CEYLON (Sri Lanka) AND MADAGASCAR, ISLANDS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: COMPARISON OR CONTRAST ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANGLO–FRENCH IMPERIAL RIVALRY TILL 1850 IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

by

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The small Island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) lies eastwards almost at the heart of the Indian Ocean. To understand the history of British imperialism in the Indian Ocean a study of Ceylon' s history is essential. Likewise the much larger island of Madagascar occupies an equally important position westwards in the Indian Ocean and a knowledge of its history too is vital to gain a clear perspective of Anglo-French rivalry (1) and English oversea imperialism in the Indian Ocean region.

Even before the Western imperial powers embarked on maritime imperial enterprise, for navigators too, the true centre of the Indian Ocean has always been the country from whence it takes its name – India (2). To the early trader and to the later European commercial companies, the fascination across the Indian Ocean was India. Strangely enough, well before the two large European

(1) See Parkinson, C. Northcote, *War in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1815* (London, 1954) ; Malleson, G.B., *Final French Struggles in India and the Indian Seas,* (London, 1878) ; also Panikkar, K.M. *Asia and Western Dominance* (London, 1954).

(2) For general reading see Pannikar, K.M., *India and the Indian Ocean,* (London, 1945) ; Villiers, A.J. *The Indian Ocean* (London, 1952) ; Toussaint, Auguste, *History of the Indian Ocean* (translation, London, 1966) ; Ballard, G.A., *Rulers of the Indian Ocean* (New York, 1928) ; Parkinson, Northcote C., *The Trade Winds* (London, 1948).

imperial powers waged a struggle for supremacy in this ocean, both Madagascar and Ceylon, because of their geostrategic positions had enticed the same groups of visitors. The Arabs had visited Ceylon much earlier while later in the fifteenth century, they had touched Madagascar (3). However, whereas Ceylon was left more Islamised and bears the enduring influence of Muslim visits, Madagascar, on the contrary, was only very slightly Islamised.

The first of the Westerners who began a more definite pattern of colonial exploitation in the Indian Ocean region were the Portuguese. In 1510 Albuquerque signed a treaty with the ruler of Ceylon and established a system of fortified trading posts (4). Thus remained the classical type of European establishment in the Asian seas until the 19th century when the English and the French changed it. Along with Goa in western India and Malacca on the Malaysian coast, Colombo in Ceylon proved to be one of the essential elements in the Portuguese scheme for trade in the Indies (5). The Portuguese, on the other hand, never ventured to establish themselves securely around Madagascar in the African waters of the Indian Ocean.

In 1500 Diego Diaz, a captain in Cabral' s Portuguese naval expedition did arrive on the eastern coast of Madagascar (6). He called the place Sao Lourenco because he reached it on August 10., St. Lawrence' s day. Peculiarly, Colombo in Ceylon too was brought under the patronage of St. Lawrence, but because it was reached by Lourenco Almeida, whose patron saint was Lawrence.

In 1510 Madagascar island was placed on Portuguese maps and fairly accurately drawn. By about 1529 and 1545 small Portuguese settlements existed at Ranofotsy Bay (Bay of Galleons) and on the coast of Fanzahira (False Bay of Galleons) at the southern tip of Madagascar. It was only in 1615 that the Portuguese unsuccessfully attempted to gain a foothold on the island (7). At Ceylon, however, from 1505 onwards a Portuguese stronghold had been established. Along the island's coast, especially at Colombo in the west, Galle in the south and Jaffna in the north, the Portuguese exercised a control which gave them the spices they so eagerly sought until they were dislodged by another European rival, the Dutch, in quest of the same spice trade by the middle of the 17th century.

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(3) See Hitti, P.K., *History of the Arabs from the Earliest Times to the Present*, (London, 1953) ; Nainar, S.M.M., *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of Southern India* (Madras, 1942).

(4) Abeysinghe, Tikiri, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, 1594-1612*, (Colombo, 1966) ; De Silva, C.R. *The Portuguese in Ceylon*, 1617-1638 (Colombo, 1972) give good accounts of the Portuguese in Ceylon.

(5) See Whiteway, S. *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India (1497-1550)*, London, 1899) ; Hart, H.H., *Sea Road to the Indies*, (New York, 1950) ; Boxer, C.R. *Fidalgos in the Far East* (The Hague, 1948) ; Danvers, F.C., *The Portuguese in India* (London, 1894).

(6) Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.* p. 109 ; Parry, J.H. *The Age of Reconnaissance, Discovery, Exploration and Settlement 1450 to 1650* (London, 1962).

(7) *ibid.*

Dutch flirtation with Madagascar was rather brief and definitely indirect (8). They showed no interest in neighbouring Madagascar, although they were at Mauritius in 1638, by which date they had assured for themselves a hold on Ceylon. To the Dutch, Madagascar offered neither pepper nor spices. It was of use only to produce slaves. When the attempts of creating Dutch settlements in Mauritius failed, in spite of the slaves imported from Madagascar and convicts transported from Batavia, thereafter Madagascar meant nothing more to the Dutch than a stepping stone in the Indian Ocean. But in Ceylon the Dutch displaced the Portuguese and established a more efficient commercial stranglehold. Their stay until they yielded to the British in 1795–1796 left indelible marks on the island's history as much as did the Portuguese occupation earlier (10).

Before the British or the French ventured towards Ceylon, the French had reached Madagascar. French voyages towards the Indies had initially been undertaken by adventurers while the first real shipping enterprise of the *Compagnie des Moluques* set out for Java in 1616 (11). Dutch vigilance foiled this attempt and the French returned. Then they focused their attention on Madagascar which had been earlier explored by Martin and Pyrard, two adventurers, and also by other adventurers in search of cargoes of ebony. More organised was the endeavour made in 1642. At the instance of Richelieu a *Société de l'Orient ou de Madagascar* was formed for founding a *France in the East* in Madagascar, which although offered little in the way of resources yet served as a stepping stone to the Indies (12). Under incompetent leadership, a settlement formed at Fort-Dauphin on the island's south in 1643 soon declined. From 1648 Flacourt attempted to rehabilitate the settlement, but in 1674 a frightful massacre ended the Fort-Dauphin venture.

Meanwhile Colbert had launched in 1664 the first well organised French East India Company, the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* (13). The aim now was neither Madagascar nor Indonesia but India itself. Under the leadership of Caron after 1668, when Surat had been established as a French factory on the Indian west coast, his ambitions soared. He wanted to establish trading factories along the lands and islands of the Indian Ocean, including one at Ceylon, up to Japan (14). Prompted by this desire in 1672 Caron tried to seize the magnificient port of Trincomalee with the help of the first French squadron sent to the

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(8) *ibid.* p. 120.

(10) See Goonawardena, K.W. *The Establishment of Dutch Power in Ceylon*, (Amsterdam, 1958) ; Arasaratnam, Sinnappah, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658-1687).* (Amsterdam, 1958).

(11) Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

(12) *ibid.* pp. 125, 126 ; see on Madagascar : Heseltine, Nigel., *Madagascar* (New York, 1971).

(13) *ibid.*, p. 126.

(14) *ibid.*

Indies under de la Haye. Unfortunately, repulsed by the Dutch, whose hold on Ceylon was now secure, the French moved to Pondicherry, where they met with better success. The *coup de main* against Ceylon had been decided upon on Caron's advice, but it failed (15).

The Franco-Dutch war which had erupted lasted over forty years from 1672 to 1713. Skirmishes between these powers occurred in the Indian Ocean, but undoubtedly the Indian Ocean was merely a secondary theatre of operations. The Asian seas were not yet the main concern of the great powers although the French had sent a squadron in 1670, even before the war with the Dutch, obviously to impress the peoples of the Indian Ocean. The fleet had touched at Madagascar where some troops and colonists disembarked (16). But this provided no base for any permanent activity, and the Indian Ocean during this period became the haven of pirates.

Piracy was the great plague of the Indian Ocean in the 17th century. Foremost amongst these terrorist groups of the seas was the extraordinary pirate *Republic* formed at Diego Suarez in northern Madagascar, around 1685 to 1730 (17). The buccaneers from the West Indies, when those islands were settled, moved to Sierra Leone on the West African coast, and then to the Indian Ocean. Lured by better prospects here the pirates made Madagascar their home which since the Fort Dauphin massacre had been forsaken by the French (18). Ceylon, further eastwards, lay amidst settled and busier roadsteads and free of piracy. Only during the American Revolutionary War when pirateering proliferated did the most celebrated of the privateers Deschiens Keralvay operating from Ile de France close to Madagascar, make his first cruise in the vicinity of Ceylon gathering thereby a formidable haul (19).

Madagascar itself was not free of the scourge of privateering. In fact the French were the first to practise privateering in the Indian Ocean. In 1526 three privateers had taken off from Dieppe and one reached Madagascar. Shortly after, the first French settlement had been founded in Madagascar in 1642, two privateers had left Fort Dauphin for the Red Sea (20). These first expeditions were not so different to piracy.

Unlike in Ceylon, in the region of Madagascar, English activity was very limited during the first decades of the 19th century. Despite the emphatic protests of the first English Governor of Ile de France (Mauritius), Robert Farquhar,

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(15) *ibid.*, p. 139.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 138.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 144 ; see also Ballard, G.A., *Rulers of the Indian Ocean*, (New York, 1928).

(18) Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 161.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 160.

Britain initially determinedly refused to launch a policy of annexation (21). The principal order Farquhar and his successors received was to stop the slave trade between Madagascar and the islands. This however did not deter English civil servants from persistently scheming to frustrate French designs on Madagascar.

Between 1815 and 1870 when the British had consolidated and were enforcing their rule over Ceylon in the east Indian Ocean (22) the French activity in the south Indian Ocean comprised merely a new attempt following so many others of using Bourbon (Reunion) as a point of departure for colonising Madagascar (23). But confronted by the hostility of the dominant indigenous Hova of the great island, the counter plots of the English, and above all because of the lukewarm interest in the undertaking in France, trifling headway was made. Only Ste. Marie and several points on the northern coast were occupied. Finally, the French had to resort to military conquest to gain a foothold in Madagascar (24).

In the meantime, arising out of the Anglo-French rivalry in the east Indian Ocean, the British attitude towards the islands in this area had become more positive. Ceylon lay like a spearhead at the base of the giant South Indian peninsula, but separated from the south eastern extremity of the Indian Coromandel coast by a narrow shallow strait. On the eastern coast of the island of Ceylon, tucked away to the north, lay the magnificient natural harbour of Trincomalee. As a strategic base Trincomalee was placed in a way to stay enemy invasions on either side of India : it commanded both the Malabar and the Coromandel Coasts (25).

During the period of post revolutionary hostilities the English got the better of the Dutch in the Indian Ocean when Holland had entered the war on the side of France. The Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon, Malacca and Amboyna fell rapidly, and during the Napoleonic wars the English maintained superiority.

Nevertheless Trincomalee and Ceylon did not pass into English hands without a contest for the Prize. The French had dispatched to the Indies a powerful squadron under Suffren, the first great sailor since the Portuguese Albuquerque, Europe sent to the Indian Ocean (26). Unfortunately, however, his genius was reduced to impotence owing to the insubordination of his officers. To some

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(21) *ibid.*, p. 190 : Howe, S.E. *The Drama of Madagascar* (London, 1938) ; Rose, J. H. *et. al.* (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1929-1959).

(22) See on Ceylon, de Silva, K.M. (ed.), University of Ceylon, *History of Ceylon, Volume 3.* (Colombo, 1973) ; Mills, L.A., *Ceylon Under British Rule, 1796-1932.* (London, 1964).

(23) Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

(24) *ibid.*

(25) See Colgate, H.A. « The Royal Navy and Trincomalee. The History of their Connection, c. 1750-1958 » article in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, vol. 7, No. 7.* (Colombo, 1964) pp. 1-16 ; Rao, Ramachandra P.K., *India and Ceylon* (Bombay 1954).

(26) Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

extent Suffren's difficult disposition contributed towards the strain that arose between him and his officers. Holland was on the side of France but the Dutch navy in its pitiful state was of little aid.

Suffren, in spite of the odds, recaptured Trincomalee from the English and saved the Dutch East Indies by his brilliant campaign in the Indian waters. The mention of Trincomalee itself suffices to recall to the historian's mind Suffren's memorable engagements with the British, subject to constant harassment, remained on the defensive and for the first time the French really controlled the sea. Yet the lack of discipline among his officers who let him down in the midst of every battle restrained Suffren from realising his main objective – a complete destruction of the enemy forces. Thus was lost to the French an opportunity, which was never to return (27). But the fear of France did not die and continued to influence British imperial policy in the Indian Ocean. This is best illustrated by examining the English attitude towards Ceylon first, and Madagascar later.

With regard to Ceylon Lord Macartney, Military Governor of the Cape, had as early as in 1797, with foreknowledge, suggested that Britain should choose Ceylon instead of the Cape at any final treaty. Ceylon possessed greater strategic value. «If we give up Ceylon... at the extremity of the Peninsula of India, it would become an immediate and terrific enemy to us in that quarter, as commanding the power of invading from thence both the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel. To a maritime power the excellent harbour of Trincomalee is a jewel of inestimable value : it holds the Bay of Bengal at its mercy, and affords every facility of overawing and controlling the navigation of the Straits of Sunda and Malacca». (28).

Public attention was now suddenly diverted to the eastern Mediterranean by Napoleon's illfated Egyptian campaign. Consequently statesmen and seamen, who had been extolling the Cape as the *Key to India,* soon began searching for a suitable harbour closer to the danger zone. By 1801, therefore, the Government decided to keep Ceylon and abandon the Cape (29). If ships needed water and refreshments it was preferable to call east of the Cape at Madagascar (30). Thus both Ceylon and Madagascar now assumed a greater importance in the British imperial commercial designs in the Indian Ocean. Ships bound for Bombay or Ceylon could take the Inner Passage by the Moçambique Channel ; those for Madras and Calcutta, the Middle Passage well to the eastward of Madagascar. On the journeys back the important assembly junction for the homeward trade was Galle on Ceylon's south coast. Then the voyage was to Table Bay and on to

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(27) *ibid.*

(28) Graham, G.S. *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean* (Oxford, 1967), p. 26.

(29) See de Silva, C.R. *Ceylon Under the British Occupation 1795-1833, Vol. 1,* (Colombo, 1953).

(30) Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

England. Fear of the French led even tough Indianmen to be escorted, such as the Bombay and Madras ships sailing off Ceylon ; while Country China ships in the Straits of Malacca and off the Ceylon and Malabar coasts were likewise escorted (31).

With the surrender of Ile de France (Mauritius) naval war with France in the Indian Ocean was over, and after the conquest of Java surviving French cruisers either surrendered or retired to safety in home or neutral harbours. By September 1811 not a single port of consequence was open to the French, and the British situation in the Indian seas was commanding. While the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius and Ceylon lay in British possession, even if by any unforeseen event the British were compelled to abandon the Indian peninsula, no power could have it tranquilly.

Other factors too accounted for the British navy's choice of Ceylon (32). Next to the Seychelles, the Island of Ceylon was the healthiest British Colony in tropical Indian waters. In Ceylon the British preferred Trincomalee harbour to Colombo or Galle which the Dutch had earlier used. On the east northward lay Trincomalee, which was relatively easier to navigate offering an approachable and almost invulnerable harbour. Situated three hundred and twenty miles from Madras, a five hundred yard entrance channel at Trincomalee gave admission to an enclosed basin capable of containing approximately 500 ships of the line. A whole expanse provided deep water and a good holding ground.

Furthermore, Trincomalee was not unfamiliar ground. There were good charts of the harbour approaches that had been steadily improved since the 1760s. Grandpré, a French naval officer, who had served with the redoutable Suffren, included in a book published in Paris in 1801 a careful account of Trincomalee written in 1786, estimating its tremendous value as a Naval Depot (33). The great Nelson called Trincomalee the finest harbour in the world (34).

Britain badly needed at this time a base on the eastern side of India. Bombay on the western Malabar coast of India could be used from October to December, but the Bay of Bengal would be left undefended against any enemy force. Similarly, from May to July, a naval force based on the Malabar coast could be prevented from sending support towards the windward side or be incapable of obtaining early intelligence from ships or stations on the seaward side. From a naval strategic point of view no continental Indian port could serve as an all-year base ; only from Ceylon was it possible to circumvent or avoid the handicap of seasonal winds. Lying southward of the British settlements on the Coro-

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(31) *ibid.*, pp. 43, 44.

(32) Colgate, H.A., *Trincomalee and the East Indies Squadron 1746 to 1844* (M.A. thesis, University of London, 1959).

(33) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, pp. 305-308.

(34) See Cordiner, James, *A Description of Ceylon, etc. 2 vols.* (London, 1807), pp. 269-70.

mandel coast, Trincomalee was well placed for defence or rescue during all seasons and, above all, offered the most commodious harbour in the eastern seas.

Since 1746, Trincomalee had been regularly used by the English as a refitting base (35). Repeated visits were made for repairs, wood and water. Only during the war of American Independence was Britain denied accommodation. And when Trincomalee, which had been occupied by the French, was restored to the Dutch by the Treaty of Versailles, the English navy continued to use facilities until Holland was overrun by the French Revolutionary armies, a crisis which led to Ceylon's occupation by Britain in 1795. Between 1746 and 1795 the English East Indies squadron had spent forty winters in the Indian seas, fifteen at Trincomalee (36).

As with the Cape and Mauritius,strategic considerations made it imperative that France should not possess a base that might imperil Britain's main routes to the East. Hence, by the Treaty of Amiens, Ceylon was retained by Britain while the Cape was returned to the Dutch. Pitt, supported by sailors like Earl St. Vincent, maintained that the Cape was less important than Trincomalee as the guarantor of Britain's East India possessions (37).

Yet Trincomalee never blossomed into an important naval base. It had been for many years a useful repair and stores rendez-vous and it remained so until the end of the Napoleonic wars. The reorganisation and construction of Trincomalee suffered owing to the *futile and fallacious* arguments of vested interests favouring Indian bases, and by the successive untimely deaths of three squadron commanders, personally enthusiastic about Trincomalee. A sudden resurgence occurred in 1816 when the entire Madras establishment was ordered to Trincomalee (38). However, although Britain was still nervous about the future security of India she was now following a parcimonious policy, which hindered the development of Trincomalee. A victim to a general plan of drastic economies, official apathy, argument and indecision, owing to a fitful leadership, Trincomalee's chances of emerging as a naval station were stifled. Nor did it command value as a commercial port and entrepot in an age of imperial commercial expansion (39). Therefore, Trincomalee remained only as a supply base ; on the score of economy alone the English navy could not afford to manage without it.

Also the British Admiralty never forgot that Trincomalee could command both coasts of the Indian sub continent, and the need to retain this *key to*

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(35) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, pp. 311-312.

(36) *ibid.*, p. 312.

(37) Colgate, H.A. «The Royal Navy and Trincomalee. The History of their Connection, c. 1750-1958 article in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1* (Colombo, 1964), pp. 1-16.

(38) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, p. 318.

(39) *ibid.* pp. 322-24 ; also see Colgate, H.A. *op. cit.*

India. The harbour was increasingly used by English ships. During the Burma war, Trincomalee's naval yards had coped with demands ; and ships to Australia too had used her facilities. Nevertheless Trincomalee continued as a patch-work establishment, the victim of a peculiar interlude of peace. Among the victims of rigid economy policies Trincomalee furnished one example of drastic practice. Supremacy at sea made Britain indifferent to the future and Trincomalee decayed. When Capitaine de Vaisseau Laplace visited the old haunts of Suffren in 1838 he was distressed by the atmosphere of departed glory, desolation and decay which overhung Trincomalee (41).

Yet Trincomalee was officially designated the main victualling depot for the English squadron of the Indian Ocean. But not for long ; Trincomalee lost its lustre in the new age of steam. Even the newly established P & O service, which promised commercial resurrection found the confined harbour of Galle a more convenient rendez-vous. Trincomalee possessed advantages which no one wearied of recounting, but it was more than 300 miles off the main route as much as Diego-Suarez in Madagascar was off the usual route.

It may be appropriate to end this account of Trincomalee and review the fate of Ceylon with a brief recapitulation of the island's position in the Anglo-French imperial duel to gain commercial ascendancy in the Indian Ocean (42). In 1795 Ceylon fell easily into the arms of the predominant sea power. The English East India Company had investigated the old French base at Achin in Indonesia, and Trincomalee in Ceylon with a view to taking steps to prevent the French gaining a hold and using them as *points d'appui* for the invasion of India from the east (43). Perhaps it was Suffren's magnificient battle at the end of the war of American Independence that confirmed the East India Company in their resolution to find a base which would command the Bay of Bengal during the North East Monsoon and relieve the Dutch stranglehold on the straits.

Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary, preferred to maintain Britain's traditional course of supporting the Dutch as a barrier against the power of France in Europe as well as oversea (44). In the interests of British naval supremacy and trade security, he was determined to keep certain vital bases – Malta, the Cape, Mauritius and Ceylon – and to limit the French to a purely commercial occupation of their few East Indies factories. British policy towards the Netherlands empire was almost entirely and continuously a consequence of European geography or of British policy towards France in Europe. Accordingly, by the Treaty of London in 1814, Dutch colonial possessions in the Indian archipelago

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(40) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, pp. 324-327.

(41) *ibid.*, p. 327.

(42) See Parkinson, C. Northcote, *War in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1815* (London, 1954) ; also his *Trade in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1815.*

(43) Graham, G.S. *Op. cit.*, pp. 332-333.

(44) *ibid.*, p. 335.

were to be returned if they were held by the Dutch in January 1803 (45), a time limit which secured to the English the retention of Ceylon, which lasted till 1948 and independence.

As sure as Trincomalee, rivalry with the French, and commercial concern impelled the English to involve themselves in the island of Ceylon, similar factors influenced English attitude and action towards Madagascar, another island in the Western Indian Ocean. Among the islands flanking the African east coast between the Cape and Bombay, the stepping stones to India, Madagascar was one of the few islands with a good harbour. Hence British shipping *en route* to the East doubled the Cape and headed for India by the Outer Passage touching at Madagascar, when scurvy and diminishing ships made a halt imperative.

In the meantime French Captains had rounded the Cape to reconnoitre the islands near Madagascar (46). Across the Moçambique Channel, Madagascar was strategically placed to command the Cape route to India, as Ceylon was further eastward. It possessed two or three good harbours, as did Ceylon, which France once seemed anxious to develop, but fever had eradicated most of the original settlements. When the British forcibly took over the ports in May 1811 there were only few French inhabitants, living at Tamatave midway down the east east coast(47).

Madagascar's early history during the years of imperial intrusion into the Indian Ocean by the English and French differs from that of Ceylon. Apart from a few European missionaries and traders Madagascar remained predominantly the home of the indigenous peoples (48). After even 150 years of precarious trading and occasional settlement, Europeans had barely penetrated the island's fringe. In Ceylon, with the arrival of the Portuguese itself, in 1505 commercial hegemony passed into alien hands ; later to the Dutch and the British. Although initially in Ceylon the central Kandyan kingdom remained independent, in spite of Portuguese and Dutch assaults, it fell a victim to British advance by 1815.

On the contrary, in Madagascar the dominant Hova by their political capacities and ruthless ability preserved themselves far longer as the island's ruling race, recognized and respected by the Europeans. From the inland capital at Antananarivo, the skilful Radama I (1820–28) closely associated with the British authorities in pursuing an expansion of authority (49). While in Madagascar the British were collaborators, in Ceylon they were conquerors.

But in the area of education, both in Ceylon and in Madagascar, the European missionaries played a significant contributory role towards growth. The Portu-

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(45) *ibid.*, p. 336.

(46) *ibid.*, p. 2.

(47) *ibid.*, p. 8.

(48) See Mountjoy, Allan, B. and Embleton, Clifford, *Africa* (London, 1965).

(49) Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 9.

guese, the Dutch and the English missionaries set up schools in Ceylon. In 1818 similarly missionaries were sent to Madagascar by the British Missionary Society, which was eventually responsible for most of the fifty schools established there by the early thirties (50).

The early attention of the Europeans was focused on Madagascar as on Ceylon, however, because of its position on the sea route to the Indies. The north west coast of Madagascar was heavily indented ; Bombetoka Bay alone was capable of sheltering an entire fleet as Trincomalee in Ceylon. North of this bay grew up a struggling town – Majunga. Immune from noxious fevers and well protected against heavy gales, unlike Trincomalee, whose hinterland was notorious for malaria as bad as the Madagascar fever, Majunga was the centre of a thriving slave trade with the neighbouring east African coast. South of Cape St. Andrew the coast runs to St. Augustine Bay. Here as early as 1812 the English East India Company ships found a welcome source of cheap supplies and goods (51). St. Augustine was always a useful emergency refuge for vessels blown off course or following the difficult and baffling Moçambique Channel. Yet, with few exceptions, commercial contacts at north west coastal Madagascar were confined to those of whalers and occasional slave runners, unlike in Ceylon where the Europeans, including the English quite early developed ambitious commercial and political relationships.

Around the southern Madagascar's coastline there were no inlets save a small harbour at the south east extremity where the French founded a small post, Fort Dauphin, in 1643 (52). Soon by 1672 they were dislodged by the indigenous peoples. Not until the mid 18th century did France regain a foothold on the east coast at Ste. Marie (1750-61) and later, further south at Foulpointe, which remained the chief French settlement until reports of a healthier existence of Tamatave tempted most merchants to migrate again (53).

Tamatave became the important French post on the east coast. A second effort to take over this by the British in May 1811 succeeded (54). Tamatave lay protected against seas by a coral reef barrier, but the village was vulnerable. Under French and mulatto auspices it emerged to be Madagascar's most active European market – the chief export depot for the enormous bullock trade on which Mauritius and Bourbon, islands opposite, heavily relied for sustenance. The British Governor of Mauritius Farquhar, concluded that his island could barely survive without a hold on Madagascar ports.

Madagascar was a land of plenty which the Governor coveted and fearing

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(50) *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

(51) Wilbur, M.E., *The East India Company, and the British Empire in the Far East* (California, 1945), p. 199.

(52) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

(53) *ibid.*, also see Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*

(54) Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 54.

neither opposition nor misinterpretation he prepared to exploit the resources of his new dependency. But Farquhar's plans were abruptly shattered. France intervened in London, political and constitutional qualms arose, and Britain ordered Farquhar in October 1816 to restore to the Bourbon authorities all establishments on Madagascar's coasts that had been in French possession before January 1792 (55).

To the British the retrocession of the French ports in Madagascar merely implied that France held one or two undeveloped and unhealthy *points d'appui.* Nevertheless as Ceylon could be valuable because of India, Madagascar could be valuable because of Mauritius. French reoccupation of Ste. Marie could operate prejudicially on Mauritius. Moreover, up the coast, on the northern tip of Cape d'Ambre, Diego Suarez Bay offered the best harbour on Madagascar island, as useful as Trincomalee in Ceylon. France could occupy this Madagascar commanding site on the Cape route to India. However, then the British ignored these real dangers. Following the annexation of Madagascar in the last quarter of the 19th century, the French did build an enormously expensive naval base at Diego Suarez to *command the Indian Ocean,* even though the cutting of the Suez Canal meant that Madagascar was no longer on the principal avenue of traffic to the East (56).

Obviously, however, then there was no imminent danger. France was burdened with a huge indemnity and until 1818 France bore an occupation force of 200, 000 (57). For a decade following 1815 France was in no position to turn its energies or talents towards the sea. Yet France was rich, possessing extraordinary recuperative power (58). It was hence inevitable that Britain's formidable rival should zealously seek to regain her fortunes in the colonial field.

Moreover it was incredible that French governements after 200 years of effort would be content with ineffective establishments such as Ste. Marie. Naturally, therefore, it became a firm tenet of British policy that France should not acquire by negotiation or force either additional settlements in Madagascar or paramount influence over the Hova Government. A like attitude was evident in the British policy towards Ceylon; they wanted to prevent the French gaining a hold on Trincomalee.

By 1811 Mauritius had become to the British an undesirable acquisition. It was increasingly dependent on Madagascar for cattle and, moreover, the French residents appeared helpless without slaves. But Governor Farquhar had no alternative under the pressure of British laws except to cut the main sources of supply of slaves from Madagascar and the East African coast. This plan was

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(55) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(56) See Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*, p. 218 ; Ostheimer, John M. (ed.), *The Politics of the Western Indian Ocean Islands* See *Introduction* p. 9. for comment on value of this base.

(57) Graham, G.S. *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

(58) Cameron, R.E. *Economic Growth and Stagnation in France, 1815-1914* in *Journal of Modern History*, XXX, (March, 1958), No. 1, p. 1.

barely workable with naval help, but it was politically expedient. It was difficult to limit or block the smuggling trade from Madagascar alone ; until 1820 only a single vessel could be deployed for annual inspection of the waters between Mauritius, Bourbon and Madagascar (59). Such perfunctory supervision really invited a revival of the slave trade from Madagascar and the African east coast. Only a resurgence of French enterprise by 1844 in the Madagascar neighbourhood prompted a reorganisation of the English Cape Squadron, but even then its main purpose was to watch the French. Fear of France waxed strong in the English mind in respect of Madagascar as it had in respect of Ceylon in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile Farquhar negotiated with the Hova chief, Radama, a treaty for checking or blocking the illicit trade in slaves with Mauritius in October 1817 at Tamatave. This treaty which provided for any loss suffered by Radama prohibited « the sale or transfer of slaves or other persons whatever»... into any country, island or dominions of any other Prince, Potentate or Power whatever»... (60). It was renewed in 1820 with further English assistance to the Madagascar King. Farquhar's successor, G.J. Hall, suspicious of his predecessor and outraged at the extent of illicit trade which had resurfaced, felt that the new association between Mauritius and Madagascar had been forged owing to a mutually profitable deal. Therefore the policy of co-operation was abandoned and the treaty abrogated, thereby forsaking an agreement to prevent the export of slaves ; it was renewed only with the greastest difficulty, and continued to be respected.

The role Britain played in Madagascar, though anti-French in intent, was quite different in practice from the role in Ceylon. In Ceylon, Britain supplanted the Dutch, took over territorial control and subjugated the whole island, overthrowing the King of Kandy in the central highlands (61). But in Madagascar the powerful local ruler was won over on the basis of a treaty negotiated between two independent authorities. Subjugation of the island was not envisaged. Instead the English backed the Hova people against the rival Sakalava, who sought and gained French help. In Ceylon the local independent Kandyan King was precluded from seeking rival French assistance by the British who subdued him.

On British initiative the Hova chief in 1817 was declared King of Madagascar, which further alienated the Sakalava people, making them even more amenable to French blandishments and intrusions (62). Radama was supported by the British in Mauritius because he was the principal force, able and willing, assisted by the British, to block or restrict the extension of French power and influence. The effort to suppress slave trading was genuine, but not the major motive for alliance with Radama. The basic principle of British policy in Madagascar was to

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(59) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, p. 62.

(60) See Coupland, E. *East Africa and Its Invaders* (Oxford, 1956), p. 199.

(61) See, de Silva, C.R. *op. cit.*, vol. 1.

(62) Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 66.

keep alive in Radama the impression of British activity, and prevent French influence from preponderating (63), especially on the vulnerable north west coast. This principle of obstructing the growth of French influence and creating an impression of British activity was certainly fundamental to British policy towards Ceylon and in the Indian waters around.

Owing to Farquhar's exhortations light craft were employed to winkle out smugglers from bays and inlets in Majunga's proximity. Yet slaves trickled into Mauritius from Madagascar and the East African coast, from whence they were procured partly because of French laxity. However, Farquhar was determined to plug the Madagascar loophole. In 1823 another treaty was arranged with the Hova King envisaging the acquisition of exhaustive rights allowing intervention and interference in Madagascar matters to terminate the slave trade. But the Hova were traditional slave traders, quite sensitive to encroachments on their prerogatives. Radama did not want to lose either prestige or profit ; he did not want to forfeit either sovereign rights or commercial freedom. Hence in August 1823 the King agreed only to stop as far as possible the embarkation of slaves, but refused to enforce all what Governor Farquhar had expected for suppressing the trade (64).

The English were nevertheless willing to be accommodative because Radama could be coaxed to compromise. He needed British arms to beat the Sakalava ; and the British were committed to support him and willing to risk on his ability to achieve a unified Madagascar Kingdom. The sooner the King controlled the north west coast, the sooner the slave delers would be routed. With luck the British anticipated Radama to hold the whole of Madagascar.

Hence Britain approved the trade regulations between Mauritius and Madagascar, « since a deviation from that Treaty on the part of England might risk a breach of it on the part of Radama and thereby not only compromise the arrangements so happily concluded for the abolition of the Slave Trade but produce political misunderstandings injurious to the British Interests and beneficial to those of the French, so ready in that quarter to take advantage of any opening to extend their power (65)». Fear of the French was basic and common in the British attitude towards Madagascar and Ceylon in the Indian Ocean.

Consequences soon proved the soundness of British instincts. Because of continued intervention by French ships from Bourbon collaborating with the Sakalava, Farquhar's treaty policy proved to be the only effective means of stopping direct traffic between Madagascar and the east African Coast. By the end of 1825 Radama had ousted the Sakalava from Majunga, established a

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(63) *ibid.*

(64) See Colomb, P.H. *Slave Catching in the Indian Ocean* (London, 1873) p. 313.

(65) Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 68.

cordon of protective military posts around the bay and temporarily extinguished the slave trade of the north west coast (66).

Radama died in 1828. His successor, Queen Ranavalona, did not support British interests. On the contrary foreign interests were opposed. The British agent was expelled ; her policies led to an exodus of traders. Even France fell under royal disapproval. Nevertheless the British were still alarmed about French intervention in Madagascar. Rumours were rife about French designs, and it was iterated that a French bastion on Madagascar coast would endanger the vital route to India. In the absence of concrete information about contemporary Madagascar politics or about French settlements a British squadron from the Cape sallied forth on an investigative tour and for a show down (67).

The British cruisers from the Cape however felt no alarm. French forces had withdrawn from Tintingue, Fort Dauphin, and Froulpointe (strangely coincidental is the existence of a Foul Point off Trincomalee in Ceylon) ; but despite dreadful mortality the garrison at Ste Marie hung on. The French disaster gave cold comfort to the English because within Madagascar the situation threatened damage to over ten years of friendly relations. By 1836 all missionaries had departed and local Christians were punished, allegedly under intolerance (68).

Fears arose that Queen Ranavalona might restore the slave trade, especially because the abrupt termination of European commercial relations would hurt the exchequer. Fearing renewed action from slave dealers, the admiralty urged close vigilance on the northwest Madagascar shore and cooperation with the Mauritius Governor, if trade was resumed. The Cape Commander, completing his inspection, reported that the slave trade with Madagascar did not exist in any important degree (69).

British fear lingered, however. British officers were not convinced by the expression of the Queen's representatives that no renewal of traffic was intended. Meanwhile Britain tactfully sought to reestablish consuls at the more important ports and re-negotiate commercial relations. But the situation deteriorated. The independent Queen and District Governors were indifferent. Alleged ill-treatment of British traders repeatedly echoed to the Mauritius Governor. Queen Ranavalona prohibited cattle exports to the French island of Ste. Marie ; and apprehensions grew that a similar interdict might deprive Mauritius of indispensable shipments from Madagascar. This view prevailed around October 1838 when the British sloop visited Tamatave (70).

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(66) *ibid.*, p. 69.

(67) *ibid.*, p. 73.

(68) Pridham, Charles., *England's Colonial Empire : An Historical, Political and Statistical Account of the Empire, Its Colonies and Dependencies, Vol. 1. The Mauritius and Its Dependencies* (London, 1846), p. 156.

(69) See Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

(70) *ibid.*, p. 77.

The British felt that numerous provocations and injustice to British subjects made it imperative to act more decisively. Taking on the role of a moral reformer, Britain presumed that Tamatave needed to be forced so that the administration would mend its ways and exert itself to protect the security of British lives and property. The underlying idea, however, was to arouse the discontented, yet unsubdued tribes against the existing Government of Ranavalona, with British encouragement. But the British had long supported the Hova. An abrupt reversal of policy now could be embarrassing. It was difficult to support Sakalava insurrections in spite of the Queen's unfavourable attitude for the Sakalava had long been regarded as French allies.

Thus British policy was precariously perched between two stools. The Queen of the Hova, whom Britain had supported since Governor Farquhar's time, threatened to expel British traders. At the same time when the Queen's position was threatened any rebel success tended to weaken the tenuous British position by strengthening the French hold.

Under instructions from the Foreign Office the Cape squadron was interested in concerning itself with stabilizing Madagascar politics in the interests of British trade. But British Governments had little time to be spent on a handful of peripheral islands whose whereabouts and affiliations were but dimly known to Whitehall. Moreover, irrespective of her ultimate intentions, it was assumed that France was not yet ready to press territorial claims in Madagascar. Even barren Indian Ocean islands were getting tangled in European political rivalries ; but the British Government was not justified in investigating questions relating to «insignificant Islands» *unless they attracted another European power's Attention (71).*

While the estimation of Trincomalee and Ceylon was high indeed in Britain, it had still not sufficiently estimated Madagascar's intrinsic value. Ceylon was valuable because of the pragmatic concern with the Anglo-French rivalry already raging in India. Madagascar could be valuable only if French interests in the Island imperilled British interests in the Indian Ocean. Such a prospect then seemed remote.

The British Government, beset by mounting anxieties in the near East, either underestimated or ignored French designs aimed at compensating for the loss of Mauritius. France was obviously interested in Madagascar's best natural harbour, Diego Suarez, (an harbour as good as Trincomalee in Ceylon) ; the French had first occupied it way back in 1638 (72). Precipitate action there might impel British intervention, but adjoining Madagascar, off the north west coast, was a neglected little island, Nossi Be, without a garrison or Governor. An acquisition so trifling could hardly excite serious diplomatic concern. In early 1840 the French squadron, based on Bourbon, moved in quietly and invited Nossi Be's

(71) *ibid.*, p. 81.

(72) See Toussaint, Auguste, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126 ; also Howe, S.E., *op. cit.*, p. 190.

inhabitants to accept a protectorate. By the beginning of 1841 a garrison was ensconced in a position where they could look out on Madagascar (73).

The British Foreign Office hardly had any knowledge of Nossi Be. But the sudden assault confirmed fears of French expansionist aims. It had occurred during a crisis in Anglo-French relations, provoked by French support of Mehemet Ali in Egypt, and was considered a premeditated snatch. Britain did not desire to weaken its European position by a policy of leniency in Madagascar. However, doubts over rightful claims of any British ally to Nossi Be, the breaking of Mehemet Ali's power, British naval intelligence reports that the French would not last long in notoriously unhealthy Nossi Be, and other causes made the English reluctant to provoke French susceptibilities by creating an issue over the tiny island.

The French, however, followed up by extending control even over the best harbour in the Comoro island group, Mayotta (74). At the Cape, the British naval chief was convinced that the French intended to stay. It was further rumoured the French contemplated a settlement on the northwest corner of Madagascar. Then the whole west coast was likely to succumb to their influence. Strategically this was a threat, but greater was the threat to Mauritius' economic security, because most of vital cattle imports, considerable quantities of rice, and salted meat came from that part of Madagascar.

British failure to anticipate French action was neither due to ignorance of geography nor of French ambitions. Britain's imbroglios were France's opportunities. Queen Ranavalona' s succession in 1828 had sharply diminished foreign influence; and renewed crises in the Near East had led Britain to overlook the Madagascar issue.

Britain had to face the *fait accompli.* Furthermore, Nossi Be offered no harbour facilities to be made into a decent naval base. Even France' s re-established base in Madagascar, Ste Marie, hardly offered any hint of imperial ambition. France did not have much of a naval squadron in the south Indian Ocean; hence, Britain needed to pay scant attention, on the score of French activity.

But immediately as a reaction to Ranavalona's anti-foreign policy emerged the composition of a peculiar informal Franco-British naval alliance. The anti-European policy of the Hova Government, whose antagonism was further sharpened by the French occupation of Nossi Be and other islands on Madagascar's north west perimeter, indirectly produced a common cause and accounted for joint Anglo-French intervention.

From 1842 onwards British and French merchants in Tamatave had increasingly complained of hostile treatment. Trade had suffered, their property and

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(73) Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, p. 81.

(74) See *ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

lives were in jeopardy. On 13 May 1845 there was a crisis (75). A royal decree deemed that foreign traders should abjure their nationality and become the Queen's subjects, or quit within fifteen days. To liquidate their assets profitably in such a short time was impossible, while to become subjects of the Queen meant subjection to Madagascar law which the foreigners did not favour. The merchants confronted a dilemma.

The British from Mauritius and the French demanded redress and official investigation in June 1845 from the Queen and local officials. But Anglo-French co-operative leadership and forces could not prevail on Tamatave's local authorities : The Law of Madagascar could not be changed (76). The British and French retaliated with a show of force which ended in ignominous failure. The Tamatave authorities were not humbled or made politically quiescent. This militarily miscalculated clumsy attack lamentably failed as the earlier French effort of 1829.

The local power of Madagascar was not brought to order. Instead the Anglo-French humiliation was enhanced with a severe economic penalty. The Queen had triumphed over the united forces of Britain and France. Ranavalona's prestige aggrandized at the expense of European influence ; and she closed the coastal trade to French and British commerce, including the almost indispensable bullock traffic on which Mauritius and Bourbon depended (77).

The debacle in Madagascar affords a contrast to the events in Ceylon. In Ceylon the independent kingdom in the central highlands could not withstand the British onslaught for long. On the first occasion in 1803 the Kandyan Kingdom in Ceylon warded off the British offensive, but in 1815 it succumbed (78). In general, from the first initial venture by a European power against Ceylon, which began with the Portuguese in 1505, the Island could not hold itself against the Western powers. First capitulated the maritime provinces initially to the Portuguese and later by mid 17th century to the Dutch, and, eventually, following the English and French designs on the island, by 1815 the entire island had passed under British control (79). The resistance and success that accompanied the efforts of Madagascar distinguishes Madagascar's response to the aggression of imperial commercial powers from that of Ceylon.

Since the use of force had failed, friendly overtures were tried to establish cordiality and commerce with the Madagascar authorities, but unsuccessfully. The Queen insisted on a large indemnity. Yet in 1847 a visit to Madagascar was again suggested by the British Foreign Office « to bring about the Restoration of

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(75) *ibid.*, pp. 84-86.

(76) See Pridham, Charles, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-147 ; also Graham, G.S., *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

(77) Graham, G.S. *ibid.*, p. 88.

(78) See de Silva, C.R. *op. cit.*, vol. 1.

(79) See Pakeman, S.A. *Ceylon* (London, 1967) ; Ludowyk, E.F.C. *The Story of Ceylon.*

friendly relations» (80) and also to cultivate, if opportune, the Sakalava chiefs on the south west coast. The English naval authorities around the region lamented Britain's reluctance to exclude the French from this area by supporting the Sakalava whom they had wronged against their Hova oppressors (81). This plea was followed by an optimistic memorandum on the change of outlook in Madagascar and the growing feeling favouring a renewal of «commercial Intercourse with European Nations, of which you are to take advantage by every means in your power» (82). The English anticipated an imminent change of heart among the Madagascar authorities.

Rear Admiral J.R. Dacres arrived in June 1848 at Tamatave with a letter from Queen Victoria, expecting to conclude a treaty of friendship and commerce with Madagascar. But the reply of Ranavalona was uncompromising and gave no quarter. Despite an astringent curt rebuff Dacres hoped for some sort of commercial agreement. The later royal reply of Madagascar, however, drove Dacres away, angry and humiliated. Dacres bitterly communicated failure to the British Admiralty. With « the spirit of irreconciliation so manifest in the general tone of the letter, from Madagascar, it was inexpedient to treat any further with the Hova Government...» (83). The fines demanded were inordinate, the refusal to allow consular appointments was positive, and no missionaries or permanently resident British subjects were permitted. Beyond doubt the Hova Government wanted no treaty with Britain. The Foreign Office had been misinformed about any accommodating spirit.

Meanwhile the British navy had already pursued an arrangement with the Sakalava. In August 1848 on Foreign Secretary Palmerston's instructions British warships had visited the south west coast of Madagascar for «improving and extending British Commercial Interests in every possible direction, likely to prove beneficial to Mauritius» (84). Commercial treaties with two Sakalava chiefs, King Raboukie of Ambonga Bay and Prince William in St. Augustine Bay's neighbourhood, were negotiated. These were agreements of alliance too. Since the Hova Government had repeatedly spurned proposals for a settlement at Tamatave, Britain was now setting up camp on the opposite coast supported by two powerful Sakalava tribes. They would be sufficiently armed to maintain themselves, and the British foothold against their enemies, the Hova.

The British attitude was completely unrelated to a true knowledge of Madagascar and understanding of its ruler. It was assumed that the Madagascar administration feared British intervention and, that with the poverty that would follow with a decline of external trade, Madagascar would be compelled to

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(80) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, p. 89.

(81) *ibid.*

(82) *ibid.*

(83) *ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

(84) *ibid.*

renew friendly relations with Britain. Hence, the English refused to make any further approaches to the Queen unwilling to jeopardize their dignity any more (85). Queen Ranavalona, however, was uninterested ; she needed neither English or French relations and could stand on her dignity.

By October 1853 the British eventually ate humble pie. The Queen's pride and dignity were satiated with the payment of a fine, and an apology (86). The bullock trade was recommenced after eight years. Both the French and the English had lost a contest expensively and humiliatingly.

The events in which the English involved themselves over Madagascar were clearly different from the part they played over Ceylon. In Ceylon they had almost been invited by discontented chiefs who intrigued against the King of Kandy and met with hardly any resistance when they moved to oust the sovereign (87). The Kandyan King fell an easy prey as did Ceylon ; and unlike Madagascar there was little opposition.

Although Britain had bungled the Madagascar operation and muffed an early settlement, through lack of knowledge and dexterity, the nature of clash showed that the south western Indian Ocean meant a good deal more than a slave hunting · reserve. Rebuffs at Tamatave lifted the mists that shrouded the east African waters and taught the British Foreign Office much about Madagascar and its neighbouring islands. During the decade after 1845 fear of French expansionist aims in the Madagascar area dominated English strategical thinking at the Cape. Visits of French vessels to a west coast bay provoked much intelligence activity and vigilance both from England and Mauritius. In early 1847 fear of French intrigues with various Sakalava chiefs on the Madagascar coast prompted the British navy to shadow the enemy elusively (88). The French threat haunted the British and havered over the minds of the English, as much as it had in respect of Ceylon in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

By 1846 the natural and accepted division of the south west Indian area was officially effected by a new naval appointment (89). The second Senior Officer at Moçambique Channel controlled a division covering the seas between Algoa Bay and the equator extending seaward to include the Madagascar west coast and the neighbouring islands. The Mauritian division was confined to the east coast of Madagascar from Cape d'Ambre to Cape Ste. Marie although ships might visit any part of Madagascar, if covered by the Mauritius Governor.

The possible seizure by France of further *points d'appui* like Nossi Be on the direct track to India was reckoned as a threat equivalent to the re-occupation of

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(85) Freeman, Rev. J.J., *A Tour in South Africa* (London, 1851), pp. 373-374.

(86) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, p. 93.

(87) de Silva, C.R. *op. cit.*, vol. 1. ; also Mills L.A. *Ceylon Under British Rule.*

(88) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, p. 94.

(89) *ibid.*, p. 93, n. 3.

Mauritius. Likewise in Ceylon fear of French capture of Trincomalee had been engendered because it was construed that such action might mean a British loss of India. British factories, agencies or outposts, on Madagascar or among islands to the north, however solitary or barren were to be held firmly on Admiralty instructions as a safeguard against French intrusion. The interception of the east coast slave trade remained important, but the principal purpose of the English Cape squadron was to watch the French and especially to report on the state and progress of French settlements at Nossi Be or Mayotta. The number of French ships of war and troops around Madagascar were to be periodically checked and any French success in extending, by treaties with Sakalava chiefs, their authority and influence on Madagascar's west coast was to be estimated (90).

The British tried to trade on the agreement, reached at the Congress of Vienna, which enjoined inter-state cooperation for abolishing the slave trade. Yet France posed a formidable obstacle to the restriction and suppression of this trade in the Indian Ocean. France was deeply suspicious of British humanitarian aims since they seemed to cloak a voracious imperialism. Sensitive to trespass or obstruction France yielded no concession which threatened either its national dignity or its commercial needs.

However, occasionally, the French proferred a gesture of compliance, but on their own terms. In January 1817 importation of slaves into French colonies was prohibited ; in 1818 this was confirmed and expanded debarring French subjects from participating in the slave trade with penalties prescribed for infringements (91). There followed immediately a drop in the Madagascar slave traffic. Yet the British had no right to interrupt or intervene in the activities of French vessels. When in 1823 a French schooner was captured off the north west coast of Madagascar and over a hundred slaves were rescued, the British Admiralty condemned this action (92). Because of this fettered position the Madagascar or Bourbon slave trading could not be sealed off for there was no right of search. The politics of diplomatic expediency which hindered the French arose from the English attitude towards France as a European power and shackled British naval activity for foiling French involvement in the slave trade around Madagascar.

Only by the Convention of 1831 «for the more effectual suppression of the traffic in Slaves» was there a pratical step to break the Anglo-French impasse on right of search (93). On the east coast the agreement included all the waters around to a distance of twenty leagues. This Anglo-French agreement of 1831 removed objections to the search of vessels, which was made clearer ; this was

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(90) *ibid.*, p. 94-95.

(91) *ibid.*, p. 95.

(92) *ibid.*, p. 97.

(93) *ibid.*, p. 99.

further strengthened by the supplementary Convention of March 1833 (94). But the French were unwilling to yield any more.

France, however was no less humanitarian in outlook or impulse than Britain. French refusal to engage actively in coordinating the attack on slave traffic was chiefly because any such combination suggested a *de facto* subordination to British aims and ambitions. France, still smarting under recent political and military reverses, remained simply averse to taking instruction from a more powerful partner of professedly higher moral stature. In the French view British predominance at sea rendered real reciprocity of search illusory. The English navy served as an arbitrary instrument of power designed to further British commerce. According to the French reciprocal right of search was simply another device to ensure Britain's prosperity by placing irritating obstacles against French overseas trade.

French intransigence was only a mild result of commercial jealousy ; fundamentally it was French prestige at stake. For the sake of *la gloire* France longed to be powerful at sea, to regain some of her lost possessions, and to compete once more with the English empire overseas (95). In such a context the English compromised by consenting to a new Slave Trade Treaty of May 1845, a face saving measure indeed (96). The problem of suppressing the slave trade was further complicated as the French developed their system of colonial indentured labour. Ostensibly hired as volunteers to work the sugar plantations, really most were brought on the African coast or kidnapped from the interior and taken either directly to Bourbon or to assembly points in the Comoro islands and Nossi Be.

When French concession seekers had expanded interests in the Madagascar area in 1829 the British had been alarmed. Suspicious of the French intriguing with Sakalava chiefs on the Madagascar coast, the English had ordered its naval unit to shadow the French, surreptiously and inoffensively. The English alliance with some of the local powers also grew stronger because the local powers too had feared the growth of French influence in the area, which could be damaging to them. For instance, sultan Said of Oman in the interests of preserving his hold on Zanzibar was steadfast in the English alliance (97).

The obliteration of the slave trade, on which the English were bent, made them dabble in the Indian Ocean in the activities of any power engaged in this nefarious business. Although Portugal had agreed to cooperate at Rio de Janeiro in 1810 itself, to put an end to this trade, actually Portuguese slave operations secretly lingered. To the Portuguese to forego their share in the trade entailed severe losses – about 10 to 12,000 slaves were annually exported to the Portuguese

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(94) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(95) See *Cambridge History of Foreign Policy, II, 1815-1866* (London, 1923), p. 263.

(96) Graham, G.S. *op. cit.*, p. 107.

(97) *ibid.*, p. 181.

settlements drawing a fair amount of these from Madagascar (98). The British humanitarian impulses however, were checked by the basic resolution to cut costs of administration. It was impossible, considering constraints on costs, to embark on schemes. When Governor Farquhar's plan to keep a tab on the slave trade was torpedoed it was stated that one had to «bear in mind what has already been incurred at one station only, that of Madagascar...», which placed limits to the expense of effecting this object (99) ; the reference was to the Portuguese slave trade.

After 1843, however, the once flourishing traffic with Madagascar had dwindled except through a few resorts on the island's west coast like Boyanna Bay, where a number of Arab merchants maintained precarious establishments. The British Senior Officer of the *Moçambique Channel* was responsible for the surveillance of an area extending from Algoa Bay to the equator, and seaward as far as the west coast of Madagascar and neighbouring islands. This was an impossible task without Portuguese cooperation which was indispensable to contain activity along the Portuguese coastline. However, the southern coastal zone, centering around Moçambique, which fed the transport *en route* to Madagascar and Bourbon and thence to Latin America,, was subject to greater annual fluctuations in the infamous slave trade, partly owing to international treaties. Yet the average yearly export remained quite high because of the Arab Slave trade *via* Muscat and Zanzibar. Naturally the English sailors, imbued with evangelical fire, were inflamed by a passion roused particularly by the Arab trade from Moçambique to Madagascar and Bourbon.

No wonder that in 1823-1824 Captain Owen obtained through intimidation or attack Said's permission to take charge at Mombasa of the Omani squadron and the authority to block or cripple the slave trade from Lamu to Bombetoka Bay in north west Madagascar, and even Muscat and Zanzibar (100). Earlier in 1822 Said had agreed, among other conditions, to owners of Arab ships buying slaves for sale in Christian countries to be arrested and punished «even though they be bound for Madagascar» (101). He also agreed to the appointment of British agents and even authorised the seizure of vessels laden with slaves bound for Christian countries : «you may seize every (Arab) vessel you may fall in with beyond Madagascar, and in the sea of Mauritius...» (102). But often in practice British intentions were only pious hopes and more than slavery commerce and empire were to be later the more important concerns of English policy : in this, rivalry with France in the Indian Ocean loomed large.

While in Ceylon and in the Eastern Indian Ocean the English could rid themselves

(98) *ibid.*, p. 111.

(99) *ibid.*, p. 121.

(100) *ibid.*, p. 188.

(101) *ibid.*, p. 200.

(102) *ibid.*

of this rivalry quite early in the 19th century they were not successful in relation to Madagascar in the Western Indian Ocean. On the contrary, with the revival of French activity in the Indian Ocean in the latter part of the 19th century, the French conquered Madagascar in 1895(103). During this period the French position in the Indian Ocean in relation to the English grew strong, with Djibouti having been occupied in 1888 gaining thereby a strategic position at the Red Sea entrance. Again, during the second World War the Allies in the Western Indian Ocean held the post of Diego Suarez, which had already been fortified by the French as a naval base. Similarly, in the period just before and during the Second World War, the English strengthened and controlled the naval base at Trincomalee in the eastern Indian Ocean. These were, however, some episodes played out in the final years of inter-imperial rivalry among Western powers in the Indian Ocean, for soon both to Ceylon(104) and Madagascar came independence , to Ceylon in 1948 and to Madagascar in 1960. Ceylon, however experienced imperial and commercial hegemony for long while Madagascar experienced it for a shorter period. Yet both these islands in the Indian Ocean, though separated by thousands of miles, had invited the attention of the western imperial powers since the quest for a hold on the Indies began.

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(103) See for more modern history, Sngleton, F.S. & Shingler, John., *Africa in Perspective* (New York, 1967), pp. 38, 129-30 ; Hodgson, R.D. % Stoneman, Elvin A., *The Changing Map of Africa* (New Jersey, 1963), pp. 17, 50, 80, 99, 101, 117, 118, 122, 123 ; Ostheimer, John M. (ed.) *The Politics of the Western Indian Ocean Islands* (New York, 1975) pp. 1-10 and Madagascar ; The Authenticity of Recovery by Allen, Philip, M., pp. 28-65.

(104) See for modern history of Ceylon, de Silva, K.M. (ed.) *Sri Lanka – A Survey* (London, 1977).