

The Partition of West Africa, with Reference to the British Colonies up to 1914

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Abstract

The relationship between the Africans and the Europeans, from the 15th century until the beginning of the 19th century, was generally based on trade. The European powers were attracted by the African riches such as gold, ivory, and slaves. However, the increasing interest in Africa led to a scramble among the European powers to get protected areas or colonies. During the 19th century, the African continent witnessed a wave of European colonialism. The aim of this work is to show how the European powers came to an agreement in the Berlin Conference of (1884-85) concerning their disputes over the acquisition of African territories, and how the Africans reacted, especially those who had to face the British presence on their lands.

Key words: European powers, West Africa, partition, British colonies, British interests, scramble

ملخص

العلاقة بين الأوروبيون و الأفارقة كانت تتركز في الغالب على التبادل التجاري بين القرنين 15 م و 19 م. من بين الثروات التي اهتم بها الأوروبيون في إفريقيا هي الذهب و العاج و تجارة العبيد . وهذا أدى إلى تنافس الأوروبيون و استغلال هذه الثروات و من ثم احتلال الأراضي الإفريقية.

الهدف من هذا البحث هو تسليط الضوء على الطريق التي لجأ لها الأوروبيون لحل نزاعاتهم و خلافاتهم فيما يخص المستعمرات الأفريقية في مؤتمر برلين 1884_1885 كما يتطرق إلى ردود أفعال سكان غرب إفريقيا لهذا الاحتلال خاصة الاستعمار البريطاني.

Imperialism is the policy of extending power and domination over weaker nations by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of the other seas. The powerful nations desired to expand their markets, provide opportunities for investment, and secure access to the needed raw materials that existed worldwide. The 19th century witnessed a wave of European imperialism in Africa because of economic reasons. Other motives included that it was the duty of the industrial and powerful nations to civilise 'backward' peoples.

Consequently, it became easy for the strong countries such as Britain, France, and Germany to embark on a programme of colonial conquest that would serve both the economic interests as well as the so-called civilising mission.

Before being colonised, the African continent was composed of empires, kingdoms, and tribes. The African people never asked to be divided into countries with new boundaries that would not correspond with their traditional ones. Throughout the 19th century, the European powers got territorial possessions on the coastline of the continent. By the end of the century, competition arose among these nations to get further protected areas and colonies. This is known in history as the Scramble for Africa. The latter led to the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 where European delegates met to settle their territorial disputes in Africa, to legitimise their presence in the continent and to decide on the future of the areas that were not yet colonised.

The early contact between the Europeans and the Africans began in the 15th century with the Portuguese explorations of the African coasts. At the very beginning the aim of the Europeans was not to colonise, but to establish commercial relations with the local population¹. Four centuries later, and after a hard competition, Africa fell under European domination. So what led to this turn of events? What were the consequences of such a competition? What were the interests of the countries involved in the scramble for West Africa in general and the British interests in the area in particular?

British Interests in West Africa from 1800 to 1884

By the mid-17th century, English traders sailed to the West African coasts because they were attracted by the profits made by the Portuguese and the Spanish merchants. The Europeans traded with the Africans in different commodities such as gold and ivory, but the most lucrative commodity was the slaves. The European traders were followed by missionaries and explorers. The British government remained reluctant² in taking over official control until the 19th century.

In 1807, the British Parliament passed a law to forbid the slave trade for British subjects. Four years later, the British government passed an Act to impose heavy penalties on any who continued trading in human flesh. Therefore, the British Royal Navy was sent to West African coasts to enforce this Act. Meanwhile, the British diplomats attempted to persuade the other nations to outlaw the slave trade. Denmark outlawed slave trading for its citizens in 1803, the United States in 1808, Sweden in 1813, the Netherlands in 1814, France in 1818 and slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833. In spite of the 1287 slave ships arrested and about 130,000 slaves liberated between 1825 and

¹ J. D., Fage, *A History of West Africa, An Introductory Survey*, Great Britain, Cambridge University, 4th Edition,

1969, p. 47

² John D. Hargreaves, *West Africa Partitioned, the Loaded Pause*, 1885-1889, London, MacMillan, Vol I, 1974,

p.1

1865, the British anti- slave squadron failed partly in its mission because during the same period about 1,436,000 African slaves landed in the Americas.¹ This failure led the members of the British anti-slavery movement, headed by Thomas Buxton, to ally themselves with the Evangelical Christians² and the British merchants. In 1830, Buxton launched his famous slogan 'Christianity, Commerce, Colonisation' arguing that the slave trade could be eradicated only if a substitute was provided.³ The Trans-Atlantic slave trade ceased when the United States abolished slavery in 1865. Nevertheless, it continued to be practised in Brazil and Cuba until the 1880's, but as a risky trade.

The abolition of slave trade led to an economic change because of the spread of the legitimate trade, which was a concept introduced during the campaign against the slave trade. It became legal to trade in different commodities except in slaves, thus the European merchants in West Africa were aware of the wealth that could be extracted from the raw materials in its tropical forests. There were many useful articles such as sugar cane, tobacco, pepper...

The search for raw materials in West Africa required the exploration of the hinterland, which remained unknown during three centuries of trade with the Africans. One of the reasons for the Europeans to avoid the penetration into the interior was that the commodities in which they traded in such as gold, ivory and even slaves could be brought to their coastal forts by native intermediaries. During the 19th century explorers such as Heinrich Barth and William Baikie drew the main geographical characteristics of the West African interior. In their reports, they mapped the itineraries of the routes and waterways, which became the basis of the political partition of the continent. Their voyages were actually successful, thanks to the invention of the quinine, which was an effective therapeutic agent to treat malaria.⁴ The exploration of the African hinterland led to a scramble for territories among the European nations. this in turn led to transforming the political map of Africa as well as tracing its today's international boundaries.

The exploration of the West African interior coincided with the advances of industry in Britain. Therefore, her interests in West Africa were renewed and heightened by the existence of raw materials in the area, mainly vegetable oil needed in greasing the factory machined. The British government sponsored exploratory expeditions into the hinterland of West Africa to discover sources of raw materials. The Niger Delta revealed itself a rich area with palm oil.⁵ This led

1 J. D., Fage, op. cit., p. 115

2 The Evangelical Movement was a religious revival that occurred in Europe and America during the 18th century. Personal religion and conversion experiences were stressed in this movement rather than the sacraments and the traditions of the churches. Encyclopedia Britannica 2008, Deluxe Edition CD-ROM

3 Robert O. Collins, *African History*, New York, Random House, 1971, p. 137

4 Ibid., p. 144

5 Ibid., p. 142

to the establishment of British trading stations on the river for the transport of commodities.

Another economic factor was the need for new markets for the British manufactured goods. During the first half of the 19th century, Britain dominated the external trade with Africa. Therefore, goods were produced in large quantities to be shipped mainly to the West African markets. But in the late 1860's, other nations such as France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal started manufacturing goods such as cloth, clothing, alcohol and guns that were sold in the African markets. Consequently, a trading competition arose among these nations. The latter considered establishing colonies or protected areas would be the best way to win the competition.¹

In West Africa, the British were also motivated by the religious factor. The early 19th century witnessed the foundation of many Protestant missionary societies that were sent to West Africa such as the Church Missionary Society, the Methodist Missionary Society, the Basel Society and the Wesleyan Society.² Until the 1870's, the tasks of the missionaries were to convert the Africans to Christianity and to create a new social class of mission-educated Africans who could read and write the English language. After the 1870's, however, the missionary movement was influenced by the imperialist racist European attitude towards the black Africans.³

The campaigners against slavery, the traders, the explorers, and the missionaries, who were working in West Africa, asked the British government to protect them from the attacks of either the local tribes or other European competitors. They also asked for the government's support so that they could vary as well as increase their activities in the area.⁴

B- The European Scramble for West Africa

There were some active European agents (missionaries, explorers, and traders) in West Africa and the European competition to control the West African territories started before the 1880's. The European powers that had already set foot in the area were Portugal, Britain and France. In 1807, the British government chose Freetown in Sierra Leone as a settlement for the Africans who had been taken to Britain as slaves and freed there, or who had fought on the British side in the US War of Independence (1776-85). In the period that stretched between 1821 and 1874, Britain and France founded colonies in West Africa. While France founded the Senegal colony in 1857, Britain created Lagos and the Gold Coast colonies in 1861 and 1874, respectively. These two nations expanded their possessions, mainly by making treaties with the local chiefs.⁵ The two powers established peace treaties in order to undertake commercial activities. The

1 Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa*, London, MacMillan, 1989, p. 305

2 Oliver Roland and J. D., Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 6th Edition, 1988, p. 118

3 Robert O. Collins, op. cit., p. 143

4 J. D., Fage, op. cit., p. 132

5 Kevin Shillington, op. cit., p. 305

European officials exploited traditional rivalries between the African states¹ by signing treaties of protection, as it was the case of the Fante against the Ashante in the Gold Coast. Other treaties included the suppression of the slave trade with the co-operation of the local chiefs.

The Europeans got benefits from these treaties by securing territories and expanding their influence in the area. In the 1860's, under the governorship of J.S Hill, the Colony of Sierra Leone was expanded northward to control the trade routes to the interior. Similarly, the French leader, Victor Regis developed trade in palm oil along the Slave Coast. In 1861, he convinced the French government to proclaim Porto Novo a French protectorate.² Since Porto Novo was situated between two British colonies, the Gold Coast and Lagos, its foundation as a French protectorate, was seen by the British as a serious threat to their interests in the area.

Rivalry arose between Rowe and Faidherbe, the governors of Sierra Leone and Senegal, respectively. In 1877, the French occupied Matacong Isle, where Rowe wanted to establish a custom post. A year later, the foreign ministers of the two colonial powers met at the Berlin Congress and agreed on solving the conflict friendly. So, the French left the isle and a mixed commission was established to draw the northern frontiers of Sierra Leone.

Another rivalry occurred between the French and the members of the African International Association (A.I.A), called later the International Association of the Congo. The A.I.A was a private geographical association created in 1876 by King Leopold II of Belgium to penetrate and exploit the Congo River. The A.I.A enlisted Stanley to forward its plans because he was a famous explorer. The agents of this association found themselves in disputes over territorial claims with the French and the Portuguese who were active in the mouth of the Congo River. Consequently, the Portuguese minister at London conducted negotiations with Lord Granville, who was colonial secretary (1868-70) and then foreign secretary (1870-74 and 1880-85), to settle questions regarding territorial titles in West Africa. The Portuguese ministers did the same at Paris, Brussels, and The Hague.³ On February, 26, 1884, an Anglo-Portuguese treaty was signed. It stated that Great Britain recognised Portugal's sovereignty on both banks of the Congo, and that the navigation of the Congo and the Zambezi rivers were to be open to all flags alike. In addition, the Treaty stipulated that an Anglo-Portuguese Commission would be established in the area to impose taxes on navigation and to abolish monopolies on navigation and commerce.⁴ Henceforth, the Treaty protected Portugal against the A.I.A. As a reaction to the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty, King Leopold II signed a confidential agreement with France to strengthen

1 Ibid

2 The French declared protection over Porto Novo in 1861, but it was re-established definitively in 1882

3 Daniel De Leon, 'The Conference at Berlin on the West African Question', in *Political Science Quarterly*, New York, Vol1, N 1, March 1886, pp. 11-12

4 Ibid, pp.13-14

the A.I.A's position in the area. The agreement stated that if it became costly or difficult to maintain the Congo Empire (the whole area ruled by the A.I.A), France would take it over.¹ On November 8, 1884, another treaty was signed between King Leopold II and Germany in which the latter declared its readiness to recognise the foundation of the Free State of the Congo as an independent state governed by King Leopold II.²

Beside the International Association of King Leopold II, Germany joined the scramble for the West African territories. The Germans wanted to get colonies that would be markets for their products. By the 1880's Germany witnessed an economic crisis of overproduction that pushed the Germans to leave their country.³ The plan of Otto Van Bismarck, the German Chancellor (1871-90), was to provide the Germans with gainful jobs and to found commercial enterprises abroad for their products with free access to new markets and not provinces where the Germans would emigrate. In 1883, Germany, under the leadership of Bismarck proclaimed protection over Togoland and Cameroon. Bismarck organised, with the International Association of the Congo, an opposition to the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of February 26, 1884. He denied the international recognition of Portugal's sovereignty over the Congo.⁴ In addition, he found it necessary to extend the principles of the Declaration of Vienna (1814), which stipulated that navigation and commerce would be free in waterways traversing or separating several states to the Congo River and the Niger River, too.

From a Eurocentric point of view, it was also argued that the African primitive societies could be civilised and developed by putting them in direct contact with the western culture, religion, and technology.⁵ The European powers advanced that colonisation was just a means to achieve the above goals, and mainly to stop the Trans-Atlantic slave trade which they had started three centuries earlier.

Another aspect of the scramble was that the European nations considered prestigious the fact of getting colonies world-wide. For example, France used the scramble for Africa to reassert itself as a European power after its loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia in 1870. Other countries such as Italy that conquered Rome in 1870, and the German Empire founded in 1871, used the scramble to carve out a place among the European powers.

The competition among the European powers required a meeting to legitimise their presence in the continent, to settle their territorial disputes and to establish a set of written rules to avoid confrontation in Africa. In addition, the attendants had to decide on the future of the unexplored or not yet colonised areas.

1 Oliver Roland and J. D., Fage, op. cit., p. 163

2 Daniel De Leon, op. cit., p. 29

3 John D. Hargreaves, op. cit., p. 35

4 Daniel De Leon, op. cit., pp. 20-21

5 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, England, Bogle -L'Ouverture Publications, 1972, p. 151

The Berlin Conference (1884-85) and the Question of African Colonies

The European nations were accustomed to meet whenever necessary to settle questions of collective interests; diplomatic gatherings were not avoidable. Such was the case with the Congresses of Vienna (1814), of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818), of Verona (1822), and the Congress of Berlin of 1878. Concerning the territorial claims in Africa, Germany called for a European meeting to come to an agreement. On November 26, 1884, delegates from Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, the USA, and Russia joined the conference. No African representative was invited to this meeting even though its subject matter was the African territories.

The delegates met at the palace of the German Chancellor Bismarck, who chaired the first meeting. The following eight meetings, which were held until February 26, 1885, were chaired by Lord Hatzfeld and then by the adviser Busch. Sir Edward Mallet represented Great Britain, Mr. De Courcel represented France, Baron de Lambert who was the secretary of the International Association of the Congo in Brussels represented Belgium, Count Kapnist represented Russia, and an American delegation represented the USA at a European meeting for the first time in history.

Bismarck opened the sessions by pointing the humanising tendency of the conference which insisted on enforcing regulations concerning the abolition of the slave trade and providing for the welfare of the Africans. Then he enumerated the objective points of the conference that were the freedom of commerce in the Basin and at the mouth of the Congo River, the application of the principles of the Congress of Vienna on the Congo and the Niger Rivers, and the establishment of rules concerning future occupations in Africa. Then he closed his speech by declaring that the conference was not concerned with questions of sovereignty.¹

Great Britain and Portugal, which were the main powers in the Niger and the Congo rivers, respectively, agreed on the absolute freedom of commerce and navigation on these rivers. The delegates agreed on the foundation of a mixed commission known as the International Commission of the Navigation and Commerce of the Congo (I.C.N.C.C) to control the application of the principles of the Congress of Vienna.² However, Sir Edward Malet refused the control of the I.C.N.C.C on the Niger River reminding that Great Britain was the only power on the lower Niger. In addition, he declared that Great Britain would secure the execution of the decisions of the conference.³ Therefore, the two first points of the conference were settled without difficulty.

As far as the third point was concerned, it was agreed that the signatory powers would give an immediate notice to the other participants whenever they

1 Daniel De Leon, op. cit., p. 23

2Ibid, pp. 23-24

3 Henri Brunschwig, *Le Partage de L'Afrique Noire*, France, Flammarion, 1971, p. 60.

occupy a new coastal territory in Africa. Sir Edward Malet suggested the application of this principle not only on the coastal areas but also on the hinterland but, De Courcel disagreed with him saying that the exploration of the interior of the continent had not yet been finished.¹ Moreover, the colonial powers were obliged to ensure peace and protection of the existing rights such as the freedom of trade through effective authority in their new possessions.²

After the settlement of the three points, the delegates introduced other secondary matters that prolonged the conference until February 1885. The American delegation suggested two points. The first point was to delimit the Basin of the Congo that became under the jurisdiction of the I.C.N.C.C. The delegation asked this clarification to know on which areas the principle of freedom of trade would be applied, and because the Basin of the Congo included, hitherto, the whole area of land drained by that river. The second point was to adopt a declaration in which the representative powers engaged to consider the Basin of the Congo as a neutral territory in case of war and to permit the traders of the enemy to move freely on the condition that they would not transport war ammunitions. While the first proposal was rejected by the delegates, the second was accepted so as not to extend hostilities into the Congo Basin in case of war in Europe.³

Another intervention was that of the Russian representative. Count Kapnist denied that the declaration of the Congress of Vienna referred to rivers whose free navigation was of international importance. He reminded that the declaration of Vienna spoke only of watercourses separating or traversing many states. Count Kapnist was against generalisations. Thus, he specified that the principles of the Congress of Vienna were not extended to the other European rivers. At this point, he asked the delegates to give him one example of a European river to which these principles had been extended. He added that the foundation of the I.C.N.C.C was an exception and not the application of the principles of the Congress of Vienna.⁴ The arguments of Count Kapnist were strong. The delegates could not deny them and therefore, they adopted the agreement of the free navigation of navigable watercourses that separated or traversed several states.

The conference closed its sessions on February 26, 1885. All the delegates who participated in the deliberations, even those who had no concern with the purposes of the conference, ratified the General Act.

The General Act of the Berlin Conference (1884-85)

The Final Act of the Berlin Conference was divided into six chapters. As regards the problem of the Congo Basin, in Chapter I, European investment was encouraged in the area since Article 1 stipulated that the trade of all nations should enjoy complete freedom on the Congo River, its outlets, and the adjacent

1 Ibid, p.63

2 Ibid, p. 127

3 Daniel De Leon, op. cit., pp. 24-25

4 Ibid, pp. 26-28

territories. In Act II, it was agreed that all flags without distinction of nationality should have free access to the whole of the coastal territories. In order to stimulate and encourage commerce, further taxes on goods imported to the region were prohibited in Articles 3, 4, and 5. Moreover, monopoly of trade was forbidden in order to vary the commodities in which the Europeans would trade in, and also to attract as many merchants as possible to the area. The security of the missionaries and the travellers was granted in Article 6. In this Article, it was mentioned that the powers, which exercised or should exercise control over the coastal areas, should improve the moral and the well-being of the local population.¹

As far as the slave trade was concerned, the signatory powers agreed on the absolute suppression of this trade. Chapter II of the Act was devoted to this issue. It was recommended that the powers that exercised or would exercise sovereign rights in the region (Congo Basin had to employ all the means at their disposal to put an end to slave trade and punish those who engaged in it.²

Concerning the situation of the Congo Basin in case of war, chapter II stated that the whole region including the Congo Basin and the adjacent territories would be neutral. Article 10 of the chapter stipulated that the neutrality of the region was a necessary element to guarantee the freedom of trade and to establish peace, which was the first step towards 'civilisation'.

Security and peace were important elements in order to improve commercial undertakings and industry in the Congo Basin, and in the adjacent territories. This is why it was mentioned in Chapter IV and Chapter V that the concerned areas as well as the Niger River should be neutral in case of war. Articles 4 and 5 stipulated that there should be free navigation on both the Congo and the Niger rivers, including all their branches and outlets. Therefore, merchant ships and subjects of all nations should be treated equally.³

As regards the new occupations on the coasts of the African continent, it was necessary for the colonial powers to reach agreement in order to avoid confrontations and disputes over the African territories. The participants in the Conference sought to legitimise their presence in Africa. In Chapter VI, Article 34, it was stated that any colonial power that, henceforward, took possession of tracts of land on the coasts, outside of its current possessions, should declare them its protectorates, and then, should address a notification to the signatory powers. The principle of effective occupation was debated in Article 35 in which every colonial power had to establish a colonial authority in the regions it had occupied to protect its 'rights' and the freedom of trade and transit.⁴

The colonial powers that attended the Berlin Conference (1884-85) came to consolidate their presence in Africa because the colonisation of the coastline of the continent had started since the beginning of the 19th century. They came to find

1 Henri Brunschwig, *op. cit.*, p. 115-117

2 *Ibid*, p. 117

3 *Ibid*, pp. 119-126

4 *Ibid*, p. 127

solutions to their conflicts engendered by their respective commercial interests. The colonial powers agreed that the already unexplored African territories could be annexed on the condition that this should be notified first in order to avoid several claims on one territory. Apparently; the colonial powers adopted the policy first come first served as regards the unexplored African territories. The Berlin Conference (1884-85) did not engender the partition of Africa; but accelerated the process of colonising it.

British Territorial Advance in West Africa

The colonial powers settled peacefully their territorial disputes in Africa in the Berlin Conference, which insisted that they had to occupy effectively a territory before they could claim sovereignty over it. Therefore, it was time for them to occupy further territories in the interior of the continent. In West Africa, Britain like the other colonial powers had free access to the interior of the continent and her territorial advance had to take place from the existing colonies. So what were the reactions of the Africans in the area?

The representatives of the colonial powers met at the Berlin to legitimise and formalise their presence in Africa. Professor H. Brunshwig confirmed that:

...there was nothing revolutionary. They were not talking about partitioning Africa, but rather of ensuring the continuation of the traditional free trading system on its coasts and its great rivers....¹

The main British territorial acquisitions were the work of Salisbury's Governments of 1885-86, 1886-92, and 1892-1902. As far as West Africa was concerned, the British began to occupy the vast areas assigned to them as they did before the conference, i.e. either by conquest or through peace treaties that were of two kinds. The British extended their colonial possessions by signing agreements with the other colonial powers for mutual interests. In 1887, Britain and Germany signed a treaty in which the latter would cede Eastern Nigeria to Britain and the former promised to withdraw from Amba Bay in Cameroon.² In 1890, Salisbury signed a treaty with France in which Western Nigeria was ceded to Britain, which on her part, recognised the French protectorate over Madagascar. British officials negotiated treaties with the local chiefs, too. In 1893, a treaty was signed with the chiefs of the Yoruba Kingdoms to ensure peace, freedom of trade and the suppression of enslaving Africans.

The British used force, when necessary, to acquire new territories in West Africa. In the Gold Coast, for instance, the Ashante states were left to their own devices for twenty years after their defeat in 1874. Meanwhile, the Ashante people re-established themselves and tried to take over the states near the coast that they had lost in 1874. Consequently, the British realised the danger of leaving the Ashante alone. In 1895, they sent an ultimatum to Kumasi (the Ashante capital) to accept the British protectorate, and a year later, the Ashante gave in without fighting. However, this did not mean the total submission of the Ashante people

¹Henri Brunshwig, quoted by John D. Hargreaves, op. cit., p. 41.

² John D. Hargreaves, op. cit., p. 44.

since they rose against the British in 1901, but they were defeated and annexed as a Crown Colony in 1902.

In 1901, the British declared protection over Northern Nigeria of whom Sir Frederick Lugard became governor. Then he established British rule beyond the banks of the Niger and Benue rivers. In 1903, Governor Lugard conquered the Fulani Empire in a single battle. In 1914, the two protectorates were amalgamated to form the colony of Nigeria under the administration of Lugard.

Britain, like the European powers, was prompted by the success achieved by the International Association of the Congo, which converted itself into the Congo Free State on July 1, 1885. Consequently, another means of British colonisation was the chartered companies, which were granted monopoly rights by the British government to exploit and trade in different territories. In East Africa, the British African Company was set up in 1888. In the South, the British Government granted monopoly rights of exploitation of the territory of the South Africa Chartered Company of Cecil Rhodes in 1889. In the West and by the time of the Berlin Conference, the British had obtained a trading monopoly over palm oil exports from the Niger Delta and the lower Niger River and many British companies had been united by George Goldie in the International African Company to control all the exports. In 1886, Britain declared protection over the Niger Delta to affirm its position in the region. At the same time, she granted a Royal document to Goldie's company to rule the lower Niger in the name of Britain. The company became known as the Royal Niger Company in 1896.¹ Three years later, the company was divested of its political role, and the British Government took over direct responsibility for the conquest of most of the Sokoto Empire. In 1901, the Hausaland became the British Protectorate of Northern Nigeria.

Despite insisting on the principle of effective occupation before claiming sovereignty over an area in the Berlin Conference, Great Britain and Germany signed a treaty on 29 April 1885 concerning the Biafra Gulf.² They introduced the concept of 'sphere of interest' which meant that the area concerned was neither explored nor occupied by the colonial powers. This did not mean that the treaty violated the General Act of the Berlin Conference since the latter concerned only the coastal areas.

On the other hand, effective authority did not really exist because the British were reluctant to get involved in African domestic affairs, which were not fully understood by the colonisers. This is why the term protectorate was adopted. Such was the case of the Gold Coast during Maclean's administration where there was a limited British jurisdiction added to African traditional ways of ruling. After the Berlin Conference, the term had to be more clarified. Thus, Lord Chancellor Selborne declared that:

1 Kevin Shillington, *op. cit.*, p. 310

2 Henri Brunschwig, *op. cit.*, p. 83

A protectorate is the recognition of the right of the aboriginal or other actual inhabitants to their own country, with no further assumption of territorial rights than is necessary to maintain the paramount authority and to discharge the duties of the protecting Powers.¹

The definition suited the British needs. By adopting such policy, the British would reduce the cost of establishing colonial administrations for each colony. For example, the Gambia was controlled from Freetown, Sierra Leone, between 1886 and 1889.

Accordingly, new frontiers were traced to separate the colonies. These frontiers did not take into account the interests or conveniences of the local populations who were divided into communities that lived in different colonial systems. For instance, the Madinka of West Africa were under the French and British ruling and three colonies emerged: Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and the Hausa (Nigeria). In each British colony there were political institutions deriving their forms, to a certain extent, from the British model. The legislative council was composed of official members and unofficial ones. The latter was composed of traders, missionaries, and later on of nominated African representatives. The executive council was constituted of nominated British officials. The crucial aim of these institutions was law and order that could be attained by governing the local population either directly or through the traditional institutions.

The African Responses to the British Occupation in West Africa up to 1914

In the Gold coast, the Ashante wars against the British were a good example of the African resistance. The British learnt from these wars that the Africans would not submit easily. Although the British met violent reactions in some areas in West Africa, they neither withdrew their interests, nor limited their territorial extensions. The British were helped by their technological superiority as well as by the African disunity.

In some areas, the Africans accepted the British presence. It was usually felt among some African leaders that resistance to European forces would be futile, especially after having the defeat of the neighbouring tribes. They realised that the European technological superiority gave a decisive victory over their armies, whose traditional tactics and weaponry were ill-suited to modern warfare. Some African chiefs allied themselves with the Europeans to escape the conquest of more powerful neighbours.²

On the contrary, in the Muslim areas, the Emirs called for armed resistance against the British. In those areas the opposition to the European presence had begun since the arrival of the Christian missionaries. The Africans who were influenced by the Arab Muslim traders opposed those missionaries, yet the latter were supported by the Christianised Africans. However, the African resistance was frequently crushed. The British took advantage from the African

1 John D. Hargreaves, op. cit., p. 42

2 Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, London, Hutchinson, 1968, p.3

disunity, and they even recruited African troops from conquered territories or provided by African Allies. In this case, the policy of ‘divide and rule’ was beneficial for the British who took advantage from the traditional African political and ethnic rivalries.

The African reactions to British colonial rule were important factors in determining the pattern of colonial occupation. Initially, the British began to govern their colonial territories through the direct rule of British officials in West Africa. Later on, it was felt necessary among the British statesmen that each of the four colonies would be treated as an independent unit. Besides, the colonial opinion had to be taken into consideration. The British administration in West Africa had two main characteristics. Firstly, the autonomy of each colonial government in making administrative decisions and laws at the local level. This attitude was due to the unsuccessful British experience in her American colonies where the British Government did not allow self-management for British subjects and this led to the American Revolution of 1775-83. Consequently, the British Government felt it necessary to establish a legislative council in each colony. So in the Gambia, a legislative council was established in 1843, in the Gold Coast in 1850, in Lagos in 1862, and in Sierra Leone in 1863.¹ Secondly, the British officials found it more interesting and less expensive to rule via the traditional institutions that already existed and managed by the elite of the local population. It was also used to avoid confrontations with the local population in areas where the Africans refused British presence on their land. This policy of ‘Indirect Rule’ was first applied by Frederick Lugard in Northern Nigeria. It consisted of using the traditional chiefs as intermediaries between the colonial government and the local inhabitants in undertaking different tasks such as collecting taxes.

1 J. D., Fage, op. cit., p. 180

