

GROUP DYNAMICS IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA, CIRCA 1900: RELATIONSHIPS THAT  
DROVE COLONIAL VIOLENCE

By  
Stephen Hench

Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Department of History of Vanderbilt University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in History

April 2010

On the basis of this thesis  
defended by the candidate on  
April 30, 2010 we, the  
undersigned, recommend that the  
candidate be awarded  
High honors  
in History:

Madhu Ranney

Deborah

Samira Sheikh

## INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1890s, as a response to the British advance and threats to their way of life, the *Otu Ochichi* and other societies began to hold secret meetings. Allies were sought in nearby towns. Local youth clubs turned militant.<sup>1</sup> At Issele in 1898, the Ekumeku's long tenure of resistance was born. These warriors communicated through hand signals instead of speech, earning them the nickname "The League of the Silent Ones".<sup>2</sup> Until their final defeat in 1911, the Ekumeku struck fear in their British adversaries through guerilla warfare and unflappable resilience.<sup>3</sup> Captain Ian Hogg described British fears of the Ekumeku during an uprising in 1904:

Several hours fighting against an enemy who is never visible except when occasionally seen darting across a path and whose position can only be determined by the smoke from his gun hanging round the dense undergrowth, is trying to the nerves of any troops...<sup>4</sup>

What caused such violence? Who and what played critical roles in shaping it? And why were the Ekumeku so successful? This thesis attempts to answer such questions in the focused context of relationships among the different interests (e.g. merchant, missionary) acting on the colonial situation in Southern Nigeria circa 1900.

With Britain's advance into Southern Nigeria beginning in earnest in the mid-1800s, there followed significant contact between the colonizers and the Nigerians that they encountered. However, this dynamic was more complicated than it appears on the surface. Within both the British and the Nigerian interests, there were distinctions –

---

<sup>1</sup> Don Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo resistance to the British conquest of Nigeria* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 14, 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984), p. 261.

<sup>3</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> CO 520/24, Asaba, 14 March 1904. From: (Captain Ian Hogg) Officer Commanding Asaba Hinterland Expedition Force. To: The Officer Commanding Southern Nigeria Regiment. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 280.

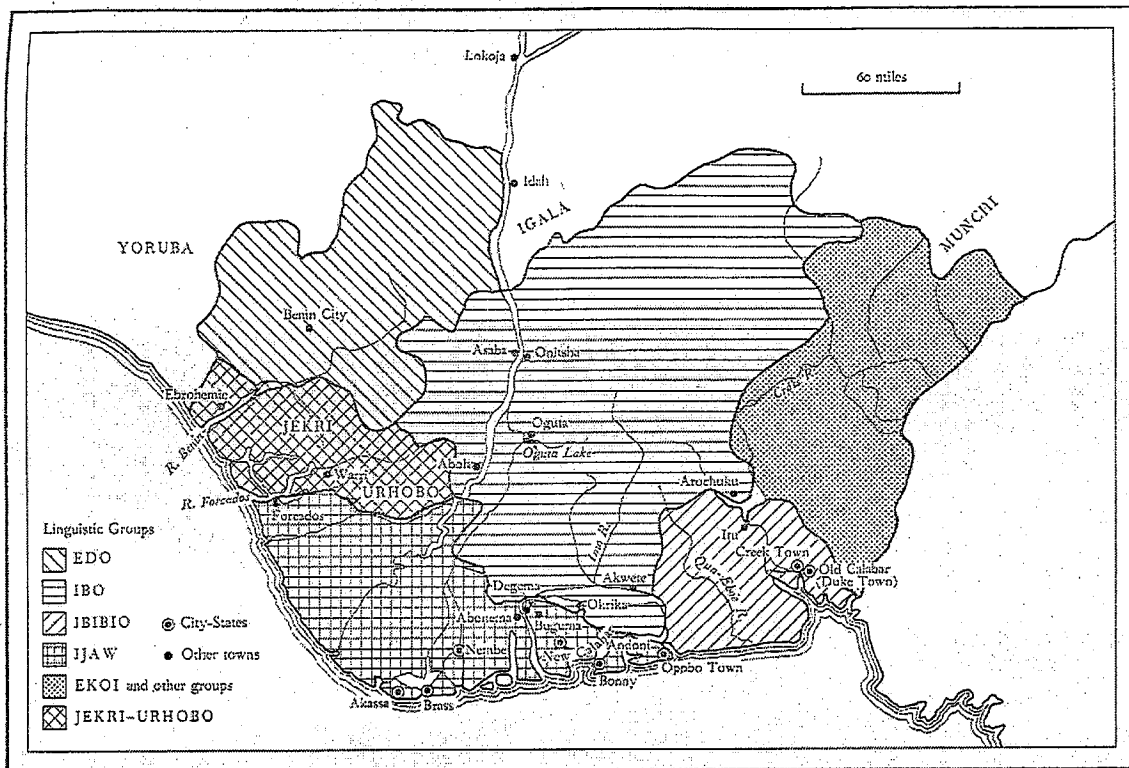
traders and missionaries for example on the British side, and middlemen and ordinary inhabitants on the Nigerian side. These and other various “players” in the colonial context harbored particular goals and agendas. Behind their sometimes conflicting aims were the causes – the perceptions, misunderstandings, and points of tension – that sparked the violence and resistance movements at the turn of the century. This thesis examines Southern Nigeria circa 1900 through the framework of British and Nigerian group dynamics, analyzing critical frictions and evaluating relationships that ultimately drove the region’s violent episodes. A number of themes (e.g. coalescence<sup>5</sup>, divergence, cooperation) are illustrated in three case studies: the Ekumeku movement, the Benin expedition, and the Ebrohemie War. Group dynamics also allow for analysis regarding the motivations and functions of various individuals in the history (so significant that their influence is comparable to that of larger interests). And the framework serves to both reconcile and disagree with historians, and lends insight into explaining the levels of Nigerian resistance and violence observed in response to British encroachment.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the outset it is useful to observe a map of colonial Southern Nigeria for reference (next page):

---

<sup>5</sup> “Coalescence” refers to the phenomenon that separate British interests (often merchants and missionaries) were sometimes viewed from the Nigerian perspective as a singular interest. This notion and some of its ramifications are cited by at least four historians. See E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), pp. 261-262; Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), p. 102; S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, Inc., 1977), p. 51; Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 67.



1. Sketch-map showing the coast city-states and the linguistic groups of Southern Nigeria, 1885-1906

Figure 1. Southern Nigeria circa 1900. From J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate*, p. 3, © 1966, Cambridge University Press.

The three case studies center on Ebrohemia (far west), the Asaba hinterland (north-central), and Benin City (northwest). Figure 1 is also useful for identifying other cities and linguistic groups mentioned throughout the thesis.

British-Nigerian history traces back to the slave trade, where African middlemen brought slaves from the interior to the British on the coasts, and received compensation for the trek.<sup>6</sup> This continued until 1807, when the slave trade was abolished in Britain. The stoppage put a strain on the British-Nigerian relationship, especially on middlemen who for so many years had benefited from the British demand for slaves. After the

<sup>6</sup> Don Taylor, *The British in Africa* (New York: Roy Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 19.

abolition, trade continued, shifting to other goods such as palm oil and rubber.<sup>7</sup> But by the mid-1850s, British merchants began instead to migrate up the rivers into Nigeria's interior. This movement was propelled by the invention of the steam engine (and the subsequent steamboat, which ultimately came to represent much of the violence that took place in later years).<sup>8</sup> Traders began to cut deals directly with producers, lowering their costs in the process and pushing the middlemen to the brink.

This movement inward sparked a "commercial war"<sup>9</sup> among British traders and African middlemen. Nigerian towns and leaders found themselves caught in the middle of this war. With British traders marching through their territory, the middleman was effectively cut out – no longer were they required to transport goods from the interior. British merchants also began to establish permanent trading posts in Nigerian towns. This economic encroachment heightened tensions between Britain and local traders and leaders. Some communities welcomed British trade. It was viewed as an opportunity for prosperity.<sup>10</sup> However others, particularly Nigerian traders, had their own markets which were until recently under their sole possession. Britain began to exploit these markets, at the expense of the traders' monopolies. Two such traders were Jaja of Opobo and Nana Olomu of Ebrohemie, both of whom fought back and were deported by British authorities on charges of violating free trade principles. The hypocrisy here, of course, is that Britain was engaged in its own monopolistic practices by ridding themselves of economic

---

<sup>7</sup> Neville Rubin, ed. Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1899-1900. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960*. (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899). East Ardsley, England: EP Microform, 1974. Microfilm.

<sup>8</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> G.N. Uzoigwe, *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974), p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People*, pp. 101-102.

competition.<sup>11</sup> In the years leading up to 1900, this “commercial war,” was in full swing, complete with military expeditions and rife with violence.

With the arrival of permanent economic activity in the Nigerian interior, another player entered the colonial game: missionaries, who sought to reform Nigerian society through religion. One of the more prominent of their organizations in Southern Nigeria was the Christian Missionary Society (CMS). These establishments generally accompanied trading posts.<sup>12</sup> The missions functioned at first with smaller congregations, and tended to avoid forcibly changing Nigerian society. Missionaries recognized that they were “aliens” in another land<sup>13</sup>, and even employed Africans. But by the late nineteenth century the role of missions in Nigerian towns began to change. They took a more active approach, sometimes backed militarily by the British government or the Royal Niger Company. This shift began with the dismissal of the African missionaries, and the church took a heavier stance toward Nigerian cultural practices that ran contrary to doctrine.<sup>14</sup> Increasing opposition and wariness toward missions developed, creating opportunity for conflict.

Whitehall, another pivotal British interest, had a unique role in Southern Nigeria. Initially, Britain had broad, unenthusiastic policies toward the prospective colony. Even in the late 1800s, Nigeria and West Africa were on the outside of British imperialist thought.<sup>15</sup> While there were bands of traders who did commercial work throughout the region – most notably Sir George Goldie’s Royal Niger Company – Britain’s government

---

<sup>11</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> Crowther to Venn, 12 May 1857. Quoted in Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 66.

was uninterested in imminently devoting attention to developing Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> Lord Salisbury preferred instead to let traders take care of staking territory for him, thereby indirectly addressing the lingering rivalries with both the Germans and the French. He affirmed this practice in 1890 while making claims on the Niger: "...the interests of this country are the interests of the Royal Niger Company."<sup>17</sup> Despite Whitehall's lack of interest, Nigeria progressed because private enterprise was able to navigate inland.<sup>18</sup> The Royal Niger Company was given a trade monopoly and the power to make treaties, and in the process proved that Nigeria was a worthwhile commercial endeavor.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the volume and value of Nigerian trade outweighed formal colonies in West Africa such as Gambia and the Gold Coast.<sup>20</sup>

The British government was initially enthusiastic toward Nigeria not as a territory to develop or maintain, but rather to control as a claim to support other interests.<sup>21</sup> Official policy was more focused on British claims in Egypt and East Africa. Largely for security reasons, concerns were centered on the Mediterranean and the Orient.<sup>22</sup> Uzoigwe also makes the assertion that British public opinion prevented the government from risking a foreign conflict.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, when the Royal Niger Company dissolved in 1900, Britain became responsible for the ensuing development and administration of a region they were relatively unfamiliar with. Before 1891, Whitehall had simply left the commercial enterprises to settle Nigeria. Throughout this conversion period (largely

---

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent* (New York: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 389.

<sup>17</sup> To Egerton, Private, 10 Aug. 1890, S.P. 59. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 390.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 391.

<sup>23</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 72.

beginning with the establishment of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1891), the notion of “development” slowly crept into British thought, directly originating perhaps with Major Claude Macdonald. Macdonald was one of the first to suggest direct intervention in Nigerian customs (e.g. human sacrifice) as part of administration, which was in contrast to Goldie’s practices.<sup>24</sup> It was this very notion that would become a crux of a number of future pretexts for violence.

When the Royal Niger Company’s charter was rescinded in 1900, Nigeria was officially divided into southern and northern regions. Britain also began to more actively implement the mechanisms of imperial rule. The main mechanism here was the “native”<sup>25</sup> court system. Courts were installed in Nigerian towns for political and judicial administration. They were operated by Nigerians (through the appointment of “warrant chiefs”<sup>26</sup>) and supervised by British officers. The goal was both to prevent Nigerian aggression through “proper”<sup>27</sup> administration, as well as aid in the development and the bringing of “civilization”<sup>28</sup> to Nigeria. The importance of these courts to British goals is echoed repeatedly in historical documents, often in official dispatches. However, these administrative tools, and the economic and societal upheaval associated with Britain’s advance, also led directly to hostility.

---

<sup>24</sup> John E. Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 153-154.

<sup>25</sup> J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966). Anene quotes the term “native” to indicate its negative connotation. The British used this term throughout colonial administration, but it is considered pejorative today. To indicate this, “native” is quoted as such in the entirety of this thesis as well.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted for the same reason as above.

<sup>27</sup> CO 520/14, Government House, Old Calabar, 17 April 1902. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 240.

<sup>28</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1904, General Observations. Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960.* (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899), 1974. Microfilm.



The late nineteenth century was accordingly characterized by both British violence (military expeditions) and a number of rebellions against British rule, particularly in the South. The Aro resisted by attacking Nigerian communities with British ties and interfering with British trade. Through this intimidation, the Aro created for themselves an image of strength that put fear not only into the towns surrounding them, but into the British as well.<sup>29</sup> Events culminated in a British punitive expedition from 1901 to 1902, and Arochukwu ultimately fell. Another violent episode concerned the Ekumeku, a coordinated resistance movement that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. This rebellion was a secret society made up of an association of towns. They were organizationally formed in response to the Royal Niger Company's violent activities<sup>30</sup> and came out of the woodwork during a mission crisis at Issele.<sup>31</sup> The Ekumeku employed guerilla tactics and served as a significant thorn in the side of the British administration from 1898 to 1911.<sup>32</sup>

## PURPOSE

As Ayandele asserts, group relationships were critical in shaping the violence that took place at the end of the nineteenth century: "Nigerian history in the period...is largely the history of the reaction of the Nigerian peoples to the three groups of intruders – missionaries, administrators, and traders."<sup>33</sup> While the three groups he mentions can be redefined, it is nevertheless true that certain characteristics and interests affected these

---

<sup>29</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 236-238.

<sup>30</sup> Philip A. Igbafe, "Western Ibo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement, 1898-1911," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): p. 443.

<sup>31</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), p. 114.

<sup>32</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 260-262.

<sup>33</sup> Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, quoted in A.E. Afigbo, "The Calabar Mission and the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 5, fasc. 2 (1973): p. 94.

groups' behaviors and interactions. This thesis analyzes Southern Nigerian group dynamics circa 1900: the contrasting actions and agendas of the various British and Nigerian interests, to understand how their interactions contributed to misunderstandings, points of tension, and decisions that drove the violence observed. To accomplish this, existing academic scholarship is reorganized and synthesized in a group dynamic framework in the contexts of three critical episodes: the Ekumeku movement, the Benin expedition, and the Ebrohemie War. The framework also allows for analysis of important individuals, historians' views, and possible reasons for the varying degrees of resistance to British subjugation.

The study focuses on the years 1884-1905. This is essentially identical to J. C. Anene's parameters in his *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate*. As the title indicates, the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries is intriguing because of the level of "transition" that took place. The British government was slowly easing out of its policy of "drift"<sup>34</sup> and entering into more formal rule. Both the rise and fall of the Royal Niger Company, through which the government administered Nigeria by proxy, are observed during this time period as well. The evolution and interaction among different interests in the colonial context during these years was at its height. For a study of group relationships, this is a rich period in the history.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

---

<sup>34</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 66. This refers to the government's rule that was characterized by reaction instead of action. Part of this included a sort of outsourcing of political authority to merchants.

There are a number of works concerned with the general colonial history. Robinson et al. serve as perhaps the traditional authority on British colonialism in the nineteenth century in *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*. Don Taylor's *The British in Africa*, and G. N. Uzoigwe's *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury* also provide general backgrounds to Britain's activities in a number of regions, including Nigeria. Policies and events are usually discussed in a macro-sense, although specific notions explaining colonial phenomena are also given. These sources are primarily useful for evaluating Whitehall's attitudes toward Nigeria over time, and its effects. Robinson et al. provide extended analysis on Britain's practice of leaving Nigeria to merchant agendas, as well as accounts of the activities of the Royal Niger Company. A relevant theme here is the British misperception of various Nigerian political systems, which was a result of both ignorance and a lack of familiarity that stemmed from Britain's period of "drift"<sup>35</sup>.

History on the Nigerian situation and contact with Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been addressed by historians Elizabeth Isichei (*The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship – to 1906*) and S. N. Nwabara (*Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860-1960*). Both have written extensively on the Igbo people and their reaction to the British advance. While serving as a general history and an assessment of the colonial invasion and subsequent subjugation, Isichei's *Genesis* examines the ties between the Igbo and the Europeans, beginning with "indirect" connections in the slave trade.<sup>36</sup> She continues to discuss the British advance, the role of missionaries, and the impact of colonial governance. This is particularly useful in that it

---

<sup>35</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 83.

describes in detail the initial stages of British consolidation. Isichei also lays out the evolution of British policies and actions in Nigeria, from more passive roles reserved to economic benefits, to active roles in conquering people and customs. Nwabara traces the contact between the Igbo and the British beginning in 1860. *A Century of Contact* is principally insightful in the ramifications of initial relationships – particularly the roles of missionaries and their influence. Both sources illuminate the theme of rivalries among Nigerian towns and communities, and the effects of this during the British advance.

When the history is narrowed in timeframe and focus, Nigerian historians tend to take over the dialogue. Numerous scholars have offered explanations and accounts of the Ekumeku, Benin, and Ebrohemie events. J. U. J. Asiegbu, in his analysis relating to a number of similar episodes (*Nigeria and Its British Invaders, 1851-1920*) tackles the colonial dynamic by providing accounts of a series of conflicts supplemented with primary sources. Often these sources are from Colonial Office records, and serve to illustrate the main themes found within each instance of violence. An example of this is Asiegbu's inclusion of Governor Egerton's remarks about the Ekumeku movement in 1903, where Egerton blames the poor administration of "native" courts for causing the uprising.<sup>37</sup> Toyin Falola is quite noteworthy here as well. In her 2009 book *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* Falola discusses how colonial players made their presence known: "The message of the missionaries [undermined] the Aro, as the missionaries [called] for changes to old customs and to institutions such as slavery."<sup>38</sup> In addition Falola addresses a variety of themes, such as gender and radical nationalism.<sup>39</sup> Also in this group of works is Obaro Ikime's *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest*, which

---

<sup>37</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 281.

<sup>38</sup> Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 131.

provides a brief yet informative introductory narrative of the time period. These sources provide interpretations of the case studies, as well as offer background into antagonistic British practices (such as “gunboat diplomacy”<sup>40</sup> and infringement on Nigerian commercial markets).

J. C. Anene’s *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate* is perhaps the most definitive source relevant to this thesis. It explores many facets of Nigeria’s transformation at the turn of the century as a result of many different, yet equally important, phenomena. Anene makes a point to emphasize that Nigerian society was not as simplistic to define as many historians wish it to were, and therefore he begins his book by “analy[zing] the structure of an indigenous society”<sup>41</sup>. This serves to explain some of the misperceptions of British agents cited in this thesis. Anene then continues to discuss Britain’s slow advance inland, describing military expeditions and other important factors in Southern Nigeria’s “transition”.<sup>42</sup> This study is particularly useful for grasping the chaotic nature of the region resulting from the convergence of many different interests. It is a complete and authoritative narrative that allows for the isolation of many of the themes discussed in the case studies, and therefore warrants specific mentioning.

In regard the Ekumeku episode, historians Igbafe, Ohadike, and Asiegbu all address worthwhile points in the history. The preeminent scholar on the Ekumeku movement, Don C. Ohadike, offers a number of explanations for what caused the Ekumeku wars. Indirectly and in the long-term, Ohadike asserts that economics involving

---

<sup>40</sup> This was using displays of force as threats to achieve certain military goals, thereby avoiding direct conflict.

<sup>41</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. ix.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

British incentives to push inland played a central role in generating the violence.<sup>43</sup> He cites immediate causes of the Ekumeku movement resting primarily on missionary interference. Also quite important to this thesis, Ohadike references what is referred to as a “coalescence” dynamic: “...the tendency among [the chiefs of Asaba] to regard all European traders, imperial agents, and missionaries as one, and in the event of a disagreement with one party, to antagonize the rest.”<sup>44</sup> This coalescence played a pivotal role inciting the Ekumeku rebellions.

In *Western Ibo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement 1989-1911*, Igbafe addresses the “inadequacies of neglecting oral evidence as historical source material” while evaluating the Ekumeku movement.<sup>45</sup> His article is imperative for understanding the organization and nature of the Ekumeku – a “secret war cult dedicated to resisting European encroachment”<sup>46</sup>. Largely through the examination of oral sources, Igbafe asserts that the resistance was not simply a response to the aggressive expansion of British institutions, but rather against the British invasion as a whole. This notion that the Ekumeku was a reaction brought about by anti-British sentiment (and not primarily by the “native” court system in 1904)<sup>47</sup> has significant implications for this thesis. Asiegbu, in his section devoted to the Ekumeku movement and appropriate documents, disagrees with this point, citing his “informants”<sup>48</sup> in the field.

---

<sup>43</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 48.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>45</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 441.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>48</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 262.

The Benin expedition and story of Nana Olomu of Ebrohemie are also adequately addressed by the above historians in these and similar works. J. C. Anene discusses Nana in detail, including the ramifications of his defeat: a power “vacuum”<sup>49</sup>, which allows this thesis to define Nana as an economic “placeholder” for British interests. Anene also mentions Nana’s misperception of British power, and emphasizes Ralph Moor’s “forward policy”<sup>50</sup>. In addition, his section devoted to the Benin expedition provides an effective narrative and emphasizes the conflict’s humanitarian aspects,<sup>51</sup> and he makes reference to the military-minded nature of the men stationed in Nigeria.<sup>52</sup> Asiegbu devotes a chapter in *Nigeria and Its British Invaders* to both the Benin and Nana episodes, coupling description and brief analysis with primary documents. Also notable, Philip Igbafe surveys the course of the Benin expedition in *The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment*, discussing the motivations for attacking the city, as well as critical points in the episode. This includes a description of the 1892 treaty, varying problems that the Oba faced, and J. R. Phillips’ expedition.

Finally, it is prudent to reference John M. Carland’s *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914*. While much of the British perspective is clear in the secondary literature (particularly the general histories such as Robinson et al.) and Colonial, Foreign, and War Office documents, Carland’s book discusses a unique dynamic. He puts forth the notion that the Colonial Office “...resisted challenges to their Office’s domination of the Colonial Empire, and did so successfully, out of a sense of Robert

---

<sup>49</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 157.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155. Anene uses this term to denote Moor’s aggressive political stance. The term also applies in other, entirely different contexts. Moor wished to press on through the interior with relatively liberal thresholds for military action (when compared to Macdonald’s more peaceful approach characteristic of the early 1890s).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>52</sup> Blyden, *West Africa before Europe* (London, 1905), p. 36. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Ardey's 'territorial imperative'".<sup>53</sup> This thesis seeks to uncover the implications of this phenomenon on events in Southern Nigeria. Using this "territorial imperative", the policy-making power of "men on the spot"<sup>54</sup> is affirmed and emphasized through the theme of detachment within the British government.<sup>55</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The importance of group relationships in the colonial dynamic is highlighted by combining and evaluating the analyses in the above sources. The literature thoroughly describes the course of events, as well as various driving factors behind them. However, a strong synthesis of group interactions and their implications in the context of various competing and cooperating interests – motivations, misperceptions, instances of momentary cooperation, divisions, etc. – is lacking. While perhaps described briefly in one source, and again briefly in another, this thesis attempts to bring the notions together under one construction. The violence witnessed in Southern Nigeria circa 1900 (including Nigerian resistance) can be explained by defining the groups involved and evaluating their interactions with one another. Important themes are illustrated throughout case studies: the Ekumeku movement, the Benin expedition, and the Ebrohemie War.

---

<sup>53</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), pp. 6-7.

<sup>54</sup> Historians use this term to note a distinction between British agents stationed in Nigeria, and officials in London offices who were concerned with administrative matters.

<sup>55</sup> Igbafe makes a small reference to men in Nigeria acting differently than those in Britain in regard to the Benin episode; Philip A. Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): p. 386. Throughout the thesis, "detachment" will both refer to separation between men on the spot and London, as well as Whitehall's attitude toward Nigeria throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (it will be clear which definition applies given context).



## CHAPTER I: GROUPS AND DIVISIONS

Colonial Southern Nigeria from mid-1800 to early 1900 played host to interactions among many distinct groups of people, British and Nigerian alike. This chapter outlines these numerous interests, whose interactions were pertinent in the development of colonial violence and Nigerian resistance.

### BRITAIN

Historians often divide the British presence into three general interests: administrators, traders, and missionaries. For the purposes of this thesis, it is useful to initially divide further. This yields several distinct subgroups in the economic, political, and social/religious spheres: British merchants (primarily before Goldie); The Royal Niger Company (merchants after Goldie); government officials; government officers; and missionaries. Important themes rooted in group dynamics emerge out of the backgrounds of these various interests.

#### *Merchants (Pre- "Economic Amalgamation" )<sup>1</sup>*

After slave trading along the African coasts for decades, by 1850 British merchants began making efforts to move past the shoreline and into the heart of Nigeria. There were two primary reasons for this. First, businessmen were looking to make profits. By eliminating Nigerian middlemen, traders could cut transaction costs. Moreover, establishing permanent settlements in Nigerian towns likely made the extraction of primary commodities easier and more efficient.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ultimate credit for this term should be given to S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, Inc., 1977), p. 10.

The second reason is related to this profit-seeking notion. In a sense, the British government gave tacit permission and support for the merchants to push inward. According to some historians, Whitehall was preoccupied with its interests elsewhere, such as Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Others contend that it was the fear of negative public opinion, in the event that a foreign conflict broke out, that limited the government's ability to maneuver the situation.<sup>3</sup> In any case, London initially left Nigeria to the merchants. With European rivals France and Germany moving into Africa, Britain could not fail to keep pace, but at the same time refused to bear the costs of formal administration. The best solution was to allow businessmen to explore and, through commercial enterprise, claim territory on their own. Merchants were given essentially unlimited discretion in the region, which by the late 1880s was escalating in violent nature.

At this point it is prudent to explain the term "amalgamation." Up until the founding of the United Africa Company (which would subsequently be known as the National Africa Company, and then the Royal Niger Company) in 1879, there were many commercial enterprises in Southern Nigeria operating with little coordination. Moreover, these enterprises were not always British. Both French and German firms made their way into the South. British firms, already weak in that government-backing was unofficial and limited (merchants repeatedly asked for more support), were not much of a force. It was a rather unorganized affair. Historians often use "amalgamation" politically, in reference to the periods before and after Southern and Northern Nigeria were united. The term is also

---

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent* (New York: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> G.N. Uzoigwe, *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974), p. 72.

applicable when evaluating the state of economic affairs, as recognized by Nwabara.<sup>4</sup> This period before the patchwork of British firms was consolidated can be considered pre-“economic amalgamation.”

The economic movement inward was well-facilitated by the dawn of steamships. With this technology, British traders navigated the Nigerian waterways with ease, bought goods directly from producers, and transported commodities back to England without direct Nigerian aid.<sup>5</sup> However, before economic domination began to take hold in the latter part of the century, British merchants still had to pay protection tributes to Nigerian leaders in exchange for security along their trading routes (known as “comey”<sup>6</sup>). Although the British were technologically more advanced, they were still unfamiliar with the territory, relatively few in number, and not yet a dominant power. Many towns also remained hostile toward merchants, as the British were invariably infringing on Nigerian traders’ markets. Naturally, the situation frustrated a number of locals, especially those from influential communities who had earlier dominated foreign trade.

British merchants soon considered it prudent to establish more permanent trading posts along the rivers. This ushered in ongoing and direct contact with Nigerian towns, which took the British-Nigerian dynamic to another level. What quickly became apparent was that when confronted with the merchants, Nigerian rulers had two options. In Igboland, as in other regions, rulers either welcomed the increased trade that the British brought into their towns, or fought to protect their own trade interests and middlemen.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo resistance to the British conquest of Nigeria* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Before British administration established rules and regulations governing trade, Nigerian leaders had traditionally received “comey”, or what were essentially customs payments.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), p. 101.

Compliance offered the prospect of economic gain. Resistance, or ignoring Britain, was observed to result in economic decline. Accordingly, some towns rose as economic powers, and some succumbed to either the British presence or economic pressures from successful neighbors. But even for those who gained prominence, their successes proved to be ephemeral. The continuing British push throughout the century all but destroyed any economic advantages these towns temporarily enjoyed.<sup>8</sup>

As such, in the group dynamic context, the British merchant presence in the mid-1800s (and onward) served to exacerbate divisions and rivalries among Nigerian towns and leaders. Competition for British trade forced towns to act for their own interests before those of the collective region. Nigerian goals were rooted in survival; not just amidst the British, but amidst each other as well. This further distracted leaders from the larger picture of what was transpiring, and discouraged cooperative efforts to stave off the British advance. Throughout the history, when economic issues were at stake, towns would act in their own interests rather than the interests of a greater community.<sup>9</sup> Nigerian middlemen, for example, united to oust Nana of Ebrohemie for their and Britain's benefit. These self-interested actions laid the foundation for future British domination in the region, effectively fueling conquest. Such events represent the ramifications of merchant activity in Southern Nigeria – playing off of Nigerian divisions (knowingly and unknowingly) while achieving commercial profits and political influence.

*The Royal Niger Company (Economic Amalgamation)*

---

<sup>8</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, pp. 101-102, 106.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

By the late 1800s, both France and Germany began to establish themselves as contenders in Africa (especially France), and their economic spheres of influence began to conflict with Britain's territorial claims in Nigeria (done largely through treaty-making). These external forces demanded that either British merchants grow more organized, or that Whitehall step in with more invasive policy. British merchant George Taubman Goldie saw a resolution in the former possibility. In fact, instead of seeing foreign conflict as the primary issue, he viewed the disunity among merchants as the most problematic matter for Britain. Goldie's reasoning was that intra-competition was eating away at prospective trade, and a lack of a unified group of merchants hindered Britain's ability to invade markets that Nigerians still controlled. In essence, Goldie desired to create a monopoly, which would then naturally have the power to fight off the French while establishing more efficient and more profitable trade. In 1879, Goldie consolidated many of the British firms and established the United Africa Company. In 1882 it was renamed the National Africa Company after further organization.<sup>10</sup>

Goldie was relentless in securing his goals. His plan was to beat the French, thereby leaving the Niger to Britain and increasing the profitability of the region for his merchants, which were now under one large company. As Uzoigwe states, it is important to remember that "Goldie's interest in Nigeria was first commercial, and then political."<sup>11</sup> However, political issues had to be settled before economic prosperity could be achieved,<sup>12</sup> and the point can be made that Goldie still had a desire to politically control

---

<sup>10</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Nigeria for patriotic reasons (Dike asserts that this feeling was an “overriding urge”).<sup>13</sup> In any case, Goldie had to deal with the French before he could achieve his trading aims. This was much to the delight of the British government, which gladly stood by as Goldie advanced Whitehall’s political interests. It took Goldie a little over a year to out-compete the French firms, after which he was able to force them into buyouts.

With the foreign threat vanquished, Goldie turned his attention to Nigerian towns. Through gunboat diplomacy the National Africa Company forced over 200 treaties of protection from various Nigerian leaders by 1886.<sup>14</sup> These treaties guaranteed the safety of Goldie’s merchants along trading routes, many of which had previously been dominated by Nigerians and middlemen. The move facilitated the further expansion of the National Africa Company’s trade endeavors. Naturally, Goldie’s achievements were to the great benefit of the British government. Indeed, “Goldie had performed an invaluable job for Britain, Salisbury, and later Earl Granville...”<sup>15</sup> His acquisitions were pivotal in establishing territorial claims at the Berlin Conference in 1884, highlighting how much of a political player the merchant truly was at this time.<sup>16</sup> Goldie was, for all practical purposes, Britain herself during his twenty years in Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

In 1886 the National Africa Company was granted further government support through a royal charter, and accordingly became known as the Royal Niger Company. With the charter, Goldie was given implicit permission to roam the Niger as he liked, establishing a monopoly power now not only over European countries, but over Nigerian

---

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1956), p. 210.

<sup>14</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*, p. 213.

traders as well. It was at this point that Whitehall clearly acknowledged that Goldie was doing their work for them. As Isichei states, “The British government granted the Charter, because it offered a classic solution to its problems in the area in the mid 1880s...creating at least a façade of effective administration.”<sup>18</sup> The Royal Niger Company had become equally political as it was commercial, regardless of the motives of its founder. In the following years, the Company engaged in a number of military expeditions to quell Nigerian towns that were hostile to its interests. This use of violence set the stage for the tumultuous late century and early 1900s.

The Royal Niger Company’s charter was revoked on 1 January 1900 and political power was transferred to the British government. This transfer has significant relevance. It represented the evolution of the role of the British government, from outsider to coordinator. It also meant the end of domination by private commercial enterprise. And third, it ushered in a new age of administration in Nigeria which centered on political tools – in particular, administrative tactics such as “native” courts. Such strategies for colonial management were justified by the notion of developing Nigeria, which differed from Goldie’s primary aims of profit and domination. Unfortunately, methods to attain such goals rested on many misperceptions about the Nigerian people.<sup>19</sup>

The ultimate role of the Royal Niger Company as it pertained to group dynamics and the violence at the turn of the century was threefold. First, the Company fielded a military force that became involved in a number of conflicts, including war with the Ekumeku resistance movement. Second, the Company constantly urged the British government to protect their interests, often by pushing for military expeditions against

---

<sup>18</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> i.e. the political climate; Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

cities such as Benin, and Nigerians such as Nana Olomu of Ebrohemie. And third, the Company remained focused on its overarching goal of profit. Regardless of its interactions with government or missionary interests, commerce remained the objective. Occasional convergences of their aims with other interests in Nigeria were merely coincidental, and often served a direct purpose for the Company.

### *Government Officials (Whitehall)*

The British government's role in Southern Nigeria evolved over time. Up until the early 1890s, the attitude toward Nigeria was relatively detached. Officials left Nigeria to the merchants, and the primary concern was keeping the French and Germans at bay without direct intervention. The initial British presence was not for development purposes. While Western Africa was rich in commodities, Whitehall preferred instead to focus on the East and other matters in the Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup> However, when it became clear that the Royal Niger Company was not going to be sufficient for the future, London became involved. The beginning of this is illustrated in Claude Macdonald's expedition to Southern Nigeria in 1890. As such, the government had roughly a decade to prepare to administrate a territory toward which it had taken a lackadaisical approach since 1840.

When the slave trade was abolished in 1807, British merchants sought alternative goods to fill the trading gap. Religious figures also became involved on the coasts of Nigeria, policing the trade that took place (i.e., no slave trade). Ministers went over with the Royal Navy, patrolling the shores and enforcing anti-slavery measures. In addition, these forces deterred other nations such as Portugal from slave trading. It is here where the government's role in Nigeria, however limited, began. In 1849, Captain John

---

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 391.



Beecroft, who had been among those policing and exploring the area, was promoted as an official British consul to supervise trade.<sup>21</sup> Lord Palmerston justified this and further intervention on the grounds that “commerce is the best pioneer for civilization...” and that the protection of it and free trade was a necessity that was in British interests.<sup>22</sup>

Palmerston was also responsible for the British military defense of the mission town of Abeokuta, which suggests a relationship between missionaries and Nigerian leaders at the time.

Whitehall also urged for the exploration of the Niger and Benue Rivers to open up new areas for trade. This was partially accomplished by Dr. Baikie in 1854<sup>23</sup>, but the encouragement to penetrate inland jeopardized the position of Nigerian middlemen and merchant monopolies. However London continued to preach free trade, having few qualms about the effects on the local population. The notion of commerce leading to eventual colonial development and expanded influence persisted. As put by Wylde, “...if we can open out the Niger to the trade of this country, it will be another and a considerable step in the right direction.”<sup>24</sup> Robinson et al. refer to this “old coast system” as “Palmerstonian”: “commerce and philanthropy [advancing] hand in hand.”<sup>25</sup>

The policy of “drift”<sup>26</sup> continued. Even by the mid-1880s the British government was reluctant to treat Nigeria as part of their official empire. Part of this reluctance is illustrated by the creation of the Royal Niger Company in 1886, which was simply another merchant outlet through which the government could maintain a presence. Being

---

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Minute by Palmerston, 20 Dec. 1850, on CO to FO, 15 Nov. 1850, FO 2/4. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Memo by Wylde, 28 April 1864, FO 97/434. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 66.

at the mercy of public opinion while able to avoid the costs of administration, merchant rule worked well.<sup>27</sup> However, despite its power, the Company also served as an indirect force in compelling the government to take a more formal stance in Western Africa. With a proposal on the table to extend the powers of the Royal Niger Company, Germany fought back with accusations (which were true) that the Company owned a monopoly in the region. This proved to make the extension of the Company's power impossible.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Britain was pressed to create the Niger Coast Protectorate (Oil Rivers Protectorate) in 1891 to stake their territorial claims, and the Company's power remained where it was. There was still no formal administration and Whitehall remained relatively detached, but the "Paper Protectorate"<sup>29</sup> was yet another stepping stone to formality.

It was here in the 1890s that true imperial efforts began. Major Claude Macdonald was appointed consul-general and commissioner, and was sent on a mission in 1891 to prepare Nigerian leaders for future British administration. Part of the goal was to secure means to extract revenue from the locals. The Foreign Office was, as usual, quite concerned with finances. This also meant that Macdonald had to find a way (and did) to tactfully get rid of the comey system that had been in place for many years. An overhaul yielded to a new age of British administration, where Nigerian leaders would be paid as British agents instead of as sovereign leaders.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, despite this new level of intrusion into Nigerian affairs, Lord Salisbury was still reluctant to devote resources to the area, especially considering that there was no immediate foreign threat. In fact, that

---

<sup>27</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>29</sup> J.C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> FO 84/2110, FO Draft to Macdonald, 18 April 1891. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 136.

was what Salisbury attempted to avoid by taking a detached approach – upsetting the French.<sup>31</sup>

It was in 1897 that Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain reflected a change in the Whitehall's attitude. He believed that the growth of the empire was essential on the world stage. As such, risking upsetting a foreign power was a potential cost far outweighed by the advantages of controlling and administering more territory in Africa. In 1899 Chamberlain created the West African Frontier Force designed to do what the Royal Niger Company could not – effectively address the French. While ultimately Chamberlain's overall imperialistic goals fell short, his actions represented a shift in the philosophy and the role that the government would play in the administration of Southern Nigeria. His work also laid the foundations for the end of company rule.<sup>32</sup>

The British government took the reins of Nigerian administration on 1 January 1900. The Royal Niger Company's charter was gone, and the territory was divided into two regions, North and South. A number of observations can be made about the government's attitude at the time it entered official rule. These are important to underscore because such factors played a significant role in group dynamics and the driving of violent events at the turn of the century. One observation is that the government had a reluctance to spend money; an obsession with finances and balancing the books. Military expeditions were scrutinized and heavily evaluated. This meant delays, and some frustration on the part of officers stationed in the colony. Action was slower. Beforehand, merchants could just act. Now, permission needed to be granted. Bureaucratic demands had to be met.

---

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 404.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 405-406, 408.

Another observation is that Whitehall began to implement the imperialist policies. This included discussing development projects, such as railways. Such debate was a marked change from the climate of ten years prior. Development was not an immediate concern of the merchants. Development required extensive knowledge of the area and its people to be effective, and the government had been maintaining its distance since the early 1800s. This unfamiliarity with Nigeria's people led to many mistakes, including the violence-inducing "native" courts and incorrect assumptions about the region's political structure.<sup>33</sup> Such oversights had a hand in producing violence and even the Ekumeku movement, the premier Nigerian resistance of the early 1900s.

Finally, there developed an intriguing dynamic between Whitehall and British officers stationed in Africa. Before the amalgamation, this had not been an issue; merchants were the authority in Nigeria, and the government meddled in the affairs of the region relatively little. However, now there were two distinct interests: the policy creators, and policy implementers. It turns out that the policy implementers had considerably more power in dictating policy than it would appear on the surface, and this was a result of the detachment between the two groups, as well as the Colonial Office's overriding concerns with its existence as an agency.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Government Officers (Men on the Spot)*

The first significant British administrator in Nigeria probably can be considered to have been Claude Macdonald, who was appointed in 1891. Starting at this time, officers such as Macdonald played central, extensive roles in policy execution. The main

---

<sup>33</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

<sup>34</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), pp. 6-7.

government characters in Southern Nigeria from 1890 to the early 1900s were Macdonald, Ralph Moor (Commissioner and Consul General of the Protectorate in 1893, and High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria in 1900), and Walter Egerton (High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria in 1904, Governor of The Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906). These officers were responsible largely for maintaining stability and facilitating the success of development projects. This was done through supervision and two primary outlets: military expeditions and “native” courts.

Security and defense against foreign threats were all encompassed in the military’s duties.<sup>35</sup> Military expeditions were for patrolling or conquest purposes. More specifically, one function of the military expedition was to “subdue, i.e. pacify, the tribes and peoples who had not yet submitted to British overrule...[this was done] by a show of, or use of, force, the precondition [that was necessary].”<sup>36</sup> For example, High Commissioner (and later Governor) Walter Egerton led the British on “patrols,” which were an effective means of inducing submission by showing but not actually using force. The threat of force was enough to maintain stability.<sup>37</sup> The other function of the expedition – an actual conquest, was also not uncommon, and had been practiced since the days of the Royal Niger Company. Such expeditions were carried out to clear the region of resistance to British rule and barriers to British trade. For instance, at the turn of the century Ralph Moor urged the Colonial Office for permission to take action against the city of Arochukwu. Its Long Juju Shrine, as well as its traders’ staunch defiance against British trade encroachment, stood in the way of both merchants’ the administration’s goals.

---

<sup>35</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office*, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

“Native” courts, or “councils”, were the primary bodies of administration that the government applied in Southern Nigeria. The courts sought to create an authority over a particular region or collection of towns, thereby making it easier for British officers to monitor and manage its affairs. As appears in a colonial report, “[t]he Native Courts possess[ed] and exercise[d] powers as conservators of peace and [had] the power of arresting offenders against any Native or other law in force in the Protectorate.”<sup>38</sup> These courts consisted of “warrant chiefs” – local leaders who were chosen, sometimes rather arbitrarily, by British agents.<sup>39</sup> In other words, people the British thought were in charge of a particular area. By 1900, a number of courts had been established across the South:

Old Calabar District – 1 High Court, 15 Minor Courts,  
Opobo District – 1 Native Council, 3 Minor Courts,  
Akwette Sub-District – 2 Minor Courts,  
Bonny District – 2 Native Councils (Bonny and Okrika), 1 Minor Court,  
New Calabar District – 1 Native Council, 3 Minor Courts,  
Brass District – 1 Native Council,  
Warri District – 1 Native Council, 3 Minor Courts,  
Sapele District – 1 Native Council,  
Benin City District – 1 Native Council.<sup>40</sup>

There were significant problems, however, with this method of administration. As Anene points out, “The extension of [the court system] to Ibo and Ibibio country was destined to prove the greatest blunder of the British agents...”<sup>41</sup> One was that the British tried to discern who was in charge among Nigerian leaders, and what territories exactly they were in charge of. This proved to be impossible, given that working in such a framework failed to take into account the complicated nature of Nigerian political

---

<sup>38</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1904, Judicial Statistics: Native Courts. Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960.* (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899). East Ardsley, England: EP Microform, 1974. Microfilm.

<sup>39</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

<sup>40</sup> H.L. Gallwey, *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1899-1900, Native Courts.* 25 September 1900. Rubin Neville, ed. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960.* (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899), 1974. Microfilm.

<sup>41</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

society. The British relied on field reports for identifying which individuals were the most important.<sup>42</sup> It is no wonder that the “native” courts led to extreme discontent on the part of the Africans, and that Governor Egerton encountered many grievances against them. Nevertheless, the courts remained. By 1904 “over 16,000 civil and 4,903 criminal cases were disposed of in the Native Courts”<sup>43</sup>.

These were the main tools at the officers’ disposal when trying to keep the peace and expand administration. What further complicated matters was that Whitehall remained the policy-makers. Funds had to be approved, actions had to be scrutinized, and plans had to be made. Such bureaucratic measures did not always mesh well with some of the more energetic men stationed in Nigeria, who were sometimes chosen from military units.<sup>44</sup> Claude Macdonald was a rather composed individual, preferring to keep terms with the Nigerian leaders at a friendly level of understanding. But his successor, Ralph Moor, was the opposite. He had a “lack of patience” and was irritated when it came to delays.<sup>45</sup> Governor Egerton also came into conflict with his associates back in London, often over the cost of development projects.

The major themes in the group dynamic context in regard to these government agents stationed in Nigeria include their overall dispositions and their detachment from London. Many of the British officers in Nigeria were from a military background, and therefore likely thought like military men, not policy-makers.<sup>46</sup> Ralph Moor, for instance, was extremely aggressive in implementing his “forward policy”, exemplified by a

---

<sup>42</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

<sup>43</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1904, Judicial Statistics: Native Courts. Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960.* (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899), 1974. Microfilm.

<sup>44</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 134.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>46</sup> Professor Moses Ochonu (Professor of History, Vanderbilt University) referenced this to me, 2009-2010. Anene also makes reference to this in *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 155, 178-180.

number of expeditions at the turn of the century. The likelihood for violence was increased by the characteristics of these men, and in some cases such dispositions served to be the primary driver of events.<sup>47</sup> Part of this was because the detachment of these officers from Whitehall (distance) put power in their hands. Despite tensions between London and officers, agents could control what went into dispatches sent back to Britain, and therefore could freely paint the colonial picture as they saw it. Whitehall had little choice but to take these dispatches at face value, and relented to focusing on finances and logistics rather than to police its men. This dynamic furthered the importance of the men on the spot and their roles as players in the group dynamic framework. Also important to note is an officer's motivations for recognition. The awarding of medals was a frequent practice in Britain, but its frequency did not seem to devalue its prestige. Violent expeditions and conquests almost assured recognition. While difficult to prove, it is worth speculating that such prospects may have served to even further agents' inherent motivations to seek action.

### *Missionaries*

The missionary presence in colonial Nigeria began largely in the early 1840s, when a number of Protestant missionary societies were established both in the North and the South. Southern Nigeria was made home by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in 1842; the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1843; the United Free Church of Scotland Missionary Society (UFCSM) in 1846; and the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board (SBC) in 1850. Also noteworthy is the Catholic

---

<sup>47</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 155, 178-180.



mission the Catholic Society of African Missions (SMA). By 1925 there were 513 protestant missionaries, nearly 5000 African workers, and over 1800 churches.<sup>48</sup>

Ajayi defines this period up to 1891 as having particular significance in the mission story. Mission work was centered in three main regions in Nigeria: the coastal city states, the interior of Yorubaland, and the Niger Valley.<sup>49</sup> The thrust of Christianity was not merely a focused effort to bring “civilized” religion to African soil, but was also part of “a grand design to launch British imperialism expansion into Africa.”<sup>50</sup> Religious groups laid the foundation for the future administration of the colony. This was a job that the traders did not do as intimately because their interaction with the Nigerian population was much more limited, as their efforts were focused on profit. As long as nothing “hampered” trade, the merchants remained relatively indifferent.<sup>51</sup> But despite their differences, missions were established in conjunction with trading stations in the mid-1800s because it was financially beneficial.<sup>52</sup> It was therefore necessary for missionaries to work with the British traders and soldiers, regardless of divergences in their goals.<sup>53</sup> No matter how separate the missions and Christians desired to be from British commerce, they were unavoidably tied to it from the start.

Nigerian leaders often sought mission stations because they brought prospects of power and security (like British merchants). Missionaries too were associated with economic and political gain, particularly because they had British military-backing. They

---

<sup>48</sup> J. Lowry Maxwell, *Nigeria: The Land, The People and Christian Progress*, ed. Alexander McLeish (London: World Dominion Press, 1927), p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria: 1841-1891*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>50</sup> *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1857, 194. Quoted in Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria: 1842-1914*, (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Crowther to Venn, 12 May 1857. Quoted in Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 63.

were an opportunity to gain an advantage in local politics.<sup>54</sup> Tasié makes the point that Christianity in the Niger Delta began largely because Nigerian leaders saw these prospects and took the initiative to welcome missions.<sup>55</sup> Such a desire partly stemmed from inter-ethnic rivalries that, according to British records, had never been entirely settled.<sup>56</sup> However, it should be noted that some leaders remained skeptical about the newcomers. These included Kosoko of Lagos and Gezo of Dahomey. Others, though, continued to welcome missions, including Akitoye, Sodeke, and Wawu.<sup>57</sup> This dynamic played a critical role in the mid-century, as local rulers effectively used the missions to convince Britain to fight battles against their rivals.

Towns were not particularly afraid of missionaries because they were confident that the church's goals for Nigerian society would not be accomplished.<sup>58</sup> Instead, Nigerian leaders simply used the missions as intermediary access to the British military. Abeokuta was defended against Dahomey in 1851 with the backing of missionaries, and thereby the army. "From 1846 to 1860, missionary propaganda played well the part expected of it by the Egba...reliance on British military power remained the shibboleth of Egba foreign policy."<sup>59</sup> Town leaders caught on to the fact that mission workers were protected by British forces. Initially church workers were excited by the towns' enthusiasm for a mission station, until they realized that the true motives of these communities resided in politics and not societal reform.

---

<sup>54</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> G. O. M. Tasié, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918* (Belgium: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1978), pp. 235-236, 240.

<sup>56</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1904, General Observations, 31 July 1904. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960*. (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899), 1974. Microfilm.

<sup>57</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Town leaders were not seeking reformation or a changing of their society through British missionaries. In fact, the contrary was true: “‘Christian’ social laws [had to] give way to indigenous customs and institutions that really mattered, such as polygamy, burial rites...”<sup>60</sup> Rulers often refused to allow the missionaries to significantly alter cultural practices. A climax came in 1860 when the British requested that Egba attack Ibadan. Egba was not warm to the idea of Britain using them. Instead, Egba countered, asking the military to attack Dohamey. Ayandele references this as the beginning of the breakdown of relations and spreading of anti-missionary sentiments. It also symbolized the British gaining a foothold in Nigeria, because now the government was asking something of the Nigerians; not exclusively the other way around. This may have frightened local leaders. They had always assumed that the missionary movements would peter out, or remain trivial. Now, after using them as an outlet for British military support, hopes were dim that the missions would be leaving any time soon, or that the status quo could be retained for much longer.<sup>61</sup>

The Church Missionary Society initially utilized Nigerians to spread religion (Bishop Samuel Crowther being one of the well-documented). However in the late-1880s there were problems with these workers that included misbehavior and general debauchery. A commission was appointed to investigate, and ultimately these agents were relieved of their posts.<sup>62</sup> This was a blow to the effort to Christianize Southern Nigeria – these agents provided a commonality between the CMS and Nigerian societies. Furthermore, some of these agents, such as Crowther, were actually quite passionate about the genuine success of these missions. The new, young British workers that took

---

<sup>60</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 51.

over had a more domineering attitude about them, ushering in future conflict between missions and towns.<sup>63</sup> Missionaries continued to focus on reforming or eradicating indigenous traditions (including human sacrifice and the killing of twins), although such practices were still found in Nigerian societies in 1900. It is important to note that such customs, while present, were not rampant and were likely exaggerated in British documents.<sup>64</sup> The dynamic of missions attempting to extinguish tradition and Nigerians fighting to defend it, however, is real. That is what such examples throughout the thesis are meant to illustrate – not to assert any falsehoods or misrepresentations.

By the 1880s, missionary intervention grew more aggressive and frequent, especially as more stations were established. At Onitsha, mission workers began attacking the indigenous practice of abandoning twins.<sup>65</sup> At Asaba, Christians spoke out against the practice of human sacrifice. Tensions further developed between leaders and the church, for messages such as “equality before God” went against traditional social systems, exciting the slave population.<sup>66</sup> At Oboso, Bishop Crowther condemned the practice of burying important men with slaves. In addition to these encroachments, indigenous religious practices were not giving in under the pressure, but were rather still on the rise.<sup>67</sup> It is also noteworthy that while the missions had expanded into towns including Asaba, Bonny, and Brass, they were not by any means a great success when it came to spreading religion. Congregations made up small proportions of town populations. In the mid-1880s, the Church Missionary Society had a congregation of four

---

<sup>63</sup> Epelle, *The Church in the Niger Delta*, p. 36. Quoted in Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 51.

<sup>64</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 65.

<sup>67</sup> Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 51.

hundred in Onitsha, while the population there was ten to fifteen thousand.<sup>68</sup> In Asaba, the mission had “some fifty or eighty humble worshippers.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the impact of Christianity on Nigerian societies was minimal. Many of the traditional, indigenous practices remained in place.

By 1900, the missionary influence was an extensive. Increasingly aggressive policies by the turn of the century caused many Nigerians to no longer view missionaries as potential allies in the fight against hostile neighbors. Rather, the church was seen as threatening to their ways of life by undermining culture and tradition. There are numerous accounts of mission-associated buildings being vandalized or destroyed, and Christian worshippers being taunted or threatened. While British economic encroachment gave Nigerians reason to fear for the economic well-being, Nigerians associated missionary activity as undermining and destructive to their very traditions. This was a less “practical” worry, but an equally if not more influential concern.

It was primarily this theme in the group dynamic – the threat of cultural subjugation – that exemplified the role that missions played in instigating colonial violence at the turn of the century. Missions also enjoyed, however limited, military-backing from merchants. In addition to their close proximity to one another, the two interests “coalesced”. That is, they were viewed as a singular group from the perspective of many Nigerians. Such an entanglement served to further fan the flames of Nigerian resistance, because if either missionaries or merchants irritated locals, both parties would bear the blame, furthering distrust and causing violence.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> CMS G3/A3/1885/23, Niger Mission statistics, 1883. Quoted in Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 103.

<sup>69</sup> *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1879, 230. Quoted in Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 64.

<sup>70</sup> See Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, pp. 261-262; Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 102; Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 51; Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 67.

## NIGERIA

In the context of the violence witnessed in Southern Nigeria at the turn of the century, there are comparatively fewer interests within the Nigerian side that can be explicitly defined at the outset. For the structure of this thesis, two primary groups suffice: traders and middlemen, and common inhabitants and their rulers. However, these interests have notable dynamics within themselves, such as inter-ethnic rivalries. These relationships play an equally, if not more important role, in explaining the colonial violence that materialized, but are more accurately defined on a case by case basis, up front.

### *Traders and Middlemen*

Prior to the British arrival inland, Nigerian commerce centered on local markets, but trading routes also played an important role in the economy. It was along these trading routes that vital goods such as palm oil (largely on the water) and slaves (on land) were transported. Luxury goods from longer distances, such as ivory, also followed some of these routes. Slave trading ceased between Britain and Nigeria in 1807 when it was abolished, but internal slave trading among Nigerian communities continued throughout the century. Slaves were useful in this economy because they could be used to transport and produce other goods that the Europeans demanded. They were also significantly cheaper now, as prices dropped significantly when the British left the market.<sup>71</sup>

While the economy was centered on local production and markets, some middlemen and traders who focused on the trading of palm oil and slaves became quite

---

<sup>71</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, pp. 62-63, 75.

wealthy. The cities through which this trade flowed also grew powerful and influential. Arochukwu, for example, was a slave trading capital.<sup>72</sup> Aboh and Brass benefited tremendously from the palm oil trade.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, a number of politically powerful Nigerian leaders were involved with trade at some level, often being merchants themselves. These men had a significant stake in their trade interests, as it combined their economic and political livelihood, as well as the security of their town or city.

When foreign traders entered Nigerian territory, the role of the middleman was cut out. Steamboats made goods much more accessible and mobile. The practice of “tapping” – referring to British merchants seizing goods upriver before they could get to the middlemen – became increasingly problematic.<sup>74</sup> British merchants began to establish more permanent settlements in towns, and the economic encroachment heightened tensions between communities and local traders. There was substantial conflict of interest. Towns sometimes had motivations to welcome British trade. It was viewed as an opportunity for prosperity and security.<sup>75</sup> However, Nigerian traders had their own markets which were until recently under their sole possession. Local rulers had to take this into consideration as well. Sometimes these leaders were powerful merchants themselves, and would instead of cooperating try to fight off the British advance. Uzoigwe puts forth the notion that Nigerians were either collaborators or resisters, in a nonzero-sum or a zero-sum game (respectively).<sup>76</sup> This depended heavily on the trade consideration.

---

<sup>72</sup> William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwo'ra and Bi'Nue (Commonly known as the Niger and Tsadda) in 1854* (London: John Murray, 1856), pp. 309-310. Quoted in Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 73.

<sup>74</sup> Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*, p. 206.

<sup>75</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>76</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 91.

To illustrate the power, influence, and significance of these Nigerian merchants in the colonial context, it is useful to observe the often-referenced cases of King Jaja of Opobo, and Nana Olomu of the Itsekiri. Because both had similar experiences, only Nana will be brought out in detail (and more so in chapter IV). The episode highlights the importance of economic interests. What should be noted about Jaja's story is that it illustrates, perhaps more so than Nana's, the unfair treatment of Nigerian rulers by British merchants and authority. Jaja was a victim of unfair treaty-making and a hostile takeover that he could not prevent, despite being acutely aware and defensive of his sovereignty.<sup>77</sup> He knew exactly what he was doing, what he needed to protect, and what agreements he could afford. This did not matter; the British used Jaja's enemies against him, and framed him so that he would be isolated from any support.<sup>78</sup>

Circa 1894 Nana was an economic giant, controlling trade on the Benin River.<sup>79</sup> Nana's business organization operated principally as a monopoly, allowing him to place embargos that had serious economic effects up and down the river. His associates were also responsible for seizing the property of potential clients who dealt with middlemen other than Nana. As early as the late 1880s the Britain began maintaining a keen eye on him. Nana had begun to intimidate Nigerians in his markets into not trading with British merchants. Officers urged Nana to allow for "free trade" and threats were made, such as potentially removing Nana from his governor office (to which Britain had approved his appointment) if he did not end an embargo in 1887.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 154.

<sup>78</sup> Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 89.

<sup>79</sup> Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977), pp. 45-46.

<sup>80</sup> FO.2/64. British Consulate – Old Calabar, February 24, 1887. Quoted in J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984), pp. 75-76.



In the years leading up to 1894, Nana deliberately ignored British requests for talks and agreements, and his associates continued to disrupt and ignore British trade interests. Ultimately, the British attacked Nana at Ebrohemie in August of 1894. He was subsequently captured and brought to trial, and charged with crimes including “[acting] in opposition to the British Consular officers...and not tak[ing] their advice on matters relating to...the general progress of civilization”<sup>81</sup>. Nana’s defense at his trial rested on blaming rivals for the events that transpired.<sup>82</sup> Britain had also “cultivated collaborators among [Nana’s] enemies”<sup>83</sup> to battle his economic power, illustrating British expansion exacerbating already existing ethnic divisions. For traders like Nana, the British were viewed as a direct threat. For towns and Nana’s rivals, the British presence may have appeared as less of a danger, and cooperation may have seemed beneficial. These group interactions drove the eventual displacement of Nana and indirectly led to Britain’s deep entrenchment in Southern Nigeria.

In summary, the late 1800s Southern Nigeria middlemen and traders were in dire straits. British merchants were encroaching on trading routes. Powerful Nigerian traders became targets in the interest of British commerce. Resistance to economic domination was stamped out when necessary through treaties, violence, or both. Middlemen were simply no longer needed, and the effects of this went past the individuals. Many towns were supported in part by these middlemen, and were now suffering an economic drop-off. The main role of the Nigerian merchants at the turn of the century in the context of group dynamics was that they were a direct obstacle to Britain’s goals – the aims of both

---

<sup>81</sup> FO.2/64. The Consular Court for the District of Old Calabar; Held at the British Consulate General under the Africa Order in Council 1889 – November 30<sup>th</sup> 1894. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 85.

<sup>82</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 95.

<sup>83</sup> Uzoigwe, *The Age of Salisbury*, p. 96.

the Royal Niger Company (commerce), and the government (commerce and development). Thus, they were at the forefront of many episodes of violence, and were forced to choose sides – to fight against Britain, or to work in cooperation at the expense of a neighbor or former ally. Such relationships are illustrated in the subsequent chapters.

### *Nigerian Leaders and Inhabitants – Political, Economic, and Societal Perspectives*

Anene states that “it is misleading to generalise” about the people of Southern Nigeria before British intervention.<sup>84</sup> It is important to recognize this, especially in light of the fact that what follows is only a light sketch of the situation in the mid to late 1800s. However, in the interest of keeping in line with the broad evaluation in this study, I hope to paint an accurate and useful picture in so few words, and that it will serve its purpose without any distortion.

Nigerian states developed based on their resources and environments among various linguistic groups. Large city-states included western Itsekiri towns such as Ebrohemie, Warri, and Sapele. Brass and Akassa, for example, were developed on the Niger Delta under the Ijaw. The Efik people founded such settlements as Henshaw Town and Duke Town.<sup>85</sup> Such city-states were at the epicenter of the British advance into Nigeria. Relationships among British and Nigerian interests developed in these places such as these.

A few notes about the connectedness of the people. Nigerian cities and towns in the nineteenth century engaged in numerous commercial activities. A large part of this activity included the slave trade, both before and after Britain’s abolition. But many other

---

<sup>84</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9. For a detailed discussion of these linguist groups and their influences, see the chapter “The Traditional Structure of Indigenous Society”.

goods were bartered and traded. Meat and fish, chickens, beans, fruits, and nuts were common commodities. Such goods were traded at markets, which also served as social centers.<sup>86</sup> Nigerians were aware of contemporary issues surrounding their communities. Word of mouth certainly brought news of any significant events, and such communication likely aided in the spread of anti-British sentiment in later years. The Igbo people traded with other ethnic groups, as well as outside of their locales; especially with the North.<sup>87</sup> The ethnic groups and towns to the south of the Igbo were equally involved with extensive trade, being on the coast and the waterways. From this it can be gathered that while the towns and ethnic groups were patchwork in Southern Nigeria, they were nevertheless quite connected with one another, especially from a commercial perspective.

The Nigerian political system was relatively localized, and hierarchies were also rather fluid. The House system for instance was a social structure that was a trading association of a leader and others below him, all the way down to slave. However, it was not impossible for a slave to work his way up to a “chief”.<sup>88</sup> Many towns were made up of these Houses. Other towns had varying social and political structures, but the significant point here is that Nigerians were not united under one political authority. There were a number of towns and city-states. As such, there was a number of varying political systems. Moreover, power was not necessarily defined by how far a town’s political system extended. Rather, informal influence was the important factor. A prime example of such influence concerns religion and the Arochukwu. The Long Juju oracle

---

<sup>86</sup> Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> Captain John Adams, *Remarks on the Counter Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo: Including Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants* (London: Whittaker, 1823), p. 131. Quoted in Nwabara, *Iboland*, p. 22.

<sup>88</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 8-10.

provided the Aro with significant political influence throughout the hinterland, despite not having any formal legislative bodies placed within their neighbors' communities.<sup>89</sup> There was less emphasis on formal offices, powers, and laws than there was in Great Britain. The Igbo represent this well, especially because their community's organization "baffle[d] British agents".<sup>90</sup> When Britain placed "warrant chiefs" in charge of communities, "...it was bound to produce an air of artificiality which contributed substantially to the disintegration of traditional Ibo society."<sup>91</sup>

Nigerian society, as it pertained to the Southern portion of the country and especially the coast, was a collage of people. They were (and still are) of different ethnic origins and linguist groups. However, Nigerians were connected commercially, by rivalry, or by influence (such as religion). The importance of the common Nigerian in regard to group dynamics was that their intricacies, which go much deeper than the survey that has just been provided, were not recognized sufficiently by the encroaching British traders, missionaries, or government.<sup>92</sup> Britain had little if any understanding of the political structure of towns and thus, among other reasons, was ill-equipped to handle the administration of the colony in 1900. Furthermore, Nigerian rivalries and competition across the South created the opportunity for Britain to exploit such divisions. This made conquest an easier task, as individuals and communities could be played against one another (with or without prompting).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

---

<sup>89</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The following chapters trace the important points of interaction and friction among the aforementioned groups in three case studies. To untangle this web of relationships and pinpoint critical junctures is a complicated endeavor. However, when done carefully, it brings valuable insight into understanding contributing factors to colonial violence in Southern Nigeria at the turn of the century. The dynamics that surface throughout the thesis in regard to the groups delineated above include, among others: the British merchant presence exacerbating and taking advantage of Nigerian divisions; the Royal Niger Company remaining focused on profit and becoming involved in a number of conflicts, intertwining itself with other groups acting on the situation; a detachment between Whitehall and the men on the spot; the general disposition of the British agents stationed in Nigeria; London's unfamiliarity with Nigeria and resulting misperceptions and mistakes (largely regarding political assumptions); pressures on Nigerian merchants to choose allegiances; and missionaries undermining Nigerian cultural traditions and becoming entangled with merchant interests. Such dynamics are rooted in the inherent characteristics of the many distinct interests present in Southern Nigeria at the turn of the century, and served to drive colonial violence throughout the history.

## CHAPTER II: THE EKUMEKU MOVEMENT

Interactions among the various interests in Southern Nigeria are illustrated on a finer scale in a number of violent episodes that took place in early twentieth century. One such episode concerns perhaps the strongest resistance mounted against the British invasion in Nigerian history: that of the Ekumeku Society (the *Otu Ekwunokwu*).<sup>1</sup> In the Ekumeku story, dynamics among missionaries, merchants, government officials, and Nigerians consistently drove events through misperceptions, converging and diverging goals, and detachment and coalescence. Missionary actions forced the hand of the Royal Niger Company, bringing merchants into direct conflict with Igbuzo and Issele. Merchant actions and perceptions of their intentions led missionaries to conduct themselves in a more aggressive manner, further encouraging the Ekumeku rebellion. And Whitehall's detachment allowed for the "native" court system, an embodiment of British interests,<sup>2</sup> which served as a primary cause of the war in 1904. The nature of group dynamics in the Ekumeku case serve to both explain the events that transpired as well as offer plausible reasons as to why the Ekumeku were so successful as a resistance movement. Moreover, two prominent historians' contrasting viewpoints may also be reconciled in light of this framework.

### BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS

The Ekumeku movement originated in the Igbo town of Igbuzo. After some Igbo men put up a small-scale resistance against the Royal Niger Company in 1888, they

---

<sup>1</sup> Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Alluding to this point, Philip A. Igbafe, "Western Ibo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement, 1898-1911," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): p. 458.

“realized that...they could not [overcome the British] unless they pooled their resources.”<sup>3</sup> Local leaders then began to congregate and turn youth clubs into militant warrior clubs. The clubs met in secret, discussing the threat of British subjugation. The Society grew as they recruited more members from outside Igbuzo. More local leaders were willing to join the movement after the British conquest of Benin, as a distinct pattern of British violence and domination began to emerge.<sup>4</sup> Town security became a primary issue. Such concerns, noted earlier, often resulted in fragmentation – a lack of cooperation among Nigerian towns, inviting merchants and missionaries at the expense of their neighbors.<sup>5</sup> But in the Ekumeku case, the British threat had a more positive effect: young people in many Igbo towns banded together.

Violence was born at Issele in 1898. Conflict began when the king accepted missionaries into the town without consulting advisers or other local leaders. When Father Zappa of the Roman Catholic mission went to see Obi Egbuna about establishing a church presence in Issele, the Obi exemplified the effects of the coalescence of British groups in Nigeria throughout the century:

Listen, white man! The battle which the English waged against Asaba makes me hesitate. I know you are not a soldier and that you have brought the word of God, but that notwithstanding, the white man frightens me.<sup>6</sup>

The Catholic mission was eventually granted access to Issele, perhaps because Father Zappa talked to the Obi’s mother, who was sympathetic to his cause.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent events echo what had happened in the case of Eyo Honesty in 1850 – the door was open, and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), pp. 101-102.

<sup>6</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

reforms flowed in.<sup>8</sup> Father Zappa asked that Obi Egbuna cease a traditional religious ceremony. The Obi obeyed, then freed his slaves. Locals deemed this unacceptable because many leaders in the region owned slaves, as it was a traditional and widespread practice. Egbuna had “single-handedly abolished” an important custom.<sup>9</sup> The “petty chiefs” (lesser leaders) then staged a rebellion, bringing supporters in from nearby rival Igbuzo.

Missionaries supported Issele’s king, and when Igbuzo warriors came into Issele, Father Zappa asked the Royal Niger Company to intervene.<sup>10</sup> The Royal Niger Company then attacked Igbuzo, drawing the warriors back to Igbuzo and away from Issele. Anene states that it was here that “a new enemy was added from the standpoint of the [conservative Nigerians].”<sup>11</sup> The Royal Niger Company promptly burnt much of Igbuzo. The expedition was met with tough resistance, as is reflected by British ammunition use: “7pdr. Guns – 62 rounds; Maxim gun – 2,346; Snider – 19,598...”<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant Festing and Governor of the Royal Niger Company William Wallace forced the terms of surrender that included the following: abolition of human sacrifice, opening roads to everyone, missionary buildings in three Igbuzo towns, and “one king with a council of twelve would be appointed and be responsible to the government, instead of the two hundred chiefs then reigning”.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>10</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 241.

<sup>12</sup> WO 32/8503, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1898. Quoted in J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984), p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> PRO, F02/178, *The Daily Graphic*, February 7, 1898 (extract). Quoted in Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 87.



The remarkable thing about the Ekumeku when compared to other resistance was that it was not stifled by an initial attack. Rather, the Society regrouped and gained more strength and support. The Ekumeku began to employ guerilla tactics at Issele, targeting Father Rousselet who was head of the Roman Catholic Mission there.<sup>14</sup> Another Ekumeku target was the Roman Catholic Mission church at Illah. One of the grievances against this church was that it was built in close proximity to a juju house. Attacks followed, but the church was not moved to a new location. It was damaged in October of 1898. After this, missionaries at Illah appealed to the Royal Niger Company again,<sup>15</sup> which sent troops, again. This led to another Ekumeku assault during which the mission at Illah was entirely destroyed. But the rebellion was eventually put down. At the end of the conflict, the Royal Niger Company forced Igbuzo to accept a mission station, and their leaders were ordered to protect the priests. This opened up the surrounding area to the church: after the “insurrection” was put down, missionary activity increased dramatically in towns such as Issele, Ebu, and Ezi.<sup>16</sup> What is evident from the aforementioned violence is that the beginnings of perhaps the most successful and influential Nigerian resistance toward British colonial rule grew out of distinct group relationships: largely among Nigerians, missionaries, government (lack thereof), and merchants.

First, the Obi’s remarks to Father Zappa suggest that Nigerian leaders did in fact recognize a distinction between British interests. The apparent group coalescence did not render them blind. Nevertheless the phenomenon has strong implications, because the

---

<sup>14</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> SMA, Strub, Folio 14. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 241.

Obi ignored such distinctions anyway. All British interests were encompassed by the term “white man” or something similar.<sup>17</sup> This general “xenophob[ia]”<sup>18</sup> played a critical role in the Ekumeku movement, because the overall fear toward Britain disposed the Igbo to be more likely to organize attacks against them. Earlier military conflicts by merchants drove Nigerians into a sort of survival mode, laying the foundation for coordinated resistance. This was in addition to an ethnic predisposition: that as a result of their social structure where no one man is supreme, many Igbo were quite individualistic, averse to subordination. Therefore the Igbo viewed the imposition of British authority with particular disdain.<sup>19</sup>

Also embedded in the Obi’s remarks is that the conquest of Asaba, like that of Benin, was a pivotal point in the development of the Ekumeku movement.<sup>20</sup> The Royal Niger Company’s exercise of its unregulated power, infringing on traditional cultural practices, had led to this conquest. Such actions can be attributed at least in part to the British government. Even in the 1880s, Whitehall had yet to make a firm decision on how to govern Nigeria and allowed a profit-seeking adventurer in Goldie to make his own rules. This resulted in military action when trading interests were at stake. Had the British government disallowed or policed this, or perhaps adopted an official policy at an earlier date, episodes such as the conquest of Asaba might have been avoided or mitigated. Considering that London was eventually forced into administrative rule anyway, the episodes concerning the Royal Niger Company were, in some sense, a preventable

---

<sup>17</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), pp. 261-262. Ayandele makes a slight reference to this.

<sup>18</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 262. Asiegbu is referring to Philip A. Igbafe’s more general explanation for the Ekumeku Society’s resistance.

<sup>19</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 458.

<sup>20</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 84.

tragedy. Lack of action, or detachment on the part of Whitehall, is therefore also responsible for the initial development of colonial violence in the Ekumeku episode. The violence established by a merchant interest that London consciously allowed to control Nigeria played a significant role in banding together future Ekumeku communities under mutual concern.

A particularly enlightening dynamic is contained in the Royal Niger Company's terms of surrender forced upon Igbuzo. The document's contents illustrate a critical link between merchants and missionaries. At Issele the Company rushed to the aid of the missionaries and imposed surrender terms on their behalf. These two interests were separate in their ultimate goals of conversion/education and commerce. But here their temporary interests converged. For instance: what motives did the Royal Niger Company have to abolish human sacrifice? Why was this included in the document? One possibility is that the church demanded it as part of the terms; and the Company was simply looking to end the conflict – i.e. they did not really care about whether or not human sacrifice was abolished at Igbuzo, or about anything in the treaty for that matter. However, this seems implausible. The fourth term of agreement was a reorganization of the local government – replacing two hundred Nigerian leaders with one king and a council. The presence of this more political term suggests that it was not only the demands of the church that were being outlined in the terms of surrender. The Royal Niger Company was also placing some of its own demands on Igbuzo, and this political term was one of them. The Company desired stability, for instability adversely affected trade. The fourth term attempts to cultivate such stability by declaring political domination. It is also likely that the second term – the opening of roads – was approved for similar reasons. Throughout

the late nineteenth century, merchants constantly complained about trade routes being obstructed, such as embargos from traders like Jaja, or violence that blocked access to markets. A general “opening” would have alleviated such a concern.

Given the Company’s heavy interest in the contents of this document, it can be argued that the Royal Niger Company did indeed care about human sacrifice (but not for altruistic reasons). Where missionaries were in control of indigenous practices, it was less likely that there would be trade impediments. Trading routes would remain open for longer, and merchants could move freely from town to town if Nigerian society could be “reformed” by church groups. Thus it is seen that out of the Igbuzo conflict, merchant-oriented impositions were born both as a result, and for the benefit, of missionary activity. This illustrates a convergence of aims between two interests that ultimately had vastly diverging goals. The actions of missions here affected the actions of the merchants – if the missionaries were successful, the traders would theoretically increase their profits. And if the merchants were successful (in this case, militarily), then the missionaries could achieve their aims with a sense of security and a threat of force. It was this intersection of goals between two otherwise distinct groups that characterized the beginnings of the Ekumeku. This momentary convergence, however, only temporarily solved the issue at hand. Eventually, it was this temporary convergence that contributed to future violence and the increasing power of the Igbo resistors. The lack of total cooperation between British merchants and missionaries – in stark contrast to the cooperation among Ekumeku members – served to antagonize the Igbo people, but also render the British weak enough so that they were unable to effectively put down the revolt.

Illustrative of this lack of cooperation was an observation made about the Royal Niger Company troops at Illah in 1898: “Father J. J. Hilliard claimed that the company’s soldiers did not go to Illah to fight but were merely ‘called in to fire their guns on the town just to show what would be done if law and order were not quickly restored.’”<sup>21</sup> While this is reflective of the Royal Niger Company’s desire for stability, it is also representative of the Company’s relative apathy toward the missionaries. Ultimately, the Royal Niger Company did not care if a mission was destroyed, as long as stability could be maintained. The Company was not made up of crusaders; they were profiteers engaged in a business venture. Ohadike also makes note that the Company was possibly called in to reinforce their own defenses, not those of the mission.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Father Zappa directly accused the Company directly of not providing adequate protection. Major Arthur G. Leonard of the Company responded by saying that despite the fact that the missions were given land by the Royal Niger Company’s earlier agreement forced upon Igbuzo, it was not a guarantee of protection.<sup>23</sup> When the Company traveled to Issele to check up on the safety of Father Rousselet who had missed a roll call, their actions did not lend any particular support to the missions. Rather, they simply marched around the town to demonstrate a show of force.<sup>24</sup> It was as if the Company was using the missionary’s plight as a pretext to advance its own interests.

Clearly, the Royal Niger Company had its limits in how far it wished to cooperate with the church. These limits worked to actually further the cause of the Ekumeku. The Company’s rescue at Issele in 1898 and the subsequent terms of surrender gave the

---

<sup>21</sup> SMA, 3 B 45, p. 19. Quoted in Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> PRO, C0520/3/265/35286 of October 12, 1900, report on claim of French Roman Catholic Mission. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> SMA, Strub, Folio 15. Quoted in Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 90.

church confidence as well as new opportunities to develop their missionary enterprise throughout the region. However this was not entirely backed by the Company, who continued to engage in only limited displays of force. There was no real policing in these towns on behalf of the missions. Missionaries felt supported by the Company more so than the Company was interested in supporting to the missions. This misunderstanding played a significant role in allowing the destruction of the mission station at Illah, and provided for the growth of the Ekumeku. There was enough antagonism by the missions to create resistance, but not enough military force from the Royal Niger Company to keep this resistance at bay. One of the primary complaints against the Roman Catholic Mission was its lack of respect for the juju shrine, and missionaries refused to alleviate the problem. Part of this may have been because they believed that the Royal Niger Company supported them more heavily than was the reality; after all, the Company had just imposed surrender terms that abolished human sacrifice and allowed for missionary expansion. The Royal Niger Company's apathy toward the church is epitomized in the case where they collected fines from Nigerian towns for the damages that resulted from an attack. The Company did not compensate the missions when they realized that they had not collected enough money to pay for the costs of extracting the penalties.<sup>25</sup>

Even when the mission appealed to the government, it was turned away. The Colonial Office sided with the Company, stating that the attacks were just a natural occurrence in an ongoing struggle. The detachment of the administration is clearly seen here in that that it did not want to become financially responsible for the actions of the Company either – that is, if the Royal Niger Company began asking the government for

---

<sup>25</sup> PRO, C0520/3/270/36867, November 26, 1900. Quoted in Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 91.

compensation in the event of a military clash.<sup>26</sup> This dynamic of government detachment remains significant. It put the Royal Niger Company in charge, and forced the missions into a subordinate position. Missionaries did not have their own means of protection, so they had to rely on the merchants. The Royal Niger Company had little compulsion to help the church except when it advanced its own interests. London could have enforced more cooperation to some degree – such as threatening the Company’s charter. But by the late 1800s, with merchants having de facto political control,<sup>27</sup> it was not to Britain’s immediate advantage to focus heavily on mission stations. The Company was fulfilling its intended role – claiming Nigeria for Britain. This lack of unity between the merchants and missionaries left the door open for resistance to spawn.

The ongoing supremacy of the merchants over the missionaries meant that the Company dictated the course of events. The government did little to stop this. This was a problem, because the initial targets of the Ekumeku were the missions – not the merchants, and not the government. Had more concern been given toward the Catholic mission’s cause, the Ekumeku may have been stymied. Consider: if the Ekumeku directed their efforts at the Royal Niger Company, one could be sure that the Company would have squashed the rebellion more “completely”, perhaps by maintaining a prominent and extended military presence. And the government would have been much more concerned with the Company’s fate (because in their fate rested Britain’s stake in Nigeria) than to simply refuse explicit support like Whitehall did to the missionaries after the Igbuzo conflict in 1898.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1956), p. 213.

Therefore, the causes of the Ekumeku movement are directly related to group relationships – primarily between merchants and missionaries, but also with regard to British government detachment. It is worth noting that historian Philip Igbafe considers the root aim of the early Ekumeku to have been to rid Asaba of the Royal Niger Company. This was largely because many of the societies that made up the early *otu ochichi* groups were formed in response to the Royal Niger Company's actions.<sup>28</sup> It is true that the Ekumeku's organizational aspects began as a reaction against merchants. Initial cooperation among Ekumeku members was brought on by the Company's activities and its perceived threat to Igbo society. But it is also true that Ekumeku activity and legacy was sparked initially by missionary activity.

The *otu ochichi* violence began directly because of religious factors, as outlined by Ohadike – the establishment of a mission and the threat of the undermining of traditional practices. The violent clashes with the Royal Niger Company materialized because the Company came to the aid of missionaries. To downplay the role of the missions would be a mistake, for they were influential since the beginning of the British presence in the middle of the century. In essence, neither distinct interest can be given full credit. The Ekumeku required both British interests to prosper. The movement was the result of the combination of merchant and missionary activities, and a convergence of their goals. It was in the interests of both the merchants and missionaries to put down any opposition, but for entirely different reasons. This is what opened the possibility for a prolonged rebellion. Ekumeku targets recognized the connectedness of the merchants and missionaries as well:

---

<sup>28</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 443.



Mission stations were deliberately attacked because British troops often used them as camping sites. The missionaries themselves often evacuated the missions before the arrival of troops. This was proof that there was effective liaison between missionaries and administrative officers in the war of extermination against the Ekumeku movement.<sup>29</sup>

These early events illustrate that the beginnings of the Ekumeku movement grew out of distinct group dynamics, largely among Nigerian, missionary, government (lack thereof), and merchant. The relationships drove events and allowed for resistance to continue.

### RETURN<sup>30</sup> AND A ROLE SUBSTITUTION

The next wave of Ekumeku activity began about 1902. Employing guerilla war tactics, it was here that the Society became known as their oft-referenced name “Ekumeku”, from “*Otu Ekwunokwu*”.<sup>31</sup> Again, the movement was sparked by Christianity. The Ekumeku expressed a number of grievances with the missionary activity in the region. Conversions ruined the influence of local customs, and forced one to forsake their ancestors. Church workers and priests were also responsible for the destruction of sacred cultural property, including juju shrines. These attacks were sometimes unprovoked. As a result, the Ekumeku acted out, threatening and sometimes killing converts (i.e. their own people). British troops under Widenham Fosbery were sent to Asaba in December of 1902 to address outbreaks of violence at Onicha-Olona, Ezi, and Ogwashi-Ukwu. By April, the violence was mostly suppressed. The ramifications included increased Igbo distrust toward the British government. Official

---

<sup>29</sup> Enugu Archives, I.D. CSO 8/11. Father Zappa’s letter dated 27 Jan. 1911 to Egerton claiming indemnity for the mission house destroyed at Ogwashi-Uku in Dec. 1909. Quoted in Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 450.

<sup>30</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

administrators had supplanted the role of the Royal Niger Company from the 1898 conflicts, and the Ekumeku had found yet another enemy.<sup>32</sup>

The dynamic between the merchants and the missionaries evolved to a dynamic between the missionaries and the government. The British government supplanted the Royal Niger Company's role by using military force when necessary to maintain stability, which also happened to work to the direct benefit of the mission stations. In fact, with the Ekumeku movement under military pressure from the British government, Nigerian participation in Christianity dramatically increased in worship and school attendance.<sup>33</sup> In his article *Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915*, author F. K. Ekechi asserts that it was not until the intervention of the government, and by extension the more concentrated effort to politically dominate Nigeria society, that the mission stations and the church truly began to prosper.<sup>34</sup> Oddly enough, when the British government began its administration in January 1900, their support for the missionaries was on par with that of what the Royal Niger Company's had been. H. C. Gallwey warned missionaries in June of 1900 that religious endeavors that did not take place under the protection of government troops were done at the risk of those involved. The Colonial Office also questioned "whether Foreign Missionaries should be allowed in the British territories at all", in light of the dangerous situation in the Ika country.<sup>35</sup> Yet again missionaries were at the mercy of a group that did not have a

---

<sup>32</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, pp. 99-105, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 245.

<sup>34</sup> F. K. Ekechi, "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): pp. 103-104.

<sup>35</sup> CO 520/2, Gallwey to CO no. 166, 12 June 1900, and Minutes by Sir Ralph Moor. Quoted in Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 242-243.

strong interest in their success. Cooperation was lacking. And these two groups again had diverging goals. Predictably, war broke out between 1904 and 1905.

#### THE PINNACLE OF RESISTANCE AND THE “NATIVE” COURT QUANDRY

Ohadike defines the events of 1904-1905 as the Ekumeku War – perhaps the climax of the Ekumeku Society’s existence. The causes of this episode have been attributed to largely to the role of British “native” courts, whose extensive application was the primary change in administration when Whitehall took over in 1900. Such courts were headed by “warrant chiefs” to enforce labor laws that ultimately upended traditional slavery and customary political powers. Oftentimes these “warrant chiefs”, who were chosen by ignorant British officers, were not leaders in the traditional Nigerian political structure. This furthered tensions and concerns regarding political domination.<sup>36</sup> The inexperienced “warrant chiefs” also illustrate another division within Nigerian society. These officials were resisted or viewed as traitors by former leaders. The ultimate Ekumeku War was touched off in an effort by the British government to rescue said “warrant chiefs” who were awaiting execution at Onicha-Olona. The presence of government soldiers brought about attacks in towns such as Ezi, Ubulu-Ukwu, and Issele.<sup>37</sup> The London Gazette reported the military actions taken against the Ekumeku in so many words:

Operation No. 6 was undertaken with a view to suppressing a rising among the natives of the Asaba Hinterland. Under pressure of a secret Society known as the ‘Ekumeku’ or ‘Silent Ones,’ several mission stations had been destroyed and numerous friendly natives murdered...A force...left Asaba on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January...By the 25<sup>th</sup> of April over 300 of

---

<sup>36</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

<sup>37</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, pp. 113-114, 117.

the 'Ekumeku' Society had been captured, and have since been tried by the [native] courts.<sup>38</sup>

By 1904 the Ekumeku were attacking both court buildings and mission stations in numerous towns including Onitsha-Olona, Illah, Ezi, and Atuma. Moreover, these actions were not taken merely against the British. African Christians, for instance, were also targets.<sup>39</sup> The Ekumeku were after everything that seemed threatening to them; Igbafe states that after 1900, "In a sense, the Ekumeku Society can correctly be described as an 'anti-European club'."<sup>40</sup>

Supposed leaders of the resistance were jailed and the "native" courts were shut down, oddly cited as a show of punishment (i.e. Nigerians did not "deserve"<sup>41</sup> them). Anene asserts what other historians have observed as well – that shutting down the courts only illustrated how much the government misunderstood the Ekumeku and Nigerian grievances.<sup>42</sup> This uprising illustrates a number of key points in light of group relationships, including some consequences of British detachment, causes of the conflict, and possible explanations for the Ekumeku's success. Evaluating the episode in the framework of group dynamics also yields a reconciliation of two prominent historians' contrasting viewpoints.

What is important about the war in 1904 and how it differs from 1898 is that the British government was now officially involved in Nigeria. What changes were seen in the colonial landscape? The extensiveness of the "native" courts is the most obvious. The relative detachment from previous decades of merchant control under Palmerston,

---

<sup>38</sup> The London Gazette, 25 August 1905, 5832.

<sup>39</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 244.

<sup>40</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 444.

<sup>41</sup> CSO 1/13, no. 57, Encl. 4. Quoted in Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 244.

<sup>42</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 245.

followed by immediate administration in 1900 (after some preparations in 1891 and throughout the decade), left Whitehall somewhat unfamiliar with how to handle the colonial situation. The courts therefore were viewed as extremely vital to British success: "...so much depends on native councils, who have, collectively to supply the want of strong native rulers. The work to be done by them, supported and encouraged by the district commissioners, is of the greatest importance to this Protectorate."<sup>43</sup> However, it was these very courts that led to the calamities in 1904 and 1905, and also serve to explain the zealous nature of the Ekumeku movement.<sup>44</sup>

Much of the tenacity of the Ekumeku can be attributed to the fact that the British government simply did not understand the political nature of the Asaba hinterland. When Divisional Commissioner Fosbery visited the region in 1902, he assumed that Nigerians were eager to work with the Europeans. He also assumed that the Nigerians were incapable of politically administering themselves. This was notion not unique to Fosbery, but was rather pervasive in British thought.<sup>45</sup> Such ideas likely stem from the history of inter-ethnic rivalries, which officials were keen to cite:

Speaking broadly the type of native to be dealt with is of a lower class than probably any other in British West Africa. Long before a European set foot in this Protectorate inter-tribal warfare had been waged on a very large scale. No one dominant power effected a conquest; a see-saw victory went on from week to week, and the intervals of peace must have been few and far between. The effect of this is seen here as elsewhere, in the survival of the fittest.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1903, General Observations*, 31 July 1904. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960*. (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899). East Ardsley, England: EP Microform, 1974. Microfilm.

<sup>44</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 262.

<sup>45</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 243.

<sup>46</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1903, General Observations*, 31 July 1904. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960*. (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899), 1974. Microfilm.

The fact that “no one dominant power effected a conquest” did not necessarily mean that there were not important, influential rulers that represented political leadership. And there actually were a number of important leaders in various towns that commanded this kind of power, which was being taken away by missionaries – especially in the area of Ekumeku activities.<sup>47</sup> Sadly, Fosbery and the rest of Britain did not understand this. Foreign notions of political rule did not sit well with the British, and this was one of the reasons that the “native” councils were put into place – to administer regions that in the British view had no suitable administration.<sup>48</sup> An observation from 1904 illustrates a promising view of these courts:

...over 16,000 civil and 4,903 criminal cases were disposed of in the Native Courts. The large number of cases dealt with indicates an increasing tendency on the part of the natives to refer their disputes to these Courts for decision instead of having recourse to the varied forms of trial by ordeal which formerly existed.<sup>49</sup>

The “warrant chief” component of these courts, however, proved to actually instigate the uprisings in 1904.

Continuing in the theme of detachment, it is interesting to note that the London Gazette description of the Ekumeku was one of its few references of the conflict. Other violent episodes, such as the Aro War, received much more attention. This would be expected, on the one hand, because the administration was much more heavily involved in the execution of the Aro expedition (i.e. it was a more “government-sponsored” undertaking. Ralph Moor had invested months into approval for a formal expedition from the Colonial Office, and budget concerns and the like had to be thoroughly addressed).

---

<sup>47</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 83.

<sup>48</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 11, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1904, Judicial Statistics: Native Courts. Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960.* (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899), 1974. Microfilm.

On the other hand, though, the Ekumeku posed a serious problem to British interests and mounted what was probably the most successful violent resistance against colonialism in Nigeria. To find such little reference about the Ekumeku in the Gazette further highlights Whitehall's detachment from the situation on the ground. London's unfamiliarity with the Nigerian political landscape, which allowed for the belief that a "native" court system could serve as an effective administrative tool, indirectly caused the Ekumeku resistance. The consequences of government detachment therefore appear quite serious.

There is a notion that the "native" courts, however, were not the ultimate catalyst of the Ekumeku War. Historian Philip Igbafe states:

If the Ekumeku outbreaks occasionally appeared to have connexions with native court functionaries and the destruction of native court buildings, it was not that the evils of the native court system caused the Ekumeku outbreaks, just as the establishment of mission stations did not cause the outbreaks, but that the native courts, the malpractices of the functionaries and the missions symbolized the British presence in a vivid manner.<sup>50</sup>

Igbafe has a point – that the Ekumeku were not entirely a response against a singular cause. But it is nevertheless important to distinguish from direct and indirect causation. The Ekumeku attacks were directly sparked as responses to particular events – be it the adoption of a mission or the British intervention to prevent the execution of "warrant chiefs". This was also true for the secondary movement that appeared in 1909. Without these explicit antagonists, the Ekumeku may not have materialized as they did. Anti-British sentiment would have been present among Igbo towns, but the scales may not have tipped into such organized violence. Igbafe makes a sound point regarding these feelings that encompassed the Society, and that they served to propel the Ekumeku. But he seems to be too keen on dismissing some fundamental events that simply cannot be

---

<sup>50</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 458.

ignored. Specific events regarding “native” courts played critical roles in fueling the revolts.

However it is important to note that Asiegbu’s dismissal of Igbafe’s assertions – that “native” courts were the definitive cause<sup>51</sup> – offer too narrow a picture of the events. One cannot ignore the general attitude of the Ekumeku at the time as a result of a culmination of the past. For without the anti-British aspect, the Ekumeku movement would not have been so widespread. Towns banded together under the fear of domination, not under the banner of opposing a specific missionary establishment. Nor did they erupt all at once under a singular protest of British intervention in “native” court matters. Obi Egbuna’s use of “white man” as an umbrella term illustrates that the Igbo viewed the British as a singular interest in regards to their threats to Igbo society.<sup>52</sup> This supports Igbafe’s anti-British notion, and indeed this played a role in the Ekumeku’s decisions to attack various British establishments (i.e. court and missionary buildings). For example, while the specific causes of the 1902 episode were missionary activities, “native” courts nevertheless bore a significant brunt of the attacks. In essence, the church caused the attacks but all British interests became targets on account of anti-British sentiment. While Asiegbu’s and Igbafe’s viewpoints differ, in the framework of the thesis the two can be reconciled.

The “native” courts were a natural embodiment of the dynamics among missionaries, government, and merchants, which Igbafe does seem to indicate somewhat in his article.<sup>53</sup> The administrative aspect of the courts – e.g. issuing rulings, replacing

---

<sup>51</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 262.

<sup>52</sup> Made slight reference to by E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), pp. 261-262.

<sup>53</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 458 (quoted on previous page).



indigenous political structures – represented political oppression that is largely attributable to the British government. That is, the strategy of administration that was brought extensively to Nigeria in 1900 after the Royal Niger Company’s charter was revoked. The courts also represented the merchants in that threats to their interests were addressed with military force. This paralleled the way in which the Royal Niger Company came to the aid of missionaries on account of the ulterior motive to protect trading interests. Finally, the courts exemplified the missionary practices in Southern Nigeria by culling traditional customs. The “native” court was the supreme form of group coalescence, which bred anti-British sentiment as well as directly instigated the Ekumeku war through its “high-handedness”<sup>54</sup>.

Igbafe may have alluded to this by stating that “the native courts, the malpractices of the functionaries and the missions symbolized the British presence in a vivid manner”<sup>55</sup>, but such a notion still does not completely resolve differences with Asiegbu’s views on causation. Applying group dynamics serves both historians’ assertions. In one sense the “native” courts were indeed a specific cause of the Ekumeku war in 1904. Field sources confirm their instigation of violence.<sup>56</sup> However, the very same “native” courts were also an effective incarnation of all of the long-term causes of the resistance, which explain Igbafe’s view of Igbo anti-British sentiment. Therefore, both historians are correct. The antagonizing actions of the courts were a summation of all past grievances, representing both a specific cause, and long-term causes. By inciting the Ekumeku, the courts were essentially bringing both themselves, and many years of fear, to bear on the

---

<sup>54</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 262.

<sup>55</sup> Igbafe, *Western Ibo Society*, p. 458.

<sup>56</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 262.

locals. Perhaps it was this release of pent-up injustice that made the Ekumeku Society's reaction and nature so resilient.

A much more observable reason for such resilience was their cooperation.<sup>57</sup> This deviation from the standard pattern of colonial violence and town relationships in Nigeria serves to partially explain the Ekumeku's success.<sup>58</sup> Most resistance movements undertaken by an oppressed society are not as coordinated, and the result is rather limited effectiveness:

Most forms of ["ever yday" peasant resistance] stop well short of outright collective defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on.<sup>59</sup>

The Ekumeku went past this, even though "...Formal, organized political activity, even if clandestine and revolutionary, is typically the preserve of the middle class and the intelligentsia..."<sup>60</sup> While it is also tempting to hypothesize that larger and more influential communities would offer even greater resistance against Britain, it is important to emphasize the uniqueness of the Ekumeku by noting that this was not the case.<sup>61</sup>

The Aro, for instance, were a powerful cultural and trading society that, while appearing formidable, collapsed under British pressures.<sup>62</sup> The influence of the Long Juju Shrine, as well as their wealthy middlemen who controlled the region's trade, gave the

---

<sup>57</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 9. Ohadike states that the success of African resistance movements often depended on cooperation, which involved pooling resources.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1985), p. xvi.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>61</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 17-18.

Aro a significant “image of strength”<sup>63</sup>. Aro men attacked Nigerian towns with British ties, and intimidated other communities into opposing British economic endeavors.<sup>64</sup> But ultimately the British had “imagined” an Aro empire that did not exist.<sup>65</sup> When Britain underwent a military expedition against Arochukwu in December of 1901, it turned out to be a quick war.<sup>66</sup> Such observations highlight the importance of cooperation when it pertained to resisting colonial rule. The relative success of colonial opposition could not be predicted based on the power of a city in the Nigerian political or economic structure. Cooperation, therefore – a staple of the Ekumeku movement – appears to be a pivotal cog in the workings of an effective resistance.<sup>67</sup>

What is also noteworthy in regards to causality, success, and cooperation is that British military expeditions continued to rouse local concerns.<sup>68</sup> This likely gelled Ekumeku communities together. A question to ask therefore, from the British perspective, is that if military endeavors had been kept to a minimum, could the genesis of the Ekumeku have been cut short? According to Ohadike, Ekumeku recruitment was not strong until after the fall of Benin.<sup>69</sup> As will be discussed later, the Benin expedition itself was probably a “colonial inevitability”<sup>70</sup>, so from the British perspective avoiding this would have been difficult. However, the nature of Benin’s conquest could not have been more disconcerting to neighboring communities. The actions of Consul-General Ralph Moor, and the expediency at which the expedition was given approval and

---

<sup>63</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 238.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>65</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 238.

<sup>66</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), pp. 57-58.

<sup>67</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 128. Isichei states that colonial boundaries continue to expand until they reach another colonial boundary.

commenced, was likely quite alarming to people who obtained knowledge of Benin's downfall. Given that the Igbo had put up with an already violent Royal Niger Company and were nevertheless still hesitant to engage in a coordinated resistance, the British may have been able to avoid the degree of cooperation seen in the Ekumeku movement if they had given a more pragmatic approach to Benin; i.e., had given the Igbo people less reason to be frightened for their immediate safety. From the British perspective, it is a question in hindsight that is worth considering, and can be applied to an overall evaluation of colonial violence. Many men stationed in Nigeria were chosen from army units, and not "likely to possess the temperament or the diplomatic finesse necessary for imposing political control on a complex society..."<sup>71</sup> Fear caused by repeated British military conquests likely promoted the cooperation that the Ekumeku exhibited and used to their advantage and success. Reducing this effect may have paid positive dividends for Britain's colonial goals.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The interactions among various interests in Southern Nigeria are illustrated in the resistance of the Ekumeku Society. In the Ekumeku story, dynamics among missionaries, merchants, government officials, and Nigerians consistently drove events through misperceptions, converging and diverging goals, and detachment and coalescence. Missionary actions affected merchant actions, and vice versa. The tenuousness of this relationship served to fuel the Ekumeku rebellion. And Whitehall's detachment allowed for the implementation of the "native" court system, an embodiment of British interests, which served as a primary cause of the war in 1904. Group dynamics serve to explain the

---

<sup>71</sup> Blyden, *West Africa before Europe* (London, 1905), p. 36. Quoted in Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 134.

events that transpired, offer plausible reasons as to why the Ekumeku were so successful, and reconcile the contrasting viewpoints of two historians.

### CHAPTER III: THE FALL OF BENIN

The Ekumeku were a unique occurrence in Southern Nigerian history, conducting a remarkably prolonged, coordinated, resistance against British rule. In contrast, many other British-Nigerian military engagements were one-sided. Many Nigerian towns succumbed to British punitive or military expeditions. These were carried out primarily for the sake of Britain's security and commerce, but additionally exhibited some humanitarian pretexts and undertones. Such expeditions were necessary from the British standpoint because some Nigerian towns, kingdoms, and communities were viewed as disruptive to trade and progress into the interior. Prominent Nigerians such as Nana of Olomu and King Jaja of Opobo engaged in commercial resistance that encouraged this kind of British military response. For instance, Britain accused Nana of "block[ing] trade and monopolis[ing] certain oil districts"<sup>1</sup>, and the conflict grew into the Ebrohemie War. With Britain's history of merchant rule and economic interests preceding political considerations, it comes as little surprise that such commercially obstructive actions led to conflict.

The Benin episode was one of these conflicts rooted in commercial considerations. Group dynamics played a significant role in the affair, out of which a number of significant themes arise: British unfamiliarity with the region led to critical misperceptions that indirectly led to the military expedition; divisions among Nigerians hindered Benin's ability to respond to British challenges; the cooperation of varying interests (merchant and government in particular) drove events; and Whitehall was divided between British agents in Nigeria (men on the spot) and officials back in London.

---

<sup>1</sup> George W. Neville, "Nanna Olomu of Benin," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 14, no. 54 (1915): p. 164.

Furthermore, a comparison of the Ekumeku movement and the Benin expedition yields intriguing observations that serve to explain the differences between the episodes (primarily in regard to the level of resistance seen in each). The main explanations here include cooperation, the specific interests acting on the situation, and the goal convergences/divergences of these interests.

#### BEGINNINGS OF THE BENIN EXPEDITION: COMMERCIAL FRICTIONS

The expedition against Oba Ovonramwen of Benin stemmed from British economic concerns. Britain was interested in the rubber from the forests surrounding Benin, and it was imperative that trade be established in the region for these resources to be extracted. Oba Ovonramwen, meanwhile, was exercising embargoes and imposing fees (“presents”).<sup>2</sup> Urhobo villages were making excuses to not trade with merchants. Agents blamed this commercial problem on Benin, citing that the Oba was forbidding commerce and was threatening to punish outlying towns. This created the springboard for the future overthrow of Ovonramwen. However, some Urhobo villages were quite welcoming and friendly to the British, offering gifts and entertainment.<sup>3</sup> This observation illustrates two important issues.

First, Benin was not all-powerful in the region, in the sense that it did not control commercial activity in every town within its reach. This notion is reflected in Uyilawa Usuanlele’s essay *Pawnship in Edo Society: From Benin Kingdom to Benin Province Under Colonial Rule*. In it, Usuanlele states that “[Benin’s] economy depended largely on

---

<sup>2</sup> Philip A. Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): p. 390. i.e. customs duties.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 189.

internal production and exchange, which was not heavily tied to supplying the European trade.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Richard Burton echoed this sentiment when he visited Benin in 1862: “...the natives seemed to care little for the suspension of trade. It became painfully evident that they could stand the ordeal better than we could.”<sup>5</sup> Even so, leading up to the military expedition, Consul-General Ralph Moor continually charged the Oba with a number of misdeeds, including many that regarded commerce.<sup>6</sup> Clearly these claims were exaggerated.<sup>7</sup> Second, the observation shows that the communities within the sphere of Benin influence were not united in their approach to handling the British. That is, there was no widespread, centralized Benin state. These divisions do not appear to be a result of inter-ethnic rivalries, but they do illustrate that there were not strong ties among these towns in regard to attitudes toward the foreigners. In obvious contrast to the Ekumeku, this dynamic partially served to doom Benin. Despite this lack of cohesion, the British continued to assume that Benin had a sort of evil grip on particular communities, frightening them from trading.<sup>8</sup> These misperceptions led to a treaty in 1892 that attempted to alleviate their commercial grievances.

#### THE TREATY OF 1892<sup>9</sup>

The foundations of the Benin conflict were laid by H. C. Gallwey, who in 1892 obtained the signatures of the Oba and other leaders in a treaty that allowed Britain to

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola, editors, *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> James D. Graham, “The Slave Trade, Depopulation and Human Sacrifice in Benin History,” *Cahiers d’etudes africaines* 5, no. 18 (1965): p. 322. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> FO 2/101, no. 50, Moor to FO, 14 June 1896. Quoted in Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Igbafe refers to the treaty as “draw[ing] [Benin] into the orbit of British influence”, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 400.



hold the Oba accountable for obstructing free trade practices.<sup>10</sup> Igbafe points out that this treaty “marked the beginning of the end of the independence of Benin.”<sup>11</sup> Interestingly enough, the treaty did not explicitly outline grievances against human sacrifice or any other cultural “abhorrence”. Here is what the document did in fact outline: the inclusion of government officials in the Oba’s government, the development of Benin’s resources, jurisdiction for British subjects by Britain alone, free trade, and opening for church missions.<sup>12</sup> An examination of these terms is prudent in understanding the motivations and expectations behind the treaty. Such an inspection yields intriguing observations about what British officials were thinking about the Benin situation, and why the treaty was pursued despite its limited effects.

The terms of the treaty of 1892 were commercially-driven. Despite the later horror stories from Ralph Moor and other British agents about grotesque cultural practices taking place in Benin, Gallwey’s treaty did not give an outright accusation or order an abolition. Igbafe does bring attention to the notion that such “humanitarian” contents could be implied to be present in an article where the treaty references “government” and “civilization,” but such possibilities do not make a strong enough point to fully accept (and Igbafe is also hesitant to assert this interpretation).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Claude Macdonald recognized the significance that Benin’s cultural practices had on opening up trade in the region – that “the fetish power of the Oba had to be broken of the commercial privileges won by the treaty were to be preserved.”<sup>14</sup> The

---

<sup>10</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 387.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> FO 84/2194, Macdonald to FO no. 26 of 16 May 1892. Quoted in *Ibid.* I do not have a copy of this source, so its contents are outlined as by Igbafe in his article.

<sup>13</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 387.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

question here is opposite that in the Ekumeku case: why were these cultural elements *left out* of the treaty? Igbafe acknowledges that the treaty was “conspicuously silent”<sup>15</sup> about the “fetish practices of the Oba”<sup>16</sup>, as well as details McDonald’s view that such a “state of affairs”<sup>17</sup> was not compatible with economic progress. Humanitarian considerations were certainly the minds of the British. Asiegbu even states:

European writers themselves paint[ed] lurid and probably exaggerated pictures of what may have been only occasional social evils; such exaggeration [was] made in order to provide humanitarian reasons and justification for the British invasion of Benin in 1897.<sup>18</sup>

If the British could have convinced the Oba to agree to cease such practices, the very backbone of Benin’s sovereignty would have been broken before an expedition had to be sent. There are two plausible explanations for the absence of cultural elements in the treaty of 1892.

The first is that Gallwey and the British expected to go on an expedition anyway. This is a fairly popular assertion, which is supported by many historians. Anene makes the case that Britain had essentially made up their minds for a military expedition in 1896.<sup>19</sup> Igbafe recognizes that forces that had been in development for decades were coming together and determining Benin’s fate: that “events had been moving steadily in the direction of more European involvement in the politics and trade of the Niger coastal states”<sup>20</sup>. McDonald’s opinion about Gallwey’s 1892 treaty, for instance, was that it was essentially a stepping stone.<sup>21</sup> The future would likely hold a military expedition. But an

---

<sup>15</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 388.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> FO 84/2194, Macdonald to FO no. 26 of 16 May 1892. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>18</sup> J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984), p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 188.

<sup>20</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 399.

<sup>21</sup> FO 84/2194, Macdonald to FO no. 26 of 16 May 1892. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 388.

issue arises from this: what was the purpose of this treaty? Was it a genuine attempt to open up trade and avoid military confrontation? Was it a complete farce – some sort of pretext being laid? Perhaps it was simply done because for the British it represented a presence in Benin, which they had not had since 1862.<sup>22</sup> The treaty's purpose also may have paralleled that of Philip's doomed expedition in 1897 – merely a sort of “survey”<sup>23</sup> of what Benin was like. In any case, it appears difficult to fully comprehend the motivations behind the treaty if the British were sure that they would attack the Ovonramwen in the near future.

A second possibility for the treaty's lack of cultural terms relies more heavily on speculation – i.e. getting into the minds of the British officials. Claude Macdonald recognized after the treaty was accepted that the cultural element of Benin had to be crushed if trade was to prosper in the region.<sup>24</sup> The implication here was that economic sanctions and cooperation with Nigerian communities was not enough to guarantee British satisfaction. Cultural domination was a necessity for Britain to achieve its goals. Macdonald may have recognized this as a result of his earlier attitudes toward Nigeria. He had often emphasized cooperation and trust with the locals. That is, Macdonald may have been keener toward the cultural aspects of Nigerian life and their importance when it came to “breaking” a community or kingdom such as Benin. There is little doubt that Gallwey, who obtained the treaty in 1892, was aware of this kind of information.

Given this, it is plausible that Gallwey may have left cultural terms out of the treaty for a calculated reason. Why? Perhaps such terms would have made the treaty completely unacceptable to the Oba and the surrounding communities. While British

---

<sup>22</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” pp. 386, 388.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

treaties impressed upon Nigerians were nearly always signed (there was no real alternative), as well as the fact that these treaties were often ignored anyway, it does not discount the potential effects on the Oba when he would have been told that both his economic and cultural power was about to be done away with. Such a treaty may have provoked harsh reaction. Ovonramwen may have, instead of largely avoiding Britain, taken the harsher stance that his subordinates were encouraging. Perhaps Gallwey thought he could more easily get away with a commercial treaty and observe how it played out (fitting nicely with the “survey” theory), than if explicit cultural elements had been included. A strong refusal from the Oba to sign the treaty would have certainly complicated matters for Britain, and those small Urhobo communities that had welcomed Britain so dearly may have begun to turn their backs on them. Resistance was a possibility and officials were likely aware of that. Although disgusted by the (likely exaggerated) inhumane cultural practices at Benin, for Britain it was not worth fighting a battle they had yet to prepare for.

In a sense, the second explanation does have commonalities with the assertions put forth by Anene and Igbafe (that there would be an expedition in the near future). Gallwey was not making a whole-hearted effort in the 1892 treaty in either account. He may very well have felt that an expedition against Benin was likely in both scenarios. The key difference between the two explanations, however, is that in the one just described the British had a respect for consequences – they were cautious of the language of the treaty, keeping it relatively vague with words like “civilization”. It was not that they were trying to avoid any sort clash with Benin – it was that they were trying to avoid an unfavorable one at a certain point in time. Whether or not this is giving Gallwey and the

British too much credit is a difficult question to answer, but it is worth considering. The notion fits nicely into the group dynamic framework, because it serves to explain the rationale behind a particular interest's decision. A slightly different approach could have yielded to much more troublesome interactions between the Oba and British agents.

#### NIGERIAN POINTS OF FRAGMENTATION AND CONVERGENCE

In any case the 1892 treaty set the stage for future British contact with Benin. The circumstances for Oba Ovonramwen were bleak. Not only was he facing Britain, but he was also facing his own people. Here the theme of divisions across Nigerian communities plays a significant role in the episode. Such divisions historically served to strengthen British power, as neighbors played against each other in attempts to recruit trading stations and missions. This left some communities to momentarily prosper, and others to fail.<sup>25</sup> Such divisions, however, were not starkly illustrated in the Ekumeku movement, where cooperation led to one of the most successful armed revolts in Nigerian history. The relative unity of Nigerian people and communities was critical. And in the Benin case, unity was not strong, and this had serious consequences as they pertained to the fall of the city.

The Oba's rise to power had been protested throughout the region by competing factions and external threats, including violence from the Ishans.<sup>26</sup> This was not an isolated event, but rather common when a new Oba was attempting to solidify his rule.<sup>27</sup> This lowered the potential for a strong resistance against Britain, as the war against the factions continued throughout the 1890s. It is difficult to put up resistance in a state of

---

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 101-102.

<sup>26</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin," p. 389.

disunity. In fact, in an intelligence report from Commander R. H. Bacon, he actually refers to “natives” supporting the British expedition against Benin in 1897 to various degrees.<sup>28</sup> Fragmented communities made conquest easier for Britain, even when they misinterpreted the reactions of these communities (believing that these towns desired to break free from Benin and accept British rule as a better alternative). When Britain eventually deposed the Oba, they expected people to unite; but this did not occur. The loss of the traditional political structure had brought about more chaos than order. Anene asserts that such disorganized conditions at Benin laid the foundation for the Ekumeku movement<sup>29</sup>, which is ironic considering that the Ekumeku’s most salient characteristic was its relative cooperation, not fragmentation.

Oba Ovonramwen also faced opposition from his lesser rulers, who had earlier overridden his desire to accept a British mission. This highlights splinters not just among Benin’s surrounding communities, but within the leadership itself. As Anene acutely observes, “...the role of the king in the crisis which engulfed his kingdom was not that of a master in his own house.”<sup>30</sup> The divisions had disastrous consequences for Benin’s ability to resist British rule, in numerous ways. The most direct ramification is illustrated in the lack of response in defending Benin, where the Oba did almost nothing, partially because of a rivalry with his councilors.<sup>31</sup> In earlier years, there was less enmity and the Oba’s rule was more substantial. A true resistance against the British expedition may have been possible at that time.<sup>32</sup> But as a result of the divisions among “chiefs” and now

---

<sup>28</sup> ADM 116/87, Warrigi, 27 February 1897, Commander R. H. Bacon’s Intelligence Report on Benin City, to Rear Admiral H. H. Rawson. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 148-51, 150.

<sup>29</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 196, 203

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

also Itsekiri and Jakri traders and fragmented communities, such valiance was simply not possible. Resistance against the ultimate expedition in 1897 consisted of “stray shots” and a “discharge of two cannon...”<sup>33</sup> In a cruel twist of fate, some lesser rulers were seated at the “native” council which tried the Oba in September of 1897 after the expedition completed.<sup>34</sup> Oba Ovonramwen also cursed the Benin people after his recapture and before his final punishment was rendered.<sup>35</sup> Divisions within both Nigerian communities and leaders in and around Benin served to prevent any sort of real resistance to the British encroachment, preoccupying the traditionally centralized leadership with numerous problems.

Another example of Nigerian division concerned traders. Nigerian traders and middlemen were in many ways their own distinct interest, separate from that of common people who did not have such a heavily investment in commerce. The Oba continued to demand tribute from these middlemen, which cut into their profit margins. The goals of British traders and Nigerian middlemen began to converge to a critical point. The Itsekiri middlemen “found useful allies”<sup>36</sup> in the British traders and agents who had become frustrated with Oba Ovonramwen’s trade impediments. In fact, British agents started to prevent middlemen from coming to any terms for tribute with the Oba at all.<sup>37</sup> And it was not only Britain appealing to the traders, but also the other way around:

The Jakri traders, a most important and most loyal tribe, whose prosperity depends to a very great extent upon the produce they can get from the

---

<sup>33</sup> FO 2/121, no. 13 of 8 February 1897, enclosed Memo and Map no. 1268 by Rawson. Quoted in Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 200.

<sup>35</sup> Egharevba, *op. cit.* p. 61. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>36</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 390.

<sup>37</sup> CSO 1/13, 6; FO 2, 102, Phillips to FO no. 105 of 16 Nov 1896. Quoted in *Ibid.*

Benin country, have appealed to this Government to give them such assistance as will enable them to pursue their lawful trade.<sup>38</sup>

This goal convergence drove a deep wedge between Britain and the Benin kingdom, encouraging conflict. British officials essentially took over all economic grievances toward the Oba, who had few commercial supporters other than the “tradition” of his predecessors – to which he was adhering by defending Benin’s trade interests.<sup>39</sup>

The dynamic here between British trader and Nigerian middleman was a direct cause of the Oba’s downfall. Their momentary goal convergence eventually drove the destruction of Benin City. This is even stranger considering the fact that not only did Nigerian middlemen and British traders often not have common aims, but they had *diverging* aims nonetheless. Middlemen saw the British as a threat to their mere existence throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is cruelly ironic to see the convergence of these two otherwise rival interests occurring at a time when the Oba needed his traders most for the defense of Benin. While one could outright blame the Oba for his continual demand of “presents” from his traders, this would be unfair and to overlook the situation in which the Oba found himself – clinging to his city under the pressures of not only Britain, but also factions that sought to remove him from his position. The cooperation between Britain and the Nigerian middlemen drove expectations for an expedition against the Oba in the years leading up to 1896. Divisions among Nigerian interests, and convergences with British aims, served to further Britain’s cause and propel the events that took place at Benin at the turn of the century.

---

<sup>38</sup> FO.2/102B; Old Calabar, 16<sup>th</sup> No. 1896, Consul-General J. R. Philips to Foreign Office. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 135-40, 139.

<sup>39</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 390. This was done largely through embargoes and other “obstructions to free trade.”



## BRITISH MERCHANT AND GOVERNMENT CONVERGENCE

Another important economic interest was present in the Benin situation: The Royal Niger Company. The Company, much like in the Ekumeku case, meddled in cultural affairs. This not only establishes important connections to Benin, but also serves to bolster the points made in Chapter II: that the Royal Niger Company understood the importance of Nigerian cultural practices as they pertained to British commercial interests. In October 1894 the Company made clear after McTaggart's visit to Benin that human sacrifice was a concern. Perhaps not coincidentally, in January of 1895 it was reported that the Oba had agreed to abolish human sacrifice.<sup>40</sup> Igbafe uses evidence that cites Gallwey stating that a punitive expedition would thus no longer be required against Benin.<sup>41</sup> This observation has implications in the group dynamic framework, as it highlights merchant-government cooperation, its limits, and how it fueled the Benin expedition.

The Royal Niger Company's McTaggart and his citation of human sacrifice at Benin came only three months before the report that the Oba had agreed to abandon the practice. Could the Company have been a driving force in its abolition? Indeed, the Royal Niger Company did not only have interest and understanding in regard to cultural practices as they pertained to commercial interests, but their opinions still likely held sway with the British government. Such cooperation between a primarily merchant interest and Britain's official imperial agents illustrates a significant tie that appears quite powerful. The Company probably had some part in Gallwey's correspondence with the Oba that eventually led to the agreement to abandon human sacrifice.

---

<sup>40</sup> Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin," p. 391.

<sup>41</sup> Ca. Prof. 6/1, vol. II. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 391.

The Royal Niger Company also kept close ties with the government in other, more foundational ways. A concern expressed by the Company in 1897 regarding the relocation of troops as a result of the Benin expedition, sent to government offices:

I AM directed by the Marquess of Salisbury to state to you...that a telegram has been received from the Niger Territories by the Royal Niger Company, and communicated to his Lordship, stating that a large proportion of the Company's troops are detained in the Delta owing to the fear of an attack from natives of the Niger Coast Protectorate, and an urgent appeal has been made by the Deputy-Governor for assistance from Her Majesty's Government.<sup>42</sup>

There was logistical coordination between the government and the Royal Niger Company. Such coordination made military operations more plausible, and were therefore a critical component of the violence at Benin. This is somewhat predictable given that the two interests had their roots at Whitehall, but it is nonetheless important. The convergence supported the ultimate expedition against the Oba.

However, the government and the Company were not always in sync. Back in London in 1897, Mr. Curzon stated that "The unfortunate mission of the King of Benin has nothing to do with the Royal Niger Company."<sup>43</sup> In fact, the exact role of the Royal Niger Company in regard to the Benin situation seemed to always be in question. Sir Charles Dilke asked, in May of 1896, "...whether, should [Benin] be entered upon, this will be done in co-operation with the Royal Niger Company." Ralph Moor expressed anger toward the Company's actions. But the Company remained a critical component. For instance, after the completion of the Benin expedition the Royal Niger Company

---

<sup>42</sup> Francis Bertie, Foreign Office to War Office, 14 January 1897, Reports and Correspondence on the Niger Coast Protectorate and Surrounding Territories, 1888-99. Series of British Parliamentary Papers. Irish University Press, Shannon, Ireland, 1971.

<sup>43</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 45 (21 January 1897), col. 188.

went in pursuit of the Oba after he had fled the city.<sup>44</sup> The royal charter appeared to connect the merchant and government interests, but only half-heartedly. Whitehall grew to be less enthusiastic about the Company's existence as events continued to play out leading up to 1900. Chamberlain already had a plan to get rid of Goldie's merchants.<sup>45</sup> The ramifications of this tenuous relationship in regard to Benin, however, were minimal. The reason was that the Company and the government did not have high expectations of one another. Their informal ties protected them from the complications that the Company had with the missionaries at Issele in 1898, where the relationship was more circumstantial and awkward.

The situation at Benin remained fairly unchanged from 1892 to 1895, despite Gallwey's treaty and correspondence with the Oba. By 1895 though, Acting Consul-General Ralph Moor began advocating a military expedition. He justified its costs based on the amount of trade it was expected to open.<sup>46</sup> In September of the same year, another convergence of interests materialized between merchant and government. James Pinnock, a businessman who was trading on the Benin River, sent a letter to Claude Macdonald urging the government to fix the stalling trade by deposing the Oba. Four more businesses followed in Pinnock's footsteps in 1896, asking the government to take action. Ralph Moor took these claims seriously, as he had already developed a plan for Benin before the Foreign Office could convince him to do so.<sup>47</sup>

How significant of a role did Pinnock and his counterparts play in convincing Moor and the government to get on board with a military engagement? It was not a

---

<sup>44</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 199.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin," p. 392.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 392-394.

decisive factor. But it was a component of the build-up of a number of grievances against and frustrations toward the Oba. This notion falls in line with Igbafe's account.

The stage was thus being set for the overthrow of Ovonramwen, even if it meant a resort to arms. It only needed a few incidents, the persistent protests of the traders against the Oba's economic policy and principles, a zealous Consul-General devoted to the cause of trade expansion, and a little spark to produce the conflagration.<sup>48</sup>

Benin was a loaded spring. Goal convergences between the government and British merchants laid the groundwork for the expedition. It is significant to observe this kind of cooperation among two interests that, while related, were ultimately seeking some outcomes that were not always the same (i.e. merchants were profit-oriented, while the government still harbored plans for colonial administration, development projects, etc.). The Pinnock letter and merchant enterprise involvement is yet another illustration of cooperation among distinct interests playing a critical role in creating conditions for colonial violence. Without such cooperation, an "effective" policy toward Benin may have proved difficult.

#### THE FATEFUL EXPEDITION AND MEN ON THE SPOT

Beginning in late 1896, events transpired rather quickly. This can largely be attributed to one man, J. R. Phillips, who filled in as Commissioner and Consul-General of the Niger Coast Protectorate for Gallwey and Ralph Moor (as Gallwey was in for Moor while he was on leave). Visiting the Benin region, Phillips came to the conclusion that the Oba needed to be deposed, based on poorly informed beliefs that the surrounding communities viewed the Oba as a power-hungry leader.<sup>49</sup> Phillips stated, "I do not

---

<sup>48</sup> Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin," pp. 388-389.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

anticipate any serious resistance from the people of the country – there is every reason to believe that they would be glad to get rid of their King...”<sup>50</sup> While the government did not confirm that an expedition would be carried out at any specific date (largely because no troops were immediately available), Phillips went on a trip of his own to Benin with a small party. The problem with this was that no one had agreed to see him, and ceremonies that were taking place at the time prevented, in the eyes of the Oba, any visitation. Phillips went anyway, and after repeated warnings from Benin, his party was eventually ambushed, killing all but two of Phillips’ men. District Commander Burrow’s diary sums up Phillips’ fate: “Launch ‘Daisy’ arrived 10.45a.m. Engineer says they shot Consul-General three times, and have taken him to the city...”<sup>51</sup> Igbafe concludes, convincingly, that Phillips was going on a “reconnaissance survey”<sup>52</sup> for information relevant to perhaps a future military engagement. This was not a genuinely friendly expedition, although nor was Phillips seeking direct conflict.

Intriguing contact between Phillips and merchant traders illustrates another critical convergence of British merchant and government interests. Before heading out on the doomed expedition, Philips forwarded a letter from James Brownridge, a representative of Miller Brothers, to the British Foreign Office. The letter emphasized the urgency of the situation from a commercial standpoint.<sup>53</sup>

The whole of the English merchants represented on the river have petitioned the Government for aid to enable them to keep their factories

---

<sup>50</sup> FO.2/102B; Old Calabar, 16<sup>th</sup> No. 1896, Consul-General J. R. Philips to Foreign Office. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 135-40, 139.

<sup>51</sup> ADM 116/87, Diary of District Commissioner Burrow on the Philips Expedition. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 141-3, 143.

<sup>52</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 396.

<sup>53</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 190.

open, and last but not perhaps least, the revenues of this Protectorate are suffering.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly Phillips was foolish and likely going to find a pretext for his personal expedition anyway, but this encouragement from a prominent business could only bolster his convictions that it was time to address the Benin situation head on. The Foreign Office then forwarded the letter and other information to Ralph Moor. Moor's beliefs about Southern Nigeria, which constituted following a "forward policy", predisposed him to approve of Phillips' provocative proposal.<sup>55</sup> At a critical juncture in the Benin story, this convergence of two distinct British interests – merchant and government – served to propel the situation forward. Phillips even took European merchants with him on his fateful expedition, including representatives from Miller Brothers and African Association. This was in addition to some Nigerian Itsekiri whose trading interests were also at stake.<sup>56</sup>

It is worth noting here the significance of two phenomena in relation to the British government: the dispositions and motivations of men on the spot, and the relative detachment of these men from the politics of Whitehall. These factors had profound effects on group dynamics at Benin. First, both Ralph Moor and James Phillips exhibited aggressive tendencies. Moor advocated a "forward policy", even going as far as to sign off many of his dispatches with disparaging remarks against Benin's Oba.<sup>57</sup> And Phillips seemed entirely irrational when heading to Benin with a small, unarmed force. What was going on here? The men stationed in Nigeria were men of the military, who were likely to

---

<sup>54</sup> FO.2/102B; Old Calabar, 16<sup>th</sup> No. 1896, Consul-General J. R. Philips to Foreign Office. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 135-40, 139.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> FO 2/121, Gallwey to FO no. 1, 16 January 1897. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 191.

<sup>57</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 189.

have forceful personalities.<sup>58</sup> That is not to say that Britain should have kept them home; for any imperial power, this was indeed the type of person desirable to administer a colony. But the characteristics of this distinct interest made violence more likely. The promise of prestige and recognition may have also driven the actions of men on the spot. From the London Gazette:

For services in the operations against the Chief Nana of Benin during the period August to October, 1894:  
To be Companions of the Distinguished Service Order, viz.: --  
Major Peter Wade Grant Copland Crawford...”  
...For services in the punitive expedition against Nimba and Brass villages in February, 1895:  
Captain Henry Lionel Gallwey...<sup>59</sup>

Moor himself pressed the issue of recognition in a dispatch:

I would strenuously urge that the services of all officers and men engaged in the operations be recognized by the issue of a medal and clasp, which, I submit, is most thoroughly deserved. An arduous and perilous duty has been carried out with enthusiasm and disregard of danger and privation by all ranks under most trying circumstances of climate and position of the enemy, who were, I may say, always unseen.<sup>60</sup>

Parliament made a point of getting these awards out to the recipients. Lord Charles

Beresford inquired in March of 1898:

I beg to ask the Under Secretary of State for War if he will explain the cause of the delay in distributing the Benin medal to those officers and men who are entitled to it; and if he can inform the House when the distribution is likely to take place?<sup>61</sup>

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. G. J. Goschen responded:

...In the case of the Benin Expedition, all the lists were not received from the ships until October, when they had to be carefully examined. The orders to the Mint were given in December, but owing to difficulties in

---

<sup>58</sup> Professor Moses Ochonu (Professor of History, Vanderbilt University) referenced this to me, 2009-2010. Anene also makes some reference to this in *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 155, 178-180.

<sup>59</sup> The London Gazette, 10 April 1896, 2200.

<sup>60</sup> The London Gazette, May 7, 1897, 2533.

<sup>61</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 55 (28 March 1898), col. 1052.

carrying out previous large demands, the Mint have been unable to supply any Benin medals until this month...<sup>62</sup>

Asiegbu asserts that “In a most foolhardy manner, [Phillips], with more haste than caution or sound judgment, and probably with a view to scoring, through a military coup in Benin, a major point for official recognition and promotion, rushed with his party to Benin, and to his death.”<sup>63</sup> Awards were not only important, but they were given out in significant portions. Officers and soldiers had something to gain by engaging in battle. If nothing else, the above exchanges illustrate Britain’s extensive involvement in a vast number of violent conflicts.

The second phenomenon – that British agents were detached from Whitehall – is important because it highlights a group distinction within the British government that had profound implications. The notion of detachment stems from John M. Carland’s idea of “territorial imperative”<sup>64</sup>. The Colonial Office was concerned not necessarily with the best course of action in regard to others (e.g. officials stationed in Nigeria), but what was best for the Office itself. They were first and foremost concerned with their own survivability.<sup>65</sup> The Colonial Office wanted British agents to know that Whitehall had the final say, and in doing so were stingy with finances and allotments. They wanted to be superior to those under them and to exercise control; protecting their own “territory” of policy-making.<sup>66</sup>

Consul-General Ralph Moor likely learned to cater to this notion of territorial imperative. He allowed the Colonial Office and the government to believe that they were

---

<sup>62</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 55 (28 March 1898), col. 1052.

<sup>63</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 133-4.

<sup>64</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), pp. 6-7, 200.

<sup>65</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914*, pp. 6-7, 200.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



indeed in charge. Moor was cooperative and open about his opinions (regardless of how many times the Offices were hesitant to accept actions pertaining to his “forward”-looking policy recommendations). He did not often directly disobey Whitehall’s wishes. This was in contrast to Frederick Lugard, who did not play the game the same way. He kept a number of his plans secret.<sup>67</sup> This is not to say that Lugard was not successful and Moor was. Rather, Moor decided to take a different path that illustrates how he handled the detachment between himself and others like him, and the Colonial Office. With his cooperation, Moor’s opinions were given serious consideration and often eventual backing. Furthermore, this meant that the Offices were likely inclined to take his descriptions of the situation, say, at Benin, more literally.

It is important to note here that it was the men on the spot who actually implemented, and in many ways dictated, colonial policy. While the government directed administration from a broad standpoint, the men on the ground had power – the power to act, manipulate, and convince. They were Britain’s eyes and ears; the source of information. For the Colonial Office, the way to understand Southern Nigeria was through what British agents reported back to them. “Territorial imperative” could not control this. Such notions are particularly intriguing when one notices that Moor likely exaggerated claims about human sacrifice and the condition of the Benin kingdom. Asiegbu emphasizes this notion of British exaggeration:

...British humanitarianism became generally suspect, partly because it tended deliberately to dramatise or exaggerate those evils which were probably the exception rather than the rule in African society, and because it consciously underplayed Britain’s overriding interests of commercial and political control and dominance in West Africa.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office*, p. 55.

<sup>68</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 132-133.

When Sir John Colomb asked the First Lord of the Admiralty about the Benin Expedition, the Lord responded with a description from Ralph Moor:

Dreadfully mutilated human sacrifices met en route, and in the city crucifixions and mutilations. Juju houses, compounds surrounding them, reek with human blood several deep holes in compounds filled with corpses. Effects of Europeans, Phillips's party, founding King's palaver house... Immediate action taking (sic) capture king and Juju men and pacify country. Inhabitants inclined come in. All survivors well. No fever. [Cheers.]<sup>69</sup>

Moor was likely speaking in superlative in the above dispatch. As Anene mentions, the resistance put up by the Bini was far from creating trying circumstances.<sup>70</sup> The position of the enemy being "unseen"<sup>71</sup> was likely due to the fact that they were not reacting in a coordinated manner. While the British truly did not know what to expect heading into the conflict, the violence itself was not extreme, which makes Moor's account appear inflamed. In his intelligence report, Commander R. H. Bacon goes into detail about the fighting style of the Bini, but nothing in his descriptions suggests that resistance was particularly distressing to the British and their ultimate goal.<sup>72</sup> The trust that Moor developed with government officials may have allowed him to expedite the Benin engagement. Moor played off of a critical group dynamic to get what he desired – the detachment between the offices in London and the men on the spot. In addition to his aggressive disposition, this gave Moor significant sway in dictating the course of events.

The Philips massacre touched off the military expedition of 1897 that led directly to the downfall of Benin, despite Chamberlain stating that "The proposed expedition is not in retaliation for the mas-sacre [sic] of Mr. Phillips and his party... [but to] capture

---

<sup>69</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 46 (22 February 1897), col. 964.

<sup>70</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 195.

<sup>71</sup> *The London Gazette*, May 7, 1897, 2533.

<sup>72</sup> ADM 116/87, Warrigi, 27 February 1897, Commander R. H. Bacon's Intelligence Report on Benin City, to Rear Admiral H. H. Rawson. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 148-51, 151.

two chiefs.”<sup>73</sup> Moor was ushered back to the region to finally assemble troops, and the final pieces were put in place with dispatches appearing in the London Gazette.<sup>74</sup> Fittingly, the British made the cooperation of the Nigerian traders a priority, “[winning] them over”<sup>75</sup> before the expedition. In another cooperative move with a distinct interest, the Royal Niger Company was brought in for concerns over fugitives.<sup>76</sup> After the British force overran the city Oba Ovonramwen fled, but eventually returned and was deported in September of 1897. Naturally, commerce was the first issue addressed after wresting control of Benin, and the British opened up trade throughout the region. The Phillips massacre and subsequent events were driven by a number of dynamics among different interests. These included cooperation between British merchants and government agents, the dispositions of British agents, and the detachment between Whitehall and men on the spot.

#### FURTHER ANALYSIS: MATCHING GOALS AND INTERESTS

As an analytical point of finality, it is insightful to analyze the goal convergences and divergences of the interests involved in both the Benin and Ekumeku conflicts. The groups involved at Benin – the British government, the Royal Niger Company, British officers, Nigerian traders, British mercantile companies – worked in cooperation with each other largely for the single goal of commerce. They all wanted Benin’s power removed so as to open up trade in their own true interests. This was in stark contrast to the events preceding the Ekumeku movement, and a close examination of the

---

<sup>73</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 70 (20 April 1899), cols. 35-6.

<sup>74</sup> *The London Gazette*, 10 April 1896, 2516.

<sup>75</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” p. 398.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

implications of these relationships suggests possibilities as to why resistance and violence varied in these two instances.

What transpired in Igboland concerning the Ekumeku movement involved three primary groups: the Royal Niger Company, Nigerians (the Ekumeku and others with more collaborationist tendencies), and missionaries. The conflict originated in a cultural context, which differed from the Benin expedition (which originated in an economic context). The division among Nigerians in the Ekumeku episode parallels that of the Benin expedition in some respects – “councilors”<sup>77</sup> were disgruntled with Obi Egbuna, much like those advisers who conflicted with Oba Ovonramwen. However, the actions that were taken in the Ekumeku episode differed from Benin. Councilors were the spark that began a resistance movement against Britain in Igboland, whereas at Benin they only served to divide the leadership. Moreover, Igbuzo came to the aid of Issele, while a number of Benin’s communities did not come to support the Oba (which was made difficult by the various factions that were in conflict with each other). Benin’s leaders did not/could not channel their grievances to fight against Britain, instead focusing them on Ovonramwen. Cooperation among different towns was one of the features of the Ekumeku movement that spurred its success,<sup>78</sup> and this is where it deviated drastically from Benin parallels. This serves as part of the explanation of why resistance took place in 1898 in Igboland, and did not to such a degree at Benin in 1897.

Another important difference between the two episodes concerns the goals of the interests that were involved. There was strong missionary presence in Igboland during the rise of the Ekumeku. British interests concerned with the Ekumeku movement had

---

<sup>77</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 192. These were simply lesser rulers; advisers, in a sense.

<sup>78</sup> Don Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo resistance to the British conquest of Nigeria* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), p. 9.

diverging goals – the Company did not desire the same outcomes that the Catholic missions did. Missionaries desired humanitarian reform and the bringing of “civilization” to an “uncivilized” people. Conversion was the aim. The Royal Niger Company, however, was not interested in this as far as it did not concern commercial benefit. Humanitarian considerations were tertiary, only as they applied to being trade hindrances. The Company wanted larger profit margins, not higher worship attendance. This meant that Nigerians living in Issele, Igbuzo, etc. felt two-pronged pressure from two distinct interests – both cultural and economic.

Benin did not face the same level of missionary pressure. The kingdom had been closed off from Britain altogether for many years, and the grievances against Benin only came when the city was acting as an obstacle to British trade. Its relative isolation kept the British out, not allowing enough exposure to cultural interference for it to become a serious problem for the city’s people.<sup>79</sup> The Bini primarily felt economic strains, but from an enemy with whom they were not intimately familiar. The prolonged, two-front oppression in the Ekumeku case gave Igbos awareness that the Bini did not have: greater concern for their overall way of life in the context of a singular, African community. These differences between Benin and Igboland highlight possible reasons why the Benin episode contrasted with the Ekumeku. The Igbo were better prepared in terms of exposure than the Bini. They felt more pressure and had more time to react to this pressure. The result was a strong resistance. Events at Benin unfolded quickly, lacking much of an extended experience or build-up. Divisions also made this complicated. Awareness takes time to develop, and Benin did not have that luxury.

---

<sup>79</sup> Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin,” pp. 385-386.

Finally, the level of goal convergences of the interests acting on these situations can also serve to explain the resistance (or lack thereof) that materialized. In the Ekumeku movement, the Royal Niger Company fought Igbuzo warriors for economic reasons. Goldie wanted stability and the protection of commercial interests. Missionaries were concerned with their work as cultural crusaders, and had few real economic concerns. Only for security purposes did economic interests matter to them (i.e. defense from uprisings as in 1898). This led to misunderstandings, such as missions viewing the actions of the Company as a sort of continued protection, and notions that the British government had more backing for the missionaries than they actually did. This perpetuated violent outcomes, in many ways fueling the Ekumeku fire. Misperceptions encouraged missionaries to be more aggressive, while their de facto protectors would not completely wipe out the revolt (only enough to achieve their goals, such as stability). This left the door open for further rebellion.

In contrast, at Benin the interests involved were coordinated. They were all seeking to depose the Oba for economic reasons. Misunderstandings were minimal. True, Nigerian traders were in some ways acting paradoxically, fighting against the Oba who had for years supported their way of life. But these traders, as well as government officials, the Royal Niger Company, and British enterprises, were not seeking things significantly different from another. They all wanted commercial “progress”, and in the spirit of that interest converged to depose the Ovonramwen. Poorly-calculated actions – such as missionary aggression in Igboland – were not present at Benin (save Phillips’ foolish decision, which was largely the fault of a single person, and in fact worked for the benefit of Britain anyway as a viable pretext). The absence of these frictions lowered the

likelihood of fueling any sort of resistance stemming from miscommunication or misunderstanding. And if resistance did materialize, cooperating interests could more adequately address the issue than groups who misunderstood each other. The group dynamic framework serves not only as an effective means through which to understand episodes of colonial violence but, as illustrated above, to also explain why resistance may have been successful in Igboland, and did not materialize as such at Benin.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Benin episode played host to a number of intriguing group dynamics. The expedition itself was rooted in commercial considerations. British economic and political interests, in cooperation with some Nigerian interests as well, pushed to oust the Oba and thereby open trade throughout the kingdom. The first significant step was Gallwey's 1892 treaty, which may or may not have been a calculated stepping stone to a future military engagement. Throughout the years leading up to 1897, the disunity of the Nigerian community, the breaking off of Nigerian traders and middlemen from Benin, and the convergence of merchants, the Royal Niger Company, and British agents served to propel Britain on its crash course with the Oba. Also playing a significant role were the personalities of the men on the spot and their relationship with Whitehall. In the end, Benin fell to the superior military capabilities of the British troops and their allies. In comparison to the Ekumeku movement, the Benin episode showed relatively more cooperation in its group dynamics on the aggressor's side, and relatively less cooperation on the Nigerian side. These phenomena serve to explain, at least partially, the lack of

resistance observed during the Benin expedition in 1897 when compared to Igboland in 1898.



## CHAPTER IV: NANA OLOMU OF EBROHEMIE<sup>1</sup>

The two previous chapters discuss phenomena in case studies as they pertain to groups of people – misperceptions, goal convergences, and other nuances that drove events. This chapter, however, emphasizes an individual: Chief Nana Olomu of Ebrohemie. But this does not change the analysis and only serves to recognize the outstanding achievements and commendable resistance of a powerful man against British rule. Nana is representative of the role of many middleman traders in the late nineteenth century. His band of associates (or “boys”<sup>2</sup>) dominated the palm oil trade on the Benin River, and had played an integral role in the Southern Nigerian economy before the British movement inward. Nana was extremely successful, exemplified by Sir Harry Johnston’s descriptions of his visit with him: “I...was taken up...in a magnificently arrayed canoe...I was greatly astonished at [the] large buildings of white-washed clay, neatly thatched...he fed me with well-cooked meals...”<sup>3</sup>

With his wealth and trade network, Nana developed problems with Britain. The relationship lasted roughly ten years from contact to exile.<sup>4</sup> Historians are keen to note that the war on Ebrohemie was another trade war in the history of Southern Nigeria, not a humanitarian endeavor.<sup>5</sup> Enjoying commercial success, Nana shut out British merchants from markets he controlled, such as those at Warri and Sapele. The merchants appealed

---

<sup>1</sup> Obaro Ikime has written a focused work about Nana’s relationship with Britain. For information and a review, see K. O. Dike, review of *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, by Obaro Ikime, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5, no. 3 (1972): pp. 493-494.

<sup>2</sup> Nana’s associates were frequently referred to in British documents as his “boys”, and are therefore often referred to as such by historians.

<sup>3</sup> From Sir Harry Johnston, *The Story of My Life*, (London: 1923), pp. 212-213. Quoted in Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 308-309.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984), p. 75.

to London, and when the aggressive Ralph Moor entered the scene Nana was doomed. A number of themes in the group dynamic framework arise: Nana served as an economic “placeholder” for British interests, and also made a critical misperception regarding the strength of his opponent. Ralph Moor’s role illustrates the profound importance of an individual’s relationships with larger interests in the framework. And Nigerian divisions, stemming from the problem of inter-ethnic rivalries across Southern Nigeria, were critical in both Nana’s rise to power and in his eventual exile. These themes, all intricacies in group relationships, were the main drivers of the Ebrohemie War.

## ORIGINS

The war against Nana originated out of British trade grievances. These grievances developed because over the decade of 1884-1894 Nana became a middleman giant, controlling a large segment of the palm oil trade on the Benin River.<sup>6</sup> His rise to power was partially a result of his birth (he was of the Itsekiri people but his mother was Urhobo) which helped him maintain good relations among both groups in the region. Nana became both a political and commercial leader, although it is important to note that he had no formal political power. The British erroneously assumed he did when they met him in 1884. In fact, Britain actually thought that Nana was acting in the interest of Benin’s Oba<sup>7</sup> (a disconcerting notion, given British viewpoints and frustrations toward the “city of skulls”<sup>8</sup>).

---

<sup>6</sup> Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977), pp. 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 151-152

<sup>8</sup> Philip A. Igbafe, “The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): p. 398.

This initial set-up is enlightening within the thesis framework. Group divisions left many Nigerian communities working at cross purposes with one another,<sup>9</sup> and relations between the Itsekiri and Urhobo were traditionally tenuous.<sup>10</sup> Nana, however, transcended this division as a result of his birth. This mitigating (and perhaps unifying) effect partially explains Nana's success as a merchant and a force against the British in the conflict in 1894. He was able to attain a vast army of men, consisting of three to four thousand, along with an armada of war canoes.<sup>11</sup> This undoubtedly would have been more difficult had Nana not appealed to both the Itsekiri and the Urhobo. Throughout Southern Nigeria, when complications from such divisions could not be avoided, detrimental competition often ensued. Despite Nana's success in this respect, he still had rivals during this time. However, these were middlemen/commercial-related more so than ethnic. Numa and Dudu for example, were middlemen Itsekiri rivals of Nana.<sup>12</sup>

Also worth noting is Britain's association of Nana with Benin. The British viewed Benin as a "kingdom of darkness"<sup>13</sup>. Very little was known about the city. For decades, numerous agents had tried to gain access to Benin and the Oba, but found no luck. It was not until 1892 that this was actually accomplished.<sup>14</sup> Rumors about human sacrifice and other inhumane practices occurring at Benin were commonplace. Any association with the city was condemning. A perceived connection between Nana and Benin likely attracted increased British scrutiny toward Ebrohemie, and Nana's actions became closely monitored.

---

<sup>9</sup> e.g. competition for British support of missions or trade stations, which was at the detriment to neighboring communities. This phenomenon is explained in chapter I.

<sup>10</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> FO 2/101, no. 50, Moor to FO, 14 June 1896. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>14</sup> Philip A. Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): p. 385-386.

## FRIENDLY RELATIONS AND THE GOVERNORSHIP APPOINTMENT

Nana and Britain came to terms in an 1884 treaty of protection. Consul Hewett officially appointed Nana as governor after the death of his father (Olomu, who was also governor at the time), as decided by Itsekiri elders<sup>15</sup> and a formal recognition of his commercial and perceived political power in the region. The appointment also stemmed from a conflict with a rival leader over comey payments.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note here that the office of governor had usually passed back and forth between two houses (the other being the Emaye),<sup>17</sup> but with Nana inheriting the position from his father this tradition was broken. Nana's appointment only seemed to increase his prominence in the region among the Itsekiri and Urhobo, which extended his trading monopoly. His associates began "exploit[ing] their master's prestige to engross the trade of the oil-producing Urhobo country."<sup>18</sup> The official recognition of Nana's power served to bolster his ambition to the point where his commercial endeavors eventually expanded to anger the British. It was as early perhaps as 1887 that Nana officially irritated trading interests:

I think it well to let you know the remedies which will overcome the present difficulty and permit of trade being opened.

1<sup>st</sup> Your removal from the office of Governor.

2<sup>nd</sup> The agents establishing branch factories at markets.

3<sup>rd</sup> The Annexation in lieu of the protection of the Jekri Country.<sup>19</sup>

This raises an intriguing question: what motivations could have been behind Britain's approval of the decision to appoint Nana as a governor (for it had broken the tradition of

---

<sup>15</sup> FO 84/1660, Hewett to Granville, 28 July 1884. Quoted in P. C. Lloyd, "The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century; an Outline Social History," *The Journal of African History* 4, no. 2 (1963): p. 224.

<sup>16</sup> Sir Alan Burns, *History of Nigeria* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963), p. 151.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd, "The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century," p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> FO.2/64, British Consulate – Old Calabar, E. H. Hewett to Nana 24 February 1887. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 75.

passing the office between two families)? While one possibility is that it was simply easier to appoint the son of Olomu after his death (in terms of easing a transition, adhering to the elders' decision, etc.), there are other explanations worth entertaining.

One plausible explanation is that Britain was genuinely looking to not be the enemy of a powerful middleman trader (different from being a friend). They could not adequately address Nana's prominence at the time of the treaty (which was largely based off of his late father's power), nor did they fully understand it. If Nana proved to be a significant commercial obstacle in the future, the issue could be attended to when it arose. For the time being however, there was little use in making an enemy of Nana. It would have meant consequences for merchants in relation to the Itsekiri and Urhobo communities within Nana's sphere. That is, it could have created an anti-British aura in a region that London hoped to eventually administrate.

However, the appointment also recognized Nana as a sort of pseudo-representative of the British crown – 'the executive power through which decrees of Her Majesty's Government and of the Consular Court are to be exercised and enforced'.<sup>20</sup> This was much more significant in the 1880s than it was in the mid-1800s when the governor position was first created, because British activity had pushed further inland. A second explanation for the approval of the appointment therefore is that the British truly wished to control Nana through said decrees. But the appointment's approval may also have represented something more significant. How did Nana function in regard to British interests during his governorship? To answer this, the effects of Nana's appointment must be examined.

---

<sup>20</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 152.

On a positive note, Nana's governorship secured Itsekiri and Urhobo support on a scale more significant than it was before British intervention, putting more associates and more markets under Nana's control. In fact, Nana's associates became quite ruthless, and complaints about them and Nana continued to flow in.<sup>21</sup> Nana's empire grew so large that it eventually came into conflict with Britain herself. However, Nana's appointment also bred jealousy among his rivals. The British spread stories about Nana (perhaps because they needed an excuse to exile him) that came from rival Dogho, who saw an opportunity to use the British as an instrument for revenge. Dogho was ultimately the key to the success of the expedition against Nana, because it was not until then that the British penetrated Ebrohemie (he later received a medal for his efforts).<sup>22</sup> Which effect of the governorship outweighed the other: Nana's increased sphere of influence, or the heightened anger of his enemies?

While his rivals were certainly infuriated, they could do nothing on their own to oust Nana from control. Some other source of intervention (British) was needed. If Britain planned for Nana's rivals to overthrow him, they were mistaken. But this was unlikely: Nana was enough of a problem, and further instability in the region resulting from a power struggle was not in British interests. Therefore, the approval of Nana's appointment also likely served as a way for Britain to have an identifiable target for later endeavors while maintaining a minor presence. With further expansion inland, it is doubtful that Britain did not consider the likelihood that it would eventually want to exploit Nana's markets for themselves.

---

<sup>21</sup> Alan Ryder and K. O. Dike, editors, *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897* (New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1969), p. 275.

<sup>22</sup> Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977), pp. 45-47.

## LEADING TO CONFLICT

With the establishment of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1891, Consul-General Claude Macdonald moved into the area and was met with numerous grievances from British merchants against Nana. Such grievances are exemplified in a letter from Vice-Consul Hutton to Nana:

...many of the small Native traders tell him they are still frightened to trade at Warri, because [no message has come] from you and some of the other Benin Chiefs. I am very surprised at this for you promised Captain Gallwey you would send up a proper message and tell them that *any* man can trade at any place he likes with his own money. I want to know if you have kept your promise – *truly* – and if so why the Africans are afraid to trade at Warri and Sapele.<sup>23</sup>

In the years leading up to 1894, Nana deliberately ignored British requests for talks and agreements, and his associates continued to disrupt British trade interests. In a letter to Nana in 1893, the Vice-consul at Benin expressed dismay at how Nana's associates had removed two red British buoys from the Aruea River, and at how Nana had invaded and monopolized the Warri markets.<sup>24</sup> But perhaps the strongest British sentiments toward Nana were expressed by Consul H.L. Gallwey in 1893, whom Nana's associates refused to meet with. Gallwey foreshadows the coming conflict, stating "I fully believe you are injuring trade to the best of your ability and should I find you out you must expect full punishment and you cannot say I have not warned you in time... Your under-hand dealing has disgusted me."<sup>25</sup> In April of 1894, Macdonald deposed Nana:

---

<sup>23</sup> FO.2/64, Vice Consulate, Benin 9 August 1892. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> FO.2/64, H.B.M.'s Vice Consulate, Benin W.C.A. 7 December 1893. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> FO.2/64, H.B.M.'s Vice Consulate, Benin, 1 December 1893. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 77-78.

I write...to tell you that, now that the Government of the Queen is established here you are no longer Chief of the Jekri people. So far as the house of Nana is concerned you are head of that house: but should any member of your house wish to trade with money that is his own, he has full liberty to do so: this is the native Jekri law and you know it.<sup>26</sup>

The letter closes with a threat: "If I find that you are intimidating any people of Brohemie, or of any other place from trading with money which is their own, I shall have to take very serious notice of the same."<sup>27</sup>

The government decision to pursue Nana in a forceful matter was ultimately made by Ralph Moor, who thereby began his campaign of "forward policy".<sup>28</sup> Moor's strategy was to gather Nana's enemies and drive a wedge through his political power. Moor summoned rival leaders throughout the region, and listened to their grievances about Nana's "boys", their murders, and burning of villages. He then tried to meet with Nana on three occasions, all of which Nana refused for fear of meeting a fate similar to that of Jaja. Infuriated, Moor handed out treaties to local rulers so as to nullify the treaty signed in 1884. He then destroyed Nana's fortifications and began a blockade. From this point on, Moor sought to justify actions against Nana on humanitarian grounds, accusing him of being a "fetish ruler" and viewing any uncooperative actions on the part of leaders in the region as a result of Nana's influence.<sup>29</sup> In a letter to the Foreign Office, Moor states: "There are strong grounds for suspecting that atrocities have been committed in Brohemie Town at the funeral rites of one Serey, Nanna's half-brother, which occurred at end June."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> FO.2/64, H.B.M. Vice Consulate, Benin, 5 April 1894. Quoted in Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>30</sup> Acting Consul-General Moor to Foreign Office, Received 3 September, Old Calabar, 6 August 1894, British Parliamentary Papers: Reports and Correspondence on the Niger Coast Protectorate and Surrounding Territories, 1888-99, Irish University Press, Shannon, Ireland, p. 271.



To Nana's credit, he read the writing on the wall and began to stockpile weaponry and build defensive positions at Ebrohemie. Macdonald left the protectorate and was replaced by Ralph Moor in the middle of 1894. This was also when Nana, conveniently for Britain, began to ignore the prices of palm oil set by British merchants. He ceased dealing with the traders. Many merchants were absolutely furious at this, while a few suggested simply complying with Nana for the time being. On the government side, however, Ralph Moor had no intention of cooperating, and Claude Macdonald's deputy thought that acquiescing would damage Britain's prestige.<sup>31</sup> Moor forwarded an enraged letter from Mr. Coxon to the Foreign Office, and it found its way to Macdonald as well.<sup>32</sup> Macdonald had, throughout the early history of the protectorate, practiced a rather pacific approach toward Southern Nigeria – one that valued peace over violence, and sought respect and understanding from the local communities.<sup>33</sup> Undeviating from this line of thinking, Macdonald did not propose any hasty measures. But Moor was the one in charge.

The history here in the context of group relationships yields three insights. First, in Macdonald's message deposing Nana he states that the British government is now "established" in the region, and therefore Nana's services as governor are no longer needed. This confirms the economic "placeholder" role that Nana served for Britain as a governor. Second, the actions of Ralph Moor superseded those of the other groups acting on the situation (the government and the merchants), and illustrate the significant influence of one man within the group dynamic framework. And third, Nana was

---

<sup>31</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>32</sup> FO 2/63, Moor to FO, Enclosure in Dispatch no. 23, 8 August 1894. Letter from Coxon to Pinnock, dated July 1894. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 154.

operating under the erroneous belief that he would not in fact face the full might of the British government, even if conflict came to a head; he thought he was only up against traders and Ralph Moor. Nana may have adjusted his actions had he been aware that Britain herself would bear down on him if he failed to cooperate.

Nana was transformed by the approval of the governorship appointment into a sort of economic “placeholder” for British interests. Nana was a middleman, but with the appointment Britain could control Nana through the formality of the treaty and the informality of trust. Nana’s expansion meant that Britain could take over his markets at a later date— in effect, holding their place until the British were established in the region. Britain probably understood that Nana was/would be a powerful man before they approved his appointment as governor, and quite possibly that they would eventually come into some sort of conflict with him and his “boys”. Nana’s appointment served as a means for Britain to take some sort of control of the situation on the Benin River without committing extensive manpower or a military expedition. This made the transition from Nana’s domination to British domination, in theory, more straightforward – “linear” – on surrounding communities. Nana would simply be replaced by Britain, the markets and political power already solidified. The transition proved to be more complicated, though.<sup>34</sup> It is also worth noting that Macdonald threatened Nana in so many words at the end of his letter, after he had affirmed that Britain was indeed “established”. It seemed to invite Nana to test Britain. Even Macdonald figured violence was a likely outcome, and he held little back in his demands. Nana’s role as an economic placeholder for British interests, therefore, serves as a reasonable definition.

---

<sup>34</sup> The region fell into turmoil, and trade did not pick up immediately following Nana’s exile.

The importance of an individual in these events must also be highlighted. Merchant men and government agents were the two primary British groups acting on the situation. The general consensus from the merchant side was that Nana had to be dealt with in some way. Trade embargoes and pricing issues were becoming too costly for British commerce. But government agents were not entirely convinced by merchant viewpoints. Macdonald dismissed a Ralph Moor dispatch and enclosure to the Foreign Office, stating that “the trader’s view should not dictate British policy in the Niger Coast Protectorate.”<sup>35</sup> The government could act for its prestige on behalf of the merchants, or could act for peace.<sup>36</sup> Macdonald was in favor of the latter. But the episode did not play out so peacefully. Here, the British government’s actions seem to have been largely influenced by the actions of one individual: Ralph Moor.

Historians are reluctant to take this too far: “It is of course futile to pretend that Ralph Moor was just a bloody tyrant who provoked an unnecessary war...”<sup>37</sup> Anene asserts that the British progression inland had marked a shift in imperial thought in Southern Nigeria – that “[The political order] had no room for indigenous rulers who were prepared to defend their sovereignty.”<sup>38</sup> Isichei contends, “Moor’s period of power...was only secondarily the result of differences of personality [between Moor and Macdonald].”<sup>39</sup> She continues to argue that colonies simply tend to expand until they reach another colonial boundary.<sup>40</sup> But this should not discount the significance Moor’s role and the ramifications of his actions. He indeed was the torchbearer of a “forward

---

<sup>35</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 154.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), p.128.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

policy”, which contrasted with Macdonald’s inclinations and won out. A result of detachment between men on the spot and officials in Whitehall, aggressive military men like Moor could drive policy. Who else could London appeal to for information about what was occurring on the ground? The men in Nigeria were the primary source of information – they controlled what was included in dispatches and what was left out. Partially as a result of this dynamic, Moor’s “forward policy” became standard. Downplaying the importance of this relationship because such outcomes can be considered an “inevitability” ignores the man who was largely responsible for the outcomes in the first place. While Moor’s role in the context of group dynamics serve to highlight the limitations of generalizing motivations in the thesis framework, it also emphasizes the significance of a particular individual and how his interactions with other interests laid the foundations for violence. The Foreign Office exemplifies this notion, condoning Moor’s approach:

His Lordship desires to take this opportunity of conveying to you directly this cordial approval of Mr. Moor’s proceedings...and his appreciation of the able and energetic manner in which the position created by Nanna’s hostility to the Government has been dealt with.<sup>41</sup>

The last observation to note is that Nana had not put together the idea that he could be fighting the might of the British military. He had viewed the conflict as one between himself and British traders, with the addition of Ralph Moor.<sup>42</sup> This is revealing in the group dynamic framework. Perception was critical. If Nana had known that Moor intended and had the ability to use the British government’s arsenal against him, Nana may have relented at an earlier date, perhaps even responding to Moors’ summons

---

<sup>41</sup> Foreign Office to Sir. C. Macdonald, 30 November 1894, signed H. Percy Anderson, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 313.

<sup>42</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 159.

requests earlier in the year. True, Nana may have met a fate similar to Jaja (this is difficult to infer), but a violent engagement would have been less likely, and avoided all together if the Jaja story did repeat itself.<sup>43</sup> Nana's misperception of the power of Britain came at an incredible cost to Ebrohemie, for now it was too late. The failure of Nana to accurately identify the interests acting on the situation, as well as their capabilities, was a force that opened the door for Moor and his "forward policy" even before the attacks of 25 August.

#### ATTACKS ON EBROHEMIE AND AFTERMATH

Stability in the region broke down as a result of Nana's decreased ability to operate. Anene refers to this as a power "vacuum which the protectorate government was not yet in a position to fill."<sup>44</sup> Ralph Moor referred to it as "a state of terrorism...in the Benin, Sapele, and Warri districts."<sup>45</sup> This seems to support the notion that Nana indeed served as an economic placeholder for the government. That is, there was an opportunity for Britain to fill the void after Nana was defeated. As the situation continued to break down, Moor's impatience grew, as he believed it "imperative that action operations be undertaken and Chief Nanna and his advisers removed from the district."<sup>46</sup> He asserted:

...it is imperative that Nanna and his advisers be removed from the district, or there can never be that peace, good order, and security to life and property which are so essential to the proper development and

---

<sup>43</sup> In 1887 Jaja of Opobo agreed to meet with British agents on a steamer, where he was issued an ultimatum: return to his town and it would be bombarded, or leave, deposed, and the attack would be called off. Jaja took what many historians believe was an incredibly honorable path of self-sacrifice, and left his city to exile in the West Indies.

<sup>44</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 157.

<sup>45</sup> Acting Consul-General Moor to Foreign Office (Enclosure), Received 3 September, Old Calabar, 6 August 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 271.

<sup>46</sup> Acting Consul-General Moor to Foreign Office, Received 17 September, Old Calabar, 22 August 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 275.

opening up of the country, and to the continuance of trade without interruption.<sup>47</sup>

In late August an attempt was made to take Ebrohemie. Nana and his men actually repelled the first British attack. Captain Powell suggested in November that “to reduce Brohemie town will require a force of at least 400 white men – 300 to advance by land and 100 by water – well equipped with rockets and Maxims mounted on tripods.”<sup>48</sup> Heugh relented, “Again, whilst regretting what has taken place, it appears to me that Nanna is a far more formidable enemy than has been supposed...I consider that to annihilate him force and great caution is requisite.”<sup>49</sup> After the failure, British marines and members of the constabulary were gathered for another offensive on the town.

A full-scale attack began on 29 August, where Nana’s best initial defense was the creek surrounding his stronghold (as his stockade defense had been destroyed).<sup>50</sup> The town was captured in late September, and Nana fled toward Lagos. Sir Alan Burns mentions that it is “astonishing” that the British did not suffer more casualties than they did.<sup>51</sup> Nana had a significant stockpile of weaponry: “One hundred and six cannon...a machine-gun, 445 blunderbusses with swivels for mounting on war-canoes, 1,500 flintlock guns, 14 tons of gunpowder, and hundreds of rounds of case-shot...”<sup>52</sup> When Nana fled, Ralph Moor issued a proclamation that offered a £500 reward for Nana’s

---

<sup>47</sup> Acting Consul-General Moor to Foreign Office, Received 18 October, Old Calabar, 15 September 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 280.

<sup>48</sup> Captain Powell to Admiralty, Enclosure, Received 5 November at Foreign Office, dated 1 September 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 285.

<sup>49</sup> Lieutenant-Commander Heugh to Rear-Admiral Bedford, Enclosure, Received 5 November at Foreign Office, dated 25 August 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 286.

<sup>50</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Alan Burns, *History of Nigeria*, p. 174.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

capture.<sup>53</sup> Nana surrendered to the British a month later. He was brought to trial and summarily charged with, among other crimes:

... [acting] in opposition to the British Consular officers in the execution of the duties assigned to them, and not tak[ing] their advice on matters relating to the administration of justice, the development of the resources of the country, and the interests of commerce, or in any other matter in relation to peace, order, and good government, and the general progress of civilization.<sup>54</sup>

The Queen promptly ordered promotions, appointments, and recognitions following the triumph.<sup>55</sup> Captain Powell offered “favourable consideration” of certain soldiers.<sup>56</sup> By November, it was all over. Macdonald stated, “The Benin and Warri districts are now perfectly quiet, confidence has been restored, and all classes of natives can go about their avocations without fear of molestation.”<sup>57</sup>

In the context of group dynamics, the Ebrohemie War emphasizes the importance of the notion of Nigerian competition. This was manifested in self-interest resulting from group divisions, and is echoed loudly at Nana’s trial. Nana’s defense rested on blaming rival leaders for the events that transpired. Security and prosperity were powerful, driving factors in the decision-making of many Nigerian leaders.<sup>58</sup> While Nana’s defense may have had some merit (it would not have mattered anyway, as the trial was mostly a farce<sup>59</sup>), the fact that towns were separate in their goals and operations to the point that Nana’s argument was based on blaming rivals illustrates the relative importance of

---

<sup>53</sup> See *Proclamation*, Received 16 November at Foreign Office, dated 14 November 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 310.

<sup>54</sup> FO.2/64. The Consular Court for the District of Old Calabar; Held at the British Consulate General under the Africa Order in Council 1889 – 30 November 1894. Quoted in Asiegbu, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> See The London Gazette, 21 December 1894, 7527.

<sup>56</sup> Captain Powell to Rear-Admiral Bedford, Enclosure, Received at Foreign Office 16 November, dated 30 September 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 307.

<sup>57</sup> Sir C. Macdonald to the Earl of Kimberly, Received in December, dated 12 November 1894, British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 314.

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>59</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 95.

survivability and cooperation among Nigerians at the time. This division factor drove the Ebrohemie War. For Nana, the British were a direct threat. They were invading markets that merchants had previously enjoyed themselves, and were ultimately sweeping away any role that the middlemen could play in the economy by buying directly from commodity producers. But for Nana's rivals, Britain provided an opportunity to bring down a competitor. This exacerbation and exploitation of group divisions was a technique the British continually utilized, both knowingly and unknowingly, that aided in their conquest of the South. Nana's rivals won: he was exiled to the Gold Coast. Five years later in Parliament, Mr. Atherley-Jones inquired whether Nana may be allowed to return to the Protectorate. Mr. Brodrick responded that it would be "unsafe" to do so, and clarified that Nana was not "imprisoned" but rather "under police supervision."<sup>60</sup>

The aftermath of the war meant that Claude Macdonald had to smooth over the mess that had been created with nearby people. Nigerian leaders in the region formerly dominated by Nana – often his rivals – were appointed as British political agents. Macdonald also spent considerable time easing the tensions of the Urhobo and Itsekiri communities after the Nana fallout, building their confidence in the British administration. Throughout November of 1894 Macdonald met with leaders at Brass, Degema, Bonny, Opobo, Old Calabar, Sapele, and Warri.<sup>61</sup> Afterwards, the general area was deemed peaceful. It is important to note that British trade did not thrive immediately after the destruction of Ebrohemie. All the expedition against Nana accomplished initially was the removal of an economic thorn from the side of British merchants. Much was yet

---

<sup>60</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 66 (16 February 1899), col. 1108.

<sup>61</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 161-162.



to be done to transform the region. This contrasted with higher hopes when Nana had been defeated:

In several places there are fresh villages commenced already building on the banks, and I anticipate considerable increase in trade and general prosperity, for it is in this river more particularly that Nanna's evil influence has been felt. He excluded nearly all other traders from the river, and in the surrounding Sobo country recruited his large number of slaves by periodical raids undertaken by his Headmen from his various stations on its banks.<sup>62</sup>

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nana's tenuous relationship with Britain only lasted about ten years. A number of significant themes in the group dynamic framework are illuminated in the episode. Nana served as an economic "placeholder" for British interests, effectively reserving commercial monopoly in a number of Nigerian markets for Britain's eventual takeover. Nana also made a critical misperception regarding the strength of his opponent, which may have encouraged him to antagonize British merchants more than he would have otherwise. Ralph Moor's role demonstrates the significance of an individual's relationship with larger interests in the framework. And divisions, stemming from the pervasive problem of inter-ethnic divisions and rivalries across Southern Nigeria, were critical in both Nana's consolidation of power and his eventual exile. These themes, all intricacies in group relationships, were the main drivers of events in the Ebrohemie War.

---

<sup>62</sup> Acting Consul-General Moor to Foreign Office, Received 15 November, dated 5 October 1894, British Parliamentary Papers: British Parliamentary Papers, Irish University Press, p. 294.

## CONCLUSION

While the historiography acknowledges that a number of different interests acted on the colonial situation in Southern Nigeria circa 1900 – most explicitly missionaries, merchants, and government agents<sup>1</sup> – it appears to lack a focused approach toward the implications of this dynamic. This thesis improves upon the understanding of how these interests interacted with one another. The roles of these groups are isolated, demonstrating that further partitions can be made within each. Through case studies, this thesis demonstrates how the relationships among the various actors drove the violent events that transpired, particularly in the cases of the Ekumeku movement, the Benin expedition, and the Ebrohemie War. In the process, the importance of division, cooperation, misperception, and coalescence are emphasized. The group dynamic framework also permits analysis and speculation regarding motivations and functions of various individuals throughout the history, while allowing for reconciliation and disagreement with historians. And finally, applying these concepts, this thesis can lend insight into explaining the levels of Nigerian resistance and violence observed in response to British encroachment.

The first point this thesis stresses is that the general definition of missionaries, traders and administrators acting on Southern Nigeria, while accurate, can be redefined. It is important to recognize that the conflicts that materialized and exploded into violent expeditions and revolts circa 1900 can be understood not merely as a British-Nigerian dynamic, but as an intricate web of tangled interests among a number of distinct groups. Also, interests such as Britain's government must be divided further, into two categories

---

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966). Quoted in A.E. Afigbo, "The Calabar Mission and the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 5, fasc. 2 (1973): p. 94.

– officials in London and agents in Nigeria – in order to be fully appreciated. The British are divisible into at least five subgroups, including: British offices at Whitehall, agents stationed in Nigeria, merchants (both in and outside of the Royal Niger Company), and missionaries. There were powerful interests on the Nigerian side as well. Middlemen are distinguishable from other locals, and rivalries across different ethnic groups separated communities and towns.<sup>2</sup> All of these interests played significant roles at some point during the violence at the turn of the century, and are therefore imperative to differentiate within the framework.

A result of this group redefinition is that violent episodes are observed to have been driven by subtle interactions among these interests, including misperception, cooperation, and coalescence. Emphasis on these intricacies adds to the existing historiography. With a number of distinct groups acting on the colonial situation in Southern Nigeria, it was inevitable that the actions and intentions of certain interests would be misunderstood by another. In the Ekumeku movement, missionaries had reason to believe that the Royal Niger Company fully supported their endeavors. However, this proved to be a wrongful assumption, with the Company coming to the aid of the missions largely when it was necessary for their commercial interests as well. The Company was apathetic toward the presence of the church; merchants were only concerned with profits, and did just enough to maintain them.

The case of Nana Olomu of Ebrohemie also contains a critical misperception. Nana did not consider the possibility that was antagonizing a large force of Britain's

---

<sup>2</sup> Rubin Neville, ed. *Southern Nigeria Colonial Report, 1903, General Observations*, 31 July 1904. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960*. (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899). East Ardsley, England: EP Microform, 1974. Microfilm.

military.<sup>3</sup> With this belief Nana was rather hostile, serving as a significant obstacle to British trade. Had he been aware of his mistake, he may not have been so aggressive in removing buoys and intimidating markets.<sup>4</sup> Such examples highlight that the colonial story was not simply interests out competing others, or groups uniting to overcome a common enemy. Information was imperfect, especially considering that the British were unfamiliar with Nigeria itself (exemplified in their beliefs about political structure).<sup>5</sup> Interests even coalesced in the eyes of Nigerians, reflective in the Obi's remarks when Father Zappa asked to establish a mission at Issele.<sup>6</sup> This made the Ekumeku, whose direct grievance was against the church, more likely to also attack Royal Niger Company property and blame Britain as a whole for the missionaries' (one interest's) transgressions.<sup>7</sup>

Another result of the redefinition of groups is that the significant themes regarding both cooperation and division among interests are highlighted. Divisions were critical in generating and fueling colonial violence, especially on the Nigerian side. This thesis references the notion of rivalries numerous times, and it is no overstatement. Two of the most significant divisions in Nigeria were ethnic/communal and commercial. Ethnic divisions, as well as community/town divisions, served to prevent cooperation against the threat of Britain's advance. Instead of a unified policy, Nigerian towns competed with one another when the British arrived. While some local rulers were

---

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> FO.2/64, H.B.M.'s Vice Consulate, Benin W.C.A. 7 December 1893. Quoted in J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984), p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 257.

<sup>6</sup> Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

skeptical about the traders and missionaries, others welcomed them in with hopes for economic gain.<sup>8</sup> Such gain was at the expense of neighbors, but this was not viewed as problematic. Self-interest and security trumped concerns over other nearby towns.<sup>9</sup> Some leaders even used the British to military defeat their enemies.<sup>10</sup> Such actions resulted in an uncoordinated response to colonialism, and allowed Britain to establish a presence in the by initially winning over those who let them in.

This theme of division also drove events in a commercial sense. The slave trade (and subsequent palm oil trade played a pivotal role in the lives of Nigerian middlemen, whose interests sometimes did not match those living in towns, or rulers of these communities. Up until the British advance inland, middlemen had enjoyed a profitable existence transporting goods from the interior to the British on the coasts. As Britain inched forward, however, the role of the middleman became less and less crucial. This was effective cost-cutting for Britain, but put the middlemen in a tough position. Still clinging to markets, men like Nana came into conflict with Britain over trading interests. However, at times these Nigerian merchants sided with the British. At Benin, for instance, commercial traders aided Britain in the conquest of the city.<sup>11</sup> Rival traders aided Ralph Moor in establishing a case against Nana.<sup>12</sup> Commercial divisions within Nigeria served to both oppose and to aid Britain in many ways that drove the events of the late nineteenth century.

---

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 101-102.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Philip A. Igbafe, "The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): p. 390.

<sup>12</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 155.

Group dynamics also offer insight into the motivations behind, and functions of, a number of actions. In the Ekumeku movement, the Royal Niger Company's terms impressed upon Igbuzo can be read as being more than simply a punitive measure. It was in fact representative of both the Royal Niger Company's and the mission's interests. However, the motivations behind the contents of the terms were quite different for the Company than they were for the church. The reference of human sacrifice was not socially-motivated, but commercially-based. Nana's governorship appointment approval as well, while seemingly not worth much analysis on the surface, served a critical purpose. Britain could have expected to exacerbate divisions between Nana and his rivals, thereby laying the groundwork for his demise.<sup>13</sup> At the very least, though, the appointment's approval created Nana's role as an economic "placeholder" for British interests, and this definition matches well with the power "vacuum" that was left when Nana was deposed in 1894.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, the framework also stresses the importance of an individual among the various interests: Ralph Moor. His influence was made possible largely by the dynamics of detachment that characterized the British government. Fulfilling his role as a "man on the spot", Moor was able to dictate policy because he was both the source of information for Whitehall, and because the Colonial Office was concerned primarily with "territorial imperative".<sup>15</sup> As long as Moor was patient with London's financial and logistic scrutiny, his goals could be realized. The dispatches he sent concerning men like the Oba of Benin and Nana Olomu raised both commercial and economic fears, and Moor likely even

---

<sup>13</sup> Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977), p. 45-47.

<sup>14</sup> Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, p. 157.

<sup>15</sup> John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), p. 6-7, 200.

exaggerated claims about human sacrifice and other cultural practices. These notions played heavily into how the government viewed and approved policies, including military expeditions.<sup>16</sup>

The framework has forced disagreement with a couple of viewpoints in the historiography, but has also allowed a reconciliation of the views of two historians. In regard to the former, group dynamics emphasize the importance of motivations and relationships – therefore, rather abstract notions such as colonial inevitabilities<sup>17</sup>, while not rejected outright, cannot serve to fully explain the “how” and “why” behind the case studies. Rather, the interests involved are the roots of the explanation. The framework also allows for the reconciliation of Igbafe’s and Asiegbu’s assertions about the causes of the Ekumeku War. Recognizing the blurring of the distinctions among British actors through the Nigerian perspective,<sup>18</sup> the “native” courts can be viewed as an embodiment of anti-British sentiment, as well as the direct cause of the uprisings. While it appears Igbafe’s stance may imply a similar notion,<sup>19</sup> this explanation serves to effectively bridge the gap between the two historians. Thus, by focusing on group relationships, compromises in the historiography can be made.

Finally, group relationships yield intriguing observations that serve to explain the level and likelihood of Nigerian resistance observed in a couple of events. While this is largely speculative (and therefore does not make up the majority of the analysis), it is worthwhile because it offers insight into the effectiveness of British strategy – that is, allowing a collection of different interests to act on Southern Nigeria in a relatively

---

<sup>16</sup> Asiegbu, *British Invaders*, p. 132-133.

<sup>17</sup> Isichei, *The Ibo People*, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Philip A. Igbafe, “Western Ibo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement, 1898-1911,” *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): p. 458.

disorganized manner (as a result of a “drift” policy).<sup>20</sup> The main theme in this analysis is the convergence and divergence of goals. The level of cooperation was important in both how effectively the British addressed uprisings, and in how likely it was that Nigerians would be able to put up resistance. The reason for this is that when interests are all operating with the same concern, the opportunity for misperceptions is minimized. The Benin episode, which did not result in prolonged Nigerian revolt, was driven by economic concerns. Company men, other British merchants, Nigerian traders, and government officials were all working under the goal of commercial gain. This minimized opportunities to misinterpret the actions of others, and led to an effective military expedition.

In contrast, during the birth of the Ekumeku at Issele and Igbuzo, missions sought societal reform while the Royal Niger Company was purely concerned with its commercial interests. Despite the two groups’ goals momentarily converging to use military force, their ultimately diverging aims led to wrongful assumptions. The missionaries believed that the Royal Niger Company supported their endeavors more so than they actually did. The Ekumeku were thus antagonized sufficiently by the mission to produce revolt, but not addressed adequately enough by the Royal Niger Company to completely shut down the rebellion. Obviously, the theory of goal convergences/divergences is in addition to many other factors that were present in these episodes. For instance, the Ekumeku may also have been successful because of a certain Igbo predisposition to resist British rule.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the base notion of cooperation was critical for effective Nigerian resistance. Overcoming the traditional obstacles of

---

<sup>20</sup> G.N. Uzoigwe, *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974), p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Igbafe, “Western Ibo Society,” p. 458.



ethnic and communal divisions was a difficult task, but a salient and important characteristic of the Ekumeku.<sup>22</sup>

This thesis takes a field rich in historiography – the British conquest of Southern Nigeria – and applies a specific framework to violence observed circa 1900. In doing so, it highlights the interactions among a number of different actors present at the colonial scene. These interactions serve as the bases for understanding the events that occurred and emphasize perception, cooperation, division, and the relative influence of various groups and characters in the colonial dynamic. The framework also offers unique analyses and definitions, particularly with regard to the Ekumeku movement, the Benin expedition, and the Ebrohemie War. Ultimately, group dynamics prove to be an effective means of highlighting the intricacies of these historical episodes by focusing on motivations, explanations, and causes behind events.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, p. 9.

### Primary Sources

- Reports and Correspondence on the Niger Coast Protectorate and Surrounding Territories, 1888-99. Series of British Parliamentary Papers. Irish University Press, Shannon, Ireland, 1971.
- Rubin, Neville, ed. *Government Publications Relating to Nigeria, 1862-1960*. (MF 3836, 3837, 3840: 1891-1899). East Ardsley, England: EP Microform, 1974. Microfilm.
- United Kingdom. *The London Gazette*. Available online at <http://www.london.gov.uk/gazette.co.uk/search>
- United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 45 (1897). Available online at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>
- United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 46 (1897). Available online at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>
- United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 55 (1898). Available online at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>
- United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 66 (1899). Available online at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>
- United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 70 (1899). Available online at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>

### Secondary Sources

- Afigbo, A. E. "The Calabar Mission and the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 5, fasc. 2 (1973): pp. 94-106.
- Ajayi, J. F. Ade. *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965.
- Anene, J. C. *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
- Asiegbu, Johnson U. J. *Nigeria and Its British Invaders, 1851-1920*. New York: NOK Publishers International, 1984.
- Ayandele, E. A. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. Edited by J. F. A. Ajayi. UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1966.
- Burns, Sir Alan. *History of Nigeria*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963.

- Carland, John M. *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985.
- Dike, Kenneth Onwuka. *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1956.
- Ekechi, F. K. "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): pp. 103-115.
- Falola, Toyin. *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Flint, John E. *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Gallagher, John, Ronald Robinson, and Alice Denny. *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961.
- Hodgkin, Thomas. *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Igbafe, Philip A. "The Fall of Benin: A Reassessment," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): 385-400.
- Igbafe, Philip A. "Western Ibo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement, 1898-1911," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): 441-459.
- Ikime, Obaro. *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977.
- Isichei, Elizabeth Allo. *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship – to 1906*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973.
- Lloyd, P. C. "The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century; an Outline Social History," *The Journal of African History* 4, no. 2 (1963): 207-231.
- Lovejoy, Paul E. and Toyin Falola, eds. *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003.
- Maxwell, J. Lowry. *Nigeria: The Land, The People and Christian Progress*. London: World Dominion Press, 1927.
- Neville, George W. "Nanna Olomu of Benin," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 14, no. 54 (1915): 162-167.

- Nwabara, S. N. *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860-1960*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, Inc., 1978.
- Ohadike, Don C. *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883-1914*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991.
- Ryder, A. F. C. *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897*. Edited by K. O. Dike. New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1969.
- Tasie, G. O. M. *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918*. Belgium: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1978.
- Taylor, Don. *The British in Africa*. New York: Roy Publishers, Inc., 1962.
- Uzoigwe, G. N. *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974.

#### Maps/Figures

Figure 1: Southern Nigeria circa 1900. From: Anene, J. C. *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.