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# **Pivotal Catalyst: The Seven Years' War and Anglo-French Scramble for West Africa up to 1900**

**David AWORAWO**

**Key Words: Seven Years' War, Scramble, Colonial Collision, Africa**

## **Abstract**

*The Seven Years' War which was fought between Britain and France mainly as a result of struggle for territory in North America had immense impacts on West Africa. This article explores the place of West Africa in the Seven Years' War and the impact of the war on the sub-region from 1763 to the end of the nineteenth century. Although West Africa was not a major theater of conflict during the war, it, nevertheless, featured in the strategic calculations of Britain and France, partly because of its geographical location along the Atlantic coast and its importance as a gateway, in addition to the region's immense economic potentials. The defeat of France and loss of territory after the war made her to focus more attention on West Africa. It is concluded that the Seven Years' War set the tone for the scramble for Africa by European powers in the nineteenth century.*

## **Introduction**

Britain and France controlled the vastest territories in Africa during the period of European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of the nearly fifty countries that became independent between the late 1950s and mid-1970s, more than three-quarters were former colonies of Britain and France. Informal trade with coastal African societies which went on for one and a half centuries began to gradually give way to the establishment of settlements from the early seventeenth century (Kanya-Forster, 1969: 22-39; Brooks, 2003: 253-254). From the early 1530s, the French and English intensely challenged Portuguese domination of contact and trade with Africans along the Atlantic coast from Senegal to Benin and Warri. This was especially so of the French, and by 1553, they had forced the Portuguese to recognise them as a force to reckon with in the West African trade (Blake, 1977: 136-137).

The French were also at the forefront of this early effort to plant colonies in West Africa. France established a colony in Saint Louis in Senegal in 1637, and the surrounding islands of Gorée, Rufisque and Joal shortly thereafter (Oloruntimehin, 1974:352-353; July, 1968: 68-68, 234-236). The French spread their control of territories where they sought to gain economic advantage in the decades that followed. At the same time, French traders became increasingly desirous of establishing direct contact with interior people to cut off middlemen. This brought intense opposition from the African middlemen and set the stage for conflict during the early period of French colonial enterprise in West Africa. Owing to climatic factors and other hazards,

the European traders and adventurers who came to West Africa from the fifteenth century up to the mid-nineteenth century were generally limited to the coastal areas. This made the European traders to rely on African middlemen for supplies from the interior. The French were among the first group of Europeans who attempted to alter this pattern by directly establishing contact with the interior and from the early efforts in the sixteenth century the French spread their colonial domination around the Senegal River area and beyond (July, 1970:162-163). Other European powers were to follow the French example in the decades that followed.

The pattern of the acquisition of territory in Africa and elsewhere, and indeed the nature of interaction between the people of West Africa and the Europeans, came to be affected by the Seven Years' War between Britain and France (1756-1763) (Kanya-Forstner, 1969: 23; Oloruntimehin, 1972: 246-282; Newbury, 1961: 49-76). The war broke out mainly because of disagreements over colonial acquisition in India and North America, specifically the Ohio Valley area, the waterways of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Quebec. Real and imagined fears over being disadvantaged in settlement patterns and territorial claims pitched Britain and France against each other and the result was the Seven Years' War. One source notes that by the mid-eighteenth century, colonial conflicts had become merged "in a struggle which stretched from Bombay to the Mississippi" (Smellie, 1962: 58). At the outbreak of the war in 1756, attention was diverted to the prosecution of the war in North America. At the end of the war in 1763, Britain and France had to do stock-taking and sketch the way forward in the colonial enterprise. As it turned out, the war came to affect attitude toward the acquisition of territories in Africa in general and West Africa in particular.

To begin with, France lost St. Louis in Senegal to Britain in 1758 in the course of the Seven Years' War and by the Treaty of Paris that concluded the war in 1763. Britain obtained the French colonies in the Senegal area (Oloruntimehin, 1974:153; Kanya-Forstner, 1969: 23). This was a serious blow to French interest in West Africa since the acquired colonies served as the base for French activities in the sub-region. The loss of Senegal did not only negatively affect French economic interests in West Africa, but it also led to the loss of strategic advantage in making inroads into other territories beyond West Africa. All these made France more aggressive in its attitude towards colonial acquisition after the Seven Years' War as it strove to replace what she had lost. Although the lost colonies of France in the Senegal area were restored to her in 1783, the French colonial authorities continued their aggressive colonial acquisition in West Africa especially in the course of the nineteenth century.

### **Issues at Stake in the Seven Years' War**

There were numerous issues at stake in the Seven Years' War but colonial acquisition and overseas territorial control which brought enormous economic benefits were undoubtedly the most important. Britain and France

engaged each other in India with each supporting rival Indian princes. Led by Robert Clive, the British succeeded in outwitting the French and the latter left India entirely for the British. Nearly the same pattern played itself out in North America. The British colonial authorities were concerned about the situation in the waterways of the Gulf of St. Lawrence guarded by a fortress and forts which protected French traders and Quebec (Roberts, 2002:721-723). They were also disturbed by the movement of French colonists to the unsettled Ohio River Valley from the Great Lakes and their forts on the Mississippi. The area between the Appalachians to the Mississippi River was increasingly being occupied by the French from early eighteenth century. There was the fear of a Mississippi valley enclosed by French forts and surrounding the British thirteen colonies. Britain expressed concern, with good reasons, that by linking the upper reaches of the Gulf of St. Lawrence with the Mississippi in the territory south of the Great Lakes, the English colonies would be encircled and their westward advance would be hampered (Ogg, 1964:80-81). The British were, therefore, vehemently opposed to the French advance and it was a major issue in the Seven Years' War. It is for this reason that the Seven Years' War is also called the Great War for Empire.

Britain and France considered the Seven Years' War as a conflict that would determine the future of their respective colonial enterprises. And considering the interlocking relationship between the possession of colonies and economic development as well as national prestige, the war was regarded as a fundamental one with the possibility of a 'bitter end' outcome. The fact was that both Britain and France derived enormous economic benefits from their respective colonies and neither of them lost sight of the economic benefits of the territories under contention both in India and North America. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonial possessions of France were already very vast, surpassed only by those of Spain. However, France was not ready to give up any part of its colonies as they were important to its overall development. One source notes that: "From these sources (the colonies) France derived great wealth in the eighteenth century, as attested by the many new and imposing buildings in Marseilles, Nantes and Bordeaux" (Ogg, 1964:82). George Clark explains the process thus: "The growth of trade is obviously linked with the rise of industry. The capital accumulated in trade expansion, for instance, helped to launch the new productive processes which were soon to be dramatically important. On the other hand an increase in the production of textiles was a stimulus to the search for new markets" (Clark, 1960: 26).

Economic issues featured prominently in the Seven Years' War. Indeed, it could be said that it was mainly for economic and strategic considerations that the war spread to parts of West Africa. An English merchant, Thomas Cunnings, developed an elaborate plan to acquire French trading posts in Africa in the 1750s. Desirous of expanding trade, the Pitt government in England supported the Cunnings plan, and it was one of the reasons for the military invasion of the

Senegalese coast in 1758 (Marshall, 1962:291; Clark, 1960:26). The British government sent a small squadron with a tiny force of marines under the command of Captain Henry Marsh and Major Mason in March 1758. The small force quickly captured Fort Louis which enabled them to control the mouth of the Senegal river. Although the British squadron failed in its attempt to conquer Gorée, another small force under the command of Commodore Keppel succeeded in taking Gorée at the end of 1758. Dorothy Marshall describes the effects of the capture of Gorée thus:

This was a valuable acquisition; it increased the area from which supplies of slaves could be drawn, it provided gold dust and ivory, and it gave Britain a monopoly of the gum arabic used in the manufacture of silk and therefore vital to France. The harbour, better known by its modern name of Dakar, was a useful base for a power aiming for control of the sea.

The Seven Years' War was, therefore, a struggle for colonial acquisition and the promotion of the economic well-being of the two states in conflict. Apart from economic considerations, there was also the strategic dimension. As already noted, the fear of encirclement of the thirteen colonies of Britain by the French in North America was a major *casus belli* in the Seven Years' War. It remained a major issue throughout the war and after (US Army, 1988:107-109; Lee, 1969:1-16). The issues at stake in the Seven Years' War were, therefore, diverse.

### **Importance of West Africa to the Colonising Powers**

West Africa was of utmost importance to the colonising powers from the early period of European expansion. The economic and strategic value was recognised early, and it influenced interest in the region. The west coast of Africa served as a gateway to central and southern Africa and indeed southern Asia through what used to be called the Cape of Good Hope. For the French, Dakar constituted the bridge between Gibraltar and Gabon. It was also in that area that trade in the Sudan and the Nile valley was coordinated. Depending on developments elsewhere, especially the closure of the all-important route of the Suez Canal, the West coast became an important route to the Far East and Madagascar (Akinyeye, 2003:30). West Africa also had the potential of a commercial highway from Europe to Equatorial Africa, the Antilles, Panama and South America.

The strategic importance of the West coast of Africa to the colonising powers could be appreciated from the report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry headed by Lord Camarvon in the aftermath of the Russian war scare of 1878/1879. The Commission, which was set up to assess the sufficiency or otherwise of the defence of the important seaports of British colonial possessions, identified the Cape route as a veritable alternative to the Suez

route to India in case of a disruption or threat. It was stated that in periods of emergency, reinforcements to and from India and Australia would be through the Cape route. However, West Africa was crucial to the Cape route. Any disruption to the West coast of Africa made utilisation of the Cape route impossible. Moreover, West Africa, being equidistant between Europe and the Cape, provided numerous advantages. The Royal Navy was, accordingly, mandated to protect the route. This entailed the establishment of coaling stations since the naval steamships of the time depended on coal for power. It was for this reason that the British established a coaling station in Sierra-Leone in the late 1880s. The strategic importance of West Africa had been recognised since the seventeenth century, but it was the rivalry and scramble of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that compelled some of the colonising powers to take concrete action in line with the recognition (Flint, 1965:372-373). Again, Britain and France were ahead of the rest in maximising the strategic advantage of West Africa.

To a large extent, the actions taken by either Britain or France to secure West Africa and exploit its economic and strategic potentials were a response or reaction of one to the other. The establishment of a coaling station in Sierra-Leone by Britain in the late 1880s elicited frantic reaction from France. Serious steps began to be taken, and in the late 1890s, the French established a coaling station and military base in Senegal. The French thought of West Africa as an area where it could secure massive economic and strategic advantages. It was felt that a military base in West Africa would not only make possible a location for coal and ammunition storage, but also enhance the operations of the flotilla of the French navy. An important aspect of British and French military activities in West Africa from the eighteenth century was that neither of them wanted to be left in a disadvantaged position (Akinyeye, 2003:30-31). For instance, the recommendation for the establishment of a military base in Sierra-Leone stated that troops should be positioned in such a way that French military landing would be resisted, as if only the French constituted military threat to British interests in West Africa.

Perhaps there were good reasons for British preoccupation with French threat in their security calculations in West Africa from the 1760s onwards. In reality, apart from occasional attacks by the Dutch and conflict with local inhabitants of some areas where the British operated, the French constituted the major and persistent threat to British interest in West Africa. In 1794, the French attacked the Sierra Leone Colony, an action that was difficult to understand and rationalise by the British (Goerge, 1968: 28-35). A similar situation played out in the River Gambia between 1817 and 1824. In 1814, the Treaty of Paris had given the French the right to settle in Albreda. The same treaty gave the British the right to trade for guns in Portendic. However, in 1817 the French governor of Senegal sent a big *argus* to the area, thereby creating fear as few were certain of the motive. One source states that: "In fact in 1824, when ... soldiers (under British command) took their boat from the Island of Albreda to obtain water, the



French Resident threatened to arrest them for espionage” (Gray, 1966: 399-401). Such was the level of suspicion that characterised Anglo-French operations in West Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The same pattern of conflict took place between British and French colonial officials in other parts of Africa. Conflicts also took place between the British and other colonial powers like Germany as well as between France and Germany. For instance, one archival source states that in the mid-nineteenth century “a triangular contest was waged between the Germans, the British and the French over who should exercise greater control in the Cameroons” (National Archives, Ibadan). However, Anglo-French conflicts were by far the most prominent. One of such conflicts took place at Fashoda in Sudan in 1898 where French Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand was obliged to withdraw before British General H.H. Kitchener on 1 April 1898 (July, 1970:477). The withdrawal in Fashoda confirmed French fears that the British posed some of the greatest obstacles to their colonial enterprise in Africa. Britain was undoubtedly the main target of the establishment of the Senegal military base. Recognising the importance of West Africa to the colonial enterprise, France was desirous of minimising its security vulnerability and one way of achieving this was the establishment of the military base. It was not until the signing of the Anglo-French *Entente* of 1904 that the intense rivalry began to abate. Even then, the economic and strategic importance of West Africa continued to be recognised, and this was reflected in colonial policy (Thomson, 1966:512-513).

#### **Anglo-French Rivalry in West Africa after the Seven Years' War**

Long before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, Britain and France had worked to gain advantage in their commercial activities in Africa, especially on the west coast which was of immense economic and strategic importance. The defeat of France and the advantage gained by Britain after 1763 increased the apprehension of France in the colonial enterprise (Bowle, 1974: 142-144). Accordingly, rivalry with Britain also intensified. As J.M. Roberts noted: “The Peace of Paris, which ended the Seven Years' War ... is a convenient marker of a new world order which had already replaced that dominated by Spain and Portugal. It registered the ascendancy of Great Britain in the rivalry with France overseas, which had preoccupied her for nearly three-quarters of a century. The duel was not over, and Frenchmen could still be hopeful that they would recover lost ground” (Roberts, 1999:342). The recovery of lost ground was not to be limited to the Americas. West Africa occupied a great deal of attention in the contest that followed.

The slave trade grew in importance in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and it occupied the attention of almost all the colonial powers (Curtin, 1969:35-40, 85-86; Rawley, 1981:99-100). The organisation of the trade did not require territorial acquisition by the colonial powers as such since African middlemen brought slaves from the interior for sale along the coast. However, the trade was not smoothly organised in such a way that traders



of any nationality could freely purchase slaves from any location. The exercise of influence by a European power over a territory gave immense advantage to the slave dealers of that country in the procurement and export of slaves from that territory. One source explains that: "Because of the peculiar nature of the slave trade, European governments believed they needed to garrison fortified settlements and warehouses along the coast of West Africa. These forts provided a safe haven where their nationals received and stored slaves provided by African rulers and slave dealers. And the forts also protected them from attack by hostile European powers" (Rogozinski, 2000:126). West Africa was bound to be of immense interest to the colonial powers since it provided a large chunk of all the slaves procured from Africa and taken to the Americas.

The importance of the slave trade to the European colonial powers made many of them to be directly involved in the trade. For instance, it was English leader, Charles II, who chartered the Royal African Company in 1660, and the French West African Company was established by Colbert in 1664. In addition, several European states established forts to facilitate the slave trade in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ryder, 1965:226-230). The ownership of the forts changed hands either through forceful seizure or by legitimate acquisition as the European powers struggled for a share of the slave trade. According to one scholar:

Except for the Spanish, all the colonial powers encouraged and were directly involved in the Atlantic slave trade. Until the 1680s, the Dutch West Indian Company dominated Atlantic commerce, including the slave trade. The British and French then destroyed Dutch commercial power during the Second (1665-1667) and Third (1672-1678) Dutch Wars. Great Britain thenceforth flourished as the supreme slaving nation in the Atlantic world. Between 1690 and 1807, British traders exported some 2,500,000 to the Caribbean and Spanish America. Envyng British success, the French government tried to foster participation by its own nationals. But French entry into the slave trade was slow and ineffective. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French slavers exported from Africa only half as many slaves as British traders (Rogozinski, 2000:126).

The importance of the slave trade meant that West Africa was regarded as extremely valuable by the European colonising powers.

The Royal Africa Company established by the British government had a monopoly of the British participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As already stated, the slave trade was the most important commercial activity in economic relations between Africa and Europe at the time and the Royal Africa Company aggressively pursued the importation of slaves into the Americas

(Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965:35; Rogozinski, 2000:89). The Portuguese, Dutch and French also took active part in the slave trade but it was the British that became dominant and took the lion share of the trade by the late seventeenth century. British participation in the slave trade was further given a boost by the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht which resulted from the Spanish Succession in 1713. The Utrecht treaty granted Britain a contract known as the *Asiento* which conferred on Britain the right to supply Spanish settlements with slaves for the next thirty years. Britain also secured the right to send an annual ship to trade with Spanish America as well as Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Hudson's Bay in North America (Black, 1990:224). This gave a massive advantage to Britain in the colonial enterprise. It is noteworthy that the *Asiento* was previously held by France and its loss to Britain had put France at a disadvantaged position economically. All these were to raise the stakes four decades later in the Seven Years' War. France was determined not to be further limited in the quest for colonial expansion even as Britain was desirous of stretching its advantage. As already noted, the spread of violent conflict to West Africa during the Seven Years' War was part of the overall design.

The political leaders of Britain and France as well as other European states engaged in trade with West Africa felt some obligation to protect their companies and create the condition for them to thrive in their trans-Atlantic trade. After all, the profits made went back to the respective countries which contributed to national prosperity. It is for this reason that these European states, notably Britain and France, made efforts to establish special relationships with the leaders of different states in West Africa where they exercised influence. Furthermore, the traditional trade in other products other than human cargo continued in the eighteenth century even when the slave trade was dominant (Flint, 1966:110-111). The French, for instance, continued their trade in gum arabic along the Senegal river area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The British also continued their trade in gold, especially in the Gold Coast area, during the period. These two European states along with others like Denmark and Holland traded in other products such as ivory, beeswax, and hides and skin. More than the slave trade, European colonising powers needed to establish settlements to successfully carry out this trade. When, in June 1828, the French authorities sent the Duranton Mission to explore the commercial potentials of the Upper Senegal area, the mission was expected to ascertain the economic possibilities of the area and "... à devancer les Anglais dans la pénétration du Soudan" (Oloruntimehin, 1974:354-355). This objective was aggressively pursued by Duranton and this pitched him, not only against the British, but also the indigenous people in whose local politics he got involved. These developments were a precursor to the establishment of formal colonial rule later in the nineteenth century (Oloruntimehin, 1974:355).

The abolition of the slave trade by Denmark in 1792, Britain in 1807 and many other European states in the next two decades changed the nature of

territorial acquisition and control in West Africa. Henceforth, West Africa was to be developed to produce and supply the raw material needs of European states and also serve as markets for finished products. Emphasis, accordingly, shifted to the development of 'legitimate' commerce and the focus was on the production of primary products. An important development at this time was that there was no systematic framework for the actualisation of the project of legitimate commerce in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were thus many twists and turns in the approach adopted by Britain and France in West Africa. On a number of occasions it was traders that influenced the course of action and in others it was the European officials on the ground (National Archives, London, 1853; Dike, 1956:1-13). However, one issue that remained constant was the maintenance of a firm grip on the territories where they had established themselves during the era of the slave trade and attempts to secure new ones as the circumstances demanded and the opportunity existed. Attempts were made to establish plantation agriculture in some parts of West Africa as a part of the new economic structure and this translated to the maintenance of a firmer grip on the controlled territories by each of the European powers (National Archives, Ibadan).

For the French and English, different steps were taken to consolidate their positions and project their interest in post-slave trade economic dispensation in West Africa. In 1818, the French began the project of translating their settlement in Senegal to a model agricultural area to produce raw materials for their factories. France dispatched a group of agricultural experts and machinery to establish the scheme in 1818. The level of French troops on the ground was also increased to provide effective security. When Governor Roger arrived in Senegal in 1821, he had the objective of developing the settlement as a place for the production of primary products. He established a botanical garden and he sought to transform the St. Louis settlement to a place for plantation agriculture (Flint, 1965:367). These efforts yielded only modest success, but the French colonialists were undaunted. They combined their search for agricultural products to secure raw materials with the expansion of trade in the traditional products with African communities. The French increasingly pushed to the interior through the Senegal River up to the Sudan and a system of trade routes was established across the upper Niger in the process. These efforts led to the expansion of trade in the vast territory.

The preoccupation of France in the area around Senegal and Mali was the promotion of trade and commerce as well as the establishment of plantations to secure agricultural products. This led to attempts to establish colonies which ultimately resulted in violent clashes with local rulers. In spite of the conflict between French colonial officials and local African rulers, French explorers continued to be active in the interior of Africa. Bouet-Willamez, an energetic French naval officer, penetrated the interior and secured the Ivory Coast stretching to Mauritania in the north for France in the late 1830s and early 1840s. He also moved south to Equatorial Africa where the

area of modern Gabon was secured. A significant aspect of the activities of Bouet-Willametz was that he signed treaties of protection with local African leaders in these vast territories thereby making it possible for the French to assert their claim. Formal colonial rule was established in these areas in the 1880s and it formed the basis for French claim at the Berlin Conference ((July, 1970:312-313).

In the meantime, attention continued to be paid to the gateway territory of Senegal where France had established its longest presence in West Africa. The French increasingly pushed into the interior as they detested the activities of African middlemen and the tolls and taxes levied by African rulers. French colonial design in the Senegal area was pursued with tremendous energy following the appointment of Faidherbe as governor in 1854. Under Faidherbe, France established a firm grip on the Senegal area and penetrated eastwards and southwards, securing Guinea as well as the north and south of the Gambia river in the process. Faidherbe formed the French African army of Senegal with which he embarked on campaigns as he pushed into the interior (Flint, 1965:372). This inevitably brought the French to clash with Al Hajj Umar, leader of the powerful Tukolor empire which was dominant in the Sudan area at the time. To avoid a major war, both sides had to partition the Senegalese interior in 1860 with Al Hajj Umar holding sway to the east. It was not only African rulers that the French had to contend with in their expansion in the interior and along the coast of West Africa. The expansion of the French to Guinea and their activities north and south of the Gambia River alarmed the British who sensed a threat to their influence in Sierra Leone and Gambia. This was the precursor to the onset of the scramble in the 1860s.

Up to the 1860s, the conduct of profitable trade was still the main objective of the British and French in West Africa. Political leaders in London and Paris were skeptical of the possibility of the gains of colonial administration being adequate to cover the costs. In spite of this, intervention in the political activities of the indigenous people was considered desirable for the expansion of trade. There was no hesitation about intervention which most of the time involved military action. In 1851, for instance, John Beecroft, who had been appointed Her Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra in 1849, attacked Lagos and installed Akintoye, who was regarded as more pliant, to the throne. His rival, Kosoko, was described as a committed slave trader and his activities were regarded as a hindrance to "legitimate" commerce (Oliver and Atmore, 1996:63-64; Dike, 1956:1-13). In 1861, a decade after the Beecroft-led invasion, the British declared Lagos a Crown Colony. Partly in response to the British action, the French in turn declared Porto Novo and Cotonou protectorates in 1863 and 1868 respectively both of which later became the French colony of Dahomey. Effective administration was not established in these acquired territories in the 1860s. The Asante, a powerful kingdom in the north of the Gold Coast area, twice invaded the coastal area in 1863, where the British had exercised authority for decades, causing much damage. This led to

the inauguration of the Select Committee on West Africa which reported in 1865 that colonial acquisition should be discouraged while attention should be concentrated on the expansion of trade. The French too had their domestic problems and France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 halted for some time its colonial ambition in Africa. The domestic condition in the major colonial powers of Europe, therefore, made the competition for territories less intense in the 1870s than the previous two (Flint, 1965:374-376). The decade was characterised by attempts to promote commercial expansion without increased territorial acquisition.

A change of policy toward West Africa and Africa generally by the European colonial powers took place in 1879 which altered not only the pattern of territorial acquisition but set the tone for the partition of West Africa. The establishment of formal colonial rule also began for some and expanded for others which continued with unpunctuated regularity until the decolonisation of the early 1960s. However, there were few policies designed by the European powers toward Africa that endured for a long time, and the result was that by 1879 territorial acquisition and control became the norm once again. The fact was that the most important determinant of the policies of European powers toward Africa during this period was national interest. This led to frequent adjustment of policy in accordance with what was perceived as promoting the greatness of the state. The activities of some states also influenced the actions of other states as none of the great powers wanted to be left behind in the race for colonial acquisition in Africa (Ward, 1966: 310:314). This led to conflicts of interest by the European colonial powers in different parts of Africa.

France it was that blazed the trail in the establishment of political control in West Africa again after a lull of about a decade. Having resolved domestic political problems that accompanied defeat in the war with Prussia in 1870 with the Republicans establishing a fairly stable government, France turned to Africa to make up for some of its losses in the war since it was clear that the recovery of the territories, if ever they were going to be recovered, was to be sometime in the distant future. The French began to build the first West African railway from Dakar to St. Louis in 1879 which set them on collision course with several local communities and created panic among other European colonising powers who were disturbed about what the ultimate intentions of the French were (Flint, 1965:377). The aim of the French was to maintain a firm hold on its Senegal settlement and control the routes inland to Bamako. At the same time, French traders were moving westwards down the lower Niger where British traders had been active. A French company appeared on the lower Niger in 1880 and another came calling in 1881. This was an area where British firms had dominated. Indeed, George Goldie had brought British firms trading around the Niger together in 1879 to form the United African Company (Oliver and Atmore, 1996:101). Increased French activity in the area, therefore, naturally alarmed the British. Britain's response was to maintain a stronger hold on the area around the lower Niger. It gave more support to its

trading firms in the area and pursued the signing of treaties of protection with local chiefs more vigorously. Eventually in 1885, Britain granted a royal charter to the United African Company to administer the lower Niger area and the conglomerate was renamed Royal Niger Company (Webster and Boehen, 1980:149).

It was also in the late 1870s that the French government sent the explorer Savognan de Brazza to acquire the north bank of the Congo. In 1879 and in 1880, de Brazza founded Brazzaville after extensive travel in Equatorial Africa. In addition, France annexed Tunis in 1881 causing even greater panic among other European colonial powers. At this time, none of the European colonial powers was left in doubt about France's imperial designs. Their response to French colonial ambitions was swift. The British were worried that France might use its base in Gabon to make incursions into the Cameroons and then into the Oil Rivers in the Niger Delta where, as already noted, French traders were becoming increasingly active. Dahomey was declared a colony in 1892 and Ivory Coast in 1893. It also strengthened its hold on the interior of the Senegal area up to Futa Djallon in the north (Flint, 1965:397-380). Britain hastened its own establishment of formal colonies in the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s partly in response to French colonial activities.

The European scramble for territorial control in Africa increased progressively in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Berlin Conference, which was held in late 1884 and early 1885 to resolve disagreements arising from conflicting territorial claims, set new guidelines for future territorial acquisitions. The Berlin meeting helped to reduce tension among the European colonial powers. However, disagreements continued to be recorded and in a number of instances conflicts nearly degenerated into war. One of the most explosive cases was the clash between British General Horatio Kitchener and Jean-Baptiste Marchand at Fashoda in Sudan in July 1898 to which a cursory reference was earlier made (Thomson, 1966:512-513). Only the display of a good sense by the two military personnel and the foreign ministers of the two countries helped to stave off the outbreak of war. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly the whole of Africa had been partitioned among the colonising powers of Europe. It took another half a century before European colonial rule came to an end.

## **Conclusion**

The above analysis reveals that the Seven Years' War had a profound influence on West Africa, even though it was a war between European states fought mainly in North America. Britain and France fought for supremacy in colonial acquisition which was central to their economic development and West Africa had as much to offer as North America in this regard. In addition, the position of parts of West Africa as a gateway which offered immense strategic value made the region even more attractive to the colonial powers. This necessarily made the Seven Years' War to spread to West Africa especially

territories that held great economic advantage and strategic value such as the Senegal area. Britain utilised the war in North America as a pretext to stretch its interest in West Africa and the result was the clash with France in the Senegal area from 1758. The struggle for colonial possession in West Africa which had gone on for some time before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in the mid-eighteenth century, therefore, became more wide-ranging during and after the war. Developments during the Seven Years' War revealed even more the economic and strategic importance of West Africa and this made the struggle for colonies in the region even more intense after the war. This pattern remained unchanged almost throughout the rest of the eighteenth century and it eventually led to the establishment of formal colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century which continued until the decolonisation of the early 1960s.

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