



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST
A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Episode 4 - Thursday, June 4th, 2020

Conquest in Africa

With Paula Larsson (P), Olivia Durand (O), and Harrie Aldrich (H)

P: Hello and welcome to the podcast a very brief introduction to the British Empire. This podcast is run by Uncomfortable Oxford, a student-led social enterprise that runs walking tours and public events in the city of Oxford. Today is our sixth episode, titled Conquest in Africa. My name is Paula Larsson, I'm co-founder, co-director of Uncomfortable Oxford and also a doctoral student in the history of medicine.

O: And my name is Olivia Durand, the other co-founder and co-director of Uncomfortable Oxford, and I'm very happy to be welcoming Harrie Aldridge.

Harrie is a doctoral student in history at the University of Oxford and her work focuses on the concept of political exile in Africa with special attention to Ghana and networks of Ghanaians in exile.

Welcome. How are you? Thank you so much for joining us today.

H: Thank you so much for having me Olivia and Paula.

P: So, can you give us a bit of an outline of what you're gonna talk about today?

H: So we're gonna be thinking today about the British Empire and its relationship with Africa, so we're gonna start off by contextualizing Africa geographically and historically. And then kind of move on to think about some of the concepts surrounding conquest of Africa and then reframe the narrative a little bit towards the end.

So we should pretty much cover a variety of topics by the end of this. Okay, so to begin with I'm gonna lead you through a bit of an impromptu geography lesson. It's really important to contextualize African geographically before we go on to think about it historically.

When we think about maps, we often don't think about them critically, but they fundamentally shape the way in which we conceptualize and consider the world around us and this is particularly important when we think about Africa. One of the most important things to remember is that no map is actually flawless.



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The earth itself is roughly a sphere, and it's almost impossible to map a 3D object onto a 2D plane and not have any errors in proportion when in that attempt to translate those two things. Therefore what we choose to prioritize when we map objects can tell us a lot about our attitude towards the rest of the world.

So Paula and Olivia, can you imagine for me in your heads a map of the world right now? What does it look like to you?

O: Typical rectangle, very often Europe is at the center. It looks quite big if you know that, you know, it's not that large in reality. Green, and it's huge.

P: And it's also divided into the way that we could look at the world so if you think about a map you have the West, as we call it, on the west hand side of it and the East, as it's called, on the east. The Middle East is right in the middle of those two, so even the way that we conceptualize politics and culture today is embedded within that visual of the map itself.

H: Absolutely, so the way in which we actually conceptualize and think about the world around us is framed by the map itself. We use terms like Middle East, the West, East when actually those are completely arbitrary concepts that don't really map onto the globe, because the globe is just a ball hurtling through space and it actually has no rooting in reality in that sense.

And what you're describing to me, there, is the Mercator Map. There's no surprise that you're describing that map because it's the most popular map projection in the world. It's been around for 448 years, so we've been using this map for an enormous amount of time since before Antarctica was actually discovered, and it was drawn by Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569.

Now when we think about maps, it's really important to consider what their purpose is. And the purpose of the Mercator Map when it was drawn was to be a navigational tool for sailors. So the way in which it's designed means that there are lots of parallel lines and it's very easy to draw straight lines, so you can plot your course as you sail from Europe to the Americas.

However, the Mercator Map, as you were mentioning Olivia, has many, many downsides. Consider the way in which Europe is in the middle, how big Europe is, and the prioritization of the northern hemisphere.

What if I told you that on that map Greenland is depicted as roughly the same size as Africa when you see it visually. In reality, Africa is almost 14 times larger than Greenland. So it completely distorts the way we actually think about the continent of Africa, completely.

Other examples of this is, so, the Scandinavian countries on the Mercator Map look larger than



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

India, whereas actually India is three times the size. So all of these, all of these, discrepancies, you know, we can document them. I can talk about the problem to you here, but Google Maps, Yahoo, Bing, Open street maps, all of these platforms continue to use some version of the Mercator Map and it's the one that we all think about when we think about the world.

So to sum up, in short, that original globe map, sailors love it. It's great for plotting courses across the sea, but it's really fundamentally bad at demonstrating to us the real size and shape of continents and countries in relation to each other.

P: And I'm sure all those historical sailors loved having Europe in the center of the world.

H: Yeah, absolutely. So this is a really key criticism of the mercator map that leads me on to think about other versions of maps that have been created more recently.

So in 1973 a man called Arno Peters, who was a German filmmaker and journalist, he argued that the Mercator projection was actively damaging in that it presented Europe and North America as far larger and also in the center of the world in a way that gave white nations the sense of supremacy over non-white nations.

And he came up with a different projection, so he came up with a projection that's called, now called, the Gall-Peters projection and it aimed to show the correct sizes of countries relative to each other.

So there'll be a image of this attached to the, this podcast, that you'll be able to see yourself, and when you look at this different projection, you can suddenly see that the global South figures so much more prominently than we think about in our day-to-day lives, and Europe and North America no longer dominate most of the image.

Now it's not flawless by any means, the map stretches the poles horizontally and some of the elements are stretched in a way that can look really off-putting when you first look at it, but this is partly because we're so unused to conceptualizing Africa and the rest of the global South as proportionate to their actual size on the globe.

Now, as you said Paula, this is because the mercator projection is a map made by Europe, for Europe.

O: Was there any specific reason why Europeans decided to map Africa in this way and make it a much smaller continent that it is in reality

H: So that was no accident, Europeans wanted to be able to prioritize and draw the maps and roads and towns that they knew existed in the northern hemisphere in detail onto their maps, but they didn't actually really know at this time what was inside Africa, so nineteenth century



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

maps often depict Africa as mostly empty in comparison. There might be a few rivers, the Nile, The Niger Delta, maybe a few mountain ranges, but not much else. There's very little understanding of what Africa's internal landscape looks like at this time from Europeans.

This shows to a certain extent how little interest Europeans had in Africa up to this point, and they were far more interested in other areas of their empire and more lucrative areas in Asia. So why have I spent so much time talking about this?

Maps are a key way in which we visually see representations of power. The power dynamics illustrated by the mercator map are really stark, with the West completely dominating any African representation.

However, as I said at the beginning, these maps are also a useful way of illuminating European attitudes to the global south, so these were maps that were being used by contemporary British officials helping to fuel their sense of superiority and entitlement when it came to the continent of Africa.

On a much more basic level it's also really important to emphasize how large a continent Africa actually is when we go on to consider how British officials approached it. When we talk about the history of this period, there simply is no one overarching narrative which encapsulates everything.

And diversity will be something that comes up a lot. Just as an example, Africa spans about 5,000 miles from north to south. And it's made up of many different landscapes and environments which each presented unique challenges to colonizers when attempting to partition the continent. So, just to finish off the geography-heavy section of this podcast.

How many different types of ecosystems and terrains can you think of in Africa?

P: Oh, there is definitely savannah grasslands and the Congo rainforests.

H: Absolutely equatorial forest definitely.

O: Well, I know that there is the desert. The Sahara is a gigantic desert and we often forget North Africa when we think about Africa as a continent.

H: Yeah, absolutely. There's often a focus on sub-saharan Africa when we discuss it, absolutely.

O: There are some mountains, some very high mountains. Less and less snow, but there is some snow.

H: There is snow in Africa.



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

P: And coastlines, there's a lot of coastlines.

H: Yeah, so the coast is really important especially when we come to talk about the conquest of Africa.

So exactly, we've got all the ones you've mentioned we've also got river deltas that are really important when we think about the Nile. Let's think about, kind of, the Ethiopian Highlands, East Central Plateau, sort of it's known as the spine of Africa, so very elevated of the landscape down the African--the center of Africa.

And also just general grass planes, high belt, bushfelt, enormous diversity, that's really the most important part, and that's what I want you to take away from this. When we talk about the conquest of Africa, which is the title of this podcast, Africa is hugely diverse and there is no single Africa which was conquered.

There are many--it's made up of many different people's landscapes and circumstances, which is what we're going to explore a little bit today.

P: So generally what time period are we thinking of here, when we're talking about the major conquest of Africa?

H: Yeah, so conquest of Africa is an interesting term, and you might also have heard it called the partition of Africa or the scramble for Africa. These are terms that are often used by historians to essentially mean the invasion, occupation, division, and colonization of African territory by European powers during a really short period.

Between about 1881 and 1914, so that's about a 30-year period that we're discussing here today.

However, what's really important to remember about this is that Britain and Europe have been interacting and informally colonizing Africa long before this 30 year period. So from the 1600s to the 1800s, Britain and the other European powers founded coastal outposts from which to trade and also as military bases all along the coast of Africa.

From these they could exert their economic and military influence over much of the coastal part of Africa. British activity and was mostly focused on the West African coast and was centered around the lucrative slave trade between 1562 and 1807. British ships carried up to three million people into slavery in the Americas.

European traders grew rich on the profits, while the population of Africa's west coast was devastated. Britain abolished the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, and you're often hear about



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

this in British histories of the period; however, changes within Britain, namely the industrial revolution, meant that slave trading no longer presented the best way of making money from Africa. It became clear that Britain could do better from extracting raw material from Africa such as rubber and palm oil. In order to achieve this, labor which was being extracted in the form of slaves was needed within Africa itself.

No longer trading in slaves across the seas, Britain began what is known as legitimate commerce: buying raw products from African farmers and selling manufactured goods from Britain back into these communities.

The 1800s was also a time of exploration. It was at this point that famous individuals such as Dr. Livingston and Henry Morton Stanley, made famous by stories centered around their encounter near Lake Tanganyika with the iconic line: “Dr. Livingston, I presume.” These individuals were striding across the African continent, intent on filling in some of those blanks on those Victorian maps that I mentioned at the beginning. These men were seeking knowledge of the geography of Africa, but they were also keen to learn how to control and conquer the environment, and by extension it's people.

So the important takeaway from this is that Britain and Europe in general had been interacting with Africa for centuries at this point in a myriad of different ways. As late as the 1870s only 10% of the continent was under direct European control. Algeria was held by France; the Cape Colony and Natal both in modern South Africa were held by Britain, and Angola by Portugal. And yet by 1900 European nations had added almost 10 million square miles of Africa one-fifth of the landmass of the globe to their overseas colonial possessions. By 1900 Europeans ruled more than 90 percent of the African continent.

So having said this, can either of you begin to name some of the African colonies that Britain acquired during this time.

O: Many, well, Zimbabwe which was named Rhodesia at the time.

H: Absolutely yeah

O: and Kenya. And was Egypt like a sort of, form of, colonial role?

H: Absolutely we'll talk about that it became a protector, absolutely.

O: Nigeria was a British colony

H: And what about you Paula?

P: Tanzania, especially Zanzibar was British controlled for a long point in time, especially just



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

through the political negotiations with the Sultan. Also, Olivia said, Zimbabwe, but Zambia was another one of the Rhodesias historically, and Sierra Leone on the west coast was one of the major slave ports for the British for hundreds of years.

H: Absolutely. We already said Kenya, the Sudan, now North and South Sudan has been separated since then. There's Botswana, South Africa. This was also Gambia, Malawi and essentially what I'm trying to say is that it's an enormous amount of land. These countries actually accounted for more than 30% of Africa's population. This is essentially expressing just how intense this moment of annexation was in terms of British conquering of African territory. The other cheap colonizers were France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain, but we're not going to focus on them today because this is a very short history of the British Empire, but rest assured they were also very busy during this period.

So we're going to spend the second half of this podcast thinking about how we got from 10% of the continent under direct European control to more than 90%. How did we get from there to here? So I mentioned at the beginning that Britain hadn't been enormously focused on Africa up to this point. I talked about the blanks that they left on the maps of the inside of the landscape of Africa, and there was a general perception that Africa was almost an empty wasteland.

So for Britain, initial colonization of Africa wasn't actually driven by desire to own Africa at all, but instead it was driven by a desire to secure trade routes to other more lucrative parts of its empire namely India. So if either of you ever heard of the Suez canal.

P: Yes, of course, absolutely.

H: So it's one of the most famous episodes in British imperial history, and when we think about the Suez canal, it was opened in Egypt in 1869, and the British and French funded it, and the project was essentially motivated by a desire for easy access to India, and to make that access much more efficient. However, when it came to the project's conclusion, the British were keen to secure it for themselves, because they were concerned about it falling into the hands of rival powers, which could disrupt the flow of trade.

So Britain was keen to ensure that it had sole rights to the Suez canal. When the ruler of Egypt began struggling with revolts from the south, he asked for British military aid and the British used this as an excuse to take control of Egypt in 1882. As you said earlier Olivia, they didn't actually formally colonize it. Instead it became what they called a protectorate. But Britain was able to establish a kind of formal control. So this first foray into annexing African territories was notable, because:

A: it shows how gradual this process actually was; Britain had been involved in Egypt politically and economically well before this.

and B: it was motivated by wanting access to other parts of its empire, rather than a desire to only land itself.



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

P: So clearly indicates to the Suez canal that the competition between European nations and political rivalries was very important to ensuring that conquest was undertaken in Africa. Where else in the continent do you see this similar kind of pressure?

H: Right absolutely, so South Africa is a really key one here. I mentioned earlier about the development of commerce and Britain wanting to extract resources from Africa. In this way many early colonizers weren't actually British soldiers or officials; they were actually businessmen, and South Africa is a really key area to discuss this with.

P: Have either of you heard of Cecil Rhodes. Yeah, we definitely talk about South Road quite a bit. In fact, we have a number of recently released blogs on who he was and why his statue in Oxford is controversial. So if you're interested, you should check those out.

H: So, what can you tell me about him?

P: Cecil Rhodes was the quintessential colonial man, in that he started out from a very fairly poor family. He had poor health, and he was sent to Cape Colony and ended up getting involved in diamond mining, in which he started blood diamond mining, meaning that he mined diamonds in order to fund insurgencies and further war. And he also had horrific business practices. Even in his own time the newspapers referred to him as unscrupulous, but he became a millionaire by the time he was 30 and conquered vast portions of land which displaced many indigenous tribes.

He was responsible for the murderous bloodshed of many conflicts that especially used European military technology on the bodies of black African tribes. And on top of that, he was just himself a staunch imperialist. He came to study at Oxford for a period of time. He didn't make much of an impression on his tutors. He wasn't an academic man, but he wanted power and he wanted recognition, and he decided while he was at Oxford that the best way to get that powered recognition when you're not that athletic, when you're not that intelligent was to simply be an imperialist, was to conquer other peoples and to gain the power that way and that's what he did.

He had a dream of expanding the British Empire as much as possible, and he did it in very horrific ways. And then when he died he was incredibly hated in many parts of the world, not just in- by the people he conquered-but lots of people in England didn't like him either.

There were actual protests in Oxford, not today, as there are against the statue, but against him when he was given an honorary degree in 1899. They didn't want him to get this honorary degree from the University because it's validating a man who had unleashed a wave of evil in the world, and I think what happens today is people misremember just how controversial he was for his own time, not just today. And now for some reason people think he's a national



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

hero. The only thing he really did was give a ton of money to England and to Oxford and that is how he knew he could secure his legacy because even if people hated him while he was alive, they'll remember him fondly with his wealth and diamonds after he died.

O: And so most of his fortune came from the diamonds, but he got involved in British politics and ended up being the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, and he's very much responsible for the discharge of the, of the, very fast conquest of land and inside the African continent. So after all Rhodesia, modern day Zimbabwe was named after him.

H: Absolutely. So he's a really key figure at this point, and he's a really good example of the many British industrialists and financiers that were interested in Africa, because it presented a new place to invest the money that was being made from the industrial revolution, and it had the potential to make money quickly.

Simply put the industrial revolution was generating significant amounts of excess capital in Britain, and British businessmen were looking for places to invest this money. So Cecil Rhodes is really key, when it comes to this conversation. So you mentioned that Rhodes was involved in diamond mining. Now, this is really key when we think about different techniques of annexing land, and Rhodes was very involved with obtaining mining concessions from local chiefs and leaders in South Africa.

Specifically, there's an incident where Rhodes was attempting to get Lobengula, the king of Matabeleland, to sign away rights to his land so that diamond mining could be done in the area. However, he was particularly reluctant, and essentially there was a large discussion about the different rights and the different ways in which this could be configured. And he was, Lobengula, was assured that no men, no more than 10 white men, would mine in Matabeleland at any one time, and that was what Rhodes was assuring him; however, this limitation was left out of the document which Lobengula eventually signed.

Furthermore, the mining companies were signed into the document. They wrote into the document that they could do anything necessary to their operations, which essentially gave them carte blanche to annex and mine in the area. When Lobengula discovered later the true effect of the concession, he tried to renounce it but the British government ignored him, and it was used as the method by which Britain was able to access this land and gain rights to it.

P: So what you are saying is that Cecil Rhodes tricked the king into signing a treaty by telling him it said one thing, and then when it came to the actual document it said something completely different, and then of course the European governments, specifically the British government, didn't believe the king when he said that this is what was promised, and then Cecil Rhodes gained territory and all control.

The sounds very similar to how things were done in Canada as well. The treaty signing process



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

with Indigenous populations was very similar in that it was said verbally this is what we'll be , but then when the document was actually signed it was a very different document.

O: Yeah, it feels like they still want to justify what they are doing. They want to operate within a sort of legal framework, so they do draft legal documents, but then they still make sure that the terms are deeply unfavorable to the one that signed them.

P: Yeah, the legal justification is really important, as you said Olivia, because the other European nations had to be convinced that the British had rights to that land. It wasn't really about the indigenous peoples themselves, whether they cared about it. It was whether they could prove it to other encroaching territories and other competitors from Europe, whether or not they actually had validity in that space, and that came through a document that was signed or a treaty of some sort because it showed other European nations that they deserved that land.

H: Absolutely. And in this way the British were often really conscious of how their imperial activities were seen by other European powers at the time. Specifically in a way that mirrors the British desire to control the Suez canal, Rhodes and the British government were really keen to create what they called the Cape to Cairo red line.

Essentially Rhodes dreamed of connecting Africa from the north to the south entirely through British territory, through railway roads and telegraph wires which cross the entire African continent, which was a really big signal to other European powers of the imperial majesty of Britain itself. However this dream, so but the attempt to try and link Africa in this way was far more difficult than they first thought and it leads us back to thinking about this imperial European rivalry within Africa.

I mentioned earlier that Britain was far from the only European power active in Africa at this time, and the late 19th century was one of significant rivalry between various powers within Europe. We're not going to go into depth about it, but suffice to say this period leads up to the First World War if we think about the global historical context, which was the very crystallization of these tensions.

Colonies in Africa were beginning to be perceived by various European powers as assets, which defined the balance of power in Europe. As a major European nation, having annexed land in Africa was seen as desirable as it was a sign of your wealth and status on the European stage. This to some extent fueled the rush to formally colonize large swaths of Africa and partially explains why Africa was almost fully colonized within this thirty year period.

So this concept of this Cape to Cairo line was to some extent an expression of power to the other European colonizing states. Rhodes himself was actively seeking to topple and undermine the rival white colonial settlers in Southern Africa, namely the Dutch Boers. He ended up backing the disastrous Jameson raid of 1895, which was designed to topple the government of



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

the neighboring gold-rich Transvaal republic, but this was an event that ended up leading to the second Boer in which thousands of people died.

So the real crystallization of these European rivalries was the Berlin Conference, and this is often spoken about when we think about the conquest of Africa. It was a conference that took place from 1884 to 1885 and it was convened by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Essentially, this meeting was where the European powers sat to discuss the future of Africa, and the future of Europeans in Africa and how exactly they plan to govern it.

The Berlin Conference began the process of carving up Africa. You know, the way in which we think about it now paying no attention to a local culture or ethnic groups, and leaving people from the same tribe or ethnic group on separate sides of European imposed borders.

P: Yeah, it's very counterintuitive that we don't actually follow the geographic barriers in the landscape, like a large mountain range or a gigantic river.

Those are barriers that make things difficult to cross, but instead of using the natural contours of the environment, you see a straight line that is literally drawn on a piece of paper and then suddenly applied to an entire geographical location.

O: Yeah, oh yes the straight lines that we can see in the African continent, but I guess we can also see those quite often when you look at the states and the territories in the Americas, because obviously there are a lot of native nations around. The way the boundaries have been conquered up it's as if we're just using a ruler, right?

H: And this is essentially where we see the strongest idea of *Terra Nullius*, which is the term used to describe the idea that this land belonged to no one.

P: So obviously this land was settled much earlier. Can you explain why the Europeans believed that land without Europeans in it belonged to nobody?

H: Yeah it's a really interesting thought-process, and to some extent this is rooted in the ideas I was discussing at the beginning. The ways in which we depict the globe, the inaccuracies of the Mercator map, the way in which we think about the rest of the world. Ideas of white supremacy, which were evident in many areas of society became crystallized at this period and were used to justify and drive the empire.

So that was part of why when people looked at other areas of the globe, they weren't interested in thinking about who might already be there. Ideologies of racial hierarchy were prevalent in Europe in the 19th century. Many Europeans viewed themselves as the most advanced civilization in the world, and some saw it as their mission to enlighten and civilize people in the rest of the world. This feeling of racial superiority and responsibility was captured



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

in a poem written in 1899, *The white man's burden* by British poet Rudyard Kipling.

In it, he implores the US to invade and colonize the Philippines and states that it's their duty as part of the white race to rule non-white people and civilize them, helping them progress socially, politically, and culturally. And this is really emblematic of a general pervasive idea at the time that Africans and other people in the global south should be educated, and that it was for their own good, and that this kind of civilizing mission should be expanded.

It's almost the infantilisation of people in the global south, projecting them almost like their children. So these ideas kind of encapsulate opinions that were right in the public sphere at the time, and they can be attributed to individuals like Rhodes, who we were discussing earlier. So he's particularly infamous now for his beliefs that the quote "Anglo-Saxon race was superior".

He stated specifically that "the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race," and that's a direct quote from him. Many inaccurate and racialized stereotypes of African peoples, which existed at the time, were then used to justify colonialism in Africa.

O: This resonates a lot with all the debates that were happening at the time around Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and how people were actually taking up those theories and applying it to humankind in general, right?

H: Absolutely, science was a really key part of the justification of this rhetoric. The idea of evolutionary hierarchy applied to different races. And the *Origin of Species* published in 1859 was really part of this conversation, and the idea was that white races were the most highly developed and black African races were the least.

P: Yeah, we talked about this on our first podcast actually on disease and empire quite a bit. So if you're interested in learning more you can go back and listen to that one. It really fed into a narrative of which areas in the world were considered to be underdeveloped or more diseased and disease-ridden or prone to infection in some cases. So that narrative is all mixed in here with the development of new scientific theories in the 1800s as well.

H: Absolutely so science also played a really important part in allowing colonizers to overcome the issues of terrain that we spoke about briefly at the beginning. I got you to name all those different types of landscape that were found within Africa. Technology was one of the key ways that European colonizers were able to access the interior of Africa.

When we think about the invention of steamships, for example, so if you've ever read Conrad's *Heart of darkness*, steam ships are a really important part of that whole book, and one of the reasons for that is that in order to access the interior of Africa the best way of doing that was upriver, but you needed a shallow enough boat to be able to access some of these areas so steamships were a really important invention.



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Have either of you heard of quinine?

P: Oh yes, that has been all over the news lately and just for our listeners there is no clinically proven evidence that quinine is a treatment for Covid 19. Although it is a treatment for malaria, which is why it was used by the British.

H: Yeah. So really key because when we think about malaria, malaria was one of the most deadly diseases to white colonizers at this point. Before 1860 Europeans in Africa were likely to die at a rate of 75 percent, 75 percent of them were statistically going to die on arriving in Africa, but with the invention of quinine within two years that risk fell to 8 percent by 1900.

So it was an enormous change in the way the British colonizers were able to interact with the continent.

O: Well, that's incredible. That explains why the change happened so fast then.

H: Yeah because before then it was practically a death sentence. So thinking about science, something we actually haven't spoken about today is violence, which is something maybe you thought I might speak about more, violence being kind of an inherent aspect of the suppression of people in conquest.

One of the key technological aspects of this violence that was perpetrated during this conquest was the invention of the maxim gun, which was invented by Hiram Maxim. And essentially this is an early form of the machine gun and allowed the British and other European powers to subdue Africans with an enormous amount of bloodshed, and essentially the invention of the Maxim gun is perhaps best summed up by Hilaire Belloc who was a writer at the time who said quote "whatever happens we have got the Maxim and they have not". And I suppose the best incident that really sums the impact of the Maxim gun is General Kitchener's campaign of 1898 in the Sudan. Specifically the Battle of Omdurman, which lasted only five hours. But at the end of that battle 20 British soldiers and 20 of their Egyptian allies had died, but on the opposite side 11,000 Sudanese had died, and that should give you an idea of the enormity of the impact of that particular piece of technology.

P: Can you imagine 11,000 people dying in five hours?

O: And also 11,000 on just one side, just because of the technological advantage.

H: Absolutely. So while this is a really memorable and almost trite phrase from Hilaire Belloc here, and I'm gonna take the opportunity before we finish up this podcast to slightly throw a spanner in the work and disagree with him a little.



THE UNCOMFORTABLE OXFORD PODCAST A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

So certain circumstances, yes, the Maxim gun was incredibly important and changed the outcome of many situations within Africa. However, as I mentioned at the beginning, the only real overarching narrative in this period is one of variations. So, I'm gonna throw you a slightly contrasting story here at the end.

I said at the beginning of this podcast that about 90% of Africa was colonized by the end of this period. So that does allow us a little bit of Africa that was actually not conquered.

And specifically we're going to talk about Ethiopia. The Ethiopians interacted mostly with the Italians and they had a Treaty of Friendship with the Italians and Menelik II was the King of Ethiopia at this period. And the Treaty of Friendship that they signed--again in a way that happens back to Rhodes and Lobengula -- the treaty itself said different things in Italian and Menelik purpose. The Italian version gave them control of Eritrea and rights to the protectorate of Ethiopia while the version merely said that Menelik could use Italian diplomats in his foreign policy if he wanted to, so very different documents depending on who you asked.

So in a similar way Menelik repudiated this treaty in 1893, and the key bit here that changes the entire, the whole narrative, from the Sudanese example that I used earlier. In contrast Menelik began stockpiling modern European weaponry, so when Hillary Bellox says that they don't have the , in this particular case Menelik began buying enormous amounts of modern European weaponry, sometimes from the Italians themselves. So that by 1894, when the Italians began military action the Ethiopians had stockpiled an enormous amount of modern technology.

So this culminated in the Battle of Adwa on the first of March 1896. 15,000 Italian troops arrived in Ethiopia and essentially they were met by nearly a hundred thousand Ethiopian troops with modern rifles, field guns, and Maxim guns supplied from the French. All together seven thousand Italian troops and Eritrean troops were killed, three thousand taken prisoner, and the rest fled. So it's a very different picture from the Sudanese one that I told you about before, and I think it's important to remember that not all of these circumstances played out the same way across Africa.

P: Yeah I remember in Oxford when I you gave this lecture, you showed a great image which depicts this battle. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

H: Yeah, it was a painting by an Ethiopian artist of the battlefield of Adwa.

It's this amazing colorful depiction of the two lines of opposing forces lining up against each other. You can really see the kind of technology aspect of it. The amount of guns, the firepower on both sides and I think that's a really powerful important image when we think about, trying to think about the different forms of conquests that took place in Africa and this time the variation in responses that actually technology was used on both sides and it wasn't simply Europeans conquering Africans actually, Ethiopia was successful in fighting back and actually



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was never conquered by any European power.

And I think that's a really important thing to end it on. If you're interested in seeing the painting, there'll be a link attached to the reading list. So you can see it in your own time. But if you're wondering why I wanted to add in a discussion about Ethiopia and the Italian Empire at the end of a podcast about Britain and the British Empire. It's because I first saw this painting as I was wandering around the British Museum and it's a really interesting moment of British cultural imperialism there.

O: And I think that's a perfect way to conclude that's very much what we try to do with this very brief introduction to the British Empire, kind of give you some snapshots of some ideas if you want to look deeper, to go into the museums and maybe see things with a slightly different perspective. So thank you so much Harry for joining us today. It was really really informative and very engaging as well.

H: Thank you so much for having me. I really enjoyed myself.

P: And that concludes our sixth episode on the conquest of Africa.

If you're interested in seeing the reading list that was mentioned, please go to our website www.uncomfortableoxford.com, and if you want to attend any of our other events, we have a number of online events currently happening which are open to the public.

We're also excited to announce that we just launched virtual tours of Oxford which discuss these legacies of colonialism within the city and university of Oxford itself.

You can find information about us by searching Uncomfortable Oxford or finding us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.

This podcast is proudly supported by TORCH, The Humanities Research Network at the University of Oxford.

And the music you've been hearing is Wishful Thinking by Dan Liebovitz. See you next time!