

# THE BERLIN WEST AFRICA CONFERENCE 1884-1885: A RETROSPECTIVE RECONSTRUCTION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 met on 15 November 1884 and, after a deferment, concluded on 26 February 1885 with the signature of a General Act regulating European colonization and trade in Africa during the New Imperialism period (George, 1985). The conference was organized by Otto von Bismarck, the first chancellor of Germany, at the request of Leopold II of Belgium (Sybil, 2015). The General Act of Berlin can be seen as the formalization of the mix up for Africa that was already in full swing (Muriel, 1994). Some scholars, however, warned against an overemphasis on its role in the colonial partitioning of Africa, and drew attention to bilateral and multilateral agreements concluded before and after the 1884-1885 conference.

Most of Africa's borders were not initially formed until after the 1884–85, although Duyile, William Abiodun in an interview with the researchers contended this assertion as racist rhetoric of the Europeans and a push by these authors to justify colonialism. However, the conference contributed to ushering in a period of heightened colonial activity by European powers. Some scholars like Buhari Lateef and Ediagbonya Michael have also laid the blame in "the partition of Africa" on the doors of the Berlin Conference. These they said in the interview with this researcher. Roger Louis holds a contrary view, although he conceded that "the Berlin Act did have a relevance to the course of the partition" of Africa (Crowe, 1942). Of the fourteen countries being represented, seven of them – Austria-Hungary, Russia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden-Norway, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States – came home without any formal possessions in Africa (Muriel, 1994).

Prior to the conference, European diplomats approached African rulers and the French leaders had already invaded some parts of Lagos in the same manner as they had in the Western Hemisphere, by establishing a connection to local trade networks (Winfried, 1982). In the early 1800s, the European demand for ivory, which was then often used in the production of luxury goods, led many European merchants into the interior markets of Africa (Michael, 2002). European spheres of power and influence were limited to coastal Africa at this time as Europeans had only established trading posts (protected by gunboats) up to this point (Michael, 2002).

By the early 1880s, many factors including diplomatic successes, greater European local knowledge, and the demand for resources such as gold, timber, and rubber, triggered dramatically increased European involvement in the continent of Africa (Wesseling, 1996). Stanley's charting of the Congo River Basin (1874–1877) removed the last cache incognita from European maps of the continent, delineating the areas of British, Portuguese, French and Belgian control (Evans, 2002). Some of these European nations pursued the annexation course that might be claimed by rivals.

The European race for colonies made Germany start launching expeditions of its own, which frightened both British and French statesmen. Hoping to quickly calm the brewing conflict, Belgian King Leopold II convinced France and Germany that common trade in Africa was in the best interests of all three countries. Under support from the British and the initiative of Portugal, Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of Germany, called on representatives of 13 nations in Europe as well as the United States to take part in the Berlin Conference in 1884 to work out a joint policy on the African continent. The conference opened on 15 November 1884 and closed on 26 February 1885 (Timothy, 1999). The number of plenipotentiaries varied per nation, but these 14 countries sent representatives to attend the Berlin Conference and sign the subsequent Berlin Act: Uniquely, the United States reserved the right to decline or to accept the conclusions of the conference (Alice & Fletcher, 1999). For instance, as a final measure to secure the territory for Britain, the British government decided to terminate the charter granted the Royal Niger Company and by 31st December, 1899 took control of the region. Before this time in 1891, Britain declared the Niger Delta area as the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1893 and extended the protectorate over the hinterland and renamed it the Niger Coast Protectorate (Duyile, Ediagbonya, Buhari, &

Nwachukwu, 2020). In the same Nigerian territorial space, the Lagos colonial office had in 1887 established the Lagos Marine as a transport and military organization to hold forth that space (Duyile, *The Nigerian Marine Department Contribution to British Colonial Economy*, 2016). The Lagos Marine became a part of the Southern Marine Department in 1894 and in 1900 the Northern Marine Department was established at Lokoja same can also be said of the Nigerian land space (Duyile, *Historicizing the Development and Intensification of the Nigerian Navy Between 1956-1958*, 2019). The ability to develop the littoral areas of Nigeria is prerequisite to maintaining and improving the British Nigerian economy (Duyile, *The Nigerian Navy, 1956-1966: Manpower and Platform Development and the First Court Martial*, 2024). In the Nigerian context as in the contemporary world, citizenship is conceived in exclusionary term of indigeneity, which defines those indigenous to a locality and thus enjoy full membership right to the exclusion of yet other citizens seen as non- indigenous members. It must be noted that the First World War could partly be linked to some diplomatic hiccups in the Berlin conference. The race for African territories started off diplomatic and the later naval arms race.

The agenda at the conference was to sign the Act or agreement which contains the following objectives why the conference was conveyed

The General Act fixed the following points:

1. Partly to gain public acceptance, the conference resolved to end slavery by African and Islamic powers. Thus, an international prohibition of the slave trade throughout their respected spheres was signed by the European members. In his novella *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad sarcastically referred to one of the participants at the conference, the International Association of the Congo (also called "International Congo Society"), as "the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (Olomola, 1982). The first name of this Society had been the "International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Central Africa".
2. The properties occupied by Belgian King Leopold's International Congo Society, the name used in the General Act, were confirmed as the Society's. On 1 August 1885, a few months after the closure of the Berlin Conference, Leopold's Vice-Administrator General in the Congo, Francis de Winton, announced that the territory was henceforth called "the Congo Free State", a name that in fact was not in use at the time of the conference and does not appear in the General Act (Evans, 2002). The Belgian Official Law Gazette later stated that from that same 1 August 1885 onwards, Leopold II was to be considered Sovereign of the new state, again an issue never discussed, let alone decided, at the Berlin Conference.
3. The 14 signatory powers would have free trade throughout the Congo Basin as well as Lake Malawi and east of it in an area south of 5° N.
4. The Niger and Congo rivers were made free for ship traffic. The Principle of Effective Occupation was introduced to prevent powers from setting up colonies in name only. The principle of effective occupation stated that a power could acquire rights over colonial lands only if it possessed them or had effective occupation: if it had treaties with local leaders, flew its flag there, and established an administration in the territory to govern it with a police force to keep order. The colonial power could also make use of the colony economically. That principle became important not only as a basis for the European powers to acquire territorial sovereignty in Africa but also for delimiting their respective overseas possessions, as effective occupation served in some instances as a criterion for settling colonial boundary disputes. However, as the scope of the Berlin Act was limited to the lands that fronted on the African coast, European powers in numerous instances later claimed rights over interior lands without demonstrating the requirement of effective occupation, as articulated in Article 35 of the Final Act. At the Berlin Conference, the scope of the Principle of Effective Occupation was heavily contested between Germany and France. The Germans, who were new to the continent, essentially believed that as far as the extension of power in Africa was concerned, no colonial power should have any legal right to a territory unless the state exercised strong and effective political control and, if so, only for a limited period of time, essentially an occupational force only (Abiola, 1986). However, Britain's view was that Germany was a latecomer to the continent and was assumptive unlikely to gain any possessions beyond those it already held, which were swiftly proving to be more valuable than British territories (Abiola, *100 Questions & Answers; Nigerian History*, 1986).
5. Any fresh act of taking possession of any portion of the African coast would have to be notified by the power taking possession, or assuming a protectorate, to the other signatory powers.
6. Definition of regions in which each European power had an exclusive right to pursue the legal ownership of land.
7. The first reference in an international act to the obligations attaching to spheres of influence is contained in the Berlin Act.

### **Negotiations and Compromises among the European Powers**

During the conference, representatives from fourteen nations, including Portugal, Belgium, and Italy, engaged in negotiations that would shape the continent's future (Adu, Ade-Ajayi, & Tidy, 1986). The primary objective was to formalize claims to African territories and prevent conflict between European powers (Abiola, WAEC Questions and Answer, 1986). Bismarck emphasized the need for a cooperative approach, urging nations to respect each other's claims and to notify one another before occupying new territories (Adu, Ade-Ajayi, & Tidy, 1986).

This led to the establishment of rules that would govern the partitioning of Africa, including the principle of "effective occupation," which required nations to demonstrate control over claimed territories.

The negotiations also addressed the administration of the Congo River basin, which was of particular interest to King Leopold II of Belgium (Evans, 2002). The conference recognized Leopold's claim to the Congo Free State, granting him personal sovereignty over the region while ensuring that it remained a neutral area for trade and navigation. This decision highlighted the complex interplay of personal ambition and national interests, as Leopold sought to exploit the region's resources for his gain, while other powers aimed to secure their own economic interests.

While the conference sought to create a framework for peaceful colonization, it did not eliminate rivalries among European powers. Tensions remained high, particularly between Britain and France, as both nations sought to expand their empires in Africa. The conference's agreements were often disregarded when convenient, leading to conflicts such as the Fashoda Incident in 1898, where British and French forces nearly clashed over territorial claims in Sudan (George, 1985). This ongoing rivalry underscored the limitations of the conference in preventing imperialist conflicts.

The outcomes of the Berlin Conference had lasting implications for Africa. By establishing arbitrary borders without regard for existing ethnic, cultural, or political boundaries, European powers set the stage for future conflicts on the continent. The conference effectively legitimized the colonization process, leading to the rapid expansion of European control over African territories (Muriel, 1994). By 1900, nearly 90% of Africa was under European control, fundamentally altering the continent's political landscape. In addition to territorial divisions, the conference also addressed issues of trade and commerce. The leaders agreed to principles that promoted free trade among colonies, aiming to facilitate economic exploitation while minimizing competition among European powers. However, these agreements often prioritized European interests over the rights and needs of African populations, leading to widespread economic exploitation and social disruption.

The Berlin Conference was a significant turning point in the history of European imperialism in Africa (Alice & Fletcher, 1999). While it aimed to establish order among competing powers, the conference ultimately facilitated the rapid and often brutal colonization of the continent. The negotiations and compromises reached during this period not only shaped the geopolitical landscape of Africa but also laid the groundwork for enduring challenges that continue to affect the continent today.

### **Outcomes of Agreement Reached at the Conference**

The conference provided an opportunity to channel latent European hostilities towards one another outward; provide new areas for assisting the European powers expand in the face of rising American, Russian and Japanese interests; and form constructive dialogue to limit future hostilities. In Africa, colonialism was introduced across nearly all the continent. When African independence was regained after World War II, it was in the form of fragmented states.

The Scramble for Africa sped up after the Conference since even within areas designated as their sphere of influence; the European powers had to take effective possession by the principle of effective. In central Africa in particular, expeditions were dispatched to coerce traditional rulers into signing treaties, using force if necessary, such as was the case for Msiri, King of Katanga, in 1891. Bedouin- and Berber-ruled states in the Sahara and the Sahel were overrun by the French in several wars by the beginning of World War I (Olomola, 1982). The British moved up from South Africa and down from Egypt and conquered states such as the Mahdist State and the Sultanate of Zanzibar and, having already defeated the Zulu Kingdom in South Africa in 1879, moved on to annex the independent Boer republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Within a few years, Africa was at least nominally divided up south of the Sahara (Wesseling, 1996). By 1902, 90% of all the land that makes up Africa was under European control. Most of the Sahara was French, but after the quelling of the Mahdi rebellion and the ending of the Fashoda crisis, the Sudan remained firmly under joint British–Egyptian rulership, with

Egypt being under British occupation before becoming a British protectorate in 1914. The Boer republics were conquered by the British in the Second Boer War from 1899 to 1902. Libya was conquered by Italy in 1911, and Morocco was divided between the French and Spanish in 1912.

### **Negative Impacts on Africa**

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 had profound long-term effects on African territories, shaping the continent's political and social landscapes for generations. One of the most significant outcomes was the arbitrary division of Africa into territories controlled by European powers, disregarding existing ethnic, cultural, and political boundaries (Crowe, 1942). This lack of consideration for indigenous societies led to conflicts that persist today, as many African nations struggle with issues of national identity and cohesion stemming from these imposed borders.

Another critical effect was the establishment of colonial governance structures that undermined traditional authority systems. European powers often replaced local leaders with colonial administrators, disrupting established governance and social hierarchies. This shift not only eroded local power but also led to the imposition of foreign legal systems and cultural norms, which marginalized indigenous practices and identities. The legacy of these changes continues to influence contemporary governance issues in many African countries.

The economic ramifications of the Berlin Conference were equally significant. The conference facilitated the exploitation of Africa's vast resources, as European powers sought to extract wealth to fuel their industrial economies. This exploitation often came at the expense of local populations, who were subjected to forced labor and harsh working conditions. The economic structures established during colonial rule prioritized European interests, leading to persistent inequalities and economic challenges that many African nations face today.

Moreover, the conference set a precedent for international relations regarding Africa, establishing a framework where decisions affecting the continent were made without African representation. This exclusion has had lasting implications, as African nations often find themselves negotiating from a position of weakness in international forums, where their interests are frequently overshadowed by those of former colonial powers.

The social fabric of Africa was also deeply affected by the Berlin Conference. The imposition of new borders and governance structures contributed to the fragmentation of societies, fostering ethnic tensions and conflicts that have erupted into violence in various regions. The artificial divisions created by colonial powers often failed to reflect the complex realities of African societies, leading to ongoing strife and challenges in nation-building efforts post-independence.

Furthermore, the conference's legacy includes the introduction of the principle of "effective occupation," which encouraged European powers to militarily conquer and administer territories. This principle justified aggressive colonial expansion and led to violent conflicts, as indigenous population resisted encroachment on their lands (Winfried, 1982). The resultant violence and suppression have left deep scars in many communities, contributing to a legacy of distrust and division.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 had significant and lasting effects on the cultural identity of African nations. The arbitrary division of the continent into European-controlled territories disregarded existing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, leading to a fragmentation of communities that had coexisted for centuries. This division often forced diverse groups into single political entities, creating artificial nations that struggled to forge a cohesive national identity (Timothy, 1999).

European powers imposed their cultural norms and governance structures, which undermined traditional authority and practices. The introduction of Western education, religion, and legal systems often marginalized indigenous cultures and languages. As a result, many Africans were compelled to adopt European languages and customs, leading to a gradual erosion of traditional identities and practices. This cultural imposition created a legacy of hybrid identities, where elements of both African and European cultures coexisted, often in tension. The concept of ethnicity was redefined during the colonial period, as colonial powers categorized and labeled African societies based on rigid classifications. This process, described by scholars as the "invention of tradition," solidified ethnic identities that were previously fluid and multifaceted. The colonial emphasis on tribal affiliations has had lasting implications, contributing to ethnic tensions and conflicts that continue to affect political dynamics in many African nations today. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 had significant cultural impacts on various regions of Africa, leading to the disruption of traditional societies and the imposition of European norms and practices. Here are a few examples of how specific African regions were affected:

In West Africa, the Berlin Conference facilitated the colonization of territories by European powers like Britain and France (Sybil, 2015). This led to the imposition of foreign languages, such as English and French, which gradually replaced indigenous languages in official and educational settings. The introduction of Christianity by European missionaries also disrupted traditional religious practices and belief systems in many communities.

The creation of the Congo Free State under the personal rule of King Leopold II of Belgium had devastating consequences for Central Africa. The exploitation of resources and labor led to the displacement of populations, the destruction of villages, and the disruption of traditional economic and social structures. The brutal suppression of resistance by the colonial administration resulted in the deaths of millions of Congolese people, leaving deep scars in the collective memory of the region.

In Southern Africa, the Berlin Conference contributed to the expansion of European settlement, particularly in regions like South Africa and Namibia. The displacement of indigenous populations, such as the Khoikhoi and San in South Africa, led to the disruption of traditional lifestyles and the loss of ancestral lands. The imposition of colonial rule also led to the suppression of local languages and the promotion of Afrikaans and English as the dominant languages in these regions.

The Berlin Conference facilitated the colonization of East Africa by Germany and Britain. In German East Africa (present-day Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda), the imposition of German rule led to the disruption of existing political structures and the marginalization of local leaders. The introduction of cash crops, such as coffee and cotton, disrupted traditional agricultural practices and led to the exploitation of labor. In British East Africa (present-day Kenya and Uganda), the colonial administration introduced English as the official language and promoted Western education, gradually eroding traditional cultural practices.

The effects of the Berlin Conference are evident in the political, economic, and social challenges that continue to affect African territories. The arbitrary borders, disrupted governance structures, and economic exploitation established during this period have created a complex legacy that shapes contemporary African societies. Understanding these historical impacts is crucial for addressing the ongoing issues faced by many nations on the continent today.

### **Positive Impacts on Africa**

One of the significant positive outcomes of the Berlin Conference was the establishment of free trade zones, particularly in the Congo and Niger River basins. The conference facilitated agreements that allowed for free navigation and trade in these regions, which were crucial for economic development. This opened up access to international markets for African resources and goods, promoting economic interactions that had previously been limited. Although the exploitation of resources often favored European powers, the infrastructure developed for trade laid the groundwork for future economic activities in the region (Michael, 2002).

The conference also spurred the introduction of new technologies and innovations to Africa. As European powers expanded their influence, they brought with them advancements in transportation, communication, and agriculture. Railways, telegraphs, and modern farming techniques were introduced, which transformed local economies and facilitated greater connectivity within the continent. These developments helped to integrate African regions into the global economy, providing opportunities for growth and development that had not existed before (Timothy, 1999).

Moreover, the Berlin Conference contributed to the establishment of a framework for international law regarding colonial claims and governance. The agreements made during the conference set a precedent for how European powers interacted with one another and with African territories. This framework, while primarily serving colonial interests, also laid the foundation for future diplomatic relations and negotiations in Africa. Over time, these legal principles would evolve and be adapted to support the sovereignty and rights of African nations as they gained independence (Winfried, 1982).

The conference also aimed to address humanitarian concerns, including the abolition of the slave trade. Although the implementation of these principles was inconsistent, the discussions at the Berlin Conference highlighted a growing awareness of human rights issues. The commitment to end slavery and protect indigenous populations, even if not fully realized, marked a shift in attitudes that would influence future movements for social justice and human rights in Africa (Alice & Fletcher, 1999).

In addition to economic and legal advancements, the Berlin Conference inadvertently fostered a sense of African identity and unity. As colonial powers imposed their rule, many African communities began to recognize the need to resist external domination. This awakening led to the emergence of nationalist movements and a stronger collective identity among various ethnic groups. The struggle against colonialism ultimately contributed to the formation of modern African nations, as people rallied around shared goals of independence and self-determination.

The introduction of Western education systems during the colonial period, partly a result of the Berlin Conference, also had long-term positive effects. Education became a tool for empowerment, enabling a new generation of African leaders and intellectuals to emerge. These individuals played crucial roles in advocating for independence and shaping post-colonial governance. The legacy of education established during this time continues to influence contemporary African societies, fostering critical thinking and innovation.

While the Berlin Conference is often viewed through the lens of its negative impacts on Africa, it also initiated several positive changes that contributed to the continent's development. The establishment of trade routes, introduction of new technologies, promotion of international law, and the fostering of African identity and education were significant outcomes that shaped the trajectory of African nations. Understanding these positive aspects provides a more nuanced perspective on the complex legacy of the Berlin Conference and its role in African history.

### **Impacts of the partition of Africa on the European colonialist**

The partition of Africa by European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 had significant impacts on the colonizers themselves. While the conference aimed to establish order and avoid conflict among the colonial powers, it ultimately led to a range of unintended consequences that shaped the trajectory of European imperialism in Africa.

The following are the effects of the partition on the European colonialists

1. **Increased competition and rivalry:** The partition intensified competition among European powers like Britain, France, and Germany, as they raced to claim territories and resources. This rivalry sometimes led to conflicts, such as the Fashoda Incident in 1898, where British and French forces nearly clashed over territorial claims in Sudan.
2. **Overextension of resources:** Maintaining control over vast African territories required significant investments in military forces, infrastructure, and administration. This overextension of resources strained the economies of European powers and diverted funds from domestic priorities.
3. **Resistance and rebellion:** The imposition of colonial rule often met with fierce resistance from African societies. Suppressing this resistance required ongoing military campaigns and the deployment of troops, which came at a high financial and human cost for the colonizers.
4. **Unrest and instability:** The arbitrary borders drawn by European powers disrupted existing political and social structures in Africa. This led to unrest, conflicts, and instability in many regions, which the colonizers struggled to control.
5. **Moral and ethical dilemmas:** The brutality and exploitation inherent in colonial rule raised moral and ethical concerns among some Europeans. This led to growing anti-colonial sentiment and criticism of the colonial project, which the colonizers had to navigate.
6. **Administrative challenges:** Governing diverse African territories with limited resources and knowledge proved challenging for European powers. Establishing effective colonial administrations required adapting to local conditions and cultures, which the colonizers often struggled with.
7. **Economic exploitation and dependency:** While the partition aimed to facilitate economic exploitation of Africa, it also created dependencies and imbalances in trade relationships. African economies became oriented towards serving the needs of European industries, limiting their potential for autonomous development.
8. **Demographic shifts and social disruption:** The partition and colonial rule led to significant demographic changes, such as the displacement of populations, the spread of diseases, and the disruption of traditional social structures. These shifts created new challenges for the colonizers in maintaining control and stability.
9. **Nationalist movements and decolonization:** The partition and colonial rule sowed the seeds for future nationalist movements and demands for independence. As African societies adapted to colonial rule, they also developed new forms of resistance and political organization that would eventually lead to decolonization.

- 10. Lasting legacies and responsibilities:** The partition and colonial rule left deep scars on African societies, with lasting impacts on political, economic, and social structures. As African nations gained independence, the former colonial powers faced questions about their historical responsibilities and the need for reparations and reconciliation.

Conclusively, the partition of Africa had profound and often unintended consequences for the European colonizers themselves. While the conference aimed to establish order, it ultimately led to increased competition, overextension of resources, resistance and rebellion, and lasting legacies that continue to shape the relationship between Europe and Africa today.

### **Exegesis of Berlin Conference**

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 was a pivotal moment in the history of European imperialism in Africa, marking the formalization of the "Scramble for Africa." Convened by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the conference brought together representatives from fourteen nations to negotiate and regulate European claims to African territories. This gathering was prompted by the rising competition among European powers for resources and markets, as well as the need to prevent conflicts that could arise from overlapping territorial claims. The conference established a framework for colonization, which had profound implications for both Africa and the colonizers (Adu, Ade-Ajayi, & Tidy, 1986).

One of the primary outcomes of the Berlin Conference was the establishment of the Principle of Effective Occupation. This principle required that a European power could only claim a territory if it had established actual control over it, which meant military presence or administrative authority. This rule aimed to reduce conflicts among European nations by ensuring that claims were backed by tangible governance. However, it also led to a rush to occupy and control vast areas of Africa, often through violent means, as powers sought to stake their claims before others could.

The conference also facilitated the creation of spheres of influence in Africa, where specific European powers would have exclusive rights to trade and governance. This arrangement allowed for the division of Africa into territories controlled by different nations, leading to the establishment of colonial borders that often disregarded existing ethnic and cultural boundaries (Timothy, 1999). As a result, many African communities found themselves split across different colonial territories, contributing to long-term social and political fragmentation. While the Berlin Conference sought to regulate the colonization process, it ultimately legitimized and accelerated the exploitation of African resources. European powers were motivated by the desire for raw materials to fuel their industrial economies, leading to the extraction of resources such as rubber, minerals, and agricultural products. This economic exploitation laid the groundwork for a system of dependency that would persist long after the end of colonial rule, as many African nations continued to rely on the export of raw materials to European markets.

The conference also had significant implications for international diplomacy (Muriel, 1994). By establishing rules for territorial claims and trade in Africa, the Berlin Conference set a precedent for how European powers would interact with one another in the context of imperialism. This framework would influence subsequent negotiations and conflicts over territorial claims, as well as the relationships between colonial powers and their African subjects. However, the absence of African representation at the conference highlighted the disregard for indigenous voices in decisions that profoundly affected their lives (Muller, 1997).

In addition to shaping territorial claims, the Berlin Conference had a lasting impact on the cultural and social dynamics of African societies. The imposition of colonial rule disrupted traditional governance structures, leading to the marginalization of local leaders and the erosion of indigenous cultures. As European powers sought to impose their systems of governance, education, and religion, many African communities experienced significant cultural upheaval, which has had lasting effects on their identities and social structures.

The legacy of the Berlin Conference is complex and multifaceted. While it facilitated the rapid colonization of Africa, it also sowed the seeds for future resistance movements and the eventual struggle for independence. The arbitrary border and divisions created during this period have contributed to ongoing conflicts and challenges in post-colonial Africa, as nations grapple with the consequences of colonialism.

The conference is often viewed as a symbol of the exploitative nature of imperialism, and its impacts continue to resonate in contemporary discussions about race, identity, and economic inequality.

In conclusion, the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 was a critical juncture in the history of European colonialism in Africa. It formalized the partitioning of the continent and established rules that guided European powers in their quest for territory and resources. While the conference aimed to create order among competing colonial interests, it ultimately led to widespread exploitation, cultural disruption, and social fragmentation in African societies. The legacy of the Berlin Conference remains a significant topic of study, as it continues to shape the political and cultural landscape of Africa today.

## 2. CONCLUSION

The European partition of Africa, culminating in the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-1885, was a pivotal event in modern African history. The conference, attended by 14 European powers, aimed to establish guidelines for the colonization of Africa, leading to the carving up of the continent into spheres of influence. This study examines the historical context, political motivations, and far-reaching consequences of the Berlin Conference, highlighting its enduring legacies in modern Africa. The conference was driven by European political, economic, and social factors, including the scramble for Africa's resources, strategic ports, and markets. European powers employed various tactics, including diplomacy, coercion, and manipulation, to expand their colonial empires. The conference's resolutions, including the principle of "effective occupation," legitimized European colonial claims, disregarding African sovereignty and territorial integrity. African leaders and populations responded to the European partition with resistance, diplomacy, and accommodation. Some, like Samori Ture and Menelik II, resisted colonial encroachment, while others, like the Zulu Kingdom, attempted to negotiate with European powers (Adu, Ade-Ajayi, & Tidy, 1986).

However, African agency was ultimately undermined by European military might and technological superiority. The Berlin Conference's legacies continue to shape modern Africa. The arbitrary borders created by European powers have contributed to political instability, conflict, and economic underdevelopment. The conference also perpetuated racist stereotypes and paternalistic attitudes towards Africans, undermining their dignity and self-worth. Despite these challenges, the study highlights the resilience and agency of African societies in the face of colonialism. It emphasizes the need for Africans to reclaim their history, culture, and identity, and to promote self-determination and cooperation in addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

The European partition of Africa, exemplified by the Berlin Conference, was a critical event in modern African history, with far-reaching consequences for the continent's politics, economies, and cultures. By examining this history, we can better understand the complexities of modern Africa and promote a more equitable and just future for its peoples (Achebe, 2018).

In conclusion, the European partition of Africa, epitomized by the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-1885, was a pivotal event in modern African history, with far-reaching consequences for the continent's political, economic, and cultural trajectory. The study has demonstrated that the partition was not simply a benign event, but a calculated and brutal process of colonial expansion, driven by European powers' desire for resources, markets, and strategic advantage. The conference's legacy continues to shape African geopolitics, economies, and cultures, perpetuating inequality, instability, and underdevelopment. However, the study has also highlighted the agency and resilience of African leaders and populations, who resisted and challenged colonial rule, and continue to strive for self-determination and development. By examining the historical context and legacies of the European partition, we can better understand the complexities of modern Africa, and the need for Africans to take control of their own destiny. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of decolonizing knowledge production, promoting African perspectives and voices, and fostering international understanding and cooperation. As Africa continues to navigate the challenges of the 21st century, it is essential to confront the ongoing impacts of colonialism and imperialism, and to prioritize African-led solutions, solidarity, and cooperation. By doing so, we can work towards a more just, equitable, and prosperous future for Africa and the world.

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