a conscious and concentrated cultural policy consisting in stamping out local culture and cultivating an elite sharing the political values and education of French elite itself.[5]France pursued a determined policy to spread her language through the setting up of schools with competent teachers trained to promote French political and cultural ideas ; Britain was not enthusiastic at all to use culture

for purposes of influence. Consequently, much of English education overseas was the business of missionaries rather than of the British state :

> While France diffused her language through a network of schools with … teachers, and bestowed recognizably French attitudes of thought with it, Britain built upon autochthonous practices and left much English education to the mission schools.[6]

This British apparent lack of interest in changing the social structures of their colonies as part of a cultural policy is epitomized in the case of 19th century Egypt, already referred to. For instance, the nobles and the Khedives – Ismail, Tewfik … – were symbols of apparent cultural, political and economic independence for the natives. While they closely worked with the British government, the latter adopted an adhoc rather than a systematic policy. It set whatever laws Britain wanted in order to preserve her interests. The Egyptian parliament was changed several times by the Castle – El Kasr as the Egyptians called it when referring to local authority – whenever the British judged that necessary.[7] However, the British colonial policy tended to create conditions in which the division between superior and inferior was not disrupted. For instance, in India the British lived far from the Indians, in different crews, sent their children to different schools, in short led their own life in the provided British conditions away from any conflict with the "natives". Their cultural philosophy involved non-mixing with the natives for this very purpose, though churches spread English throughout the British Empire. The purpose behind such apparently peaceful measure was to facilitate the communication process as well as commercial and economic

links in British dependent territories. What Britain tried to do was to superimpose an efficient and practically "fair model of administration" – according to a well-established phrase – on what they found there.This approach

> involved co-opting Land (and when they did not exist, creating) local leaders to maintain the essential Frame work of order, according to local customary law, leaving the colonial administration free to concentrate on matters of high policies, defence, finance and foreign affairs in particular.[8]

In fact, several patterns were behind this British attitude. What were the factors that favoured this British Government's non-interventionist cultural approach before 1934 ? Could this colonial maintained attitude resist the development both international and colonial circumstances imposed after the First World War ?

II-TheBritish Non-Intervention Attitude in the Cultural Field

The transplantation of the British cultural pattern in the colonial context was hampered by several factors that shaped the British official attitude in the field of foreign cultural policy. Among these, one can cite 'Laissez-faire' policy and Church monopolyover education.

When Britain acquired the African colonies, she acknowledged the social structures found upon arrival, though there was not a complete

acceptance of all the social laws which were mainly derived from religious beliefs, for instance. She accepted relatively the traditions, customs and native institutions. It was partly the 'Laissez-faire' philosophy which prevailed in Britain herself, opposing anygovernment intervention in the economic as well as social affairs, that prevented the British government from supervising the cultural field in general and the educational one in particular, at home as well as inthe Britishcolonies. This, in fact, reinforced the Church's dominance over the cultural and educational fields.

Indeed, the British education in public schools, at home as well as overseas, mainly, in British colonies, was the responsibility of the Church which thought to retain this privilege for a long time. For instance, several attempts towards the introduction of public education in England before the 19th century, financed and controlled by the state, had been opposed by the Church. The 'Laissez- faire' philosophy forced the British Government to occupy a secondary position, giving way to the proliferation of voluntary agencies which owned the majority of the educational institutions. Schools in Britain were, indeed, run by the Church or voluntary agencies which received small grants from the government. The British nation had to wait until 1870 to witness the first concrete answer to the labour's pressure against the Government's indifference towards social affairs.

More important Government involvement in the educational field was registered in 1882, when grants were offered to the mission schools in order to control and supervise the provided education. Indeed, the 1882 Ordinance, provided money to raise the teachers' salaries, to improve the quality of education and to introduce more secular subjects. These imposed patterns were not always agreed by the mission because they feared that this government's interference in their teaching would be a first step towards the secularisation of their schools. The missionaries' attitude would have delayed the growth of education as their primary goal was restricted to the learning of the Bible and the spiritual development of their converts while working in the

colonies. However, Labour's pressure to obtain more governmental involvement in social and educational affairs was not to diminish throughout the following decades, but to increase as their advocates became stronger and acquired more experience to lead their struggle.

At the colonial level, no one could deny that in most British colonies the educational work was begun, and for many years supervised, almost and entirely by missionary efforts. The mission schools became largely financed by the colonial governments which also provided the inspectorate for maintaining academic standards. The governments had also provided a certain number of schools, mainly secondary and technical ones. Yet, the establishment of government schools here and there didn't mean a commitment of the British government in natives' education. There was not any definite educational policy. In fact, the colonies were expected to be self-supporting and education was considered as a heavy expense.

The economic interest of the British government required clerical staff to fill its posts, but, on the other hand, was not ready to spend money on education. Such a contradiction remained a source of worry since the demand remained greater than supply as less and less people succeeded in the entrance exam. Thus, the low standard, mainly provided by missionaries, motivated the government's concern in education. In fact, the attempts to raise the level through grants and supervision were a way to obtain more and better educated people for the different government posts with the object of forming efficient clerks.[9]

It is obvious that the British Government was far from the idea of 'education for culture promotion'. For instance, Western education was introduced in the British colonies and maintained for European interests: the missionaries wanted to spread their religion and the government wanted to have a cheap manpower. Yet, whatever was the motivating force, British culture was promoted overseas through both the religious and educational

enterprise of the missionaries. Indeed, the missionary schools were in charge of the provision of British education which produced western educated colonial individuals. The latter's welfare in Britain, where the majority of them completed their studies, became the concern of several institutions, namely Victoria League, West African Student Union and Aggrey House which contributed to promote capitalist values against anti-British propaganda.

The Victoria League was established in 1907 to promote a close union between British subjects living in different parts of the world. Before 1934, it was concerned with students coming from Malaya and Hong Kong, but later on it extended its work to other colonies. The institution arranged hospitality, administrated hostels for overseas students and provided them with the needed information in London. The League received the sum of £400 a year from the Federated Malay States and the Strait Settlements.[10]

The West African Students Union, created in 1925, was originally as auxiliary of the National Congress of British West Africa in 1920. It was confined initially to students from West Africa, but from 1928, it extended to students of African descent. The Union Hostel, also known as Africa House, was offered contributions from the West Africa Colonial Government to fulfil the same task.[11]

Aggrey House, another cultural body, helped the promotion of British capitalist values mainly among the educated colonial people. This institution was founded in 1932 on the recommendation of the Colonial Office Conference of 1930. It was particularly conceived as a Club in London for students of African descent.Its dynamism depended on the money the colonial governments provided.[12]

This government non-intervention attitude was to change as state control became very important to counteract the prevailing German and

Italian virulent propaganda that was threatening the British imperial interestsin the world. Thus, direct intervention in the cultural field became necessary to protect British colonial achievements.

III- The British Direct-Intervention Attitude in the Cultural Field

The British new attitude in the field of culture – promotion was the result of several developments Britain experienced at both the international and internal levels, after the First World War. The British government was driven to change its attitude and enter heavily this field in a direct way to protect British interests from the increased propagandasome Britain's European counterpartswere leading.

Though Britain had been slow to set up a cultural organisation entrusted to promote British culture overseas, she committed herself to an outstanding propaganda programme during the First World War. It was based on cultural patterns which could easily influence mass-feeling and have demoralizing impact on enemies,[13] and which showed a certain awareness of the importance of culture as a weapon to show Britain in a favourable light, as being advocate of justice and peace. The British were the first not only to use photography and the cinema but also to send famous artists to paint scenes of war in allied and neutral countries,all handled with a 'ruthless disregard for the truth'.[14] For instance, the Germans were pictured only as 'barbarians'.[15] In addition to this, the Department of Propaganda in enemy countries distributed publications among Austro-Hungarian forces 'appealing to their national aspirations'.[16] Indeed, they exploited their anger against the Germans and flattered their cultural pride to reduce any complex of inferiority vis-à-vis Germany and encouraged them to desert while they convinced German forces of the futility of the war.[17]Besides, the diffusion of news was shaped according to British political ends. As Frances Donaldson stated, quoting a writer on the subject of war time dissemination :

Information was not only restricted, it was also structured. Much of what reached the public was distorted and exaggerated for propagandist ends, through the activities of newspaper proprietors and editors. They often subordinated their responsibility of providing accurate information to other obligations which were to do with carrying out their patriotic duty; the duty to persuade men to fight, to keep up morale, to inspire patriotism and continually to degrade the enemy.[18]

In the colonial territories, after the First World War,[19] the British Government was particularly driven by the pressure of world opinion and the growing radicalism of nationalist movements in involving itself in the improvement of education as the idea of supplying the British Empire with reliable collaborators became an objective. For instance, in 1933, a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies declared that the government should develop institutions to university standards for the motive was to lessen the number of African students abroad.[20]

But, it should be noted that this eagerness to develop the already existing colonial educational institutions was, in fact, related to British fear of

European educated Africans. Those who studied abroad were relatively out of the control of British authorities and were, then, open to 'subversive ideas' that could be dangerous to British colonial rule. For instance, both the American President Wilson's claimed philosophy of self-determination (1918) and the emergence of Pan-Africanism were to have a tremendous impact on colonial students. Wilson's anti-imperialist attitude in favour of colonized peoples already encouraged the British white Dominions to ask for independence. Besides, the Pan-Africanist movement emphasized the improvement of the Africans as a race with a glorious past and the abolition of racial segregation through colonial reforms.[21]

Public education was in most need for government control. Indeed, following theChurch monopoly and given the increasing demands for education, the British Government had to take measures for controlling public education. This change in attitude was caused by several factors among which the Labour Party's pressure and the First World War and its aftermath.

The colonial people's awareness resulted in the emergence of national protest movements – whose struggles particularly multiplied during the 1930s – claiming the reform of the colonial system. The latter excluded the colonial elite from the running of their country both at local and central levels, as well as from Colonial Civil Service. Consequently, British fears augmented. In order to calm this colonial attitude, the British Government felt a need to resort to the cultural weapon.

Thus, to secure its imperial interests threatened by the ideological propaganda operations the new big powers like Germany and Italy were leading in different parts of the world, Britain decided to establish cultural centres in her colonial territories. In this context, a British official stated :

More important perceptive people in the Whitehall recognized a new danger : the emergence in Europe of totalitarian regimes which regarded the dissemination of their national cultures as part and parcel of the dissemination of their political ideologies ... Worse still, these new imperialists (Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) were making strenuous efforts to penetrate not only the minds of Western and Eastern Europe but also of countries either within the empire or within what used to be called Britain's sphere of influence.[22]

The British officials, however, felt they should have started such kind of activities long before the state had to intervene. To catch up with this situation, it would seem that in the 1930s, they had set out to lay the ground for a 'long-term policy' ; consequently, one with more lasting effects than 'small immediate successes' as suggested by the Prince of Wales in 1935:

> Of all great powers [Britain] [was] the last in the field in setting up a proper organisation to spread a knowledge and appreciation of its language, literature, art, science and education.... To achieve these aims, it was decided to adopt a long-term policy and strive for lasting results in the future rather than for small immediate successes.[23]

The 'British Committee for Relations with other Countries' was established in November 1934, by a private initiative and with the approval and support of the Foreign Office. Two years later, this organisation was renamed 'The British Council' with the task of promoting a programme of 'national interpretation', a phrase the British preferred to substitute to 'cultural propaganda'[24] in official documents after the First World War. As Frances Donaldson put it : 'The British themselves... looked back on their war-time propaganda with extreme distaste. As late as 1929, we find Angus Fletcher, Head of the British Library of Information in New York, writing to Sir Arthur Willert, Head of the New Department of the Foreign Office, to protest against the use of the word 'propaganda' in official documents ...'.[25]

Conclusion

Thus, the British culture was initially introduced as part of the missionaries' religious, educational and social activities among the natives. The latter's frequent demands for the missionaries' educational and social

services helped the learning of the English language and the Bible which initiated them to the British way of life.

The missionaries remained the main propagators of British culture during the colonial era. Yet, this situation came to an end between the two world wars when the British Government decided to expand the British Council's operations in different colonies to protect its interests and preserve what could be preserved. This choice coincided with the relative decline Britain experienced.

The British might be said to be late comers in the field of cultural diplomacy in time of peace, but when they entered the competition, it would be unfair not to recognise their genius in adopting the appropriate policies in different parts of the world to cultivate the needed friendships and the required conditions to further British influence and protect British interests from the strongestcompetitors. One has to read about the British Council's achievements to get concrete illustrations.

Notes

1. Quoted by A. Parsons, "Vultures and Philistines : British Attitude to Culture and Cultural Diplomacy" (London, British Colonial, 1984), p. 8.
2. F. Fanon, Peau Noire, Masques Blancs (Paris,Seuil, 1971), Fear Does not last but complexes do.
   F. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York, Grove Press, INC, 1963) (Translated by Constance Farrington).
3. M. Crowder, West Africa under Colonial Rule (Evanston, North Western University Press, 1968), p. 166.
4. Ibid.
5. R. O'Neil and J. R. Vincent, The West and the Third World, Essays in Honour of J. D. B. Miller, (London, Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1990), p. 69.
6. J. Mitchell, International Cultural Relations (London, Allen &Unwin, 1986), p. 35.
7. B. Porter, The Lion's Share. A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1970 (London and New York, Longman, 1975), p. 91.
8. R. O'Neil and J. R. Vincent, op. cit, p. 69.

9. In this context, Sir Frederick Lugard, High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria (1900-1906), Governor of Hong Kong (1907-1912), Governor of Northern and Southern Nigeria (1912-1914) and Governor-General of Nigeria (1914-1918), declared that 'an increase in the supply has become a matter of vital and pressing necessity'. A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria, London, F., Cass, 1968, p. 150.

10. CO 859/3/1205/1939, Part 2. For instance, Gambia contributed with £10, Sierra Leone £50, Gold Coast £125, Nigeria £175.

11. CO 859/3/1209/1939, Extract from memos submitted by the Colonial Governments at the 1939 Conference in Lagos.

12. CO 859/3/1205/1939, op. cit, for instance, Sierra Leone contributed with £100, Nigeria £250, Gold Coast £200.

13. 'Both Hindenburg and General Von Stein, the Minister of War, testified to the demoralizing effects of this campaign. Another success of First World War propaganda was in helping to bring the USA'. J. Mitchell, International Cultural Relations, London, Allen &Unwin, 1986, p. 29.

14. F. Donaldson, The British Council : the First Fifty Years 1934-1984, London, Jonathan Cape, 1984, p. 13.

15. 'Early in 1918…. A new Ministry of Information was set up under Lord Beaverbrook to deal with propaganda to allied and neutral countries, and Lord Northcliffe was appointed Director of Propaganda to Enemy countries. Lord Beaverbrook was the first to use photography and the cinema and the first to commission leading artists to paint scenes of war'. Ibid.

16. Quoted by J. Mitchell, op. cit, p. 29.

17. Ibid.

18. F. Donaldson, op. cit, p. 13.

19. For instance, after the First World War, the white man's superiority had been shaken in the eyes of Africans, and Europeans themselves felt less-confident. Consequently, a new vision towards African dependencies began to emerge. It was particularly motivated by the new partition of Africa after the German defeat and the introduction of the concept of mandates. The German Colonial Empire was divided : the British and the French shared both the Cameroons and Togoland ; South West Africa was given to the Union of South Africa and German East Africa was divided between Great Britain and Belgium.

20. G. N. Brown and M. Hiskett (eds), Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa, (London, Allen &Unwin, 1975), p. 371.

21. P. O. Esedebe, 'Origins and Meaning of Pan-Africanism', PrésenceAfricaine (1970), Vol. 74, p. 126.

22. A. Parson, op. cit, p. 4.

23. P. Taylor, The Projection of Britain, British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-39, (Great Britain, Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 153.

24. P. H. Coombs, The Fourth Dimension of Foreign Policy : Educational and Cultural Affairs, (New York, Harper & Row, 1964), p. 82.

25. F. Donaldson, op. cit, p. 13.

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