

French Colonisation of Sub-Saharan Africa at the End of the 19th Century: Colonial Administration and Dimensions of National Resistance

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Abstract:

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the African continent witnessed extensive French colonial expansion, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, within the framework of the European rivalry known as the ‘Scramble for Africa’. France sought to extend its political, economic and military influence from its North African colonies, occupying vast territories such as Senegal, Chad, Gabon and the Congo, with the aim of creating an interconnected colonial empire stretching from the Mediterranean to Central Africa. Its expansion relied on military campaigns, the conclusion of treaties with local leaders, and the exploitation of military and technological superiority. This expansion was driven by economic motives, namely the search for raw materials and new markets, as well as political motives linked to enhancing France’s international standing following its defeat by Germany in 1871.

French expansion was met with strong national resistance from African peoples who rejected the occupation and defended their sovereignty and identity. This resistance took the form of armed uprisings and popular movements, most notably the resistance of Samori Touré in West Africa. Other forms of resistance also emerged, including political rejection and the preservation of local traditions and culture.

Understood. I will now present the same English translation, but with the reference numbers formatted as small superscripts (e.g., ¹, ², ³) placed immediately after the last word of the referenced sentence or clause, without parentheses, as is typical in the original Arabic academic style.

Based on the full article (abstract, introduction, and all subsequent sections), here are 5 appropriate keywords in English:

Keywords: French colonialism; Sub-Saharan Africa; National resistance; Colonial administration; Border disputes.

Introduction:

The nineteenth century represented a decisive phase in the history of international relations and major colonial transformations. European powers entered a frenzied race for expansion beyond their continental borders, driven by a combination of economic, political, strategic and ideological factors. The Industrial Revolution that Europe witnessed contributed to an increased need for raw materials and consumer markets, while competition among European states pushed them to seek new spheres of influence and domination. This turned the African continent into an arena for international conflict and colonial rivalry. In this context, the

Scramble for Africa emerged as one of the most prominent manifestations of modern imperialist policy, especially after the Berlin Conference which legitimised the partition of Africa among the major European powers without regard for the specificities of its peoples or their historical and cultural boundaries.

France was among the foremost powers that strongly engaged in the colonial project in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to build a vast colonial empire stretching from North Africa to West and Central Africa, exploiting its military and organisational superiority. It imposed its control over vast areas such as Senegal, Chad, the Congo and Gabon, among others, relying on military campaigns, exploratory missions and political treaties that were often imposed on local leaderships by force or deception. The aim of this expansion was not merely territorial control, but extended to the exploitation of natural resources, control of trade routes, and the enhancement of France's international standing amid escalating European rivalry, especially after the decline of its influence in Europe following its defeat by Germany in 1871.

However, the French colonial project in Sub-Saharan Africa was neither easy nor peaceful, as it encountered strong resistance from African peoples who refused to submit to foreign domination and clung to their political independence, cultural and religious identity. This resistance varied between direct military confrontation, popular uprisings, and political and cultural rejection. A number of African leaders led prominent resistance movements against French occupation, such as Samori Touré and Ahmadou Cheikhou (Ahmadu Shaykhu), among others, who sought to confront the colonial project and defend the sovereignty of their countries despite the imbalance of military power.

Studying the French occupation of Sub-Saharan Africa is of great importance, as it sheds light on the nature of European colonial policy and its real objectives, reveals early manifestations of African national consciousness, and highlights the scale of sacrifices made by African peoples in defence of their freedom and dignity. It also enables an understanding of many of the political, economic and social transformations that the African continent experienced during and after the colonial period. Based on this, the following main problem can be posed:

How did France manage to extend its influence in Sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the 19th century, and what was the nature of the national responses with which African peoples confronted this colonial expansion?

A set of subsidiary questions falls within this problem, most notably:

- What were the real motives behind French expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa, and what means and methods did France adopt to consolidate its colonial presence?
- What were the most prominent national resistance movements that emerged against French occupation, and to what extent were these resistances able to affect the French colonial project in the region?

French Expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa after the Berlin Conference (1884–1885)

Following the Berlin Conference¹, France began to strengthen its influence on the West African coast. In 1886, the French government managed to establish direct control over various centres in the region. French officials swiftly worked diligently to sign protection treaties with local

chiefs and leaders, treaties that would grant France full control over the coast, especially the area between Liberia and the Gold Coast. In 1887, France occupied Conakry and gained influence in the Sahel region, particularly the area between Sierra Leone and Portuguese Guinea, especially after the constitution of the new French colonies was established².

In 1893, France formally founded the colonies of Ivory Coast and French Guinea. In the same year, French troops entered the Dahomey region, deposed its king, Bihazin, the last of its independent monarchs, and from 1900 Dahomey became a French colony. The most significant French expansion in West Africa occurred in the Senegal River basin after they entered into conflict with the empire of Ahmadou Cheikhou (Ahmadu Shaykhu), son of El Hadj Umar Tall. Clashes continued between the French commander Gallieni and the forces of Ahmadou Cheikhou until the Tukolor Empire collapsed after its military forces were destroyed³.

The French also entered the upper Niger Valley, seized the city of Bamako (in present-day Mali), and captured Timbuktu in 1894 under the command of Joffre, taking control of it⁴. They also seized the town of Say, despite the resistance they faced from national forces and the strong opposition from the British, who also laid claim to the region. After Chamberlain assumed responsibility for the British colonies in 1895, he realised that the Royal Niger Company was incapable of matching French competition, so he appointed Captain Frederick Lugard to oversee the West African Frontier Force, which managed to control the region and annex it to the British Crown⁵.

It is worth noting that British policy towards French movements in West Africa remained diplomatic. After the signing of the 1889 agreement, which drew a boundary from the coast northwards to the 9th parallel, the palm oil forests in Yoruba land remained within the British sphere of influence, while the interior regions beyond the 9th parallel, such as the area opposite the Gold Coast, remained open to foreign expansion. Matters were later settled in West Africa, and it was agreed that France would take control of the interior regions behind Algeria up to the northern borders of the Royal Niger Company's sphere of influence, extending to the western side of Lake Chad⁶.

French progress in the interior of West Africa continued and became more active than before. Years after the occupation of Bamako, France concluded treaties with Samori Touré⁷, under which the southern Niger and Tinkisso rivers were placed under French protection. Samori Touré had aspired to establish a large Mandinka empire in the upper Niger. In 1872, he made Bissandougou his capital, then seized the Kankan region in the same year. He also sought to extend his influence south of the Niger after successfully forming a large army from the Mandinka tribes⁸. The French officer Péroz provided a detailed description of Samori's empire after concluding a treaty with him in 1887, stating that the empire was divided into 126 provinces, each containing 20 villages, each distinct from the others. He mentioned that the empire had many markets, such as those for gold, ivory and cattle, some of which gained great fame, such as the markets of Cambay, Nora and Kouroussa⁹.

Péroz added that the military organisation relied on "sofa" soldiers to form the imperial army. Each leader was responsible for supplying the army with recruits. The army was divided into three groups: the first carried rapid-fire rifles; the second was responsible for guarding and protecting citizens; the third was tasked with annexing new lands towards the east. This third

group was stationed on the borders of the empire and clashed with French forces on more than one occasion¹⁰. Samori Touré fiercely resisted French occupation and presence in the region. He aspired to revive the Islamic kingdoms that had declined in West Africa due to devastating wars among themselves and with European powers. In 1874, he called for the establishment of an Islamic state in Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Upper Volta, but he soon clashed with the French, who were expanding into areas adjacent to the Niger River, forcing him to withdraw southwards towards the Ivory Coast¹¹.

In the face of Samori Touré's victories north of the Ivory Coast, France decided to pursue him and sent a military expedition to destroy his state, led by Captain Menard. Menard left the coast at the head of a military force that set up camp in the Bisségila region in the centre of the country, after which they engaged in skirmishes with Samori Touré's army, which inflicted heavy defeats on them and killed Captain Menard and his followers in 1892. Five years later, Samori's son, Saranké Mori, managed to defeat British military detachments led by Henderson. Samori Touré himself captured the Kong region in May and then extended his influence as far as Bobo¹². In 1897, Samori Touré advanced to the Bobo region, where he clashed with the French column commanded by Coudrélier. Finding himself surrounded between the French and the British, he decided to return to his allies among the Toma in Liberia. However, he was attacked en route by a surprise assault led by Gouraud and was taken prisoner on 29 September 1898. He was then exiled to Gabon, where he died in 1900. Thus ended the longest series of campaigns against the French invasion in West Africa¹³.

At the same time as the conflict between Samori's forces and the French forces was raging, the latter opened another front against the Tukulor Empire of Ahmadou Cheikhou, who had succeeded his father, El Hadj Umar Tall, the founder of the empire. Like most African rulers, Ahmadou was determined to save his empire and preserve its independence and sovereignty. He chose to pursue a strategy of both alliance and military confrontation simultaneously. However, unlike most rulers of the region, he relied more on the former strategy than the latter. The evidence shows that from his accession to the throne until 1890, he adhered to a policy of alliance or cooperation with the French, resorting to war only in the last two years of his rule¹⁴. One should not be surprised by Ahmadou Cheikhou's choice of this strategy, for the political and economic realities he faced left him no alternative. Politically, his rule was troubled from the start, and he was forced to fight on three fronts: against his brothers, who did not recognise his authority; against his subjects—the Bambara, Mandinka, Fula and others—who despised their new Tukulor rulers and sought to regain their independence by force; and against the French. Complicating matters further, the army his father had used to build the empire had weakened and diminished in number, amounting in 1866 to no more than 4,000 *talibé* soldiers and 11,000 "sofa" infantry¹⁵.

Among the treaties concluded between Ahmadou Cheikhou and France was that signed by Gallieni, who was appointed governor of French Sudan in 1886. Gallieni focused his efforts against Mamadou Lamine, one of the leaders of national resistance in West Africa, and saw it as necessary to cooperate temporarily with Cheikhou. This cooperation resulted in the signing of the Gouri Treaty in May 1887, by which Ahmadou Cheikhou placed his country under French protection, opened the way for the French to navigate the Niger, and allowed them to

build installations on his lands¹⁶. Hanotaux mentions that the French commander Gallieni noted that this treaty enabled France to place the state of Ahmadou Cheikhou under French protection, extending French control from Senegal to the Niger. He also noted that Cheikhou, in Gallieni's view, posed no danger to the French; on the contrary, he provided assistance in capturing Soybou, son of Mamadou Lamine, who had obstructed French progress in the region. Furthermore, Gallieni praised the Tukolor tribes and declared that they could be useful in developing trade in the region¹⁷.

However, after the French suppressed Lamine's rebellion and concluded new treaties with Samori Touré, they no longer needed the alliance with Ahmadou Cheikhou, leading to an attack on him. In February 1889, they launched a military campaign against the Tukolor fortress in the Kéniéran region, which was an obstacle to their advance towards Siguiri and Dingueraye. Despite this, the operation was not swift because of the fortress's impregnability and the strength of its garrison, in addition to Ahmadou Cheikhou's efforts to transfer the struggle to the religious domain. He called upon all Muslims in his empire to take up arms in defence of their land and sent letters to the Wolof, Futa and even Mauritanian tribes asking for help¹⁸.

Despite Ahmadou Cheikhou's measures, Gallieni managed to capture the fortress and expel the Tukolor from it, which further strained relations between the two sides. Although Gallieni tried several times to appease Ahmadou Cheikhou, the latter refused his justifications and insisted on breaking off relations with the French. If we ask why Gallieni took this step despite signing the Gouri Treaty and his adherence to a policy of appeasing the Tukolor, the answer is that he needed the Koundian fortress because it occupied a strategically important position, controlling the valley of the Bafing River, which connects to the Senegal River¹⁹.

With the arrival of Archinard in Sudan, who succeeded Gallieni in command of the French forces in West Africa, he urged the French government to invade Ahmadou Cheikhou's territories in order to realise the French dream of building a vast empire in West Africa. He struggled to prove the validity of his theory calling for the elimination of the Tukolor and all national forces that stood as obstacles to French progress in the region. He managed to convince the French government of his views, planned accordingly, and then began his military campaigns in the region²⁰.

After preparing for his military campaign and obtaining sufficient weapons, including two 95 mm cannons with 100 shells of the latest melinite type, Archinard captured the imperial capital in April 1890. From there, he advanced on the fortress of Oussebouyou, which was defended by Bambara loyal to Ahmadou. All of them were killed in the battle, but only after inflicting heavy losses on the French forces. Archinard continued his advance, seizing Kouniakary. When faced with fierce resistance from the Tukolor garrisons, he ordered a halt to the fighting and called on Ahmadou Cheikhou to surrender and go to live in the village of Dingueraye as an ordinary individual. However, Ahmadou abandoned his diplomatic strategy and took up the weapon of military resistance, attacking the railway line at Talari in June 1890 and engaging in numerous skirmishes with the French between Kayes and Bafoulabé, in which French losses were heavy²¹.

Military campaigns against Ahmadou Cheikhou continued. Archinard decided to invade the Niore region, which was Cheikhou's main centre. He formed military detachments under

Lieutenant Marchand, which moved to surround Nioro from the eastern side. He also concluded an agreement with N'to, one of the former Bambara chiefs of Ségou, charging him with blocking the Tukolor's path. He placed two detachments of French soldiers on the Niger for fear that Samori might take any hostile action against the French²².

Ahmadou Cheikhou was prepared to defend Nioro, dividing his forces into four groups and structuring a defensive and offensive strategy. He placed the main force around Nioro under the command of the Bambara leader Baffi and the former Wolof king Alboury Ndiaye. On 22 December 1890, the French managed to inflict a devastating defeat on the army of Bissirou, using their 80 mm and 95 mm cannons. On 1 January 1891, Archinard entered the city of Nioro after defeating Ahmadou Cheikhou's army, which lost nearly 3,000 men killed and captured. Ahmadou then withdrew to Massina, which he left after the fierce battle of Kori²³.

Under pressure from French military campaigns, Ahmadou Cheikhou was forced to head towards Massina and then to the Sokoto region, where he died in 1898, after most of the territories he had defended had fallen into French hands. Years after the fall of Nioro, the French captured Timbuktu and then the town of Say, as mentioned earlier. After 1896, the French occupied the Fouta Djallon and Benger regions. France concluded treaties with the rulers of other regions and placed the Mossi territories in Upper Volta and the lands between them and the Ivory Coast under its protection²⁴.

It is worth noting that Archinard's military campaigns drew the attention of the French Parliament, which issued a decree in December 1891 forbidding further military expansion in Sudan and limiting itself to organising the territories Archinard had seized. Delcassé deemed it necessary to end the state of war in Sudan and work towards its economic development. Consequently, orders were issued to appoint a civilian governor, Grodé. Delcassé reminded him that organising and administering Sudan was more difficult than conquering it. It may also be observed that with the start of Archinard's campaigns, the idea of unity among national leaders began to emerge as a result of the common danger. Ahmadou Cheikhou sent gifts and envoys to Tieba, and Samori Touré wrote to Ahmadou Cheikhou saying that the three leaders must unite to make it easier to confront the French forces²⁵. However, these moves came too late, as France had already made great strides in invading the interior regions of West Africa and had occupied most of its cities.

a – Colonial Rivalry in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Problem of Borders:

The African kingdoms and emirates were given no opportunity to express their opinion or even to conduct a survey of their populations and spheres of influence. Rather, the competition and colonial scramble to acquire expansion areas played an important role in drawing the borders of modern African states. It can be said that the main borders were drawn with a ruler on the negotiation table at the Berlin Conference. By studying the political map of Africa, many facts become clear, the most important of which are:

- That a large number of the political units created do not merit consideration as states because they lack the necessary components, and that the arbitrary planning of borders between states resulted from the creation of fragmented and artificial political units.
- That when the borders were drawn, no regard was given to the harmony between land area and population, which led to the emergence of forty-six political units after the Second World

War, of which 13 units have no maritime outlet, whereas the number of landlocked countries in the entire world (outside Africa) is eleven countries²⁶.

It is worth noting that during the Berlin Conference, no official territorial divisions of the African continent were agreed upon; rather, the creation of spheres of influence for each European state was approved, as happened in West Africa, where certain regions and areas became subject to Britain, France and other European states. Subsequently, the borders between these spheres of influence became the official borders of West African states, which the Organisation of African Unity²⁷ recognised as official borders in 1963²⁸ – a division that was consistent with the positions and interests of some European states but contradicted those of others at times, and which left the door open for competition and conflict between some regions, as we will discuss later.

The report of the Economic Commission of the United Nations on West Africa for 1962 stated: ‘There are no other regions in the world with such a large number of small states, small in terms of production and population.’ The only significant region resembling Africa in its multiplicity of states was Central America, but with a great difference in political and even economic conditions. European governments continued to claim sovereignty over all forty African units. The division of Africa, and West Africa in particular, in this manner was likely the result of conflict and rivalry between the colonial powers themselves. This division was not in the interests of the African peoples, and the result was a multiplicity of cultures, parties and policies, all of which were obstacles placed in the way of African unity and the restoration of Africa’s strength and vitality²⁹.

From this, it can be said that the most significant dangers that tore Africa apart, especially West Africa, lay in the expansionist ambitions and fierce competition between European states. Both Britain and France exploited this fragmentation for their own benefit by helping one side against another until they established themselves, and they indeed succeeded in doing so, especially after African national forces found themselves in a position that no longer allowed them to continue the struggle against the hordes of Europeans.

Maps published at the beginning of the 20th century show that all of West Africa was under the control of European powers except Liberia. France had a vast empire in the region covering an area of about 1,800,000 square miles, followed by Britain, whose colonies in West Africa covered about 480,000 square miles. The British territory did not occupy a single continuous area like the French territory in West Africa but was divided into four parts due to French presence in the same region. Germany possessed an area of 33,000 square miles, represented by the colony of Togo, located on the southern edge of West Africa, as well as a large part of Equatorial Africa, namely Cameroon, which covers about 200,000 square miles. Portuguese influence was confined to the colony of Guinea, with an area of 14,000 square miles³⁰.

Although the European powers pre-emptively defined their respective spheres of influence, this did not prevent disputes from arising between them, such as the dispute between France and Britain over the Senegalese border on the Gambia side. This was settled by the two parties concluding a treaty in 1904, under which Britain ceded Gorée Island to the French, and the French ceded a large area on both sides of the Gambia River, which became known as the Gambia and became a British colony³¹. It should be noted that the Treaty of London of 1890

was concluded between France and Britain, under which England recognised France's influence in the Mediterranean as far as Barrowa on the Niger River and along the line from Say to the western shore of the lake. The commissioners of the two states were left to determine the borders and spheres of influence in the regions west and south of the Niger River. Before that, France had succeeded in persuading Portugal to renounce its claims in the same region, and the matter was settled by the treaty concluded between the two states in 1887³².

The same thing happened between France and Germany, which lost hope of expansion in the western Sudan and the Niger region in particular, leading it to conclude a treaty with France in 1897, under which the border was extended to the 11th parallel north, and the Mono River became a natural boundary instead of the artificial boundary represented by the meridian passing through Babol Island. Germany left the city of Agoué on the coast to France and, at the same time, renounced its claims to the right bank of the Niger River³³.

France continued to conclude agreements with other colonial powers over disputed areas and, by virtue of these, was able to define its spheres of influence in West Africa and the equatorial regions into which its influence extended. Thus, France acquired a vast, sprawling empire in the African continent, including Algeria, Tunisia and then Morocco in North Africa, and westwards from Dakar to the borders of Sudan and the Nile Valley, extending south to the coasts of the Congo. This constituted what was known as French Equatorial Africa (A.E.F.), which included Central Africa, Cameroon, the French Congo, Gabon and Chad³⁴.

The primary problem facing France, Britain and even Germany remained the Africans' recognition of European sovereignty and their new borders, in addition to the problem of some African rulers refusing to allow any European military force to pass through their regions, which led to numerous skirmishes with them from time to time. After 1900, the French were forced to subdue some peoples in the equatorial regions of French Guinea and the Ivory Coast through a series of military operations that continued until 1915, as happened with the nomadic tribes in the northern Sahara and the north-east of Niger. Germany's influence remained weak until the end of 1914 in the territories it occupied, such as northern Togo and Cameroon³⁵.

As for Britain, after extending its control over the region north of Ashanti territory, as mentioned earlier, and in order to maintain its spheres of influence and curb French and German advances, it extended the borders of its protectorate to the 8th parallel north of the equator, covering both the Gold Coast and parts of northern Togo. This was done without regard for the situation of the various African communities of different races and creeds. For example, some of the Ewe tribes found themselves living in Togo, while alongside them was the state of Dagomba, which was divided between Togo and the Gold Coast. Some parts of the Akan region in the Ivory Coast were annexed to the French colony, while other parts fell under British control³⁶.

The European states were not satisfied with concluding treaties and agreements among themselves over spheres of influence and their respective borders; they also hastened to conclude agreements with African tribal leaders in order to obtain material and strategic gains at the same time. Envoys of the European states, especially Britain and France, roamed the regions of West Africa, offering gifts and bribes to tribal chiefs and leaders, then signed treaties

with them. Often these leaders were ignorant of the contents of these treaties and what they were signing, thus placing their regions under colonial protection unwittingly³⁷.

These methods were among the consequences and reflections of the Berlin Conference and its decisions, which at once organised and justified the colonial expansion of the European states, such as the decision stipulating that no state could declare its acquisition of any region of the continent without reinforcing it with effective occupation, as well as the decision stating that any state that had previously concluded treaties with the native inhabitants would have the right to acquire the region without the intervention of other states³⁸. This led to a race among European states, each trying to obtain spheres of influence even at the expense of the political and social unity of a single tribe or people.

From the colonial rivalry and political conflict between the Germans in Togo, the French in the Ivory Coast and the British in the Gold Coast, the territory inherited by present-day Ghana was determined. Similarly, French Guinea was created to allow the French to cut off British influence in Gambia from their influence in Sierra Leone. Under the guise of political bargaining, many substantial changes were made to borders without regard for the territorial unity in which a settled group of people lived. The unidimensional factor played a major role in dividing the political units of the continent and drawing their borders, known as geographical borders, represented by straight lines conforming to lines of latitude and longitude – the worst kind of borders, which resulted in many problems among the continent's states after independence³⁹.

For example, in African countries with pastoral tribes, herders often cross the borders of their state into neighbouring countries, especially if the autumn rains fail in their areas. The original situation is that these tribes were separated and divided into parts, such as the Zaghawa tribes – part in Darfur and another part in Chad; likewise the Acholi tribes – part in South Sudan and the other in Uganda; also the Maraweer between Sudan and Egypt, and others in other regions. Pastoral problems used to be resolved by tribal leaders through mutual consent without state intervention, but sometimes the state is forced to intervene if losses are recorded among its citizens. This issue was one of those considered by the Organisation of African Unity in the context of solving border problems by peaceful means⁴⁰.

After analysing the political map of West Africa following the Berlin Conference, it appears that a large number of its political units – at least in the tropical zone – do not represent natural, economic or even human divisions that could be organised separately as independent states with sovereign decision-making. This region is perhaps the greatest stronghold of heterogeneous political units. For example, Gambia was an integral part of Senegal naturally and humanly: the Gambia River is the wide natural outlet of the Senegal River, and the people of Gambia have their real relatives in Senegal. Hence, in the words of a politician before the independence of the two states, the future lies in the integration of both Gambia and Senegal⁴¹. Similarly, we find that Upper Volta is a purely artificial state; the simplest evidence of this is the radical changes in its borders when it was a unit within French West Africa. On more than one occasion, parts were cut off from it and annexed eastwards or westwards; indeed it disappeared completely in 1932. The last of these modifications was in 1947, when it was restored with its 1932 borders, but the largest part was detached and annexed to the Ivory Coast

– due to excess population in the former and deficiency in the latter. The same applies to Togo, whose people resemble the people of Ghana (the Gold Coast) and Dahomey, and whose geographical divisions are those of the neighbouring countries⁴².

Thus, it can be said that colonial expansion and rivalry led to the arbitrary planning of borders between African regions, resulting in the emergence of fragmented and artificial political units that lack the natural, human and even economic components that could justify their existence as independent states – a situation that serves the interests of the colonial powers more than anything else. This was confirmed by Roland Levergon (?) in his book **History of Africa**, where he said: ‘The colonial states tore Africa apart as an insurance for the future; Britain alone divided its colonies in Africa into 14 parts, and France did much more than that.’ Thus, these divisions formed an obstacle on the path to unity among African states and became a major impediment to their recovery of strength and vitality⁴³.

European rule came to Africa and radically changed the methods known in the continent, imposing other new methods that the African man had not known or understood. Moreover, he was not granted the right to dialogue, discussion or persuasion, as the European system of government replaced Islamic law and traditional African customs that the natives knew and obeyed out of conviction of their suitability for a society where everyone knows their rights and duties⁴⁴.

c – The French System of Government and Its Repercussions on the Populations of Sub-Saharan Africa:

The methods of government and laws brought by Europeans to Africa were spontaneous and improvised, as they had no knowledge or familiarity with the African regions and their populations, and they were ignorant of the boundaries of tribal and kingdom expansion in order to devise systems and laws for each that conformed to what they were accustomed to beforehand. The result was that two tribes or two peoples became subject to one administration, and what one tribe accepted, the other rejected. Sometimes one people or one tribe was divided between two or more regions, each with its own administration and subject to a different style of government and language from the other part. Furthermore, laws, legislation and systems were issued by the occupation authorities, who did not represent the interests of the African people, and the same applied to the executive councils, which were in the hands of the Governor-General and his European assistants. Even when the colonial authorities wanted to involve Africans in government, they brought in loyal chiefs who served their interests and neglected the rights of the African tribes⁴⁵.

All administrative and technical powers were in the hands of the colonial government employee in the African regions. He had the right to maintain order and law, supervise tax collection, and also had the right to supervise the means by which local communities governed themselves. Colonial employees went to extremes in their arrogance and disdain towards African kings and chiefs, dismissing them from their posts, breaking up the large political units they found and fragmenting them into smaller units over which they appointed governors of their own choosing⁴⁶.

The French system of government in Africa generally, and West Africa in particular, relied on the method of direct rule – a system completely different from the systems of government of other European states, especially Britain, whose system of government was distinguished by indirect rule. Direct rule was a hallmark of the successive French governments that administered the African colonies, as they saw no need for the existence of tribal or local leaderships that would mediate between them and the Africans. This drove them to break these leaderships, strip them of any authority or influence, and fight anyone who supported them⁴⁷. Strangely enough, French policy was built on certain legal and humanitarian principles proclaimed by the French Revolution. The French relied on the idea that all inhabitants of the colonies should be French citizens, possessing the same rights and subject to the same duties. On this basis, the theory of assimilation (Assimilation) was founded, which aimed at stamping the colonies with a French character by imposing French culture, language, traditions, social systems and even politics on Africans so that they would absorb them completely, making their thinking and orientation in all aspects of life exactly like the French. This naturally required cutting every tie the African had with his national and civilisational history, so that he would gradually imbibe French culture, with its associated traditions and civilisational manifestations, and become historically, socially and politically linked to the great mother country, France, which embodied civilisation and urbanity⁴⁸.

The French themselves say about this phenomenon of assimilation that it is a positive act to bring French civilisation to the colonies and raise their inhabitants to the level of the French. This is a saying whose outward appearance is good but its inner essence is ugly. The attempt to raise these natives to the level of the French while ignoring racial, religious, mental and cultural differences is a failed attempt that indicates a lack of understanding. The attempt that should be made is to work on raising these natives to a level of European civilisation, awareness and culture within the African framework – that is, by drawing on the original African culture and all African circumstances and trying to develop them into a modern style that suits the African mentality⁴⁹.

Over the past hundred years, the relationship between France and its colonies varied from era to era, but it was always characterised by a strict centralised administration based in Paris. France followed a vertical colonial system alongside a new form that allowed each protectorate to retain its national flag, currency and legislation, while France retained the final word in all matters through the French officials headed by the High Commissioner, the Governor-General or the Resident-General. This situation continued throughout the days of the Fourth French Republic, which tried to clothe French colonialism in a new garment under the name of the Community⁵⁰.

With France's completion of its occupation of West Africa, it found it difficult for the French administration in Senegal to maintain its control over the remaining regions. Hence, the idea emerged of grouping the French colonies into federal units to facilitate their administration and control. Thus, what came to be known as French West Africa (A.O.F.) and French Equatorial Africa were formed as two federal units. The federal union was composed of several units, each subject to a governor who was in turn subject to the Governor-General of the federation, who represented the French Republic and was the primary official responsible before the

French Minister of Colonies, thus acting as the intermediary between the French colonies and the Ministry of Colonies⁵¹.

In addition to the Governor-General being subordinate to the Minister of Colonies, the latter was assisted by the Supreme Council of the Colonies, as well as other advisory councils specialised in certain affairs such as education, health and so on. On the other hand, the Governor-General received assistance from French officials appointed by the Ministry of Colonies to head the various departments⁵². The only powers granted to the native populations – i.e., the Africans – were village headship, but under the supervision of French regional officials subordinate to both the Ministry of Colonies and the Governor-General at the same time⁵³.

On the other hand, the French Parliament was the sole body competent to legislate for all the colonies throughout the French Empire, leaving the execution of the laws it enacted to French officials. It is noticeable that these laws were written in French, the only language that anyone working in the government or having any business with it was required to know to the exclusion of others. For this reason, only French officials sent by the Paris government to the colonies were permitted to work in government departments. Those natives who worked in the lowest posts were required to have sufficient command of French. Thus, the share of the native elite in the jobs of their own country became notably small, and social discrimination and racial segregation appeared in a clear form, despite what French law stipulated about complete equality among all inhabitants of the French Empire⁵⁴.

The aim of this was a comprehensive and collective Frenchness for all Africans, and any resistance to this Frenchness was considered a heinous crime and a failure to recognise French favour, punishable by law. Despite all this, this attempt did not bear the expected fruit. Some new ideas emerged against it and against the policy of assimilation, arising as reactions to practical facts that appeared in the life of France and the African continent. Among the writers who opposed this was Jules Harmand, who adopted the theory of policy based on association (Politique d'Association), which aimed to create a group of Africans capable of absorbing French culture, called the elite, so that cooperation might take place between the French governmental administration and local bodies and individuals in order to create African leaderships that would lead peoples and societies towards civilisation and urbanity⁵⁵.

In addition to the elite, privileges were granted to Africans born in the bosom of Saint-Louis, Dakar and Rufisque, making them automatically French citizens, and the same for their children. For other Africans, conditions were imposed for them to become French citizens: submission to local law, reaching the age of 18, undertaking not to practise polygamy, learning French, performing national service, and then being permitted to work in a French job for ten years⁵⁶.

The phenomenon of racism and discrimination between Africans and French remained the dominant feature of French policy and its administration of the African colonies. In addition to what has been mentioned, we find that discrimination appeared even in the taxes imposed by the government on Africans, such as the so-called head tax for Muslims, from which even women were not exempt, as well as the cattle land tax, which was set at 10% of the value of the animal, and the tithe on land. These designations, even if they were Arabic-Islamic, were

merely camouflage and deception and had no connection to the Islamic religion. Zakāt in Islam is just a sample not exceeding 2.5% of value, with freedom of choice in its distribution, whereas the French government added it to general revenue and disposed of it as served its interests⁵⁷. Around 1920, the French realised the failure of their plans to turn Africans into Frenchmen and their failure to govern French West Africa as part of France. This led them to pay attention to African systems; indeed, they encouraged local self-government in local regions and large cities. Nevertheless, French officials continued to run the affairs of the African colonies, and they refused to abandon their tyranny and bureaucratic methods. Following the international events witnessed by the European continent, France was compelled to make a slight change in its administrative practice in the African colonies, and this continued until the beginning of the Second World War⁵⁸.

The global events that France went through obliged its politicians to review their positions and plans with the states under their influence. This led to the holding of several conferences to discuss the relationship between France and its colonies. Among the most important of these was the Brazzaville Conference, held in 1944, which resulted in France issuing a series of constitutions concerning the development of relations between France and its African colonies. The most important of these were the constitution of the Fourth Republic in October 1946 and de Gaulle's constitution of 1958, which stipulated granting the French colonies their independence – known as the French campaign analogous to the British Loi-cadre⁵⁹. With the arrival of the European hordes to the African continent, they gradually managed to change the pattern of life there, bringing about many transformations and changes in its various fields and aspects. And no change or transformation was more severe or deeper than that which affected the local economy of the continent's regions, especially the western part, which before the 16th century had experienced economic prosperity and development that soon began to gradually disappear before the colonial economy in the following centuries⁶⁰.

With France's completion of its occupation of West Africa, it found it difficult for the French administration in Senegal to maintain its control over the remaining regions. Hence, the idea emerged of grouping the French colonies into federal units to facilitate their administration and control. Thus, what came to be known as French West Africa (A.O.F.) and French Equatorial Africa were formed as two federal units. The federal union was composed of several units, each subject to a governor who was in turn subject to the Governor-General of the federation, who represented the French Republic and was the primary official responsible before the French Minister of Colonies, thus acting as the intermediary between the French colonies and the Ministry of Colonies⁶¹.

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Conclusion:

In concluding this article, it can be affirmed that the French occupation of Sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the nineteenth century occurred within an international historical context marked by intense European colonial rivalry in what became known as the Scramble for Africa. France sought to expand its imperial domain and link its colonies in North, West and Central Africa within a comprehensive colonial project based on achieving economic and strategic interests and consolidating political and military influence. This occupation was not merely a process of geographical expansion but represented a structural project to reshape African societies according to the French colonial vision, by imposing new patterns of administration and governance, reorganising the local economy to serve the requirements of the French market, as well as attempting to impose cultural and intellectual hegemony over the colonised peoples.

The study has shown that the French colonial administration relied on a range of means and procedures aimed at consolidating the pillars of colonial control. It employed military force to subdue regions that rejected occupation, and adopted a policy of direct rule in some areas and indirect rule in others, exploiting tribal, ethnic and local specificities to facilitate control and domination. The French administration also worked to establish new administrative and legal structures that abolished or marginalised many traditional African authorities, linking the various occupied territories to the colonial centre in France, which led to profound transformations in the political, social and economic structures of African societies.

On the economic level, the French colonial project was based on exploiting natural resources and subjugating African labour to serve the French economy, through the imposition of taxes, forced labour, and directing agricultural activity towards cash crops linked to the needs of European markets. This exacerbated the social and living conditions of the local populations. France also sought to monopolise trade and impose economic dependency, making the African colonies mere spaces for production and consumption within the colonial capitalist system.

From a cultural and intellectual perspective, the colonial administration attempted to impose its civilisational model through missionary education and cultural policies aimed at spreading the French language and culture, within the framework of the so-called assimilation policy, which sought to create local elites intellectually and politically tied to the colonial administration. However, despite their limited penetration, these policies encountered the African peoples' adherence to their civilisational, religious and cultural components. Religious institutions (zawāyā), traditional leaders and religious authorities played an important role in preserving local identity and confronting attempts at cultural erasure.

In the face of this colonial penetration, multiple forms of national rejection and African resistance emerged, reflecting the local populations' rejection of foreign domination and their adherence to their right to freedom and sovereignty. This resistance varied between armed revolutions led by local leaders, movements of disobedience and rebellion, in addition to cultural and religious resistance that sought to protect African identity from dissolution within the French colonial project. Despite the military and technological superiority possessed by France, African resistance constituted a real obstacle to the stability of the occupation and proved that colonial control was never acceptable to the colonised peoples. Moreover, these diverse forms of resistance contributed to the development of national and nationalist consciousness within African societies and laid the first foundations for modern liberation movements that would later develop during the first half of the twentieth century, culminating in national independence movements after the Second World War. Thus, national rejection was not merely a temporary reaction to occupation but an expression of a growing historical and political awareness of the danger of the colonial project and its effects on the present and future of African societies.

Accordingly, the study of the French occupation of Sub-Saharan Africa reveals the nature of the French colonial project as an integrated system of political, economic and cultural hegemony. It also highlights, in contrast, the ability of African peoples to resist, endure and preserve their identity despite conditions of oppression and exploitation. This makes this subject a fundamental axis for understanding the modern history of Africa and comprehending the roots of many of the political and social transformations experienced by the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa after independence.

¹ Shawqi Attallah al-Jamal, **Modern and Contemporary History of Africa**, Riyadh: Dar al-Zahra, 2002, p. 147.

² Fage J. D., *A History of West Africa*, trans. Yusuf Nasr, Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1983, pp. 322–323.

³ Ibrahim Abd al-Razzaq, *'The Berlin Conference and Its Impact on the Political Map of West Africa'*, Journal of African Studies, Institute of African Studies, Egypt, 1983, issue 12, p. 41.

⁴ Guillaumet Édouard, *Le Soudan en 1894 (La vérité sur Tombouctou)*, ed. Savine (Paris), 1895, pp. 11–12.

⁵ Muhammad Ali Fadil, *Muslims in West Africa*, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007, pp. 160–161.

- ⁶ Robinson Ronald and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, London, 1961, p. 301.
- ⁷ Samori Touré was born in Guinea and descended from Malinke origins. He worked as a trader, especially in firearms, which were in high demand in the region extending from Guinea to the Niger. He sought to confront French imperialism and its presence in the south of the country, and thereby revive the Islamic kingdoms of West Africa after their decline due to devastating wars among themselves on the one hand and imperialist rivalry on the other. In 1874, he called for the establishment of an Islamic state in Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso), but he clashed with the French, who had begun expanding into areas adjacent to the Niger River. See: Mouncef Bekkai, *Lights on the History of Africa*, Algeria: Dar al-Sabil for Publishing and Distribution, 2009, p. 73.
- ⁸ Ilham Dhahni, *Documentary Research and Studies in Modern African History*, Egypt: Anglo-Egyptian Library, 2009, 1st ed., p. 50.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- ¹⁰ Ilham Ali Dhahni, *Documentary Research and Studies*, p. 50.
- ¹¹ Mouncef Bekkai, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- ¹³ Mbaye Guèye, '*Clashes and African Resistance in West Africa (1880–1914)*', *General History of Africa*, vol. 7, p. 139.
- ¹⁴ Mbaye Guèye, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
- ¹⁵ Kanya-Forstner (A. S.), *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French Military Imperialism*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 81.
- ¹⁶ Gabriel Hanotaux, *Histoire des colonies Françaises et de l'exploitation de la France dans le Monde*, Paris, 1929, vol. 3, p. 182.
- ¹⁷ Gabriel Hanotaux, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
- ¹⁸ Mbaye Guèye, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- ¹⁹ Ilham Ali Dhahni, *Jihad of the Islamic Kingdoms in West Africa*, Riyadh: Dar al-Mareekh, 1988, pp. 142–143.
- ²⁰ Gabriel Hanotaux, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
- ²¹ Mbaye Guèye, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–135.
- ²² Ilham Ali Dhahni, *Jihad of the Islamic Kingdoms in West Africa*, p. 145.
- ²³ Mbaye Guèye, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–135.
- ²⁴ Fage J. D., *op. cit.*, p. 318.
- ²⁵ Ilham Ali Dhahni, *Jihad of the Islamic Kingdoms*, p. 158.
- ²⁶ Muhammad Ali al-Qawzi, *Modern and Contemporary History of Africa*, Lebanon: Dar al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya, 2006, p. 99.
- ²⁷ The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was founded in 1963 in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, with 32 founding members. Over the years, its influence increased on African and global issues. It established a special fund to assist independence movements against European colonial rule, supporting the successful struggle of black people in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) to achieve self-rule. It also prevented member states from trading with South Africa and attempted to expel South Africa's representatives from the United Nations due to their policy of racial discrimination against Africans. It ceased its activities after the

African majority attained rule in the country. The OAU had no power to compel its members to follow its policies; some member states engaged in trade with South Africa despite the embargo. The OAU was dissolved in 2009 and replaced by the African Union, which was formally established in 2001. See: Qasim Buqur'a, Electronic Encyclopaedia, 24 June 2015, <http://ency.kacemb.com>

²⁸ Muhammad Fadil Ali, op. cit., p. 159.

²⁹ Ali Fadl Bari, op. cit., pp. 163–164.

³⁰ Fage J. D., op. cit., p. 334.

³¹ Farghali Ali Haridi, *Modern and Contemporary History of Africa*, Egypt: Al-Ilm wal-Iman for Publishing and Distribution, 2008, pp. 153–154.

³² Helmi Mahrous Ismail, *Modern and Contemporary History of Africa from the Geographical Discoveries to the Establishment of the Organisation of African Unity*, vol. 1, Alexandria: University Youth Foundation, 2004, p. 277.

³³ Farghali Ali, op. cit., p. 153.

³⁴ Shawqi al-Jamal, *Modern History of Africa*, p. 153.

³⁵ Fage J. D., op. cit., p. 335.

³⁶ Fage J. D., op. cit., p. 321.

³⁷ Faisal Musa, *A Brief History of Modern and Contemporary Africa*, Libya: Open University Publications, 1997, 1st ed., p. 134.

³⁸ *Acte général de la conférence de Berlin 1884–1885*, published in: *Décolonisations, instabilités et famines en Afrique: Cent ans Après la Conférence de Berlin, 1885–1985*, preface by Jean Ziegler, Brussels: Solidarité socialiste, 1986, p. 27.

³⁹ Shawqi al-Jamal, *History of Muslims in Africa and Their Problems*, Egypt: Dar al-Thaqafa for Publishing and Distribution, 1996, p. 127.

⁴⁰ Faisal Musa, op. cit., p. 303.

⁴¹ Jamal Hamdan, *The New Africa: A Study in Political Geography*, Egypt: Madbouli Library, 1996, pp. 391–392.

⁴² Ibid., p. 392.

⁴³ Abd al-Hadi Mas'ud, *Contemporary Islamic Society in Africa*, Egypt: Al-Wafa for Publishing and Distribution, 1995, 1st ed., p. 12.

⁴⁴ Jamal Abd al-Hadi Muhammad, *Errors to be Corrected in the History of Africa*, Egypt: Dar al-Wafa, 2007, 2nd ed., p. 84.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Ali Fadil Bari, op. cit., pp. 164–165.

⁴⁶ Mahmoud al-Sayyid, *Africa and Western Greed*, Egypt: University Youth Foundation, 2009, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Ibrahim Abd al-Razzaq, *Studies in West Africa*, Egypt: Alexandria Library, 1998, p. 79.

⁴⁸ Shawqi al-Jamal, *Modern and Contemporary History of Africa*, pp. 387–388.

⁴⁹ Zahir Riyad, *The Colonisation of Africa*, Egypt: Dar al-Qawmiyya for Printing and Publishing, 1965, pp. 321–322.

⁵⁰ Ibrahim Abd al-Razzaq, 'Colonial Systems of Government in West Africa', *Journal of African Studies*, Egypt: Institute of African Research and Studies, 1884–1885, issues 13–14, p. 73.



- ⁵¹ Ilham Ali Dhahni, *Jihad of the Islamic Kingdoms*, p. 207.
- ⁵² Shawqi al-Jamal, *Modern and Contemporary History of Africa*, p. 388.
- ⁵³ Fage J. D., op. cit., p. 337.
- ⁵⁴ Zahir Riyad, op. cit., pp. 321–322.
- ⁵⁵ Ibrahim Abd al-Razzaq, 'Colonial Systems of Government in West Africa', pp. 75–76.
- ⁵⁶ Fage J. D., op. cit., p. 339.
- ⁵⁷ Zahir Riyad, op. cit., p. 324.
- ⁵⁸ Fage J. D., op. cit., pp. 339–340.
- ⁵⁹ Shawqi al-Jamal, op. cit., p. 288.