



COLONIZATION OF WEST AFRICA

Student's Name

Course

Date

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Introduction

Today's West Africa is an Atlantic region that unites several states freed from colonialism with their own historical, cultural, religious, social, and economic peculiarities. The African continent was the arena of fierce competitive clashes between the leading world powers since the Middle Ages. The struggle for African territories exacerbated in the late 19th century due to the imperial ambitions of European countries, their need for the expansion of raw material production sites for industrial development, new markets, and capital export. The collapse of the British and French colonial empires made former colonies in West Africa politically independent but gave the rise to various socio-political and economic problems. African decolonization led to the formation of states recognized by the international community and caused numerous tribalism-oriented movements that demanded revision of the colonial borders. Current socio-political trends in such countries as Benin, Senegal, Togo, Nigeria, and Ghana are inextricably linked with their colonial past. Since African countries and their economies are integral components of the contemporary globalized world, a comprehensive and thorough study of impacts of the colonialization on West Africa will contribute to mutually beneficial cooperation between different nations.

The Research Question

Given the scope of the colonization-associated consequences, this research aims to assess impacts of this phenomenon on countries in West Africa by reviewing existing theoretical frameworks related to colonialism, exploring authentic sources, and examining contemporary social trends in such countries as Benin, Senegal, Togo, Nigeria, and Ghana. While pursuing this study, it was intended to gain deep insight into consequences the colonialization entailed for countries in West Africa and to answer the following research question: how did the colonization affect the West African countries in the late 19th century?

The Historical Context (Review of Pertinent Sources)

The period of the penetration of European colonizers into the western Africa was the prologue to the territorial division of the continent and largely determined its course and characteristics in each specific region. Although colonial expansion mainly encompassed the violation of natural

processes of historical development of conquered countries and their forced involvement in new socio-economic relations, the colonization also positively influenced African populations.

- Socio-economic conditions, cultural peculiarities, and political systems of West African countries prior to the late 19th century;
- Causes of the intensification of colonization in West Africa in the late 19th century;
- European missionaries: impacts on the culture, religious beliefs, and education of indigenous populations;
- The rivalry between the main European powers for African territories in terms of Britain's colonial possessions and French colonial federations: regions owned, colonization schemes, approaches to the administration, relationships with indigenous populations, etc.
- Impacts of British and French colonizers on West Africa: development of institutions, contribution to industrial progress, destruction of social foundations, cultural heritage appropriation, wars with the Africans, etc.;
- The national liberation movement in West Africa (Benin, the Kingdom of Dahomey, and others): causes and consequences of resistance to colonial seizures and regimes;
- Transformations in colonialism: antislavery movement in European countries, the 1884–85 Berlin Conference, the Brussels Anti-Slavery Conference (1899–1900), etc.

Historiography of the Colonization

- Scholarly debate on the concept of colonialism
- Past theoretical underpinnings of the colonialization and justification of colonialism by European ideologists and politicians in the 19th century
- Marxism concept
- African scholars' interpretations of the colonization
- Contemporary approaches to the colonization and colonialism

Research Methodologies

The study will be based on the qualitative methodology. To attain the research purpose, various factors should be considered, like mutual interactions between civilizations of Africa, Britain, and France. The colonial systems, both British and French, were not characterized by merely geographic and political dimensions. The colonization influenced indigenous populations' ideology, culture, religiosity, interrelations, languages, and legal systems. The evaluation of the colonization impacts on West Africa will be grounded on the comparison of social conditions that dominated in societies prior to the process and its consequences; several methods of data collection will be used, including non-documentary sources analysis.

1. Examination of records and written sources. The significance of findings of archaeological excavations is greatly reduced by the fact that most of them were carried out for "treasure hunting". Official documents and collections of papers published in France and the UK comprise the main databases of written records. However, they are mainly one-sided and chronologically limited interpretations that convey events through the worldview of authors who created these datasets. Therefore, they cannot provide exhaustive factual data.
2. Exploration of the spiritual culture. Since ancient times, the territory under study has been a place of interaction of diverse cultures, intensive contacts between different tribes, and merging of various peoples. Authentic sources of this research project will include historical artefacts and elements of spiritual culture describing important aspects of life of the peoples in West Africa, revealing the features of so-called local civilizations. Communicating with the Africans is also a good method to explore the spiritual culture. Folk epic, songs, fairy tales, legends, religious rituals, and various narrations reflect the collective memory of African peoples and, thus, can shed light on their existence before, during, and after the colonization.

3. Observation of the hierarchical structure of the indigenous communities.
4. Interviewing. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with locals will be conducted to study the precise areas of their lives. The researcher will personally interview the prospective participants. This approach will ensure full understanding of the respondents' living experiences and memories.
5. Exploration of material culture of peoples inhabiting West Africa. The material culture encompasses and reflects the development of multiple economic factors, including welfare, technology, consumption patterns, etc. Art objects and preserved ancient household items will be useful for the assessment of development of African societies prior to the colonization.