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Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa

JOSLYN BARNHART

When are states willing to engage in behaviors of little material or strategic value in order to assert their status? This article demonstrates that states are more likely to engage in acts of status assertion if their international standing has been called into question. Such status-challenged states seek opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities as well as their intention to maintain their current status. Status assertions often challenge the status and security of other states, leading these states to engage in more frequent acts of aggression. Evidence for these claims comes from detailed analysis of the Scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. France and Germany adopted expansionary policies in Africa because their great power status had been called into question. These policy shifts directly led Italy and Britain to adopt expansionary policies, leading to the eventual conquest of 95 percent of the African continent.

Clear material and strategic rationales sometimes motivate state behavior in the international system. To a surprising degree, however, states are willing to engage in actions that require them to pay material costs and render them strategically more vulnerable. Scholars have focused on domestic political explanations of behavior that appears irrational at the systemic level. Yet, domestic political explanations do not account for many puzzling cases of international behavior. Detailed case analysis demonstrates that many important, seemingly puzzling instances of international behavior are best understood largely as assertions of status, often at the cost of immediate strategic or material interests.

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States do not, however, engage in the same degree of status seeking at all times. This article demonstrates that states are likely to engage in status competition if their status has been called into question by an instance of disrespect or by a humiliating international event. Humiliated and disrespected states, usually great powers or potential great powers, are likely to engage in competitive practices such as the development of advanced weaponry, competition over spheres of influence or influence within international organizations, or, as demonstrated here, the acquisition of vast amounts of territory.¹ Status-challenged states engage in these competitive acts in order both to signal that they possess characteristics and capabilities that distinguish them from lesser powers as well as to signal their willingness to vigorously exercise the prerogatives associated with their desired status. These competitive measures have a significant impact on international behavior because they often challenge the status, interests, and security of other states in the international system, leading those states to adopt competitive behaviors they likely would not have otherwise.

The evidence for this set of claims resides in the detailed analysis of the first acts of territorial expansion within the Scramble for Africa from 1881 to 1884. Analysis of the decisions made by France and Germany to adopt expansionary policies during this period indicates that the Scramble for Africa would not have occurred as it did if the great power status of these two states had not been previously challenged.² France, for instance, first adopted its forward policy in Africa as a direct result of humiliations suffered in the previous decade that had called its great power status into question. The relatively new German state dramatically altered its colonial policy in direct response to disrespect it believed it had suffered at the hands of the

¹ Offensive and defensive realism perceive the value of territory to lie in its tangible benefits. See John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Pott, 1902); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1933); Peter J. Liberman, *Does Conquest Pay?: The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). For acts of expansion aimed at diverting public attention from economic or civil unrest, see Jaroslav Tir, "Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict," *Journal of Politics* 72, no. 2 (April 2010): 413–25. For the ability of domestic interest groups to guide states toward expansionary policies through processes of domestic logrolling, see Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). While some scholars have focused on the intangible, psychological value of territory, none have focused primarily on territorial acquisition as a means to status. See, for example, Ron E. Hassner, "To Halve and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 1–33; Paul R. Hensel, "Territory: Theory and Evidence on Geography and Conflict," in *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John Vasquez (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 57–84; Barbara F. Walter, "Explaining the Intractability of Territorial Conflict," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 4 (December 2003): 137–53.

² The Scramble for Africa spanned the period from 1881 until 1912. France was the first to adopt a forward policy in Africa in 1881. Germany's official policy shift followed in 1884. Though Britain expanded into Egypt in 1882, it did so reluctantly and had no intention until 1885 of expanding elsewhere. Leopold of Belgium did set out to personally claim the Congo in 1876, though his claim was not recognized until 1884. Belgium did not formally annex the land until 1908.

British. Leaders within both states adopted expansionary policies in an effort to assert their state's great power status and in spite of their expectations of high associated costs and heightened strategic vulnerability. French and German status-motivated expansion generated status and security concerns among other states and for Italy and Britain in particular, leading both states to adopt expansionary policies that they likely would not have otherwise. Far from isolated instances of territorial expansion, the expansionary policies adopted by France and Germany during the early 1880s led to the eventual conquest of roughly 95 percent of the African continent over the following three decades.³

Historians have presented numerous accounts of the Scramble for Africa, focusing on broad explanations rooted in the material, strategic, or social contexts of the time.⁴ These explanations have often been based on imperial rhetoric employed after the act of conquest as leaders attempted to sell skeptical publics with rational myths of colonial expansion even when

³ Other states participated but were far less active. Belgium engaged in one act of expansion, though a relatively large one of 2,344,858 square kilometers. During this time Portugal added 909,000 square kilometers to the few holdings it had maintained for over a century. These figures are taken from data on all instances of territorial change from 1816 to 2008. See Jaroslav Tir et al., "Territorial Changes, 1816–1996: Procedures and Data," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 89.

⁴ For material arguments citing the need for new markets for excess goods and capital, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Hachette, 2010); Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*; Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. For a convincing counterargument, see Howard Robinson, *The Development of the British Empire* (London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922). For the demise of the "mythological beast of economic imperialism," see G. N. Sanderson, "The European Partition of Africa: Coincidence or Conjunction?" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3, no. 1 (October 1974): 10. For arguments against material rationales, see also M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1974), 40–44; D. K. Fieldhouse, "Imperialism: An Historiographical Revision," *Economic History Review* 14, no. 2 (December 1961): 187–209; Richard J. Hammond, "Economic Imperialism: Sidelights on a Stereotype," *Journal of Economic History* 21, no. 4 (December 1961): 582–98; Ronald Hyam, "The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763–1963," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27, no. 2 (May 1999): 27–52; William L. Langer, "A Critique of Imperialism," *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 1 (October 1935): 102–19; D. C. M. Platt, "Economic Factors in British Policy during the 'New Imperialism,'" *Past & Present* 39 (April 1968): 120–38; A. J. P. Taylor and A. J. Percivale, *Germany's First Bid for Colonies, 1884–1885: A Move in Bismarck's European Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1938). For the most prominent strategic rationale, see R. E. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (Macmillan, 1966), chap. 4. A great deal of evidence has also been offered in refutation of their argument. See Alexander Schölich, "The 'Men on the Spot' and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1882," *Historical Journal* 19, no. 3 (September 1976): 773; Sanderson, "The European Partition of Africa: Coincidence or Conjunction?"; John S. Galbraith and Afaf Lutfi al Sayid-Marsot, "The British Occupation of Egypt: Another View," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 4 (November 1978): 471–88; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London: Longman, 1993), 366–67; A. G. Hopkins, "The Victorians and Africa: A Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt, 1882," *Journal of African History* 27, no. 2 (July 1986): 376. For arguments rooted in social context and the notion that emigration would serve as a "safety valve" to stave off domestic unrest, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867–1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State* (London: Arnold, 1995). Each of these arguments has confronted serious and convincing challenges with time. For an exception and a well-regarded review of these perspectives, see Sanderson, "The European Partition of Africa: Coincidence or Conjunction?" Arguments based in the material, social, or strategic context of the time do not provide adequate explanations of the timing of state actions or why the pace of expansion accelerated so rapidly once it began. See *ibid.*

the act of conquest originally lacked a material or strategic rationale.⁵ This article, alternatively, roots its novel explanation of the Scramble for Africa in the detailed analysis of the key factors leading up to the initial adoption by France and Germany of expansionary policies in Africa in the early 1880s, prior to the point at which they perceived they were participating in a race of any sort. These expansionary policies precipitated a competitive race for territory that eventually penetrated every corner of the continent. To say that status concerns shaped these early decisions is not to say that such concerns guided every instance of conquest throughout the Scramble for Africa or that leaders during this time were never guided by domestic, material, or strategic motivations. Rather, the analysis demonstrates that without the impetus provided by status challenges, the conquest of Africa, if it occurred at all, would likely have assumed a very different form.

This article proceeds in three sections. It begins by laying out the theoretical argument and placing it within the context of existing literatures. It then presents the detailed analysis of why France and Germany decided to adopt forward policies in Africa when they did—starting with the French decision to acquire Tunisia and territory in the Congo in 1881 and 1882, and then addressing Otto von Bismarck’s surprise decision to join the colonial fray in April of 1884, a decision that involved the annexation of 83 percent of Germany’s eventual colonial holdings in Africa.⁶ Within each case, I address alternative arguments based on political, economic, strategic, and social factors and then demonstrate that instances of humiliation and disrespect prompted the countries’ actions. The article concludes by briefly addressing the significant impact that these acts of status assertion had on the international system more broadly, as well as the implications of the analysis for status seeking in contemporary international politics.

The Nature of Status and Status Seeking

Humans are hardwired to care about their status as individuals and about the status of groups with which they identify.⁷ Numerous scholars have

⁵ Wolfgang J. Mommsen argues that economic arguments were usually “adduced as afterthoughts to justify territorial gains that had already taken place.” See Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 102. See also D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973); Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871–1914: Myths and Realities* (New York: F. A. Prager, 1966), 182–190. Jack L. Snyder argues that overexpansion is driven by parochial rather than national interests in cartelized political systems. He notes however that Germany in the early 1880s was not governed by cartels but was strongly unified under Bismarck, who repeatedly ignored special interests unless they corresponded with his own. Snyder asserts that Bismarck’s acts of expansion were intended to assertively defend German prestige. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*. 67, 78–79, 99.

⁶ Germany acquired over 1.2 million square kilometers in 1884 and early 1885. It acquired an additional 182,000 square kilometers over the rest of the Scramble.

⁷ See Jonathan Dvash, Gadi Gilam, Aharon Ben-Ze’ev, Talma Hendler, and Simone G Shamay-Tsoory, “The Envious Brain: The Neural Basis of Social Comparison,” *Human Brain Mapping* 31, no.

demonstrated the significant degree to which status concerns drive international behavior.⁸ International status is based on the collective beliefs of others about a state's rank on admirable characteristics such as military capability, wealth, demographic position, or diplomatic influence.⁹ Because objective rankings of status dimensions are often impossible, a state's rank is rooted in social perception.¹⁰ International status seeking is therefore the process of attempting to shape other states' perceptions about one's rightful position in the international hierarchy.¹¹ Status seeking may be an innate

¹¹ (November 2010): 1741–50; Donald H. Edwards and Edward A. Kravitz, "Serotonin, Social Status and Aggression," *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 7, no. 6 (December 1997): 812–19; Klaus Fliessbach et al., "Social Comparison Affects Reward-Related Brain Activity in the Human Ventral Striatum," *Science* 318, no. 5854 (November 2007): 1305–8. For a demonstration that actors are willing to pay costs in pursuit of status even without the promise of long-term tangible rewards, see Bernardo A. Huberman, Christoph H. Loch, and Ayse Öncüler, "Status As a Valued Resource," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2004): 103. See also Robert H. Frank, "The Demand for Unobservable and Other Nonpositional Goods," *American Economic Review* 75, no. 1 (March 1985): 101–16; Ori Heffetz and Robert H. Frank, "Preferences for Status: Evidence and Economic Implications," in *Handbook of Social Economics*, Vol. 1A, ed. Jess Benhabib, Alberto Bisin, and Matthew O. Jackson (San Diego, CA: Elsevier, 2008), 69–91; Christoph Loch, Michael Yaziji, and Christian Langen, "The Fight for the Alpha Position: Channeling Status Competition in Organizations," *European Management Journal* 19, no. 1 (February 2001): 16–25. On group-level concerns about status, see Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47; Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁸ Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Deborah W. Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 63–95; Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Daniel Markey, "Prestige and The Origins of War: Returning to Realism's Roots," *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 126–72; Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity," *International Organization* 49, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 229–52; T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jonathan Renshon, "Losing Face and Sinking Costs: Experimental Evidence on the Judgment of Political and Military Leaders," *International Organization* 69, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 659–95; Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 28–57; Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For a discussion of the emotional and instrumental components of status seeking, see Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 371–93. See also Tuomas Forsberg, Regina Heller, and Reinhard Wolf, "Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, nos. 3 and 4 (September–December 2014): 261–68.

⁹ T. V. Paul, Deborah W. Larson, and William C. Wohlforth present a detailed conceptualization of status. Influence is not merely an indirect measure of capability. It depends upon one's willingness and intention to assert their interests. See Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in *Status in World Politics*, ed. Paul, Larson, Wohlforth, 7–17.

¹⁰ Objective rankings of army size or GDP may be possible. Measures of resolve or influence rely upon social perceptions. Perceptions even play a role in the relative assessment of tangible characteristics like one's strategic arsenals, where subjective estimations must be made of how the sheer number of weapons interacts with capacity or reliability in determining superiority.

¹¹ The degree to which a state's domestic elite attempts to signal its expectation that the state will hold higher status depends significantly on the status they themselves ascribe to their state. In that way, status depends both on the perceptions of others as well as on one's perception of self.

human trait, but actors do not seek status at all times. States are particularly inclined to engage in status competition when their status has been called into question by an instance of disrespect or by a humiliating international event. To show “respect” is to behave in a manner consistent with another state’s status; to show disrespect is to deny another state the degree of esteem or consideration it feels entitled to, thereby implicitly refusing to recognize the state’s desired status.¹² Disrespect therefore depends upon a state’s expectation of how much consideration and deference it believes others should show it, an expectation that is derived from the state’s identity.¹³ Disrespect may assume an evaluative form in which others clearly acknowledge but disregard a state’s interests or a nonevaluative form in which others ignore the state’s interests, rights, and concerns altogether.¹⁴ An act of disrespect may occur within the public sphere for all to see or may occur privately between two states.

A state is humiliated when it believes that its position has been lowered in the eyes of others and that this lowered estimation will result in a future decline in respect and deference.¹⁵ Humiliation may be an intended act.¹⁶

¹² This definition is taken from Reinhard Wolf, “Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition,” *International Theory* 3, no. 1 (February 2011): 105–42. Wolf presents a detailed theory of the role of disrespect in international relations and calls for plausibility probes to assess the degree to which disrespect may impact state behavior. See *ibid.*, 106–7, 112. As Wolf notes, disrespect is particularly relevant in international relations exactly because of its relationship with status. As Wohlforth notes, one’s position within the status hierarchy is hard to measure without feedback from others. See William C. Wohlforth, “Status Dilemmas and Interstate Conflict,” in *Status in World Politics*, ed. Paul, Larson, Wohlforth, 121. An act of disrespect serves as direct feedback on where one stands in the international system. Others have noted the importance of recognition of status and identity. See Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar, *The International Politics of Recognition* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012); Michelle Murray, “Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition before the First World War,” *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (November 2010): 656–88; Erik Ringmar, “On the Ontological Status of the State,” *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 4 (December 1996): 439–66; Erik Ringmar, “The Recognition Game: Soviet Russia Against the West,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 2 (June 2002): 115–36.

¹³ There is a large literature on the sources of national identity. For state leaders competing to define the national image, see Clunan, *Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence*. For the argument that national identity formation depends upon interactions with other states rather than on leaders’ agency, see Murray, “Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics”; Alexander Wendt, “Why a World State is Inevitable,” *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (December 2003): 491–542. See also Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ As Wolf notes, a state may also be disrespected if its physical integrity, social importance, ideas and values, achievements, efforts or rights are ignored or disregarded by others. See also Matthew S. Gottfried and Robert F. Trager, “A Preference for War: How Fairness and Rhetoric Influence Leadership Incentives in Crises,” *International Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming).

¹⁵ The definition of humiliation is in keeping with the definition often used within philosophy and psychology. See, for example, Maury Silver et al., “Humiliation: Feeling, Social Control and The Construction of Identity,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 16, no. 3 (October 1986): 269–83; Daniel Statman, “Humiliation, Dignity and Self-respect,” *Philosophical Psychology* 13, no. 4 (December 2000): 523–40.

¹⁶ This was the case with the crowning of the new German emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles at the end of the Franco-Prussian war. Scholars of the role of humiliation in international

It may also, however, be self-inflicted when a state fails to live up to the expectations of the international community. Defeat in conflict to a “weaker” state, for instance, or the involuntary loss of territory to a lower-status state will likely cause the international community to question the state’s position within the international status hierarchy. Humiliating events occur on the world stage and thereby threaten to generate common knowledge within the international community of the state’s decline.¹⁷

Humiliated or disrespected states that have the capabilities to do so will likely engage in competitive acts with the intention of signaling the status they expect to hold in the international system.¹⁸ Such competitive acts may occur within a bilateral environment as a disrespected state attempts to signal to a particular rival that it expects to be treated with a greater degree of deference. They may also occur within more multilateral environments as states that have been humiliated or disrespected on the world stage attempt to shape the perceptions of the international community of their right to heightened status.¹⁹ Competitive status-seeking acts may include efforts to gain membership into elite clubs through the acquisition of symbols of great power or regional status.²⁰ They may also include direct military confrontation or competition over spheres of influence, the size of weapons arsenals, or the extent of territorial holdings. Finally, states may attempt to

relations have focused primarily on effects of intended acts of humiliation on subjugated peoples. See Evelyn Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), xiv; Paul Saurette, “You Dissin’ Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics,” *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (July 2006): 495; Deepak Tripathi, *Imperial Designs: War, Humiliation & the Making of History* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013).

¹⁷ Status is rooted in second-order beliefs, or beliefs about others’ beliefs. See Paul Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, 8–9; Barry O’Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Barry O’Neill, “Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige,” Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper no. 1560, February 2006, Yale University; Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, “Reputation and Status as Motives for War,” 374–75.

¹⁸ Humiliated and disrespected states commonly possess relatively high status. They are those states that expect a certain degree of success and deference within the system. See Lebow, *Cultural Theory of International Relations*. This is supported by research in psychology that shows that those with high self-regard are more likely than those with low self-esteem to act aggressively toward those attempting to challenge their self-image. See Roy F. Baumeister, Brad J. Bushman, and W. Keith Campbell, “Self-esteem, Narcissism, and Aggression: Does Violence Result from Low Self-esteem or from Threatened Egotism?” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 9, no. 1 (February 2000): 26–29; Brad J. Bushman and Roy F. Baumeister, “Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-love or Self-hate Lead to Violence?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 1 (July 1998): 219.

¹⁹ For the role of visible, salient demonstrations of power in generating status, see O’Neill, “Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige.” For the importance of public events in generating common knowledge, see Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

²⁰ When status is treated as a “club good,” the competitive nature of status-seeking among high-status states may be somewhat abated. Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, “Status and World Order,” 9; David Lake, “Authority, Status, and the End of the American Century,” in *Status in World Politics*, ed. Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, 246–72.

demonstrate their existing influence over international outcomes in an effort to minimize the appearance of influence by the superior state.²¹

Status-challenged states are likely to adopt competitive status-seeking strategies aimed at asserting their “rightful position” in the international system for two primary reasons.²² First, both humiliation and disrespect engender strong emotional responses such as anger that increase the likelihood that a state will behave in an aggressive manner toward others.²³ Such emotional reactions to humiliation will lead states to first and foremost desire revenge upon the state that directly or indirectly threatened their status.²⁴

²¹ See Larson and Shevchenko, “Status Seekers”; Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 116.

²² Status-threatened states do not always adopt competitive strategies. They may engage in alternative strategies such as social creativity or social emulation, as laid out in Social Identity Theory (SIT). For applications in international relations, see Mathias Blanz, Amelie Mummendey, Rosemarie Mielke, and Andreas Klink, “Responding to Negative Social Identity: A Taxonomy of Identity Management Strategies,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 28, no. 5(September–October 1998): 697–729; Amelie Mummendey, Thomas Kessler, Andreas Klink, and Rosemarie Mielke, “Strategies To Cope with Negative Social Identity: Predictions by Social Identity Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, no. 2 (March 1999): 229; Henri Tajfel, “The Psychological Structure of Intergroup Relations,” in *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (New York: Academic, 1978), 27–98; Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict”; Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, “Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy,” *International Organization* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 77–110; Larson and Shevchenko, “Status Seekers.” States which lack the capabilities to do so will often turn to a strategy of social creativity in which they attempt to emphasize new dimensions of status on which they prevail. Military and economic constraints following World War II, for instance, left France no choice but to pursue a creative strategy—that of emphasizing its glorious past, its experience as a world leader, and its symbolic value as a long-standing beacon of democracy—following its humiliating performance during the war. See Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944–1958* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002). States which exist outside of the current normative order and which have repeatedly attempted to gain status through competitive strategies but failed will likely turn to imitating the norms, institutions, and values of superior states. See Zarakol, *After Defeat*.

²³ Social psychologists have demonstrated the existence of group-based emotions relating to the fate of one’s group. The degree to which an individual feels such emotions depends upon the degree to which they identify with the group. See Thomas Kessler and Susan Hollbach, “Group-based Emotions as Determinants of Ingroup Identification,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 41, no. 6 (November 2005): 677–85; Bernhard Leidner, Hammad Sheikh, and Jeremy Ginges, “Affective Dimensions of Intergroup Humiliation,” *PLoS One* 7, no. 9 (September 2012): 46375; Diane M. Mackie, Eliot R. Smith, and Devin G. Ray, “Intergroup Emotions and Intergroup Relations,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 5 (September 2008): 1866–80; Heather J. Smith and Thomas Kessler, “Group-based Emotions and Intergroup Behavior,” *Social Life of Emotions* 2 (2004): 292. For those focusing on group-based humiliation, see Victoria Fontan, “Polarization Between Occupier and Occupied in Post-Saddam Iraq: Colonial Humiliation and the Formation of Political Violence,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 217–38; Jeremy A. Ginges and Scott Atran, “Humiliation and the Inertia Effect: Implications for Understanding Violence and Compromise in Intractable Intergroup Conflicts,” *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8, nos. 3–4 (2008): 3–4; Lee Shepherd, Russell Spears, and Antony S. R. Manstead, “‘This Will Bring Shame on Our Nation’: The Role of Anticipated Group-based Emotions on Collective Action,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49, no. 1 (January 2013): 42–57.

²⁴ Oded Lowenhein and Gadi Heimann argue that the need for revenge following an international humiliation plays a key role in shaping state behavior. They do not however relate humiliation to status. See Lowenhein and Heimann, “Revenge in International Politics,” *Security Studies* 17, no.

Second, leaders of disrespected and humiliated states will desire to protect the state's self-image for fear that if they do not, the state will face demotion within the international status hierarchy.²⁵ This demotion has both instrumental consequences, in that a decline in status is a decline in influence, but also emotional consequences as well in that states, like individuals, seek to have a voice and to be respected by those in their community. Such states therefore seek clear and effective ways to establish common knowledge within the international community of their state's distinctive capabilities, their intention for the state to be perceived as high status, and their expectation that others within the international community will treat it accordingly.²⁶

Humiliated or disrespected states may choose to engage in a number of different competitive status-seeking measures at the same time, though the exact competitive measures a state chooses in response to status threat depends in part on the capabilities of the state. Status-challenged states with sufficient resources are ideally able to respond to their emotional and instrumental concerns in the most satisfying and convincing way possible—by successfully taking revenge on the actor responsible for the status decline. Revenge may be impossible, however, for states with fewer resources. In such cases, the preferred response of leaders and the public may diverge. The masses, unconstrained by concerns about capabilities, are able to focus their attention on the emotional repercussions of status threat and on revenge against the state responsible for one's humiliation or sense of disrespect at all costs.²⁷ Leaders, however, who deem revenge too risky must still manage the instrumental implications of threats to status, about which they are likely to care more than does the general public. Leaders may therefore engage in competitive status-seeking measures against third-party states aimed at influencing the perceptions of other states even when those measures lack the backing of the people.²⁸

²⁴ (December 2008): 685–724. See also Peter Hays Gries and Kaiping Peng, "Culture Clash? Apologies East and West," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, no. 30 (February 2002): 173–78; Robert E. Harkavy, "Defeat, National Humiliation, and the Revenge Motif in International Politics," *International Politics* 37 (September 2000): 345–68. See also Robert F. Trager, "Long-Term Consequences of Aggressive Diplomacy: European Relations after Austrian Crimean War Threats," *Security Studies* 21, no. 2 (April–June 2012): 232–65.

²⁵ Such acts may also reestablish the collective esteem of the state as well as shape the beliefs of others. See Clunan, *Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*.

²⁶ Revenge is often not about disrespect by seeking getting back at the wrong-doer but may also be intended to send a message to third party observers about the costs of infringing on an actor's rights. See Mario Gollwitzer, Milena Meder, and Manfred Schmitt, "What Gives Victims Satisfaction When They Seek Revenge?" *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41, no. 3 (April 2011): 364–74.

²⁷ This may be especially true in the case that the humiliation involves the loss of territory within the homeland.

²⁸ As will be shown below, French and German leaders were concerned foremost about altering the perceptions of other states rather than those of their own publics. They therefore often disregarded the publics' preferences, which were often anti-imperialist.

This article addresses one particular response to humiliation and disrespect: territorial expansion.²⁹ States are most likely to respond to humiliation and disrespect by seeking territory under two conditions. First, they will be more likely to do so when territory is a symbol of status within relevant status hierarchies. The ability to conquer and administer vast swathes of territory has served as a symbol of high international status for much of international history, distinguishing those states with unusual military capabilities and with the intention to maintain a sufficiently vigorous foreign policy as would befit preeminent states.³⁰ Support for the norm of territorial integrity by Western powers, and in particular by the United States, after World War II, however, rendered colonization and conquest unacceptable forms of behavior for a majority of the international community.³¹ Concurrently, technological development enabled the rise of new status symbols such as nuclear weapons, space missions, and aircraft carriers.³² That Vladimir Putin's recent acts of territorial aggression in the previous Soviet sphere appear to

²⁹ While this article focuses on cases of imperial expansion, the argument is not limited to discontinuous expansion or only to those states vying for great power status. Contiguous territorial gains may also be used to demonstrate a state's capabilities. Russia and Austria had unclaimed contiguous territory upon which to assert their status in the nineteenth century whereas the European powers did not. States may also engage in numerous competitive status-seeking acts at the same time. See Alfred LeRoy Burt, *The Evolution of the British Empire and Commonwealth, from the American Revolution* (Boston: Heath, 1956).

³⁰ France's "policy of prestige" during the eighteenth century, for instance, mandated territorial expansion in North America for the sake of disputing British claims to naval superiority and announcing French grandeur to the world. See Peter J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America c. 1750–1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 1; David G. Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775–1997* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). The duc de Richelieu noted in 1816 that France would retake its former colony of French Guiana from Portugal "not because of any real advantage we derive from [it] ... but because it would be harmful to the dignity both of the King and of the State to concede anything to Portugal to which she has no sort of claim." Quoted in Henri Brunschwig, *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français, 1871–1914* (Paris: A. Colin, 1960), 14–15. Russia's acquisition of extensive amounts of territory in the mid-nineteenth century was motivated by its humiliating loss of territory in the Crimean War and its desire to reassert its status *vis-à-vis* Britain. See Karl E Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Basic Books, 2009). Much of this expansion occurred even after leaders had concluded that on average the benefits of colonialism did not outweigh the costs. For a description of how by the late eighteenth century Spain, Britain, and France had come to view their colonial enterprises as disastrous experiments, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). For a definition of great powers that includes, in part, the demonstration of willingness to pursue expansive foreign policies beyond one's region independent of other states, see Thomas J. Volgy, Renato Corbetta, J. Patrick Rhamey, Ryan G. Baird, and Keith A. Grant, "Status Considerations in International Politics and the Rise of Regional Powers," in *Status in World Politics*, ed. Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, 62.

³¹ See Mark W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 215–50; Tanisha M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³² See Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996): 54–86; David Kinsella and Jagdeep S. Chima, "Symbols of Statehood: Military Industrialization and Public Discourse in India," *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 353–73; O'Neill, "Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige"; Baldev Raj Nayar and Thazha

be motivated in large part by a desire to reassert Russian status following humiliating and disrespectful treatment by the West, however, suggests that some states continue to view territorial expansion as an effective means of asserting great power status.³³ While a majority of states still prescribe to the norm of territorial integrity, alternative status hierarchies arguably exist that maintain more traditional status models in which territory remains a viable path to preeminence.³⁴ Putin's determination to pursue expansion in the face of strong Western opposition suggests that he may be signaling his expectation of heightened status to those states that doubt the legitimacy of the current Western normative structure. Second, the likelihood that states will pursue territorial expansion following a threat to status depends on whether or not territory played a role in the initial instance of humiliation or disrespect. The loss of territory is a source of significant international humiliation; states that have been humiliated through loss of territory are likely to respond by engaging in territorial aggression aimed at reacquiring lost domains, if they are able, or at taking territory elsewhere in order to signal their intentions of maintaining the expansive foreign policy of a high-status state. Similarly, if a state's sphere of influence has been disrespected, that state will likely assert the right to claim territory, either disputed or otherwise, as would befit a state of its desired status.

ALTERNATIVE THEORIES OF STATUS SEEKING

This theory of status assertion overlaps to some degree with other status-based theories of behavior. Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that groups want to maintain positive, distinctive identities and that an unfavorable comparison with a reference group engenders a desire to enhance one's position.³⁵ While states may choose to seek status through less competitive strategies such as imitation and social creativity, they are more likely to seek status through a strategy of social competition when the borders between

Varkey Paul, *India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lilach Gilady, "Conspicuous Waste in International Relations," Robert Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the US Response," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 46–81; David Scott, "India's Drive for a 'Blue Water' Navy," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10, no. 2 (Winter 2008). Technological advance also propelled the rise of the dreadnought battleship as a symbol of status at the turn of the twentieth century. See Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics." See also Robert J. Art, *The Influence of Foreign Policy on Seapower: New Weapons and Weltpolitik in Wilhelminian Germany* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1973).

³³ See Forsberg, Heller, and Wolf, "Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy"; Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: US-Russian Relations in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). While all fifteen of the previous Soviet states expressed support for territorial integrity following the collapse of the Soviet Union, their support can largely be attributed to pressure from the West. Zacher, "Territorial Integrity Norm," 222.

³⁴ Numerous status hierarchies may exist at the same time. See Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers," 74.

³⁵ Tajfel, "Psychological Structure of Intergroup Relations."

groups appears to be “impermeable.”³⁶ Disrespect can be understood as a signal of impermeability—as a sign that higher-status states are unwilling to accept new members into their ranks. Impermeability, however, suggests a sustained state of restricted access over time, not solely in the form of disrespect. I argue instead that a single instance of disrespect may be sufficient to lead states to engage in competitive assertions of status. Instances of humiliation also increase the likelihood of competitive strategies, though they are not signals of boundary impermeability. I also argue that status-challenged states with sufficient capabilities are likely to first pursue competitive strategies over imitation or social creativity for a number of reasons. First, as suggested above, because humiliation and disrespect engender anger, they serve as a trigger for aggressive action.³⁷ Second, because competitive strategies rely upon established bases of status, they are less risky than a strategy of creativity with which a state may or may not succeed in establishing new dimensions of status. Finally, competitive strategies also enable status-threatened states to send a more targeted signal to states that have disrespected it than do imitation or creativity. This signal often involves vigorously exercising the right or pursuing the exact interest that the disrespected state was originally denied.

Wohlforth presents an alternative model, arguing that a state will compete for status when it matches higher-status states in some but not all of the key material dimensions of status.³⁸ He argues that periods of power transition create the conditions for status ambiguity in which states have an incentive to strive for preeminence. I argue, however, that while instances of humiliation and disrespect may be more likely to occur during shifts in relative capabilities, states also experience humiliation and disrespect when the distribution of capabilities is relatively stable and unambiguous.³⁹ Because of the difficulty of objectively measuring how one’s characteristics rank relative to others, states obtain estimates of their status through the amount of consideration they receive from others. Instances of disrespect allow for

³⁶ Social competition is the attempt to gain status at the expense of a particular rival by attempting to outdo the superior state along dimensions of status on which they excel. The definition therefore is more specific than the concept of status competition examined in this paper.

³⁷ Whether or not this is true depends upon the relative strength of the humiliated party. See Mackie, Smith, and Ray, “Intergroup Emotions and Intergroup Relations.” Humiliation among Palestinians led to passivity rather than action but under experimental conditions in which there is no lag between the humiliating prime and one’s reaction. Logically, actor’s responses to humiliation change over time as they regain their sense of power. See Ginges and Atran, “Humiliation and the Inertia Effect.”

³⁸ See Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” 38–40.

³⁹ Instances of humiliation will be more likely as states experience relative decline in capabilities. Disrespect may be more likely as states’ capabilities rise relative to others and dominant states are reluctant to acknowledge the shift. The European conquest and dominance over China in the middle of the nineteenth century, which served as the beginning of China’s “Century of Humiliation,” did not result from a shift in military capabilities but from stronger European forces coming into contact with a Chinese force that turned out to be weaker than it expected.

such estimates and therefore serve as triggers for status seeking, whether the underlying distribution of forces is shifting or not. Finally, realist analyses of status competition (for example, Robert Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics*) view military aggression as arising from inconsistency between a state's degree of influence and its military power as states seek to demonstrate relative military capability.⁴⁰ I argue, in contrast, that status is partly but not wholly based on relative capabilities and that direct military conflict is one among many status-seeking strategies. States need not engage in direct conflict with rivals or in costly displays of capability or resolve in order to demonstrate their ranking relative to others. Numerous less risky and less costly status-seeking strategies, such as the extension of imperial control or the adoption of policies opposed to dominant states, are available to humiliated and disrespected states that allow them to signal the status they expect to hold in the international system.

In summary, I argue that states that have been disrespected or humiliated and possess the capability to engage in acts that befit states of their desired status are likely to do so. Status-threatened states do so in order to demonstrate their existing influence in the international system and their intention to hold high status in the future. This theory is demonstrated below through analysis of the initial acts of conquest in the Scramble for Africa.

These cases were chosen for several reasons. First, territorial expansion, and imperial expansion in particular, is so often attributed to material logics. Thus, the cases of French and German expansion provide a hard test of the theory that fears of declining status drive international behavior. Second, substantial documentary and secondary source material is available on all facets of these cases, which is not true for more contemporary instances of expansion. Third, these acts of conquest are of inherent historical interest. They represented significant policy shifts for both France and Germany. Expansion into Tunisia was France's first act of conquest on the African continent in over twenty years. The flag planted by Germany in South West Africa in 1884 was its first planted abroad. Understanding the motivation behind these consequential policy shifts is essential to understanding the flurry of imperial conquest that occurred in the years that followed.

⁴⁰ According to Gilpin, "prestige" is the reputation for power; it rests in relative military capability, though you know you have it when you can achieve your aims without using power. See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 30–34. For status inconsistency, see also Michael D. Wallace, "Power, Status, and International War," *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 1 (March 1971): 23–35; Thomas J. Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, "Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (March 1995): 67–84.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA, 1881–84

Over the seven decades prior to the Scramble in Africa, European states had shown relatively little interest in establishing colonies in Africa. Prior to 1881, France and Britain, the dominant powers of the time, held just under 4 percent of African territory, mostly in the northern and southernmost tips of the continent.⁴¹ In the four-year period from 1881 to 1884, France, Germany, and Britain annexed approximately four times that amount. France acted first, annexing Tunisia in April of 1881 and then territory in the Congo in November of 1882. In both cases, French leaders were motivated to reassert French membership in the great-power club by international events that they believed cast France's long-standing great power status into doubt.⁴² The relatively new German state, prompted by perceived British disrespect of its rights as an emerging power within the great-power club, then decided to acquire its first colonies ever, taking land in South West and East Africa from April to June of 1884. The adoption of expansionary policies by France and Germany set off a series of policy shifts by Britain and Italy that eventually led to the conquest of the continent.

THE FIRST CASES OF FRENCH EXPANSION, 1881–82: TUNISIA AND CONGO

On 28 April 1881, thirty-six thousand French troops arrived on the shores of Tunisia in what is considered to be the first act of expansion in the Scramble for Africa.⁴³ By 8 May, French troops had acquired Tunis and the second largest city, Bizerte, and established a formal protectorate over Tunisia. For decades prior, the French had lacked any clear colonial calling or policy. Nevertheless, the French government, led by Jules Ferry and Léon Gambetta, opted to conquer over 116,000 square kilometers of Tunisian territory. This section will show this significant shift toward a forward policy in Africa was motivated not by material, strategic, or domestic considerations, as previous explanations of imperial expansion in Africa suggest, but by the fear that other states would perceive a permanent decline in French status if France

⁴¹ Data taken from Tir et al., "Territorial Changes, 1816–1996." Of this expansion occurring prior to 1881, just 156,473 square kilometers, or 13 percent, were taken at the hands of the British around South Africa while 87 percent was taken by the French, primarily in Algeria over a period of forty years.

⁴² From November 1882 on France actively pursued territory in Africa, taking land in Benin, Djibouti, and Gabon by the end of 1884.

⁴³ The crisis in Egypt in 1882 prompted the Scramble for Africa as British moves led to French countermoves of expansion. See Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*. However, others convincingly refute this argument. See Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*; C. W. Newbury and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "French Policy and the Origins of the Scramble for West Africa," *Journal of African History* 10, no. 2 (1969): 253–76; Sanderson, "European Partition of Africa."

did not act to reassert its intention to remain a great power following its humiliating loss in the Franco-Prussian War and the loss of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

Though France and Britain had competed around the globe for international preeminence throughout the eighteenth century, their fates diverged in the nineteenth century. Britain prevailed as the paramount seafaring and colonial power throughout the century.⁴⁴ France, on the other hand, had been defeated in the Napoleonic Wars and struggled in its attempts to found a Second French Empire in Mexico and Algeria.⁴⁵ In 1871, “l’année terrible,” the country experienced its deepest humiliation yet: its shocking defeat and the loss of 15,000 square kilometers in Alsace and Lorraine to a supposedly weaker Prussia.⁴⁶ While Prime Minister Émile Ollivier had entered the Franco-Prussian war “with a light heart,” failing to recognize the shortcomings of France’s military preparedness in the face of a larger, modernized Prussian force, the war ended with Paris occupied and with Wilhelm I crowned German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.⁴⁷ The defeat called into question France’s very existence as a Great European power. Disraeli, for instance, commented in 1875 that he did “not see any prospect of the revival of France as a military puissance. She is more likely to be partitioned than to conquer Europe again.”⁴⁸

The 1870s was a period of withdrawal and retrenchment for France as it struggled to recover both economically and militarily from the war. While France managed to return to its pre-1871 military capabilities by 1881, it remained humiliated by the loss of the war and in particular by the loss of the provinces.⁴⁹ Prime Minister Gambetta famously remarked that the French should “think of [the loss of the territories] always, but speak of it never.” The French people demanded revenge against Chancellor

⁴⁴ Britain controlled roughly eight million square miles with major colonial holdings in Canada, Australia, India, and South Africa in 1871.

⁴⁵ See S. S. H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870–1925* (London: F. Cass, 1963), 171. By 1870, France possessed territory only in Algeria and Cochinchina.

⁴⁶ The humiliation of quickly losing to Prussia was arguably greater than losing after years of fighting against many other powers. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2003). The blow to French self-esteem was particularly intense since the French had announced its importance to their image and then lost, suffering a larger blow than they might have without such a declaration. See Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870–1871* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1981).

⁴⁷ Elements of the treaty, such as the parade of Prussian soldiers down the Champs-Élysées, were written in with the clear intention of humiliating the French. Alice L Conklin, Sarah Fishman, and Robert Zaretsky, *France and Its Empire since 1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31.

⁴⁸ Letter from Disraeli to Lady Bradford in 1875, quoted in Jean Ganiage, “France, England and the Tunisian Affair,” in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. William Roger Louis and Prosser Gifford (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), 43.

⁴⁹ The claim about relative military capabilities is supported by CINC data from Tir et al., “Territorial Changes, 1816–1996.”

Bismarck and the newly crowned German emperor; they demanded the return of the provinces. Germany ten years later however had become even stronger. Attempting to exact revenge, French leaders realized, would risk further humiliation however and the solidification of France's decline in the eyes of others.⁵⁰ French leaders sought not only the psychological satisfaction of revenge, but also the opportunity to reassert France's status as a first-ranked power within the international community.⁵¹ French Parliament member Joseph Chailley-Bert described it most clearly, stating: "We had been beaten in 1870. We had been demoted ... from our position as the dominant power in Europe and almost master of the world to the status of a second-class power. We were dreaming of some event or effort through which we should later seek to recover our position as a first-class power."⁵² French leaders desired to prove that France maintained the stamina to remain a great nation, and by 1881 they had become convinced that the annexation of Tunisia offered the means to do exactly that.⁵³

Why then did France focus its efforts to reassert its status on Tunisia? Territorial expansion abroad allowed France to remind the European community of its ability to project imperial power abroad, as befit a Great Power, as well as its strength as a seafaring nation.⁵⁴ The act of expansion, however, also signaled France's intention to remain active in world affairs and to assert the rights it had long been afforded as a great power.⁵⁵ A failure to do so would equate to an implicit acceptance of a lesser position. As Prime Minister Jules Ferry put it, "Should we steer French policy into a blind alley with our eyes transfixed on the Vosges Mountains, leaving everything to be done, managed, and decided on without us and around us? This would lead to the bankruptcy of our rights."⁵⁶

While the annexation of Tunisia came ten years following France's defeat, the subject of a French Tunisia did not first emerge in 1881. Rather, the idea was first planted in the minds of French leaders three years earlier at the Congress of Berlin. While it is unclear who first proposed

⁵⁰ As James Cooke puts it, following the humiliation of 1871, "Any offense to the national honor of the Third Republic simply could not be tolerated by patriotic Frenchmen." James J. Cooke, *New French Imperialism, 1880–1910: The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion* (Hamden, CT: David & Charles, 1973), 15–17. Jules Ferry in particular had emphasized the need for caution. France needed to rebuild before reengaging in international affairs or else it would face a worse defeat.

⁵¹ See Brunschwig, *Mythes et Réalités*, 176, 55–58.

⁵² Quoted in *ibid.*, 177.

⁵³ See Winfried Baumgart and Ben V. Mast, *Imperialism: The Idea and Reality of British and French Colonial Expansion, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 56. Also Henri Brunschwig, "Anglophobia and French African Policy," in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. Gifford and Louis, 23–24.

⁵⁴ France did not perceive status to be gained only with expansion in Africa, but also in Asia from Saigon to Cochin China. See Brunschwig, *French Colonialism*, 75–88.

⁵⁵ As Gabriele Hanotaux, later Minister of Foreign Affairs, put it, France engaged in Tunisia to prove its "savoir-faire et son energy." See Gabriel Hanotaux, *Histoire de la France Contemporaine (1871–1900)*, vol. 4 (Paris: Furne, 1908), 639.

⁵⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 79.

the idea, both Bismarck and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Salisbury advocated a free hand for France in Tunisia at the 1878 meeting.⁵⁷ Recognizing the building French demand for resurgence and revenge on Germany among the French people, Bismarck attempted to divert “the ambitions” of the French away from Germany by offering French Foreign Minister William Waddington the opportunity for territorial expansion along the shores of North Africa.⁵⁸ British Lord Salisbury desired the annexation of Cyprus; an unchallenged march into Tunisia was thought to be compensation for French acquiescence. That France’s two most recent military rivals supported France’s actions in Tunisia did not undermine France’s attempt to reassert its great power status both to the international community as well as to itself. Both Bismarck and Salisbury expected French status concerns to trigger a need for France to engage in a vigorous display of its great power status and merely sought to channel these aggressions away from the European continent.⁵⁹

France did not immediately send troops into Tunisia, however. While Waddington, who became the prime minister of France in the following year, had immediately been attracted to the idea of a resurgent French Empire, he realized he first needed the support of the French public.⁶⁰ The French people, weary from the long fight in neighboring Algeria, became suspicious upon hearing that expansion into Tunisia was being considered at the urging of Bismarck.⁶¹ Was he trying to distract them from a surprise attack?

⁵⁷ For a thorough relevant history of the events prior to and in Berlin, see Thomas Francis Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1944), 35–38.

⁵⁸ Bismarck was also motivated by the fear that French enmity for the Germans would lead to a disastrous Franco-Russian alliance. Bismarck had a plan to satisfy the ambitions of each European power at the Congress by providing them territory equivalent to their perceived esteem. He encouraged England to take Egypt, Russia to take Bulgaria, and France and Italy to carve out influence around the Mediterranean. See William L. Langer, “The European Powers and the French Occupation of Tunis, 1878–1881, I,” *American Historical Review* 31, no. 1 (October 1925): 59–60; Roberts, *History of French Colonial Policy*. While Waddington happily returned home from the Congress with Tunisia in his pocket, he was nearly as delighted that France once again was received at the tables of the Great Powers of Europe. See Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 37.

⁵⁹ Both European leaders recognized the humiliation associated with France’s loss of territory. Bismarck had opposed the annexation of the provinces for fear that French humiliation would come back to bite him. Salisbury stated in 1871 that the “ceded [French] territory would be a constant memorial of humiliation.” Quoted in A. L. Kennedy, *Salisbury, 1830–1903: Portrait of a Statesman* (London: J. Murray, 1953), 71. He further predicted that the French would act in response to the loss.

⁶⁰ Waddington requested that the French General Counsel in Tunisia Theodore Roustan draft a protectorate treaty for Tunisia four days after he returned home from Berlin. Before Roustan was able to present the treaty to the Bey of Tunisia, Waddington called him to stop, citing domestic concerns. “Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914,” *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1^{re} Série* (hereafter DDF), 1929, vol. III, nos. 337, 339, Paris.

⁶¹ Upon hearing this news, protests filled the streets of Paris. Even those French statesmen who had worked closely with Bismarck assumed the worst of Bismarck’s intentions.

Was he trying to divert their attention from the stolen provinces?⁶² Bismarck addressed these exact concerns quite directly to Raymond de Saint-Vallier, the French ambassador to Berlin, disavowing the first possibility, but fully acceding to the second. He had no Machiavellian intentions, he claimed. He did however want to distract France from the pain caused by that “hole in the Vosges,” arguing that a “grand pays” like France deserved satisfaction for and distraction from her lost lands. While he could not offer to return Alsace and Lorraine, he did believe that the conquest of Tunisia would help “soothe France’s amour proper and satisfy its natural and legitimate need for expansion.”⁶³

In addition to his concern about the attitude of the French public, Waddington was concerned about how the Italian government would react to a French move on Tunisia. France had long been competing with Italy for influence in the territory.⁶⁴ Upon hearing rumors that France had been offered a free hand in Tunisia in 1878, Italy began a series of diplomatic moves intended to counter French influence there.⁶⁵ Prime Minister Charles de Freycinet became particularly worried in 1879 when the Italian government paid more than four times the asking price for a Tunisian railway. Convinced by Theodore Roustan, his man on the ground, that France could not allow a lesser-ranked Italy to enhance its status before France reestablished its own, Freycinet prepared to send troops into Tunis.⁶⁶ French action in Tunisia stalled, however, when Ferry replaced Freycinet on 23 September 1880.

At the time that Ferry took office, neither he, who would later become France’s most ardent imperialist, nor Léon Gambetta, the leader of the opposition, showed any interest in engaging in military action in Tunisia. Raymond de Saint Vallier, ambassador to Berlin, had entreated Foreign Minister Jules Barthélémy-Saint-Hilaire on 26 January 1881, imploring: “Save our country from the new humiliation, the new ‘amoindrissement’ (lessening) that threatens us We have our backs to the wall and Europe is watching

⁶² Thomas Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa: White Man’s Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876–1912* (New York: Abacus, 1992), chap. 7; Henri Wesseling and A. J. Pomerans, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 28.

⁶³ “Commission de publication des documents,” *DDF*, vol. III, nos. 304, 307. The practice of allowing an adversary to overcome the sting of defeat was seen frequently in the nineteenth century. See Baumgart and Mast, *Imperialism*, 59–60. In Bismarck’s private correspondence, he emphasized the need to avoid a clash with France. Contrary to standard realist arguments, Bismarck was most concerned that another military engagement would thoroughly annihilate France now that Germany was so much stronger. See Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa*, 118.

⁶⁴ The number of Italians in Tunisia was as high as thirty thousand in 1880, while the number of French at the time was closer to three thousand. The Italians engaged in the vast majority of trade there as well. See Luigi Villari, *The Expansion of Italy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), 57–58.

⁶⁵ For a full description of the diplomatic competition in Tunisia from 1878 to 1881, see Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 38–42. For a review of literature on diplomatic signaling, see Robert F. Trager, “The Diplomacy of War and Peace,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (May 2016): 205–28.

⁶⁶ “Commission de publication des documents,” *DDF*, vol. III, no. 109.

us to judge if we are still something; one act of firmness, or energetic will ... and we will resume our place in the good opinion of other nations.”⁶⁷ Failure to act, he added, could relegate France to the ranks of Spain.⁶⁸ Convinced by the plea, Saint-Hilaire approached Ferry who expressed concern about domestic and parliamentary opposition.⁶⁹ The decision to invade, therefore, depended largely on the position of Gambetta, whose change of heart on the matter can be pinpointed to a conversation he had on 23 March with the director of political affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baron Geoffroy Chodron de Courcel. A career diplomat, Courcel had never taken an interest in commercial or financial matters. Rather, he was long interested in the need to protect French honor and standing in the world. According to his memoirs, Courcel pled his case for French expansion into Tunisia to Gambetta exactly along these lines.⁷⁰ Great power status was ephemeral, he argued; action in Tunisia would bring honor to France and would stabilize France’s international position. At no point in this pivotal conversation did Courcel mention commercial or financial motivations in Tunisia. Gambetta was said to have left the meeting a convert, later that week announcing that “in Africa, France will take the faltering first steps of the convalescent.”⁷¹

After Gambetta pressed his followers into conversion, Ferry quickly came on board, requesting authorization to send troops immediately.⁷² In the eyes of his domestic opponents, Ferry had played into the hands of Bismarck, had cost France the friendship of Italy, and had provoked the British.⁷³ His government was immediately overthrown. Yet despite the opposition of the masses, French statesmen believed that France was on course to reestablish itself in the eyes of other nations. Gambetta wrote Ferry privately upon the signing of the treaty with the Bey of Tunis that “there will be people everywhere who will not like it, but they will have to put up with it. France is becoming a Great Power again.”⁷⁴ That France had retrieved her status as

⁶⁷ Ibid., no. 376.

⁶⁸ Sanderson, “European Partition of Africa,” 9.

⁶⁹ Jules Ferry responded, “Action in Tunis in an election year, my dear Saint-Hilaire, do not think of it.” Ferry quoted in Hanotaux, *Histoire de la France Contemporaine*, vol. 4, 650. Gambetta was far more interested in focusing on continental affairs. See Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 48.

⁷⁰ For detailed reference to Courcel’s memoirs, see Hanotaux, *Histoire de la France Contemporaine*, vol. 4, 650–52. Also Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 50; Jean Ganiage and Daniel Hémery, *L’Expansion Coloniale de la France Sous la Troisième République, 1871–1914* (Paris: Payot, 1968), 74–76.

⁷¹ Quoted in R. Hyam, “The Partition of Africa,” *Historical Journal* 7, no. 1 (1964): 154–69.

⁷² Years later, Ferry attested the immense influence Courcel had in these affairs. See Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 52. While raids of the Tunisian Kroumir tribes into Algeria were presented as the primary cause, the documents clearly attest that this was merely pretext for the intervention. Ibid., 51.

⁷³ See George H. Kelly, *The Political Development of the French Overseas Empire*, vol. 3 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1955).

⁷⁴ Quoted in Estournelles de Constant, *La Politique Française en Tunisie* (Paris, 1891), 182.

a first-ranked power by adopting a vigorous and expansive policy in Tunisia became a part of national rhetoric.⁷⁵

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE FRENCH OCCUPATION OF TUNISIA

Not only did the key discussions among French leaders leading up to the invasion of Tunisia in April of 1881 contain remarkably little consideration of the material, strategic, or social benefits that Tunisia might provide, the annexation lacked logical rationales along these lines.⁷⁶ First, France had little reason to expect any material windfall. While El Dorado myths about Sudan were pervasive at the time, there were few such myths about Tunisia.⁷⁷ French experience in neighboring Algeria had not engendered dreams of profit or natural abundance. Rather, as one French explorer put it in 1870, the only thing of plenty in Algeria was the desert and the only thing “plentiful in the desert was air.”⁷⁸ Moreover, by 1870, over three hundred thousand lives had been lost attempting to quell unrest in neighboring Algeria. While the different domestic and demographic features of Tunisia suggested that it would likely be easier to quell than had been Algeria, this did not alter expectations about the degree to which North African colonies would materially benefit the French state.

Moreover, there is little evidence that the French state engaged in expansion in Tunisia at the behest of French coalitions of colonialists or entrepreneurs with parochial interests. As Christopher Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner describe, French business remained largely indifferent to colonial expansion throughout the nineteenth century and largely clashed with the interests of the small and relatively inchoate colonial parties.⁷⁹ While French entrepreneurs with significant interest in Tunisian markets did campaign for financial protections, there is no evidence that they had interest in or campaigned for full occupation of the territory.⁸⁰ Even if special interests had petitioned French leaders for expansion, the near-unanimous opposition of

⁷⁵ See Brunschwig, *French Colonialism*, chaps. 8–12.

⁷⁶ References to raw materials, to potential markets, or other economic factors were “conspicuously lacking from Ferry’s creed.” See Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 196–98.

⁷⁷ See Sanderson, “The European partition of Africa: Coincidence or conjuncture?,” 12–13.

⁷⁸ Roberts, *History of French Colonial Policy*, 177. French President Grévy argued at the time that Tunisia was not worth “un cigar à deux sous.” Quoted in ibid., 28. Tunisia in the 1870s was in bad financial and domestic straits. Twenty percent of the population had perished in famines in 1867 and 1868. The government was essentially bankrupt. Upon annexing the country, France assumed responsibility for Tunisia’s mounting international debts. Wesseling and Pomeran, *Divide and Rule*, 18.

⁷⁹ Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, “French Business and the French Colonialists,” *Historical Journal* 19, no. 4 (December 1976): 981–1000. Pro-colonial coalitions did not become powerful in France until the turn of the century. See Wesseling and Pomeran, *Divide and Rule*. See also Christopher M. Andrew and Alexander Sydney Kanya-Forstner, “The French Colonial Party: Its Composition, Aims and Influence, 1885–1914,” *Historical Journal* 14, no. 1 (March 1971): 99–128.

⁸⁰ See Wesseling and Pomeran, *Divide and Rule*; Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *French Business and the French Colonialists*. None of the large French companies with significant interests in Tunisia appear to

the French public to colonial expansion and its suspicion that colonial enterprise benefited the few while costing the many made support for special interests in an election year extremely costly while providing little electoral advantage for French leaders.⁸¹

Additionally, the annexation of Tunisia made little strategic sense for France. Most importantly, it did not serve France's primary security imperative of maximizing its continental security.⁸² Since France's shocking defeat in 1871, France had become isolated on the European continent while Germany had continued to grow in power. French strategic concerns would have been better served by consolidating French economic and military resources in order to shore up its defenses within Europe, rather than engaging in far-flung colonial exploits with few perceived material benefits, as many argued at the time.⁸³ To many French politicians, colonies were more than a mere distraction; they were a liability. As one prominent Bonapartist argued, colonies were "costly in peacetime and dangerous in wartime."⁸⁴ Conquest and colonial administration would dissipate the country's strength just when France was most concerned with its continental security.⁸⁵ France also did not expand out of a concern about relative gains or a desire to balance recent territorial gains by others. The annexation of Tunisia followed a period of relative calm among the European powers; no state had acquired African territory outside of South Africa in more than ten years.

Finally, French leaders were not swayed to expand into Tunisia by domestic considerations. As stated above, protests broke out in the street upon

have applied any pressure on French politicians for military action. This included the two companies with the largest financial investments in Tunisia as well as the railway company that had received concessions to build in Tunisia. A representative of a smaller company, the Compagnie Coulombel, which dealt in esparto grass, did urge the French consul general toward military action, though this request remained unknown to Jules Ferry prior to invasion. For more detail on the role of private interests, see Brunschwig, *French Colonialism*, 52–53. Moreover, while industrial production was increasing in France at this time, industrialists did not expect to find a market for these goods in Tunisia. See Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 197.

⁸¹ Ibid., 27.

⁸² The French did expand into Tunisia in effort to meet their strategic goals. France confronted demographic disadvantages and could make up for them by acquiring Tunisian men to fight Germany. See Burt, *Evolution of the British Empire and Commonwealth*, 510. There is little evidence however that France ever planned to incorporate or train Tunisian men within the French military. Any talk of adding men to the French military was placed in the context of reestablishing French status as a great power rather than in the context of existential security. See William Roger Louis, "The Berlin Congo Conference," in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. Gifford and Louis, 174–75.

⁸³ See Cooke, *New French Imperialism*; Agnes Murphy, *The Ideology of French Imperialism, 1871–1881* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948). Clemenceau, an ardent anti-colonialist, argued that expansion into Tunisia was a strategic mistake that would prove to be a "military liability for freedom of action on the continent." Quoted in Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 66.

⁸⁴ Quoted in ibid., 57.

⁸⁵ See Ganiage, "France, England and the Tunisian Affair," 53. Also see Brunschwig, *Mythes et Réalités*, 77–80.

word that Bismarck was in support of the move and the government was quickly overthrown following the invasion. The public, driven by an emotional desire for revenge and unconstrained by thoughts of relative military capabilities, desired the return of the lost provinces at any cost and viewed expansion into arenas farther afield as attempts to divert their attention away from France's rightful revanchist goals against Germany. If anything, the French masses viewed colonies as a luxurious and costly distraction, providing little commercial, economic, or strategic benefit.⁸⁶ As one newspaper described at the time, "There has never been an epoch nor a country more indifferent to distant adventures than the Third French Republic."⁸⁷ French leaders, on the other hand, confronted more instrumental concerns about French demotion in the eyes of others and viewed the move into Tunisia to be a clear signal to the international community that France intended to remain in the great power club.

French Expansion in the Congo, November 1882

In mid-1882, French leaders were generally satisfied with the statement made by their larger footprint on the North African shore; they had no plans for a sustained march through Africa. Another humiliating international event occurred, however, this time diplomatic in nature, which would lead France to fully adopt a forward expansionary policy in Africa, starting with an act of annexation in the Congo. Though French leaders had long expressed disinterest in the Congo, on 12 November 1881, Charles Duclerc submitted for ratification an agreement signed by French explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Makoko, chief of the Bateke, in which the chief promised to "cede his territory to France ... and his hereditary rights of supremacy."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ganiage, "France, England and the Tunisian Affair," 53.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Mary Evelyn Townsend and Cyrus Hendersen Peake, *European Colonial Expansion since 1871* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1941). Also, while French leaders had expressed belief in the "safety valve" function of colonies, such a desire to stave off domestic unrest through expansion fails to explain why France expanded when it did. Civil unrest had existed for more than a decade. See Wesseling and Pomeran, *Divide and Rule*, 17–18.

⁸⁸ The French government had stated it had no interest in the Congo in 1880 when de Pierre Brazza set off. When he returned in 1881 with the signed treaty, Prime Minister Charles de Freycinet indicated it was a matter for the Association Internationale Africaine (AIA), the charter company that had supported the trip, and not for the French government, which was officially not interested in the interior of Africa. See Jean Stengers, "King Leopold and Expansion in the Congo," in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. Louis and Gifford, 474. This again provides support against the theory that French leaders engaged in expansion at the behest of special interests. See Snyder, *Myths of Empire*. In September 1882, de Brazza informed the Belgian foreign minister that he was convinced that "neither the [French] government nor the Chambers would do anything [with regards to his treaty]." Ibid. De Brazza's expeditions into the Congo coincided with those of Leopold II of Belgium, who cherished hopes of increasing Belgian prestige through colonial expansion. Leopold perceived colonies as "a means of giving us a more important place in the world"—as a means to greatness. See Vincent Viaene, "King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860–1905," *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4 (December 2008): 741–90; Robert Aldrich,

This case of French expansion cannot be understood without considering the impact of the Egyptian crisis, which had played out in the months prior, on French attitudes.⁸⁹

In the late 1870s, the British and French had assumed direct control over Egyptian finances in an effort to protect the substantial financial investments of their citizens in the face of a series of Egyptian economic crises. This gradual encroachment of Europeans in Egyptian affairs engendered an Egyptian national movement that targeted British and French bondholders in particular. In 1882, nationalist efforts to eradicate European influence and to oust Egypt's European-backed leader led to British and French reprisals and a cycle of escalating violence. By mid-July, William Gladstone became convinced that direct military intervention was necessary.⁹⁰ While his true motivation for initiating an attack on the nationalist leader Ahmed Urabi has been debated,⁹¹ we do know that Gladstone initially proposed a joint attack on nationalist forces by both Britain and France.⁹² Freycinet supported quelling the dissent but wanted to avoid direct action in Egypt, fearing the backlash of public support at the mounting costs of intervention.⁹³ In lieu of an all-out invasion, Freycinet proposed joint intervention to protect access to the Suez Canal. Even this more limited plan, however, failed to win the support of the French Parliament, leading to Freycinet's resignation the following day on 30 July 1882. In August, forty thousand British troops entered Egypt alone, quickly occupying Cairo and Alexandria and taking control of the Suez Canal. By October, the status quo in Egypt had been irreparably altered; Gladstone requested a renegotiation of the distribution of influence

Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 54. The desirability of the land in and of itself was secondary. "Leopold wanted an empire anywhere. He wanted to annex any land anywhere and even land which others had abandoned." See Galbraith and al Sayyid-Marsot, "British Occupation of Egypt."

⁸⁹ For a detailed account of the Egyptian Crisis and on British motivations, see Hopkins, *Victorians and Africa*; G. N. Sanderson, *England, Europe & the Upper Nile, 1882–1899: A Study in the Partition of Africa* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1965), chap. 1; Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa*, chap. 8; Wesseling and Pomeran, *Divide and Rule*, 29–31. Also Agatha Ramm, *Great Britain and France in Egypt, 1876–1882*, in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. Louis and Gifford.

⁹⁰ Worried about angering the other European powers, Britain wanted to act only with their consent. On 23 July 1882, the six European powers agreed that the Suez Canal should be protected at whatever cost. See "Commission de publication des documents," *DDF*, vol. III, no. 455.

⁹¹ The British were protecting the Suez Canal amid the "anarchy" of the nationalist revolt. See Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 131. The British were prompted by the desire to protect the economic interests of British citizens and to achieve domestic political gains for the Liberal Party. See Hopkins, *Victorians and Africa*. See also Galbraith and al Sayyid-Marsot, *British Occupation of Egypt*; Dan Halvorson, "Prestige, Prudence and Public Opinion in the 1882 British Occupation of Egypt," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 56, no. 3 (September 2010): 423–40.

⁹² "Commission de publication des documents," *DDF*, vol. III, no. 408.

⁹³ Freycinet had proposed the naval bombardment of Alexandria in May, but they increasingly disagreed with the British proposal to follow up any bombardment with Turkish ground forces.

in the country, effectively omitting a role for France. The era of French influence in Egypt was officially over. British troops, however, would remain on the ground until 1936.⁹⁴

The primary point of interest of this case for the purpose of assessing the role of status concerns in the Scramble for Africa is less the British motivations for occupation than the impact of the event on the French. France had considered itself as having rights in Egypt superior to those of the other European Powers since the time of Napoleon Bonaparte.⁹⁵ Though the blame for French inaction lay solely with the French people and French Parliament, Egypt quickly became synonymous with an almost intolerable affront to French self-esteem.⁹⁶ The loss of Egypt was spoken of by some in the same sentence as the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, referred to as the “second disaster” with consequences almost as disastrous for France as the war of 1871.⁹⁷ This humiliation, though self-imposed, engendered within France a renewed desire to assert France’s status for fear that France would otherwise be reduced to the level of Italy or Spain.⁹⁸ While French leaders had not initially planned any expansion beyond Tunisia, the notion that further annexation in Africa could compensate France for any decline in status resulting from the Egyptian affair started to take root shortly after the British invasion.⁹⁹ A few weeks after Gladstone’s October request to renegotiate the status quo in Egypt, the French government ratified de Brazza’s treaty in an act of “patriotic grandeur.”¹⁰⁰ King Leopold of Belgium recognized that this

⁹⁴ Britain ended up in Egypt through “muddleheadedness” and miscalculation rather than an intentional expansionist colonial policy. The British foreign secretary Lord Granville claimed that the conquest of Egypt had been “forced” upon them and bemoaned to Lord John Spencer that the British takeover of Egypt was “a nasty business, and we have been much out of luck.” Quoted in Chamberlain, *Scramble for Africa*, 33.

⁹⁵ This was according to an American consul in Cairo. See Sanderson, *England, Europe & the Upper Nile*, 114.

⁹⁶ For numerous quotes, see Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme Français: Anthologie, 1871–1914*, vol. 68 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983). Jean Stengers, “L’Imperialisme Colonial de la Fin du XIX-siecle: Mythe ou Réalité,” *Journal of African History* 3, no. 3 (1962): 469–91. See also Sanderson, *England, Europe & the Upper Nile*, 115. The French press claimed that France had made a fool of itself in allowing itself to be supplanted.

⁹⁷ See ibid., 114–16. For the impact of the loss of Egypt on Delcassé and his later policy toward Egypt during the Fashoda crisis, see Christopher M. Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale: A Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy 1898–1905* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

⁹⁸ For the stages of French reaction to the Egyptian crisis leading to the annexation of the Congo, see Stengers, *L’Imperialisme Colonial de la fin du XIX-Siecle*. See also Baumgart and Mast, *Imperialism*, 60.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 59–62. For arguments in this vein, see the parliamentary debates on 15 November 1882 and 12 December 1882 in Assemblée Nationale, “Débats parlementaires,” *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 1882. Also Chamberlain, *Scramble for Africa*; Brunschwig, *Mythes et Réalités*.

¹⁰⁰ Journalists and leaders alike perceived that the annexation of the Congo arose out of a hit to French self-esteem. The French regarded expansion into the Congo “as an enterprise of great patriotism” with France wanting “to recoup her eviction from the Nile by the English by evicting the Belgians and the Portuguese from the northern parts of the Congo territory.” See the *Koelnische Zeitung (Cologne Gazette)*, quoted in Stengers, *King Leopold and Expansion in the Congo*, 165. The French press played

new instance of French humiliation would impact French colonial policy, informing Queen Victoria, "In Paris they are raging; they seek a twofold revenge, against the Germans and for the success of the British in Egypt. They want to expand in every direction. Tunis is not enough; they want the Niger and the Congo in Africa."¹⁰¹ French inaction in Egypt had called into question France's intentions to once again be a preeminent seafaring power with unmatched influence. Action in the Congo would serve to reiterate these intentions to both a domestic and an international audience.¹⁰²

Importantly, this move to ratify the annexation of the Congo in an effort to repair France's image was in all other ways rash. The government did so without at all examining the financial or international implications of the treaty. Not only were leaders not guided by material or strategic interests in ratifying the treaty, they knew virtually nothing about the whereabouts or the characteristics of the annexed lands. As Jean Stengers put it, "Never has a government submitted to parliamentary ratification a treaty of the reality and results of which it knew so little."¹⁰³ To date the French government had also taken great care to not provoke the British in their quest for greater influence. The British up to this point had expressed little interest in West Africa, a region its leaders acknowledged as having little material or economic value, leaving Duclerc convinced that its annexation provided the least costly way for France to signal its intention to maintain great power status.

EARLY GERMAN EXPANSION, 1884: ANGRA PEQUEÑA, TOGO, AND THE CAMEROONS

Among European statesmen, there had been no more ardent anti-imperialist than Bismarck. In 1868, he defended Prussian abstention from colonial expansion, saying: "The advantages which people expect from colonies for the commerce and industry of the mother country are mainly founded on illusions, for the expenditure very often exceeds the gain ... , as is proved by the experience of England and France in their colonial policy."¹⁰⁴ Bismarck

a role in publicizing the French humiliation in Egypt and the nationalist need for France to assert itself elsewhere. In this case, unlike in Tunisia, the French public was largely supportive of expansion in the Congo, though they had heard little to nothing about the material or strategic advantages of taking land there.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 166.

¹⁰² This quest for renewed prestige in the Congo continued under Ferry when he returned to office in February the following year. In search of parliamentary support, he pressed the fact that enlarged French holdings in equatorial Africa would contribute significantly to the stature, the glory and the prestige of France. See Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 88–91.

¹⁰³ Stengers, *King Leopold and Expansion in the Congo*, 175. See also Baumgart and Mast, *Imperialism*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Helmet Stoecker, *German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the Second World War* (London: Hurst, 1986), 17. For more quotes to this effect, see Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and*

had yet to change his tune by 1881, a year before France annexed Tunisia, stating “I don’t like colonies at all. They are only good as supply posts.”¹⁰⁵ He worried not only about a colonial drain on resources and the costs associated with administering them but also about the drain on German military capabilities as colonies would require protection from powerful naval fleets that Germany did not at the time possess. Furthermore, Bismarck had serious misgivings about becoming more reliant on parliament or individual states and about increasing the tax burden or federal deficit in order to amass funds to support colonial initiatives.¹⁰⁶ He maintained his anticolonial policy up until only a few months prior to Germany’s first act of annexation in April 1884, turning down parochial requests for colonial establishment in South West Africa and East Africa as late as December 1883.¹⁰⁷ From April to October of 1884, however, Bismarck claimed territory first at the South West African port of Angra Pequeña, current day Namibia, and then in Togo and the Cameroons.

What explains this dramatic change of heart? Given his persistent doubts about the utility of colonization, why ultimately did Bismarck decide to follow Britain, France, and Belgium into the colonizing fray? Historians have long debated the impetus for this shift in policy.¹⁰⁸ They have largely rooted their explanations in general economic, financial, and social trends of the time, citing the desire for economic growth, the desire for a solution to overpopulation and domestic discontent, and finally the desire for electoral support from imperialist domestic interest groups.¹⁰⁹ As will be shown, however, each of these general explanations confronts serious challenges.¹¹⁰ Analysis of the statements surrounding Bismarck’s shift in attitude indicates

the Development of Germany, vol. 3: The Period of Fortification, 1880–1898 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁶ See William Otto Henderson, *Studies in German Colonial History* (London: Frank Cass, 1962), 10–12; Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867–1918*, 76; Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, 122–23.

¹⁰⁷ Hal Ashby Turner, “Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture: Anti-British in Origin?” in *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 59–66.

¹⁰⁸ See W. O. Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883–1885* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1937); Mary Evelyn Townsend, *Origins of Modern German Colonialism, 1871–1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922); Gifford and Louis, *Britain and Germany in Africa*; Taylor and Percivale., *Germany’s First Bid for Colonies, 1884–1885*. The difficulty in assigning motivation is largely attributed to Bismarck as the singular and often equivocating source of German foreign policy.

¹⁰⁹ Many have refuted A. J. P. Taylor’s controversial argument that Bismarck’s expansion into Africa was aimed at angering the British in order to draw closer to the French. It is not clear why the Germans needed a quarrel with England to arrive at this outcome nor why he would have aimed to anger Britain through colonial expansion rather than exploiting British strategic vulnerability in Egypt. See Sanderson, “European Partition of Africa: Coincidence or Conjunction?” See also Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883–1885*.

¹¹⁰ These explanations focus on placing German expansion into a larger trend rather than on the exact events and statements made by German statesmen in the months preceding the first case of German annexation in Africa.

instead that his decision to annex was in direct reaction to the high-handed and overly assertive colonial policy of the British. In particular, Bismarck felt it necessary to signal to Britain Germany's intentions to exercise its right to annex territory abroad, a right it believed it was afforded by its status as a relatively new great power. He believed that a failure to assert rights associated with great power status risked demotion of Germany's newfound status.

British Indifference, German Status, and African Colonies

Bismarck first received a request for the official "protection of the flag of the German Empire" from Adolf Lüderitz, a factory owner in Angra Pequeña, in November of 1882.¹¹¹ Bismarck felt it necessary, as he had in the past, to first inquire with the British who held territory in the vicinity before extending consular protections to German citizens in Africa, a testament to the extent that Bismarck above all had prioritized maintaining good relations with the British and respecting their interests abroad.¹¹² In February 1883, Bismarck wrote to notify London of Lüderitz's request, stating that Germany "would be happy to see England extend her efficacious protection to the German settlers in those regions" and adding that Germany "naturally reserved the right to grant protection herself if the settlements in question lay outside England's influence."¹¹³ Bismarck's intention was to provide basic consular protections, but only in the case that the British were not willing to extend their own.¹¹⁴ The British understood this inquiry to be very much in keeping with Bismarck's ardent anticolonial stance.

Six months later, Bismarck, however, had yet to receive any indication from the British as to their interests in the area. In September, he requested for the German embassy in London to make a "cautious inquiry" to the British with the intention of establishing British intentions toward the territory as well as the basis of any claim to title of the land that the British might have had. He requested the ambassador inquire about provisions the British might make for the protection of German traders in the case that title was claimed.¹¹⁵ Response was again, however, slow in coming. On 12 November, ten months after his initial inquiry, an increasingly impatient Bismarck again

¹¹¹ Recognizing that the improbability that his request would be denied, Lüderitz downgraded his request to that of the basic consular protections afforded all German citizens abroad in January 1883.

¹¹² The British held only the guano-rich Walfisch islands off the coast.

¹¹³ Translated from the German in Turner, *Bismarck's Imperialist Venture*, 57–58. Many related German communiques are in Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883–1885*, 32–39.

¹¹⁴ He continued throughout the months that followed to deny requests for anything more than consular protection even in African locales where German trading interests were directly and immediately threatened by the British.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 35.

asked the British directly if they claimed sovereignty over the territory.¹¹⁶ Only on 17 November did Bismarck receive an official British response. It stated that although the British had no interest in, title to, or intention to occupy Angra Pequeña, they would perceive “any claim to sovereignty or jurisdiction by a foreign power … [to] infringe their legitimate rights.”¹¹⁷ This response left Bismarck surprised and incensed. The British were effectively declaring a “Munro [*sic*] doctrine for Africa,”¹¹⁸ attempting to unfairly exclude the influence of all other powers from the continent regardless of whether Britain had interest in or intention to occupy the territory or not.¹¹⁹ Setting aside his concerns about raising the ire of the British as well as his doubts about the advantages of imperialism, he responded in December with a strongly worded letter requesting that Britain provide a legitimate basis for its claim and citing an extensive list of the numerous British disavowals of their title to and interest in the area over the years.¹²⁰ Upon delivering Bismarck’s response to the British, Count Münster, Germany’s ambassador in London, felt the need to soften Bismarck’s language, suffused as it was with impatience and annoyance. This inquiry too went unanswered for six months, however, leaving Bismarck to fume in March that the British had handled the Angra Pequeña affair, “not only with indifference but with severity and deliberate injustice.” On 24 April 1884, without receiving any response to his strongly worded note, Bismarck ordered the German flag to be planted at the port and Germany took responsibility for protection of the Angra Pequeña settlement.

Within a few months, Bismarck’s hope that the British would extend sovereignty over the Angra Pequeña territory in order to protect German traders had morphed into anger at Britain’s unfair treatment and a desire to teach Britain a lesson that it could not ride roughshod over the interest of other European powers.¹²¹ As a result, he proceeded to acquire not only Angra Pequeña but also territory within Togo and the Cameroons, failing to

¹¹⁶ Townsend, *Origins of Modern German Colonialism, 1871–1885*, 167.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, 124.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Bismarck to Count Munster, 25 May 1884, in E. T. S. Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents 1871–1914: Bismarck’s Relations with England 1871–1890*, vol. 1.

¹¹⁹ This perception was augmented by the signing of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of February 1884, which designated the mouth of the Congo River as Portuguese territory. Given Portugal’s role as a British puppet, the treaty was perceived to be a veiled attempt by the British to expand their influence. See Hal Ashby Turner, “Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture: Anti-British in Origin?” in *Britain and Germany in Africa*, ed. Gifford and Louis, 65. This high-handed behavior by the British was not limited to Africa. In January of 1884, London rejected Bismarck’s claims for a joint commission to address German claims to Fiji.

¹²⁰ He had sent a similar inquiry to London in 1880, for instance, upon the request of protection of missionaries in South West Africa, to be told that London had no interest in the area and would not be able to extend such protections.

¹²¹ Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald E. Robinson, *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference, 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 153; Turner, “Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture.”

notify the British of the latter until after the fact.¹²² Following these initial annexations, Bismarck felt it necessary to convey his annoyance at British high-handed behavior. Stating that Germany would not abide by the “arrogance and selfishness of the English for ever,” he wrote to Münster that “the Munro [sic] doctrine, that monstrosity in International Law, was being applied in favor of England to the coast of Africa This naïve egoism is in itself an insult to our national feeling The ‘quod licet Jovi, etc.’ cannot be applied to Germany.”¹²³ Why was it that England forbade others from the right to colonize, a right that England practiced so actively, Bismarck wondered?¹²⁴ It was exactly this sense of a British double standard—the British belief that its elevated status somehow privileged it in ways that it was unwilling to grant to others—that prompted Bismarck’s colonial turn. A failure to assert Germany’s right to acquire colonies, a right Germany should be afforded because of its high status, in the face of such disrespect would threaten Germany’s status over the long term. Bismarck declared as such to Münster: “London is not showing the consideration to our overseas trade to which it is entitled. If we fail to push our rights with energy, we shall risk, by letting them sink into oblivion, falling into a position inferior to England, and strengthening the unbounded arrogance shown by England and her Colonies in opposition to us Seeing the want of consideration shown in British colonial policy, modesty on our part is out of place.”¹²⁵ It was not simply the extension of British influence around the globe but the fact that the British extended their influence without due consideration for those of near-equivalent status that motivated Bismarck to annex territory abroad, an act reserved for those with great power status.¹²⁶

For its part, London was shocked upon hearing of the German claims. The British had long taken Bismarck at his anticolonial word and had not expected his change of heart regarding German colonies. They felt it necessary to apologize for the slight, with Lord Granville claiming to have been guided by the belief in Bismarck’s anticolonialism when he deemed German colonial inquiries to be of secondary importance. Beyond a mere apology, the British focused on righting the wrong with a spirit of generosity. The

¹²² There is evidence that Bismarck intentionally deceived the British as to his true intentions in April and May, allowing them to believe he was only extending consular protections most likely so that the annexations would be a *fait accompli*. Ibid., 71. Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, vol. 1.

¹²³ Letters from Bismarck to Count Munster, 25 May and 1 June 1884, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents 1871–1914*, vol. 1.

¹²⁴ Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883–1885*, 72.

¹²⁵ Letter from Bismarck to Count Münster, August 7, 1884, in Dugdale, *German diplomatic documents 1871–1914*, vol. 1.

¹²⁶ See Förster, Mommsen, and Robinson, *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*. This explanation was supported by Bismarck’s son, the only person who according to Bismarck, possessed knowledge of all of his secrets. He claimed that Bismarck had been motivated first and foremost by the need to check British arrogance. Robert O. Collins, *The Partition of Africa: Illusion or Necessity?* vol. 67 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), 91.

British cabinet decided in mid-June that Bismarck, who they recognized was greatly irritated with the British government because of Angra Pequeña, "was to have all he wanted."¹²⁷ In September of 1884, William Gladstone made clear his low regard for the quality of Germany's new colonies, stating: "The world contains other waste places in want of occupants which would reward plantation better than these. Great Britain is very far from grudging their annexation to Germany. Colonization is costly and troublesome work."¹²⁸

Bismarck's lesson for the British was not finished however.¹²⁹ Following months of conspiring with the French about how to confront unchecked British arrogance in Africa, Bismarck convened the Berlin Conference in November 1884, a gathering intended to address the "miniature scrambles" starting to multiply along the African coasts but intended to have a far greater symbolic significance.¹³⁰ For Bismarck, who had only entered the colonial game in the few months prior, there was no greater recognition of Germany's status as an imperial great power than British willingness to convene in Berlin in order to discuss African affairs.¹³¹

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE FIRST STAGE OF GERMAN IMPERIALISM

As with discussions leading up to France's early acts of annexation in Africa, Bismarck's correspondence and recorded conversations regarding Germany's first acts of imperial expansion contained little reference to material, economic, or strategic calculations. Moreover, expansion into Angra Pequeña lacked a logical economic or strategic rationale. Bismarck had little reason to expect great material reward in the region.¹³² Numerous reports had circulated prior to annexation about the barren deserts of South West Africa,

¹²⁷ Quoted in Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883–1885*, 97. Sir William Harcourt apologized profusely to Prince Herbert Bismarck on 22 June and indicated that Germany could have all of Fiji and any land she might be interested in in Africa. See *ibid.*, 99.

¹²⁸ Thomas Curson Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series [1830–1891], 978–79.

¹²⁹ This was just the beginning of a long period of German status assertions continuing into the next century. German status concerns motivated its policy of *Weltpolitik* and its pursuit of an imperial navy and dreadnought battleships. See Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics."

¹³⁰ That the conference was intended as a further lesson to the British was made clear in part by Bismarck's intention to declare it an international rule that colonial land be occupied in order for a claim to be legitimate. See Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, "Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire: Colonial Expansion and the Process of Political–Economic Rationalization," in *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*, ed. Förster, Mommsen, and Robinson, 105–20.

¹³¹ Robinson has described the conference as a "ritual drama signifying a change in seniority between sibling nations." To dramatic effect during the conference, Bismarck declared to the Reichstag "the astonishment" of the British at "their cousins, the land rats [taking] suddenly to seafaring" and warned Britannia that its hegemony overseas was over. Ronald Robinson, "The Conference in Berlin and the Future in Africa, 1884–1885," in *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*, ed. Förster, Mommsen, and Robinson, 8–9. This was despite having fully supported British colonial expansion not a year earlier.

¹³² See quotes attesting to how little value he expected there in Brunschwig, *Mythes et Réalités*, 75. See also Stoecker, *German Imperialism in Africa*, 16–20; Woodruff D. Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 27–34.

a place devoid of water but replete with restless natives.¹³³ Prior to official annexation, one German explorer reported back that the port was “inhospitable even for a penal colony.”¹³⁴ Another stated, “It is one of the least economic coasts on earth ... no tree, no bush, no leaf is to be seen, nothing but sand.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, the British had held islands directly off the coast since 1867 but had never expressed the slightest interest in the region, attesting to the area’s lack of obvious natural appeal. Even if there had been abundant material resources within the region, extracting them would have required a significant amount of infrastructural development, investments Bismarck was absolutely not willing to make. Even after official annexation, Bismarck’s attitude toward the colonies remained one of “indifference,” much to the dismay of the explorers and the few settlers there, and official colonial policy was that the state would play as small a role as possible in colonial administration or protection.¹³⁶ Furthermore, he had little reason to believe that private investors would fill the need for capital given their reluctance to fund colonial exploits in the years before and long after annexation.¹³⁷

It is also very unlikely that Bismarck was substantially swayed by the possibility of generating economic growth through the acquisition of new markets or by an increase in German exports to South West Africa. The German economy had been hit hard by the economic crisis of 1873, a crisis caused by industrial overexpansion funded by war reparations paid by France following its loss in the Franco–Prussian War. Attention after the crisis shifted toward a need for larger markets to absorb German industrial goods.¹³⁸ The completely undeveloped, largely unpopulated area around Angra Pequeña however offered no possibility of boosting the demand for such goods.¹³⁹ Substantial infrastructural investment would be required to create an industrial marketplace but, as mentioned, neither the government nor German capitalists were willing to front such investments.¹⁴⁰ In keeping with more particularist explanations of expansion, such as that of Snyder, domestic financial and trading groups did propagandize for German expansion overseas.¹⁴¹ The vast majority of these groups, however, was small in

¹³³ von Strandmann, *Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire*, 107.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Turner, *Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture*, 60.

¹³⁵ Another German explorer, upon visiting the new protectorate, exclaimed “What a terrible desert we have acquired.” Both quoted in Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 3, 134.

¹³⁶ His colonial model differed dramatically from the hands-on French approach in that he desired for the state to play as small a role as possible in the administration and protection of the colonies. See von Strandmann, *Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire*, 106–7.

¹³⁷ African investments were deemed to be highly risky and, with safer more profitable investments closer to home and abroad on other continents, not worth the risk. *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire 1875–1914*.

¹³⁹ von Strandmann, *Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire*, 106–7.

¹⁴⁰ Famous German explorer Friedrich Fabri complained in 1885 of the inertia of “our financiers and capitalists” in colonial matters. See *ibid.*, 110.

¹⁴¹ Snyder argues that German expansion was far more likely to occur when German domestic politics was cartelized and run by groups of elites, from 1890 to 1918, or was dominated by a single

size and influence and generated little direct financial or commercial involvement in Africa prior to or after the formation of the colony.¹⁴² Additionally, Bismarck historically had no problem keeping interest groups at bay. By assuming direct control over Angra Pequeña, Bismarck met the demands for protection by the traders at the post there. As the case evidence suggests above, however, the protection of German trading interests there was more a side effect of Bismarck's primary aim of signaling German status to the British than it was a motivating aim in itself.

Another oft-cited explanation for German expansion into Africa was growing social unrest due to the economic crisis and booming population and the resulting need to acquire territory for German settlement abroad.¹⁴³ Germany held too many people, the argument went, and expansion abroad could act as a "safety valve" to prevent disorder if domestic conditions became too difficult.¹⁴⁴ For many of the aforementioned reasons, however, emigration to the African colonies was not perceived as an attractive opportunity for settlement. Beleaguered by a lack of investment, the regions suffered from poor communication, insufficient resources, and the hostility of native populations. Very few Germans ever emigrated to German colonies in Africa. By 1913, only 23,500 Germans lived within all of its African holdings.¹⁴⁵

Finally, Bismarck was not motivated by strategic motivations in his choice to annex African colonies. The locations of the colonies were determined far more by what territories were available at the time and by the position of German explorers on the ground than they were by any foresighted strategic calculations. Prior to annexation, Bismarck believed colonial adventures generated strategic weakness. The German empire, scattered in far-flung regions across the continent, lacked geographical unity and presented exactly the challenge to effective defense that Bismarck had feared.

dictator as it was in the 1930s and 1940s than it was under the unitary oligopoly of Bismarck. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 68–69, 99.

¹⁴² The largest trading group advocating overseas expansion was facing bankruptcy at the time. See Smith, *German Colonial Empire*, 7–10.

¹⁴³ Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867–1918*, chap. 5. The British also had the impression that Bismarck's colonial shift was prompted by the jingoistic demands of the German public. Bismarck's letters do convey a desire to take electoral advantage of growing nationalist sentiment. See Louis and Gifford, *Britain and Germany in Africa*, 24. It appears however that Bismarck strategically released information about the arrogant British treatment of German interests to the German press in order to arouse such popular anti-British, pro-colonial sentiments. See Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883–1885*; Chamberlain, *Scramble for Africa*, 56–59.

¹⁴⁴ The population increased by 25 percent to 50 million from 1871 to 1890. See Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 3, 116.

¹⁴⁵ Förster, Mommsen, and Robinson, *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*, 125.

THE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF STATUS SEEKING

This article has demonstrated that humiliated and disrespected states are likely to engage in competitive status-seeking behavior and that they are often willing to do so in spite of their material and strategic interests. The cases above demonstrate that responses to humiliation and disrespect need not involve demonstrations of one's military effectiveness relative to that of potential rivals. France, in a move that undoubtedly changed few minds about its military capability relative to that of potential European rivals, handily acquired control of the bankrupt Tunisian government within less than two weeks. Similarly, Germany's initial act of imperialism involved little more than planting a flag at a remote, barren port. Rather, both states sought to signal their expectation of holding higher status by exercising the prerogatives associated with their desired status.

Because it often threatens the status, security, and interests of other states, status seeking engendered by humiliation and disrespect often has a significant impact on international behavior. Germany's decision to become an empire, for instance, generated status concerns for Italy, leading it to embark upon a colonial policy of its own.¹⁴⁶ While in 1882 Minister of Foreign Affairs Pasquale Mancini privately decried the system of territorial colonies as "sterile and harmful ... a source of weakness rather than of strength," in May 1884, he ordered the occupation of Massawa in current-day Eritrea in January of 1885.¹⁴⁷ The timing of this shift in attitude can be pinpointed almost exactly to Bismarck's imperial debut. The Italian statesman came to see German actions as setting a new precedent that threatened the relegation of Italy to a lower status.¹⁴⁸ As one diplomat stated at the time, "Germany had acted; Italy must act."¹⁴⁹ If Italy were to ever acquire its "place in the sun," it would have to "abandon prudence" and engage in costly African expansion like the other European powers.¹⁵⁰

The French and German adoption of forward policies in Africa also presented direct threats to Britain's unchallenged status as the preeminent

¹⁴⁶ See Alessandro Brogi, "Competing Missions: France, Italy, and the Rise of American Hegemony in the Mediterranean," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 4 (September 2006): 741–70; Collins, *Partition of Africa*; Robert Hess, "Germany and the Anglo-Italian Colonial Entente," in *Britain and Germany in Africa*, ed. Louis and Gifford; Cedric James Lowe and Frank Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870–1940*, vol. 8 (London: Routledge, 2001); Sanderson, "European partition of Africa: Coincidence or conjuncture?"

¹⁴⁷ Lowe et al., *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870–1940*, 37.

¹⁴⁸ Italy's claim to great power status during the late nineteenth century was tenuous at best. See R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy, The Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Carlo Zaghi, *PS Mancini, L'Africa e Il Problema del Mediterraeno, 1884–1885* (Rome: G. Casini, 1955). The Italian statesman di Rudini later acknowledged that Italy had sought colonies "in a spirit of imitation ... for pure snobbism." Quoted in Langer, *European Powers and the French Occupation of Tunis, I*, 281.

seafaring power. With the French ratification of the Congo treaty and the possibility of French ownership of much of the west coast of Africa, the British began to detect a consistent French policy of anti-British antagonism.¹⁵¹ British leaders also increasingly confronted the antagonistic intentions of the “young and ambitious” Germany, which was continuing its assault on Britain’s “Munro [sic] doctrine” in the west. Over time, British leaders came to realize that if Britain were to remain a preeminent power, they could not allow themselves to be “cheeked by Bismarck or anyone else.”¹⁵² Without a “positive and vigorous effort” to assert British rights as the preeminent power, Britain would be left behind, suffering the inevitable decline of an empire. As *The Times* put it in 1891, “With the colonies massed around us we can hold our own in the ranks of the world Powers … without them we must sink to the position of a merely European kingdom a position which for England entails slow but sure decay.”¹⁵³ British leaders agreed, with Neville Chamberlain stating that a failure to expand further would “strike at the root cause of our great position.”¹⁵⁴ By the turn of the century, Britain—the once reluctant imperialist—had acquired possession of over roughly one-quarter of the entire African continent.¹⁵⁵ The European powers collectively had assumed control of 95 percent of the entire African continent.

While concerns about status have not generated similar competition for territory over the last century, recent territorial claims by Russia and China suggest that the potential for status-driven conquest remains.¹⁵⁶ The likelihood that states in the contemporary system will seek status through territorial expansion increases in cases in which states’ spheres of interest are disrespected by prominent powers within the international community. Territorial expansion, however, is only one of many ways that states in the contemporary international system may assert their status following instances

¹⁵¹ See Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire* 14–16. Aside from Cape Colony Egypt, Britain had opted against major expansion into Africa in the nineteenth century, despite its unrivaled ability to do so through most of the period.

¹⁵² Chamberlain in 1885, quoted in Taylor and Percivale, *Germany’s First Bid for Colonies*, 71. As late as December 1884, Prime Minister William Gladstone was writing to Granville regarding further British expansion, “I see great objection to it; and generally considering what we have got I am against entering into a scramble for the remainder.” Quoted in Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy*, 164.

¹⁵³ *Times*, June 18, 1891, quoted in Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1970* (New York: Longman, 1975), 133.

¹⁵⁴ By 1890, Britain’s transition to a self-conscious imperialistic power was complete. It became, as Porter has described, like a “cock-bird, blowing up his feathers to assert his dominance to rivals.” Porter, *The Lion’s Share*, 119.

¹⁵⁵ Sanderson, “European partition of Africa,” 28.

¹⁵⁶ China has also referenced its “Century of Humiliation” in connection with its controversial territorial claims in the South China Sea. See William A Callahan, “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (March–May 2004): 199–218; William A. Callahan, “The Cartography of National Humiliation and the Emergence of China’s Geobody,” *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 141–73; David Scott, “India’s Drive for a Blue Water Navy,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008).

of humiliation or disrespect. States may choose to lead multilateral interventions, to conduct weapons tests, or to form regional economic institutions.¹⁵⁷ Regardless of the exact competitive status-seeking strategy contemporary states engage in, we should expect the general conditions outlined in this article to apply. States that have been humiliated or disrespected will be likely to engage in competitive behaviors in an effort to secure their status. As with French and German conquests in Africa in the 1880s, the actions such states take in the contemporary world are likely to have far-reaching consequences.

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¹⁵⁷ Following Bill Clinton's 1995 decision to offer a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Deng-hu, China engaged in missile tests over Taiwan. See Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Decision-Making Regarding Taiwan, 1979-2000," in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, ed. David Lampton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). China's recent move to create the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as an alternative to the World Bank can also be understood as an act of status competition.