

## RENTING OUT THE EMPIRE

RENTING OUT THE EMPIRE: A HISTORY OF THE ROYAL NIGER COMPANY

By ELVAR INGIMUNDARSON, B.A., MAG.THEOL., M.LITT.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University © Copyright by Elvar Ingimundarson, December 2022

McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2022) Hamilton, Ontario (History)

TITLE: Renting out the Empire: A History of the Royal Niger Company AUTHOR: Elvar Ingimundarson, B.A. (University of Iceland), MAG.THEOL (University of Iceland), M.LITT (University of St Andrews) SUPERVISOR: Professor Bonny Ibhawoh NUMBER OF PAGES:

ii, 365.

This thesis is a revised history of the Royal Niger Company. It seeks to include perspectives and narratives missing from the company's history. Previous histories of the company have not sufficiently included the perspectives of the Africans who interacted with the company as employees, customers, competitors, and adversaries. This dissertation seeks to remedy this problem by using archival sources to glean information about the lives and perspectives of these Africans. It also covers the conflicts between the company and indigenous polities, especially the Akassa War, in more detail than has previously been done. It also seeks to clarify the somewhat muddled history of the transition of the Royal Niger Constabulary into the West African Frontier Force. The Constabulary was a precursor of the Frontier Force, and the transition of its personnel and traditions into the new force is one of the lasting legacies of the company.

This thesis is a revised history of the Royal Niger Company. It seeks to include perspectives and narratives missing from the company's history. These are the contribution of its African employees to the company's trading and military operations as well as the link between the company's need for managers and skilled artisans that could work in the disease climate of the Niger with the rise of a new social class in West Africa. This class here, referred to as Anglicized Africans, came into existence as Africans acquired western education and artisan training in missionary schools on the West Coast of Africa. Without the Anglicized Africans, maintaining trading stations and steam vessels on the Niger would not have been possible. At the same time, working for the company gave Anglicized Africans opportunities for material and social advancement not available to other indigenous people. The Anglicized Africans who worked with the RNC in the early colonial phase of company rule would later play a critical role in colonial politics and anti-colonial nationalism. This study draws attention to their antecedents to help us better understand their later role in the colonial and post-colonial states.

The thesis also explores how the company's operations affected existing social and political structures in West Africa. The most significant conflicts were the company's wars with the Nembe Kingdom and the Sokoto Caliphate. The internal political changes within the Nembe Kingdom due to the Akassa War have not been discussed in previous company histories. This revised history of the company explains how conflict with the RNC caused the balance of power within the Nembe state to shift to a previously marginalized Christian faction led by Anglicized Africans. The thesis also expands on the company's operation of a fully functioning army of African and European soldiers, the largest British fighting force on the Niger from 1886 to 1899. The tactics and strategy of this semi-autonomous military force are explored for the first time, and the integration of the

Constabulary into the West African Frontier Force is covered in more detail than has previously been done.

Acknowledgements: I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. Bonny Ibhawoh for his support and encouragement during this project. I also wish to thank Dr. Martin Horn and Dr. Stephen Heathorn of my doctoral committee for their guidance and help during the writing process. Most of all I am indebted to my family and my wife Meagan Leigh Clark-Ingimundarson without whom none of this would have been possible.

## Contents

Chapter One: A Historiography of the British Empire and its Chartered Companies .....	1
Methodology .....	7
The Historical Origins of Britain’s Chartered Companies .....	10
The Historiography of the British Empire in Africa .....	16
Post-Colonial Developments .....	32
African Engagement with the Empire.....	42
Chapter Two: Chartering the Niger .....	51
George Goldie Enters the Niger Trade .....	67
Establishing a British Protectorate on the Niger .....	83
The Berlin Conference and the Lower Niger .....	96
Negotiating a Charter .....	104
Chapter Three: Administering the Niger .....	121
The Establishment of Company Administration.....	124
The Advent of the Anglicized Africans .....	134
The Establishment of the Royal Niger Constabulary .....	151
British opposition to RNC expansion .....	170
Chapter Four: Fighting for the Niger.....	182
The Company's Employees and Trading Stations.....	186
The Imports and Exports of the Lower Niger .....	200
Relations with the Nembe Kingdom.....	210
The Akassa War Begins .....	218
The British Counteroffensive .....	233
Chapter Five: From Chartered to Commercial Empire.....	251
The RNC’s Northern Frontier.....	254
The RNC’s War with the Bida and Illorin Emirates .....	264
The Tide Turns Against the Company .....	291
Transitioning from Chartered to Commercial Power.....	305
Conclusions.....	322
Contemporary Lessons .....	329
Legacy in West-Africa .....	330



Bibliography .....	334
Primary Sources: Archival Sources .....	335
Primary Sources: Printed Works.....	338
Secondary Sources .....	344

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of the Niger River imposed on the modern-day borders of West Africa.....	55
Figure 2: The personal standard of Nana Olomu.....	55
Figure 3: A map showing the territorial claims of the RNC in March 1887.....	127
Figure 4: A map showing the eventual division of West Africa by 1914 into French, German, and British colonies.....	127
Figure 5: The organization of the RNC’s administration.....	129
Figure 6: A sketch of the Wari branch of the Niger River.....	156
Figure 7: A photo showing palm kernel trade at the RNC’s Aboh station in the late 1880s.....	156
Figure 8: Sir William Wallace, Senior Executive Officer of the RNC.....	197
Figure 9: The SS Nupe in drydock at Akassa station sometime in the late 1880s.....	197
Figure 10: A map of the waterways connecting the Nembe State and RNC territory.....	222
Figure 11: A drawing of the SS King Massaba.....	230
Figure 12: A double barrelled Gardner Gun on a land service carriage.....	230
Figure 13: The HMS Thrush.....	241
Figure 14: Photo of a Constabulary Soldier.....	241
Figure 15: A drawing of a Constabulary soldier.....	241
Figure 16: Map of the Territories of the Royal Niger Company.....	265
Figure 17: Sir George Dashwood Taubman Goldie.....	271
Figure 18: Major Alfred J. Arnold, Commandant of the Constabulary.....	271
Figure 19: A map showing the theater of the first part of the Bida-Illorin campaign .....	276
Figure 20: Engraving of Whitworth 9-pounder rifled breechloading field gun.....	290
Figure 21: A map showing the theater of the second part of the Bida-Illorin campaign.....	290
Figure 22: Map showing the new boundary between the British and French Empires in the Niger and Gold Coast territories established by the Anglo-French Convention of 1898.....	305
Figure 23: Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.....	305
Figure 24: Constabulary Attestation Sheet signed by all recruits of the RNC.....	309
Figure 25: A group of clerks of the UAC.....	309

## List of Abbreviations

CMS: Church Missionary Society

CO: Colonial Office

FO: Foreign Office

NAC: National African Company

NC: Niger Company

RNC: Royal Niger Company

UAC: United African Company

## Note on Time

All times mentioned are given using the 24-hour clock.

## Declaration of Academic Achievement

I, Elvar Ingimundarson, declare this thesis to be my own work. I am the sole author of this document. No part of this work has been published or submitted for publication or for a higher degree at another institution.

To the best of my knowledge, the content of this document does not infringe on anyone's copyright.

My supervisor, Dr Bonny Ibhawoh, and the members of my supervisory committee, Dr Martin Horn and Dr Stephen Heathorn, have provided guidance and support at all stages of this project.

# Chapter One: A Historiography of the British Empire and its Chartered Companies

The purpose of this dissertation is to write a new history of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) that includes perspectives and narratives heretofore absent in the history of the company. This is not to say that the dissertation will not tread ground already well covered in the historiography, but it will add new dimensions to the established narrative. The main dimensions of company history that have not been previously included are the contribution of its African employees to the trading operations of the company, the link between the company's need for African employees with the rise of a new social class in Africa, and its operation of a semi-autonomous army of African and European soldiers that was the largest British fighting force on the Niger from 1886 to 1898.

I chose to examine the history of the RNC because it allows for a greater understanding of historical development in Western Africa during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It also allows for a better understanding of the “company phase” of British rule in Africa. To fully understand the history of Nigeria, we need to understand this early colonial phase of company rule that lasted from 1886 to 1900. This thesis provides unique insights into that history. One of the most significant developments in nineteenth century West-Africa was the advent of a new social class here referred to as “Anglicized Africans.” This new social class came into existence as Africans acquired western education and craftsman training in missionary schools on the West Coast of Africa. The advent of this new social class coincided with the RNC's need for managers and skilled craftsmen that could work in the disease climate of the Niger. Anglicized Africans became the core of the company's middle management and its contingent of skilled craftsmen in Africa. Without them, it would not have been possible to maintain trading stations and steam vessels on the Niger. At the same time, working for the company gave Anglicized Africans opportunities for material and social advancement not available to other indigenous people. The

Anglicized Africans have so far largely been missing from the history of the company. Although their voices are often missing from the archival material, what I found is noteworthy because it gives brief glimpses of their roles within the RNC and their lives under company rule. In this history of the company, I have teased out the role of Africans in RNC history using the fragmented and limited sources available.

The RNC also affected existing social and political structures in West Africa. The company's monopoly forced African competition out of the river trade interrupting the development of African trading firms on the Niger. The RNC's emergence as a political power brought it into conflict with several indigenous polities. The most significant of these conflicts were the company's wars with the Nembe Kingdom and the Sokoto Caliphate. While the weakening of the Caliphate as a result of its conflict with the RNC has been widely discussed, the internal political changes within the Nembe Kingdom as a result of the Akassa War, have not been discussed in previous histories of the company. This revised history of the company will explore how conflict with the RNC caused the balance of power within the Nembe state to shift to the previously marginalized Christian faction led by "Anglicized Africans" such as trader and politician James Allen Spiff (d. 1930).

The Royal Niger Constabulary was established in 1886 when the company received its charter. It complemented local security forces protecting the stations of the company and was used to secure control of the Niger River for the RNC. Its members were Yoruba and Hausa recruits commanded by officers recruited from the British Army. It quickly became the most effective fighting force on the Niger and allowed the company to enforce its monopoly of the river trade. The recruitment of soldiers for the Constabulary tied into the British search for "martial races" in its territories. The organization of the force directly influenced its successor,

the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), as the obsession with exclusively recruiting “martial races” had to be accommodated to realities on the ground in West Africa.

There is a lesson to be learned from the history of the RNC concerning giving private corporations control over public administration. Why would a private corporate entity seek to shoulder the burden of governance? Was it done in the service of the empire? From a desire to act as caretaker of the people in its territories? Or was it simply done to achieve economic aims by political means? As we shall see, the RNC was not a philanthropic enterprise, and although it publicly claimed to be acting in the interests of both empire and Africans, its actions show that it sought political power in the form of a royal charter because that seemed the only option left to achieve its financial goal of monopolizing the palm oil trade on the Niger River.

The history of the RNC also ties into the wider history of the British Empire. It connects to imperial policy in the late nineteenth century and the different drives behind imperial expansion. At the same time, it has been argued, for example, by Geoffrey Baker, Dorothy Wellesley, John Flint and D.J.M. Muffet that the founding and subsequent territorial expansion of the RNC was mainly motivated by the imperial pride of its founders and their wish to contribute to the expansion of the British Empire but this conclusion is not supported by the archival evidence.<sup>1</sup> Rather it will be argued here that the founding and expansion of the company were solely motivated by the need to create and maintain a monopoly on the Niger palm oil trade. A monopoly which Goldie and the directors believed was the only way to keep the palm oil trade on the Niger profitable. It could be argued that such a discussion is meaningless as the

---

<sup>1</sup> For such arguments see: Geoffrey L. Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1996); Dorothy Wellesley, *Sir George Goldie: Founder of Nigeria* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1934); John E. Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); D. J. M. Muffet, *Empire Builder Extraordinary, Sir George Goldie: His Philosophy of Government and Empire*. (Douglas: Shearwater Press, 1978).



formation of the RNC did eventually lead to imperial expansion in Africa. But we must be careful to differentiate between intention and causality. The intentions of historical figures matter as well as the results of their actions. We should also not conflate the goals of the British government with the aims of the RNC. The government wanted to expand its control in West Africa before the formation of the RNC. It was in the government's decision to expand its protectorates in the Niger Delta that Goldie found a political solution to the economic problems of the NAC. The RNC was willing to fulfill the government's desire for a permanent representation on the Niger in return for a charter. But I argue that the RNC then used the small administration it funded almost exclusively to achieve its financial goal of monopolizing trade in the Lower Niger. In this way, the charter system allowed the government to fulfill its desire for expansion in Africa without dedicating any extra resources there and allowed the RNC to use political power to reach its financial goals.

There have been several publications dedicated solely to the history of the RNC and its leader Sir George Dashwood Taubman Goldie. The most recent of these is *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971* by Geoffrey Baker, which was published in 1996. Baker, himself a former employee of the United Africa Company, did an excellent job of examining the history of the RNC's commercial operations. His work was wide in scope and might more accurately have been titled, *A History of British Trading Companies in Nigeria* as the period he covered stretched from 1830 to 1971. Although Baker discusses some of the African traders competing with the British companies, he does not devote any attention to the African employees of the companies and the transition of the Constabulary from private to imperial service is dealt with in a single sentence. He also devoted little of his attention to the

RNC's transition from chartered to a purely commercial entity apart from listing which employees of the company transitioned to the new colonial government.

In 1978 D. J. M. Muffett wrote *Empire builder extraordinary, Sir George Goldie: His philosophy of government and Empire*. This book is a collection of the surviving writings of Goldie, being mainly a collection of letters and articles. The result is a very flattering portrait of Goldie as an empire builder that, while true to the rhetoric he often used, does not stand up to scrutiny when measured against his actions. It pays little attention to historical events and provides no insight into the commercial history of the RNC, nor its connection with the history of the “Anglicized Africans” or the Royal Niger Constabulary.

John Flint's book *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* has been the seminal work about the RNC since its publication in 1960. But Flint's focus was always on George Goldie and his part in the company's story. Flint devoted little time to examining how the company's need for managers in Africa coincided with the emergence of “Anglicized Africans” in West Africa and how this social class proved the middle managerial class that ran RNC operations in Africa. This might be because Flint's focus was always on the metropole and how decision making there affected the colonial periphery. He therefore focused almost exclusively on the role of British decision makers in the company to the exclusion of everything else.

His research was based on sources that only give glimpses of the day to day running of the company and the role of its African employees and this might also partly explain why they are completely missing from Flint's narrative. I was able to gather some glimpses of African voices using the same sources as Flint and it is therefore possible that the exclusion of the African perspective from Flint's narrative owes something to the spirit of the age in which he wrote his work before the focus of historians started to switch to theretofore marginalized voices.

Flint also viewed the last years of the company as a period of decline and fall and paid little attention to the company's successful transition from chartered to commercial enterprise. He also did not discuss the fate of the RNC's private military force, the Royal Niger Company Constabulary, at all.

The earliest history of the company was written in 1934 by Stephen Gwynn to be included in Dorothy Wellesley's book *Sir George Goldie, Founder of Nigeria*. Wellesley's work was very focused on the person of George Goldie and his contribution to the British Empire, while the history of the RNC by Gwynn focused on the personal efforts of George Goldie and events and decision-making in the metropole. Wellesley and Gwynn's hagiography of Goldie was light on historical research and facts and cannot be considered an academic history of Goldie or the RNC.

## Methodology

The research presented here is based on archival materials, primarily from the British National Archives in Kew. These are supplemented by some archival material from the Church Mission Society Archives in Birmingham as well as books, pamphlets, and newspapers printed in the late nineteenth century. Much of the published material from the nineteenth century I accessed at the Newberry Library, an independent research library in Chicago. The Adam Matthew Digital Archives were also helpful in providing access to the digitized records of the Church Missionary Society Periodicals and several British and African newspaper archives. The Gale Online Database was used to access the digital archives of *The Times* as well as several British periodicals from the late nineteenth century. The Hansard Archives provided access to the debates in parliament concerning West Africa and the company in the late nineteenth century.

When beginning my research in 2018 I visited the National Archives in Kew to collect basic materials from the Foreign Office and Colonial Office concerning the Royal Niger Company and British colonial government in Western Africa. The FO/83 and FO/84 contained much of the correspondence of the Foreign Office related to the RNC and events in West Africa in the late nineteenth century. The FO/403 series is a collection of all correspondence and memorandums issued concerning the RNC and this proved invaluable as a starting point for research into the company. Consulting with a Nigerian colleague we made joint inquiries at National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan about materials related to the RNC and British colonial governance. As it turned out the Ibadan archives did not possess any significant material related to the RNC and it appears that most documents related to the company were moved to the metropole at some point. As the RNC eventually became Unilever I inquired with the Unilever Archives, and it turned out they had several boxes of the company's documents as well as some of the papers of the Royal Niger Constabulary. Sadly, the outbreak of Covid-19 led to Unilever closing their archives to all visitors as they were housing inside Unilever's manufacturing complex in Port Sunlight. After the closure due to Covid-19 Unilever decided to move its archives to a new location and this led to their archives remaining closed to visitors until that move is complete.

After being informed of the closure of the Unilever Archives and discovering that no company records were left in Nigeria it became evident that only the National Archives in Kew and the various online sources made available to me through the university would be available for my research. When working through the chapters of the dissertation it became apparent that more material related to the RNC's transition to the Niger Company and the Constabulary's integration into the West African Frontier Force was needed. I therefore took a second research

trip to the National Archives in Kew in 2021 to collect materials for the second half of my dissertation. In addition to more Foreign Office material, I discovered the CO/445 and CO/446 series. These contain correspondence and papers related to the final days of the RNC and its Constabulary. It also provided some insight into the lives of the African soldiers in company service. The material collected on this trip allowed me to finish my dissertation.

The inclusion of the information from CO/445 and CO/446 allowed me to provide more detail about the last years of RNC operations which had been missing from previous histories of the company. Close examination of the archival materials also allowed brief glimpses of the day to day running of the company and the lives of its African employees that made up most of its workforce. The limitations of the sources used for this dissertation is that they only give us the perspective of government officials and high-ranking British employees of the RNC. There are only brief glimpses of the voice and perspective of the Africans involved with and affected by company operations. I could find no documents in the National Archives that I could confirm were written by African employees of the company. The closest I could get to the African perspective was in interrogation documents related to criminal cases and military intelligence. These documents sometimes appear to allow the African speaker to describe events from his point of view. But we must remember that the viewpoint presented might have been influenced by the recorder or have been influenced by the context in which it was taken.

The documents of the Constabulary, currently located in the Unilever Archives might have provided a more detailed picture of the lives of African soldiers in company service and the transition from private to government military service. When using the archival material available we must keep in mind that they only give us a limited perspective of events and often

present events as they were experienced by the people in the upper echelons of government and company, not by the lower ranking African and European employees.

## The Historical Origins of Britain's Chartered Companies

Because the history of the RNC is part of the history of the British Empire, especially the British Empire in West Africa, we must begin with an examination of the historiography of the British Empire in Africa and the historiography of its chartered companies. The chartered companies were part of British foreign policy from the very beginning. When the kingdoms of England and Scotland were united in 1707, creating Great Britain, the chartered companies already had a long history dating back to medieval England and Scotland. Their origins are to be found in the merchant fraternities and guilds of medieval England and Scotland. In England, the first chartered companies were formed to regulate trade with German and Dutch ports. These were mercantilist organizations supported by the king because of the widespread belief that an adequate money supply was essential to a healthy economy. Precious metals necessary for minting currency could only be stockpiled if exports exceeded imports, and this meant that trade had to be tightly regulated.<sup>2</sup>

In 1407 a group of English merchants operating in the Netherlands received a royal charter to regulate English trade in Dutch ports. The new legal entity took the name the Company of Merchant Adventurers of London and became the first English chartered company. For the government, the issuing of charters provided increased control of foreign trade, and it

---

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Muchmore, "A Note on Thomas Mun's 'England's Treasure by Forraign Trade,'" *The Economic History Review* 23, no. 3 (1970): 498.

allowed the small group of merchants to dominate and later monopolize England's richest trade route.<sup>3</sup>

While the Company of Merchant Adventurers of London was a regulated chartered company, it was not a true joint-share company like later chartered companies would become. The first true joint-stock chartered company was the Russia Company, chartered in 1555. Unlike previous companies, it was not formed to regulate existing trade but rather to open up a new trade. This endeavour required considerable high-risk investment from the merchants of London. A shareholder company was created to manage investment and profit shares. This represented a departure from the earlier regulated companies where merchants of the companies had traded as individuals. This new type of company could trade as a single body using a large number of paid employees and representatives.<sup>4</sup> The joint-stock model made it easier for the company to act as a unified body and allowed for more extensive operations as the companies were now national enterprises where wealthy citizens could invest their income.

The English crown started issuing patents of monopoly for West-African trade as early as 1588, when queen Elisabeth I, gave a group of English merchants exclusive rights to trade in the area between Senegal and Gambia rivers. Scotland's first chartered company was formed in 1634 when Charles I, the king of England, Ireland, and Scotland, issued a charter to four of his Scottish courtiers, Patrick Maule, Thomas Maxwell, Thomas Thomson, and Henry Alexander, giving them a monopoly on all trade between Africa and Scotland.<sup>5</sup> In 1660 a charter for trade between West Africa and England was issued to the regulated Company of Royal Adventurers

---

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, "The Origins and Early Development of the Merchant Adventurers' Organization in London as Shown in Their Own Mediaeval Records," *The Economic History Review* 4, no. 2 (1933): 147–48.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Willan, *The Muscovy Merchants of 1555* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), 5–7.

<sup>5</sup> Robin Law, "The First Scottish Guinea Company, 1634-9," *The Scottish Historical Review* 76, no. 202 (February 19, 1997): 186–87.

into Africa.<sup>6</sup> After a series of ill-fortuned expeditions, the company was reorganized into a true joint-stock company in 1672, and the name changed to the Royal African Company. The company maintained a few trading outposts or factories, as they were known at the time, on the West Coast of Africa to trade manufactured goods for enslaved Africans and gold. Still, the susceptibility of European visitors to tropical disease made any expansion into the interior an unattractive prospect.<sup>7</sup>

It was in the far east where the most powerful chartered company of the British Empire would rise to dominance. Its history began in 1600 when Queen Elizabeth granted a royal charter to the Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies. In the beginning, the British East India Company, as it came to be known, was not a true joint-stock company. Instead, its members raised funds for each individual trading voyage the company undertook to the East Indies. These were considered high-risk investments, and returns on the first few trips disappointed investors.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this unpromising start, the company developed into a fully formed joint-stock entity with the first joint stock of 1613-1616 and became a naval and commercial powerhouse in the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> The company now had shipyards in England constructing well-armed trading vessels. The company had established permanent bases in the Red Sea and Indian ocean and used its naval strength to drive the Portuguese away from the Hormuz straits.<sup>10</sup> A competitor to the East India Company emerged in 1695 when the Company of Scotland trading to Africa

---

<sup>6</sup> George F. Zook, "The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading Into Africa," *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 2 (1919): 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> Zook, 24–25, 49.

<sup>8</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Keay, 111.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (London: Verso, 2003), 49–50.



and the Indies was established by an act of the Parliament of Scotland. But the disastrous Darien Expeditions of 1698-1700 drained the company of its capital, and the Act of Union of 1707 stipulated that the company be liquidated.<sup>11</sup>

During its first hundred and fifty years of operations, the East India Company remained a commercial entity, with most of its revenue provided by its monopoly of English trade in the East Indies. In the 1760s, the nature of the company began to change. The catalyst for this was the Seven Years' War which led to a confrontation between Britain and France in India. After company forces conquered Calcutta and Bengal, the company was poised to become a major power on the Indian subcontinent.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, the company had become the supreme military power in Asia with a land army of some 235,000 men. Its primary source of revenue was now taxation of its 40 million Indian subjects. However, its monopoly on the trade of valuable commodities such as opium exports to China remained an essential part of its operation.<sup>13</sup> But even though the company's position seemed unassailable, the mercantilist system which had created it was facing mounting opposition in Britain.

The most serious attack on colonial administration by chartered companies in the eighteenth century came in 1788 when the House of Commons impeached Warren Hastings (1732-1818), the East India Company's first Governor-General in India. The impeachment trial was part of a larger development in the late eighteenth century whereby the British parliament attempted to place restraints on the power of the East India Company. The first step was the

---

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Watt, "The Management of Capital by the Company of Scotland 1696–1707," *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (November 1, 2005): 113–15.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce P Lenman, "Colonial Wars and Imperial Instability, 1688–1793," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162.

<sup>13</sup> D. A. Washbrook, "India 1818-1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Rogers Louis, Andrew Porter, and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 401–4.

passing of the East India Company Act of 1772. According to historian Mithi Mukherjee, the purpose of the new regulation was to limit the arbitrary power of the company's governor in India and to introduce a series of checks and balances to the administration of India. This was meant to limit the perceived corruption of the Nabobs, British subjects returning from India with great individual wealth.<sup>14</sup>

When the regulation act and two further India parliamentary bills of 1783 and 1784 failed to bring the East India Company to heel, the House of Commons took the extraordinary step of impeaching the returning Governor-General Hastings for corruption, bribery, and high crimes. The case ended before the House of Lords, the highest court of appeal in England. The trial became a debate about the nature of the colonial state and the future of the British Empire in India. In the end, it was Hastings's idea of "geographic morality" that won the day. The actions of a British agent on the colonial periphery could not be judged by the laws and morals of the metropole.<sup>15</sup> This would become the legal reality of the RNC when it began its operations in the Lower Niger and became apparent once the British government tried to bring acting Agent-General William Wallace (1856-1916) to trial for his crimes in Africa, an incident which will be discussed further in chapter four.

A notable critic of the chartered company system was Adam Smith, who began to criticize the monopolistic trade of the chartered companies in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Smith attacked the operations of the chartered companies both at home and abroad. In Britain, their government-sanctioned trade monopoly forced British taxpayers to pay higher prices for East Indian goods because there was no competition in the East Indian trade to

---

<sup>14</sup> Mithi Mukherjee, "Justice, War, and the Imperium: India and Britain in Edmund Burke's Prosecutorial Speeches in the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings," *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (2005): 600.

<sup>15</sup> Mukherjee, 608–9.

moderate prices. In India, the mercantilist policies of the East India Company stunted the Indian economy by selling European goods for high prices in India while limiting the total exports of India to maintain high prices for those goods in Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Smith's arguments were echoed by a large lobby of merchants and manufacturers opposed to the East India Company's trade monopoly. In 1813 they lobbied parliament to issue the 1813 Charter Act revoking the company's trade monopoly.<sup>17</sup> By this time, the company had already transitioned into a governmental and military power on the Indian subcontinent, and the new law did not threaten its existence. However, the 1813 Charter Act was just the first step in a more sweeping change in British governmental policy. The old system of mercantilism was now giving way to the new policy of free trade. According to historians Peter J. Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, there was a fundamental shift in British economic policy following the Napoleonic Wars of 1803-1815. After the wars, the British government gradually favoured the expansion of world trade. It embarked on an expansionist policy to establish a new economic order based on the free trade maxims. Mercantilist systems such as tariffs, trade barriers, restrictive market regulation, and monopolies were suppressed in favour of free trade.<sup>18</sup>

According to Cain and Hopkins, the British mercantilist system began to unravel in the 1840s. In 1846 the government abolished the Corn Laws opening the British domestic market to imported food. This was followed up in 1849 with the repeal of the Navigation Acts removing restrictions on shipping to and from the colonies.<sup>19</sup> The final blow to the East India Company came in 1857 when the Indian regiments of its armed forces rebelled against company rule.

---

<sup>16</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), 596–603.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Webster, "The Political Economy of Trade Liberalization: The East India Company Charter Act of 1813," *The Economic History Review* 43, no. 3 (1990): 409–11.

<sup>18</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 648–49.

<sup>19</sup> Cain and Hopkins, 650–51.

Thousands of British troops had to be dispatched to quell the revolt, and the British government lost confidence in the company's ability to govern India. As a result, the greatest of the chartered companies was liquidated in 1858 and the rule of India passed to the British government.<sup>20</sup>

With the Corn Laws and Navigation Acts abolished and the largest chartered company dissolved, it seemed that free trade reigned supreme in the British Empire and chartered companies were a thing of the past. Yet, within 25 years, a new generation of chartered companies would be formed to expand the British Empire. The first one was the British North Borneo Company (BNBC) which in 1881 received a royal charter to settle and administer North Borneo on behalf of the British government. A second company, the Royal Niger Company (RNC), received a charter in 1886, followed by the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) in 1888 and the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1889.<sup>21</sup>

## The Historiography of the British Empire in Africa

Before we delve into the history of the companies, it is necessary to examine previous historical writing on the subject. This is necessary since this revised history of the RNC builds upon the work of previous generations of historians. It also includes new dimensions of the story of the company made accessible to English speakers by the work of African historians such as Ebiegeri J. Alagoa, whose work on the Nembe state allows us to view events such as the Akassa War from both the perspective of the RNC and the African polities fighting against its expansion. Such work from African historians has made it possible for dissertations such as this to incorporate an understanding of the African political system beyond the simplistic “kings and

---

<sup>20</sup> John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 246–57.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Burroughs, “Imperial Institutions and the Government of Empire,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Rogers Louis, Andrew Porter, and Elaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 193–94.

chiefs” descriptions presented by British archival sources. Sadly historians such as Alagoa have not included the perspectives of the Africans working for and with the RNC in their accounts and such perspectives must therefore be gleaned from the British archival sources.

We must also keep in mind that the British Empire was not a monolith and its empire in West Africa, which will be examined in this dissertation, had many unique features of geography, culture, and politics which influenced the development of British influence there. This historiography of the British Empire recounted here must therefore focus on the empire as it existed in Western Africa and can never encompass the historiography of the empire as a whole. Chartered companies have been a topic in the historiography of the British Empire as well as the historiography of Africa and Britain.

After the Second Anglo-Boer War, a new organization known as the Round Table Study Movement became influential in the historiography of the British Empire, primarily through its publication the *Round Table Magazine*. A quarterly review of Imperial and Commonwealth affairs, it was first published in 1910. The movement’s official goal was to heed the call of historians such as Seeley and politicians such as Lord Milner (1854-1925) to bring about a closer union of the British Empire.<sup>22</sup>

One of the best-known historians of this movement was Lionel Curtis (1872-1955), a lecturer on imperial history at Oxford University and a devoted advocate of imperial federalism. For Curtis, the only way the empire could survive was to instill a sense of imperial citizenship into the people of the metropole and the periphery. He feared that should the colonies break off from the empire as the United States had done, Britain would be finished as a world power.<sup>23</sup> This idea that only closer political cohesion between metropole and periphery was the British

---

<sup>22</sup> May Alexander, “The Round Table, 1910-66” (Oxford University, 1995), 64.

<sup>23</sup> Lionel Curtis, *The Round Table Movement: Its Past and Future* (Toronto: Rous & Mann, 1913), 42–44.

Empire's only hope of survival, known colloquially as "unite or bust," was influential in the historiography of the British Empire in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, it was not without its critics. Among these were journalist and politician Leopold Amery (1873-1955) and journalist and author Richard Jebb (1847-1953). Amery and Jebb believed that the white settler colonies would inevitably break off from the empire and that the empire would need to be replaced by an alliance of those nations with Britain.<sup>24</sup> This policy was also advocated by many political figures in the settler colonies, such as Jan Smuts (1870-1950), the second prime minister of South Africa, who was an outspoken critic of the Round Table Movement.<sup>25</sup>

Given that we now often refer to the change of focus in humanistic studies that occurred in the 1970s as a "cultural turn," it is noteworthy that Curtis, Amery, and Jebb all studied and thought about the British Empire as a cultural entity as well as a political and economic one. In their studies of nationalism in the colonies and the Britannic nationalism of the empire, Curtis, Amery and Jebb examined the cultural foundation of the British Empire. They hypothesized that the empire would have to evolve as a cultural institution to survive. The main differences between these historians of the early twentieth century and the cultural historians of the late twentieth century would be their ideas about which parts of the culture of the Empire were worthy of study.

The last significant historiographical development on the subject of the British Empire before the Great War was instigated by John A. Hobson in 1902 when he published his book *Imperialism: A Study*. Hobson's work would become a foundation of the Marxist historiographical interpretation of the British Empire. According to Hobson, imperialism was a

---

<sup>24</sup> William Rogers Louis, "Introduction," 15–16.

<sup>25</sup> David Brock Katz, *General Jan Smuts and His First World War in Africa, 1914-1917* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2022), 221.

debased form of nationalism that had side-tracked the natural transition of nationalism to internationalism. Instead of a universal system of government where nations cooperated to advance their national goals, there was now only the cutthroat competition of imperialism.<sup>26</sup>

Hobson was highly critical of the moral justification of empire, often referred to as the “civilizing mission.” According to Hobson, the rationale that the “higher” races of Europe had to care for and dominate the “lower” races of Africa and Asia was highly hypocritical. In his view, there was no evidence that European subjugation advanced the cause of world civilization or improved the condition of the subject people. Instead, the “civilizing mission” seemed to consist of the enforced imposition of European industry, political institutions, and religion on the subjugated peoples.<sup>27</sup> Here we might have the first identification of what would later be called the “eurocentrism” of imperialism.

Hobson believed that the free trade policies that had dominated British foreign policy between the 1850s and 1870s had by the 1880s been subverted by militarism, oligarchy, bureaucracy, protection, the concentration of capital, and violent trade fluctuations on which imperialism was based.<sup>28</sup> This splitting of the Victorian era into periods of Free Trade and Imperialism would be highly criticized by later historians such as Fieldhouse in his work *Economics and Empire* and provided Robinson and Gallagher with a starting point for their imperialism of free trade theory.

For Hobson, imperialism also represented the hijacking of national policy by a small group of industrialists and financiers. He argued that the public resources of the nation should never be used to safeguard private investments. This was a sentiment that was entirely

---

<sup>26</sup> John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Pott & Company, 1902).

<sup>27</sup> Hobson, 235–37.

<sup>28</sup> Hobson, 12, 359.

incompatible with the use of chartered companies for imperial expansion. Hobson believed that private financiers, namely Jews who Hobson believed to control much of the capital of European states, had used political, social, religious, and philanthropic lobbying to force Britain into a series of imperial wars meant to secure their foreign investments and monopolize foreign markets.<sup>29</sup> We can hypothesize that Hobson's idea of capitalist financiers as the source of foreign wars inspired the later Marxist conspiracy theory that a secretive cabal of internationalist financiers had initiated the Great War. It also played to the antisemitic stereotype of Jews being shady financiers who secretly controlled the capital of Europe and profited at the expense of the European nations.<sup>30</sup>

Hobson's work formed the basis of analysis in the work of Vladimir I. Ulyanov (1870-1924), better known as Lenin. In his book *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism*, Lenin examined the economic principles of imperialism. Lenin argued that free competition inevitably led to monopoly. This monopoly gave banks control of almost all capital in a nation. When combined, this monopolization of industry and banking then transformed capitalism into capitalist imperialism.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation suggested that the free trade period of the 1850s and 1870s had in the 1880s given way to a new kind of capitalist imperialism. It is, in fact, true that there was a break in the operations of chartered companies during the supposed free trade period. But the new companies seem to have been more of a continuation of the chartered company model of the British East India Company rather than representing a new development of capitalism.

---

<sup>29</sup> Hobson, 57, 357–61.

<sup>30</sup> Francesca Trivellato, *The Promise and Peril of Credit: What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance Tells Us about the Making of European Commercial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 15–16.

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1917), 108.



Like Hobson, Lenin believed that this transformation had transferred control of British foreign policy to a little cliché of industrialists and financiers, which he referred to as a financial oligarchy.<sup>32</sup> He believed that this financial oligarchy had been responsible for the Scramble for Africa because the monopolistic combines of the western world deemed it necessary to control all raw materials of the continent to protect themselves from competition.<sup>33</sup> Lenin and many Marxist writers since therefore viewed the British Empire as nothing more than a side effect of a new stage in the development of human society. Once capitalism wore itself out and was overthrown by the proletariat, it would be replaced by a more humane socialist or communist system. Marxism, was an interpretation of history in order to make predictive models of the future. When the Marxist predictions of the future failed to materialize, this school of history took a more interpretative approach to history. Scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm and his work on the development of capitalism and imperialism in the “Long nineteenth century” have kept the Marxist school relevant to the study of the British Empire.<sup>34</sup>

The Great War of 1914-1918 was a catastrophic event in European history, and its effects were felt in the historiography of the British Empire. The dismantling of Germany’s colonial empire raised the question of what should happen to these former colonies. Critics of the current imperial system, such as Leonard Woolf (1880-1969), were vocal during the interwar period. In his report, *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, he argued that “The European went into Africa about forty years ago desiring to exploit it and its inhabitants for his own economic advantage.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Lenin, 106–8.

<sup>33</sup> Lenin, 169–71.

<sup>34</sup> Hobsbawm trilogy of *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848*, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875*, and *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* explored how the development of European capitalism led to the imperialism and colonialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and how the First World War caused an inevitable but abrupt change to the development of ideas that had begun with the French Revolution in 1789.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Woolfe, *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* (London: The Labour Research Department, 1922), 352.

Because of this, Woolf believed that the European Powers were unfit to manage the former colonies of German West Africa and German East Africa. Instead, the management of these colonies should be supervised by the League of Nations, and the colonies run for the benefit of the indigenous people residing there until the “non-adult” races of Africa were ready for self-government.<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting Woolf himself never argued against the racial ideology of the time and did not believe that Africans should run Africa. Instead, he seems to have assumed that because the Africans were inferior to Europeans, it was essential to protect the Africans from exploitation. The idea that the Social-Darwinism and racial ideology on which the British Empire rested were fundamentally flawed had not yet emerged into the academic debate.

Perhaps because of the emerging criticism of the imperial order, the interwar period also marked the high tide of debate about the imperial mission and the mutual benefits imperialism bestowed on Britain and the colonies. In his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, explorer and colonial official Frederick Lugard (1858-1945) defended the British imperial mission. According to Lugard, the British Empire had been forced into the Scramble for Africa by the actions of the French and the Germans, who were hell-bent on the “creation of naval bases and world-wide wireless stations, and the raising of negro armies for world conquest.”<sup>37</sup>

Lugard also emphasized the deplorable conditions of the “native” in Africa before the arrival of the British Empire. He further criticized the chartered companies stating that they were inherently unsuited for government because “dividends to shareholders must inevitably compete with administrative expenditure.”<sup>38</sup> To replace these faulty African and chartered governments, Lugard advocated for a system of indirect rule. This system was to be based on the education of

---

<sup>36</sup> Woolfe, 365–68.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 4.

<sup>38</sup> Lugard, 19.

indigenous rulers and the gradual extension of their powers under the guidance of the British Empire. This system would, according to Lugard, fulfil the dual mandate of imperialism that of “bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress while ministering to the material needs of our own civilization.”<sup>39</sup> Lugard’s ideas of indirect rule became official policy in many parts of the British Empire and, as we shall discuss, were in Nigeria largely a successor of the administrative system established by Goldie for the RNC.

The interwar period was also when the first history of the RNC was published by Dorothy Wellesley and Stephen Gwynn. This was the 1934 book *Sir George Goldie, Founder of Nigeria*. Wellesley was the stepdaughter of Aldred Lumley (1857-1945), Earl of Scarbrough, deputy governor on the RNC and the governor of its successor, the Niger Company. Her book was a mixture of a memoir of Goldie, who she knew personally and a short history of the company written by Gwynn, a journalist and biographer. Gwynn’s history of the company was extremely complementary, understandably, as he was commissioned to write it by Wellesley, who considered Goldie her friend.<sup>40</sup>

According to Gwynn, the company was responsible for securing for the empire a large free-market region in Africa. It had also delivered “twenty millions of people from the curse of slave-raiding... with singularly little bloodshed and destruction.”<sup>41</sup> There is little to no attention given to Africans in this history, and the focus is always on the metropole. The only employees of the RNC mentioned are the Europeans, that made up a tiny minority of its total workforce. The RNC’s competition with French and German interests is discussed in detail, but African

---

<sup>39</sup> Lugard, 618.

<sup>40</sup> Wellesley, *Sir Georg. Goldie Found. Niger.*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Gwynn, “The Making of Nigeria: A Historical Introduction,” in *Sir George Goldie: Founder of Nigeria* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1934), 3.

opposition to company rule is almost never mentioned. The Akassa War is mentioned in a single sentence of the book. The conflict with the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate is explained as a result of the emirates' opposition to all trade and their defeat attributed to their lack of “nerve.”<sup>42</sup> This history of the company is very sanitized. It makes no mention of the violence and intimidation tactics the RNC used to establish and maintain its monopoly.

In many ways, the book is comparable to the book *The Pioneers of Empire*, published in London in 1896. Purportedly written by an impartial observer to rebut criticisms against the operations of the BSAC in South Africa, it was, in fact, a work of propaganda. Commissioned by Cecil J. Rhodes (1853-1902). It was written by James R. Maguire (1855-1925) under the pseudonym “An Imperialist.” Maguire was a personal friend of Rhodes and one of the earliest associates of the BSAC.<sup>43</sup> Maguire wrote his book to answer the public criticism of politician Arnold Forster (1855-1909), who had launched a public attack on the practice of issuing charters to private companies.<sup>44</sup> Both books are meant to be vindications of the policy of renting out the empire to chartered companies. Maguire wrote his book to refute criticisms of the charter company model, while Wellesley wrote her book as she was “troubled by a sense of injustice. He [Goldie] has never had due recognition.”<sup>45</sup> Both books portrayed the founders of the chartered companies as patriotic heroes who had never received due thanks for their work for the British Empire. The chartered companies themselves were portrayed as humanistic enterprises more dedicated to ending slavery and improving the lives of African people than making a profit.

---

<sup>42</sup> Wellesley, *Sir Georg. Goldie Found. Niger.*, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Abacus, 1992), 382–83.

<sup>44</sup> Imperialist (pseud. J.R. Maguire), *The Pioneers of Empire: Being a Vindication of the Principle and a Short Sketch of the History of Chartered Companies, with Especial Reference to the British South Africa Company* (London: Methuen & Co, 1896), 13.

<sup>45</sup> Wellesley, *Sir Georg. Goldie Found. Niger.*, 50.

The dominant perspective in academic debates on the British Empire during the interwar period was the constitutional history of the Empire. There was a broad consensus among historians of the period that there were constitutional solutions to the issues of the colonies. This meant that the primary duty of the historian was to identify successful constitutional solutions to imperial problems in the past and see how they could be developed to solve the current nationalistic and racial crisis of the empire.<sup>46</sup> One of the problems that had to be solved was the continuing existence of BSAC administration in some regions of Southern Africa, a problem that would not be settled until 1923.<sup>47</sup>

The Imperial Conference, a gathering of the prime ministers of the Dominions of the British Empire, was seen as a vital tool in the constitutional development of the empire. The report of the Imperial Conference of 1926 on inter-imperial relations, also known as the Balfour Declaration, not to be confused with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 on Palestine, sparked much debate about the future of the empire. The report acknowledged the autonomous status of the Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa within the Empire. It also stated that Great Britain must consult the Dominions on any foreign policy decisions affecting the empire as a whole. It was hailed by many for diffusing any possibility of these dominions succeeding from the British Empire. In contrast, others criticized it for weakening the imperial bonds between Great Britain and the Dominions.<sup>48</sup>

The constitutional tradition in empire historiography would continue to be influential until the very end of the empire as historians tried to make sense of the constitutional implication

---

<sup>46</sup> Ronald Robinson, "Oxford in Imperial Historiography," in *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth*, ed. Frederick Madden and David K. Fieldhouse (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 36–37.

<sup>47</sup> G. D. Clough, "The Constitutional Changes in Northern Rhodesia and Matters Incidental to the Transition," *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 6, no. 4 (1924): 281.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Sovereignty of the British Dominions* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929), vii–viii.

of colonial independence and the transition from empire to commonwealth.<sup>49</sup> One could argue that after the Second World War, the debates of the constitutional school of history of empire had become meaningless as the British Empire was by that time facing inevitably decline and dissolution and the Commonwealth more resembled a shadow of the empire than a successor to it.

Keith Hancock (1898-1988) was possibly the most influential imperial historian just before and after the Second World War. In his work, Hancock integrated the constitutional, economic, demographic, and religious aspects of imperial history into a coherent role. His work on empire economics was important as the constitutional tradition somewhat neglected this crucial aspect of the empire in favour of the legal and political dimensions of empire. However, Hancock never integrated the viewpoints or actions of the indigenous inhabitants of the empire into his work, therefore limiting his view of the empire. This was probably because he did not attribute any agency to the indigenous people of the empire making their voices immaterial to the history of empire.<sup>50</sup>

After the Second World War, historians began to push imperial history past its traditional boundaries. This is understandable given the fact that this was the first time the end of the empire seemed inevitable. Although many past historians had predicted the end or evolution of the British Empire, post-war historians faced what must have seemed the inevitable and imminent end of Britain as a world power. Britain, after the war, was a bankrupt nation incapable of fixing its domestic economic problems, let alone mounting expeditions to safeguard its empire from the surge of nationalism and anti-colonialism gripping the periphery.

---

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Clinton Wheare, *The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 1–4.

<sup>50</sup> David K. Fieldhouse, “Keith Hancock and Imperial Economic History: A Retrospect Forty Years On,” in *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth*, ed. Frederick Madden and David K. Fieldhouse (London, 1982), 160–62.

Whereas historians of empire had previously been busy studying the past of the empire to predict and understand its future, the empire no longer had any future to anticipate. Focus, therefore, shifted towards trying to understand how Britain had acquired and then lost its empire. One post-war historian interested in expanding the boundaries of imperial history was Gerald Graham. Graham's work can be considered a continuation of the work of Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914) on the influence of naval power on world history.<sup>51</sup>

Graham contended that the nature of naval military strength was inherently different from land-based military force. On the sea, there was no balance of power. Once a navy was strong enough to secure a line of communication, it had achieved a monopoly on naval power in that region. During the eighteenth century, Britain's "command of the seas" allowed it to establish an Atlantic empire. Technological advances then allowed Britain to expand its empire into Africa and Asia.<sup>52</sup>

Graham's interpretation of the British Empire as a result of naval dominance and technological progress was a departure from the previous focus on the empire as a legal and political entity. At the same time, we should not hail his research as revolutionary. It was a continuation of the work of naval historians of a previous generation that had examined the effects of advances in military technology on the development of states. What was novel in his work was combining the tradition of the history of sea power with imperial history.<sup>53</sup>

The main development in the historiography of the British Empire in the 1950s was the work of historians Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson. Their work was highly critical of the

---

<sup>51</sup> Gerald S. Graham, *Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), x–xi.

<sup>52</sup> Graham, vii–ix.

<sup>53</sup> For much earlier work on the relationship between naval strength and British power projection see for example Philip H. Colomb's 1891 *Naval Warfare* or his brother John Colomb's 1905 essay "The Navy and the Colonies."

work of Seeley and the Round Table Movement as well as the Marxist tradition of Hobson and Lenin. According to Robinson and Gallagher, both schools had misunderstood the development of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. Both historiographical traditions identified a fundamental shift in British foreign policy and attitude toward the empire in the mid-Victorian period. This shift was usually believed to have taken place in the 1860s. Before the 1860s, the British Empire was described as a promoter of free trade and the British public was seen as indifferent to the expansion of the empire. After the 1860s, this was reversed, and as the economy of the empire became more monopolistic, the public began to favour imperial expansion.<sup>54</sup> According to Robinson and Gallagher, this view of empire ignored many of the developments it sought to explain. For example, between 1841-1851, a period described as the high tide of anti-expansionism, the British Empire rapidly expanded. How could this territorial expansion be tied to a government policy of anti-expansion? Were the new territorial gains on the periphery acquired despite opposition from the imperial government?<sup>55</sup>

Robinson and Gallagher, therefore, argued that a succession of British governments during the Victorian era had all pursued a consistent imperial policy whose primary purpose was to safeguard the routes connecting the empire in the East, namely India, with the metropole. They also argued that only focusing on the formal empire gave a skewed perspective of the British Empire. According to them, the informal empire, where imperial interests were safeguarded through British paramountcy and economic influence, was the basis of British foreign policy in places like South America. While British policymakers may have preferred informal empire, where possible, they did not hesitate to exert formal control when necessary.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953): 1–2.

<sup>55</sup> Gallagher and Robinson, 2–3.

<sup>56</sup> Gallagher and Robinson, 3–4.



Robinson and Gallagher would then expand upon their theories in their book *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*. There, they attempted to explain why the imperial policies of the successive Whig and Tory governments of the Victorian period had been so consistent. According to Robinson and Gallagher, this could be traced to a phenomenon they referred to as the “official mind.” The “official mind” was the worldview of the social elites that dominated British foreign policy in the nineteenth century. It was shaped by the departmental consensus and collective “memory” and rules that shaped the policies of the government. The will of the voters did not shape imperial policy, but rather, it “was still made at house parties, not by the man in the street or the man in the Stock Exchange.”<sup>57</sup>

Robinson and Gallagher maintained that the security of India was the first and foremost concern in the minds of Britain’s ruling elite in the nineteenth century. There the principles of free trade were never applied, even during the high tide of laissez-faire in the 1850s. India absorbed 19% of British exports and 20% of British foreign investment. Its enormous armies made Britain the supreme power in Asia. Simply put, without India, there was no British Empire in Asia.<sup>58</sup>

Such was the importance of India that Robinson and Gallagher theorized that Britain accelerated the Scramble for Africa, not to secure territory in Africa but rather to secure its lines of communications with India. They believed that the “official mind” of empire interpreted the fall of the Khedive in Egypt as a threat to the maritime route to India through the Suez Canal. The decline of the structures of informal empire in Egypt made formal empire necessary. The British occupation of Egypt provoked the French and Germans to seize African territories where

---

<sup>57</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 2 edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), 22–23.

<sup>58</sup> Gallagher and Robinson, 10–12.

they had previously exerted informal control, and this set off the race to divide the continent between the European powers.<sup>59</sup>

While the arguments of Robinson and Gallagher may appear convincing, they have some shortcomings of which we should be aware. Their theory that successive British governments had a consistent imperial policy has been criticized by historians such as Desmond C. M. Platt. Platt argued that their use of South America as a prime example of informal empire was misleading. While both mid- and late Victorian governments might have agreed on the importance of safeguarding British commerce, there was no continuity in the methods that they were willing to employ to secure British commercial interests.<sup>60</sup>

During the height of free trade between the 1840s and 1880s, the government pursued a non-interventionist policy in South America. It was unwilling to use force to guarantee preferable treatment for British commerce. At no stage in this period did the British government pursue paramountcy or exclusive control of territory or markets in South America despite their extreme importance to British trade. Platt argues that pre-emptive annexation and the delimitation of spheres of interest in the interest of commerce were a new development in the 1880s and, therefore cannot be argued to have been a part of British foreign policy throughout the Victorian period.<sup>61</sup>

Their theory also places all of the decision-making power and policy creation in the metropole in the hands of a small aristocratic elite. This elite was isolated from the will of the voters and lobbying by economic or political groups. If that is the case and all the important decisions of the empire were made in the metropole, we must ask ourselves if there is any point

---

<sup>59</sup> Gallagher and Robinson, 162.

<sup>60</sup> D. C. M. Platt, "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations," *The Economic History Review* 21, no. 2 (1968): 298–300.

<sup>61</sup> Platt, 304–6.

in studying events on the periphery. If the only thing of importance is how events on the periphery were received, interpreted, and acted upon in the metropole studying events in the colonies is pointless. Also, if policy was “made at house parties” by people whose culture was distinct and separate from the rest of Britain, is there any value in the economic and cultural history of the empire?

There are also some strange contradictions in the narrative of Robinson and Gallagher. For an isolated elite group whose decisions were mostly influenced by its own culture and tradition, the “official mind,” as it appears in their work, seems mainly to react to events on the periphery instead of working toward some long-term goal. If events in Egypt set off the Scramble for Africa, does that not put the agency for imperial policy in the hands of people on the periphery, far from the “official mind” in London? If a British aristocratic elite dominated British foreign policy in the nineteenth century, then how do we explain the agency and influence of Cecil Rhodes, the son of a pastor, whose influence derived from his wealth and his political status in South Africa or Alfred Beit (1853-1906), a German-born Jewish financier without whom there would have been no British South Africa Company? There is also the question of how securing the Lower Niger helped secure the route to India. Freetown in Sierra Leone and Cape Town in South Africa were important stops on the sea route from Britain to India. But Akassa, Lagos, and Bonny in the Niger Delta were out of the way and could contribute little to communications between Asia and Europe. So why was securing those ports, let alone their hinterlands, important to an empire obsessed with India? As we shall see, the occupation of the Lower Niger had more to do with imperial tensions with Germany and France as well as the lobbying of a small group of British firms engaged in the Niger palm oil trade who saw a commercial opportunity in the government’s new expansionist policy.

## Post-Colonial Developments

In the 1960s and 1970s, Africa experienced a wave of national liberation as over 40 nation-states were formed from former colonies. This launched a new wave of scholarship on the British Empire and its chartered companies in Africa. In 1960 John Flint published *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, the first scholarly history of the RNC. His history was mainly based on the now available Colonial Office and Foreign Office archival material. The book, therefore, is a detailed history of the company and its relationship with the British government. It also closely examines the colonial scramble between Britain, France, and Germany in West Africa in the 1880s and 1890s. Where Flint falls short is in his examination of the relationship between the company and Africans, both private individuals and indigenous governments. There is no discussion of the violent atrocities committed in company territory, such as William Wallace's "strike-breaking action" that left seven dead and thirty wounded. Nor is there any discussion of the Africans that made up most of the RNC's workforce. Flint's treatment of the Akassa War also lacks in depth and analysis. Much like the earlier work of Stephen Gwynn and Dorothy Wellesley, Flint does not disguise his admiration of George Goldie, and the more problematic side of Goldie's character such as his narcissism and callousness towards others is glossed over as a side effect of his genius.<sup>62</sup>

This was also the period that saw the publication of the somewhat eccentric book *Empire builder extraordinary, Sir George Goldie: His philosophy of Government and Empire*. Published in 1978 by D. J. M. Muffett, it is a collection of Goldie's published articles and letters preceded by a biography by Muffett titled "Sir George Goldie: Visionary, Statesman, Adventurer." This biography is a collection of quotes put together to make an almost cohesive

---

<sup>62</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 6–8.

narrative that paints Goldie as a founder of the indirect rule doctrine in Nigeria.<sup>63</sup> The RNC did adopt a system of administration which we might call proto-indirect rule, and it is fair to describe Goldie as the author of that system. Apart from this point, Muffet's work contributed little to the historiography of the chartered companies.

Historian John S. Galbraith was a prominent authority on chartered companies in this period and wrote extensively about both the BSAC and the IBEAC. His book *Mackinnon and East Africa 1878–1895: A Study in the 'New Imperialism'* published in 1972, portrayed the establishment of the IBEAC as a response to a new and more aggressive German colonial policy in East Africa. In East Africa, the British government was as unwilling to provide funds for colonial expansion as it was in West Africa. As a result, the government preferred issuing a charter for a company to occupy territory on behalf of Britain, and the IBEAC received a charter in 1888 to occupy and develop British claims in East Africa. While this process mirrored what would happen with the RNC in West Africa, there was a major difference. Unlike the RNC, the IBEAC was never commercially successful, and the government was forced to buy it out in 1893.<sup>64</sup>

Galbraith's book *Crown and Charter: The Early Years of the British South Africa Company*, published in 1974, was a seminal work on the history of the BSAC. Galbraith went beyond the history of its founder Cecil J. Rhodes to examine the company as a commercial and political entity. As in his earlier work, he concluded that the new generation of chartered companies in the 1880s was made possible by the unwillingness of the British government to spend resources on its colonial empire in Africa. The unwillingness of the government to take an

---

<sup>63</sup> Muffett, *Empire Builder Extraordinary, Sir George Goldie: His Philosophy of Government and Empire.*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> John S. Galbraith, *Mackinnon and East Africa 1878–1895: A Study in the "New Imperialism"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 225.

active role in Africa then resulted in very limited oversight of the new chartered companies. Galbraith concluded that this allowed the leaders of the companies like Goldie and Rhodes to direct their enterprise in Africa, almost without oversight from the metropole. This lack of government control then allowed events like the formation of the illegal RNC monopoly on the Niger and the Jamieson Raid of 1895-1896 to happen.<sup>65</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, African historians began to be published more prominently internationally, and their voice was added to the historiography of empire. It is therefore understandable that this period saw the rise of resistance studies in the historiography of empire. Among the most prominent scholars of this school was Terence Ranger, who, in his 1967 book *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1897*, attempted to place the rebellion against the BSAC in the context of enduring African resistance to European imperialism.<sup>66</sup> Ranger argued that it was not enough to examine African armed resistance to colonialism as part of the history of empire. It also had to be considered as part of the national history of the African nations involved. He also identified the seeds of Pan-Africanism, a prominent political doctrine in the 1960s and 1970s, in the Rhodesian and Maji-Maji rebellions.<sup>67</sup>

The resistance studies were an academic answer to the political developments in Africa following the collapse of the colonial empires, and they correctly pointed out that the historiography of the empire had not paid enough attention to alternative viewpoints and interpretations of imperial history, especially the African view. However, there were some weaknesses to their conclusions, mainly in their findings about the effectiveness and prevalence

---

<sup>65</sup> John S. Galbraith, *Crown and Charter: The Early Years of the British South Africa Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 20–23.

<sup>66</sup> Terence O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1897* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 345–46.

<sup>67</sup> Ranger, 348–49.

of resistance. Consider the following quote from Ranger on the Shona and Matabele rebellions in 1896-1897:

what is important about them is not their eventual failure but the degree of success that they were able to achieve. This was no doubt the result of the past traditions of resistance and the past traditions of charismatic leadership, combined with the past history of political centralization which both the Rozwi and the Ndebele had experienced. At any rate there were few risings which attained a similar degree of effectiveness and fewer still that managed to do so on a supra-tribal or supra-linguistic scale.<sup>68</sup>

Primary sources suggest both revolutions suffered from a lack of centralized control and had no common leader. How then do they represent a tradition of political centralization and charismatic leadership, let alone supra-tribal organization?<sup>69</sup> Of course, the point Ranger was trying to make was that the Shona and Ndebele people had a shared history of common interests and cooperation. In this, both he and the people of Zimbabwe would be bitterly disappointed, as shown by the events of the Gukurahundi.

Among the African historians that came to prominence during this period was Walter Rodney. Building on the works of Karl Marx, he sought to explain the developmental failure of post-colonial Africa. Rodney argued that underdevelopment was caused by exploitation. Whereas before the advent of colonialism Africa and Asia had been developing independently, the invasion of European capitalism disrupted their development, and the exportation of all surplus goods from these regions deprived them of the benefits of their natural resources and

---

<sup>68</sup> Ranger, 348.

<sup>69</sup> P. W. Forbes et al., *The Downfall of Lobengula: The Cause, History, and Effect of the Matabeli War*, ed. W. A. Wills and L. T. Collingridge (London: The African Review, 1894), 128–29.

labour.<sup>70</sup> Rodney's work is relevant to the contemporary debate over disrupted development in Western Africa.

Another African historian Ibekwe Ofonagoro is especially relevant to our subject. In his book *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, he examined the local effects of British expansion in Western Africa. According to Ofonagoro, the purpose of the British conquest of Southern Nigeria was to open the area to British commerce.<sup>71</sup> This commercial motive helps explain how the interests of the RNC and the British government overlapped in Nigeria and how the company managed to successfully lobby the government for a royal charter. Ofonagoro also observed that the operations of the RNC and later the British government caused considerable political, social, and economic disruption. British occupation created a new western-educated elite in Nigeria, and it was this new social class that took power in the post-colonial period.<sup>72</sup> This emergence of this new social class of westernized and often Christian Africans had already begun when the RNC and BSAC entered Africa, and both companies would interact with this new class, sometimes clashing, sometimes collaborating.

Also relevant to this study is the 1980s reintroduction of economic history into the sphere of imperial historiography. This was spearheaded by the work of historians Peter J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins and their theory of gentlemanly capitalism. Building on Robinson's and Gallagher's idea of the "official mind" of imperialism, Cain and Hopkins focused their research on the metropole of empire and the social classes that dominated it. However, the theory of gentlemanly capitalism moved away from Robinson's and Gallagher's idea of the geopolitical strategy of aristocratic elites as the driving force of British imperialism. Instead, Cain and Hopkins chose to

---

<sup>70</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1982), 13–14.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929* (Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1979), 397.

<sup>72</sup> Ofonagoro, 399–400.



focus on the interplay between the old, landed aristocracy and the new monied upper-middle class of the nineteenth century and how the development of the financial sector impacted British foreign policy.<sup>73</sup>

Cain and Hopkins identified a fundamental shift in British economic and domestic policy following the Napoleonic Wars. After 1815 the British government increasingly favoured the expansion of world trade and embarked on an expansionist policy to establish a new economic order. This order was based on the free trade maxims of removing tariffs, trade barriers, restrictive market regulation, and monopolies. The defining features of the mercantilist system.<sup>74</sup>

According to Cain and Hopkins, these new policies stimulated the growth of the British financial and service sector in Southeast England in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This growth required a new educated labour force, and this labour force became a new middle class whose values were at the heart of a new type of gentlemanly capitalism. Meritocratic selection to British universities, public service, and the army allowed this new class to become dominant in the political and economic life of the nation.

Cain and Hopkins rejected Robinson's and Gallagher's idea that an isolated class of aristocrats dominated the making of foreign policy. Instead, they concluded that their contemporaries acknowledged the gentlemanly capitalists of the financial industry as the cream of society. Their political influence was public and generally accepted by society. As other countries closed the industrial gap with Britain, investment capital replaced manufactured goods as its main export giving the new generation of financiers both interest and influence on Britain's

---

<sup>73</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945," *The Economic History Review* 40 (1987): 1–2.

<sup>74</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 650.

foreign policy.<sup>75</sup> Their analysis represented a re-evaluation of the economic development that Lenin identified as the beginning of imperial capitalism. As the longevity of capitalism and the failure of communism had rendered Lenin's theories and Marx's predictions problematic, Cain and Hopkins offered a new interpretation of this development.

According to Cain and Hopkins, Britain's foreign policy in the latter half of the nineteenth century was governed by the mutual interest and support of the financiers of London and the government. This was the case in Egypt, where British economic penetration led to a developmental crisis that led the British government to invade Egypt in 1882 to secure the interests of Britain's financiers. Cain and Hopkins further theorized that the first and second Anglo-Boer Wars were motivated by Britain's wish to secure its financial and economic stake in South Africa.<sup>76</sup>

For Cain and Hopkins, the chartered companies represented a merger of the interests of city financiers and the government. Because tropical Africa was not considered a strategic or economic priority, the annexation of territory there was relegated to chartered companies financed by the city. The chartered companies then received government backing because of the pressure put on the government by industrial exporters and merchant and shipping interests.<sup>77</sup>

Cain and Hopkins provided historians with new insight into how the social changes in Britain affected the development of its empire. Their analysis is useful for the subject of this essay as both the RNC and BSAC raised funds by selling company shares on the London stock market. Both companies had aristocratic elites as figureheads and board members, but their day-to-day operations were overseen by financiers and agents, often on the periphery of the empire. It

---

<sup>75</sup> Cain and Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945," 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> Cain and Hopkins, 12-13.

<sup>77</sup> Cain and Hopkins, 13.

is in the balance of power between metropole and periphery that we run into the limitations of Cain and Hopkin's theories. When we look at the development and operations of the companies, it will become clear that major policy decisions such as the BSAC's decision to go to war in 1893 or the RNC's decision to expand its operations into the Forcados region were taken by "men on the spot." This does not fit neatly into Cain and Hopkin's focus on the metropole as the centre of imperial decision-making. A *via media* between the power of the metropole and influence of the periphery has to be found to reconcile theories of empire and actual events.

The resurging interest in economic history is evident in the most recent work on the history of the RNC. *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971* by Geoffrey Baker, published in 1996. Baker focused on the history of the RNC as a trading entity and how its history permanently influenced trading on the Niger River. To demonstrate this, he continued the history of the RNC through to its descendants, the United Africa Company and Unilever. The work explains the trading activity and economic motivations in detail. But it leaves the story of the RNC's African employees out of its narrative, focusing almost exclusively on the company's white employees.

The most recent work on the economic history of the chartered companies is *Capital and Colonialism: The Return on British Investments in Africa* by Swedish historians Klas Rönnbäck and Oskar Broberg. Building on the work of Cain and Hopkins, this work is an examination of the profitability of British investments in Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The book is very focused on the history of the chartered companies of the 1880s and concludes that, on average, the returns on investments in Africa were lower than the average returns of investments on the British stock market. This could help explain the chronic undercapitalization of the trading companies operating on the Niger. It would also explain why

Goldie concluded that the only way to make the Niger trade profitable was to monopolize the trade to force palm oil producers to lower their prices.

The last significant development in the historiography of empire, relevant to our subject, concerns the debate over colonial legacy in Africa and Britain. In the 1990s, the cultural turn among scholars of humanistic and social sciences began to affect the historiography of the British Empire. The cultural turn launched a series of studies on orientalism inspired by the work of Edward Said. Said expanded upon Foucault's ideas of the power of discourse and theorized that the purpose of traditional orientalist discourse had been to dominate and restructure the East. His fundamental belief was that "the Orient" was a social construct created to catalogue the geographical Orient and make it more sensible to Western-European thinkers.<sup>78</sup> This idea of "the Orient" as a construct has since been widely criticized by historians such as John M. MacKenzie, who argue that it represents an oversimplification of the complicated relationship between "the Occident" and "the Orient." MacKenzie explained that a selection of quotes and artworks could be used to prove any point and that when applied to broader trends in the art history of Europe, the theory's weakness became evident.<sup>79</sup> Despite the criticisms directed against it, Said's work has created a branch of imperial history focused on the impact of colonialism on colonized people. This school has also examined how European societies in the late nineteenth century, whose governments were based on the principles of the enlightenment, justified the brutality and inhumanity of their colonial conquests. This dissertation engages with this subject in chapter four with its discussion of the atrocities committed by the RNC against its African subjects and employees.

---

<sup>78</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 2–4.

<sup>79</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xiv–xviii.

Before the 1970s historians such as Eric Walker maintained that the British Empire was creating a legacy of progressive political and economic institutions in Africa, in preparation for the ultimate independence of its people.<sup>80</sup> After independence and the subsequent authoritarianism and economic stagnation of many of the newly independent African states, historians began to blame Africa's colonial legacy for the political and financial failures of African countries. According to Martin Wiener, there are four significant inheritances emphasized in the writing of many post-colonial historians. These are authoritarian state structures, economic structures designed to facilitate foreign exploitation of natural resources, promotion of ethnic and religious conflict, and ongoing economic international relations that maintained this state of affairs.<sup>81</sup>

Political scientist Mahmood Mamdani has examined the governmental systems of post-colonial Africa. In his book *Citizen and Subject*, he sought to examine the extent to which the power structures of contemporary Africa were shaped during the colonial period. He concluded that the British form of indirect rule and the French association rule were a form of apartheid. This meant that apartheid was a generic form of government in colonial Africa and not a phenomenon unique to South Africa. Mamdani called this system of government “decentralized despotism.” He believed that after independence, this governmental form was deracialized but not democratized. A state of affairs that Mamdani believes lies behind the plight of many contemporary African countries.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Eric Walker, *The British Empire: Its Structure and Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Martin J Wiener, “The Idea of ‘Colonial Legacy’ and the Historiography of Empire,” *Journal of The Historical Society* 13, no. 1 (2013): 8.

<sup>82</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 24–27, 32.

The core system of decentralized despotism was the Native Authority, the order of native commissioners, chiefs and tribal rulers. These were given authority to write and enact laws of extra-economic coercion, mainly forced labour laws that allowed them to draft free peasants into public service. In the French colonies, the chefs were meant to manage the “collection of taxes, requisitioning labour, compulsory crop cultivation and provision of military recruits”<sup>83</sup> This system allowed the colonial powers to extract the resources they needed from the colonies without having to take on the financial burden of administering them directly.

However, there is a limitation in Mamdani’s theory. Like earlier writers such as Fanon,<sup>84</sup> he identifies a strict hierarchy between the citizens of colonial rule, the white settlers and administrators, and its subjects, the indigenous African inhabitants of the colonies. The problem with such a neat distinction is that it leaves no room for the people who straddled the two spheres. These “collaborators,” Africans who participated in and profited from the colonial system, do not fit into the neat categories of citizen or subject, and we must, therefore, try to identify and engage with them on case-by-case bases to see how they navigated both spheres of the colonial system.

## African Engagement with the Empire

There is a long-standing debate about “collaborators” in the historiography of empire. By the word “collaborator,” we mean African people who acted for the chartered companies as employees or agents, and the term is not used here for derogatory purposes. The issue began to receive attention from historians in the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the rise of the school of postcolonialism. One of the first historians to examine collaboration in the context of chartered

---

<sup>83</sup> Mamdani, 52–53.

<sup>84</sup> Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 27–28.

companies was Charles Van Onselen. He hypothesized that the limited resources that European powers devoted to the establishment and maintenance of their empires highlighted the importance of indigenous collaboration. According to Onselen, the British South Africa Company's government in Rhodesia relied upon four groups of collaborators to run the colony. The native police, the native messengers of the administration, the recruiters of the Rhodesian Native Labor Bureau, and the compound police.<sup>85</sup> These Africans kept the industries of the colony supplied with labour using methods the rest of the population found abhorrent, as they were known to use blackmail, kidnapping, and extortion to secure labour. However, the rewards of collaboration were nothing to be scoffed at. Collaborators were exempt from manual labour drafts, they had the right to carry weapons, and they were paid much more than other African workers. Because of this, many collaborators tended to be skilled or educated men, unable to secure living wages elsewhere. Eventually, collaborators became a defined stratum in colonial society, and there were several large families of collaborators, making them a distinct group.<sup>86</sup>

Ronald Robinson also became interested in the topic of collaboration in the 1970s. He sought to integrate African cooperation in the British Empire with his theory of the empire of free trade. He, therefore, identified what he believed to be different collaborative mechanisms that Europeans used to assimilate territories in Africa and Asia into the international economy. Robinson dismissed older theories of imperialism as a Eurocentric grand illusion that failed to take into account that imperialism was as much a function of its victims' collaboration as it was a function of European expansion. In his opinion, it was the breakdown of cooperation that forced European empires to abandon an informal empire in favour of direct intervention. According to

---

<sup>85</sup> Charles van Onselen, "The Role of Collaborators in the Rhodesian Mining Industry 1900-1935," *African Affairs* 72, no. 289 (1973): 403.

<sup>86</sup> Onselen, 416–17.

Robinson, the new formal empire then depended on a small, manufactured elite of indigenous collaborators to function.<sup>87</sup>

African historians have also addressed the part Africans played in the imperial system. Walter Rodney wrote that “The presence of a group of African sell-outs is part of the definition of underdevelopment.”<sup>88</sup> Although he was referring to African political elites in the twentieth century, the idea of African collaborators as sell-outs and traitors was prevalent in the writings of Marxist African historians in the 1960s and 1970s. It was in response to these attitudes that Adu Boahen wrote his book *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. There Boahen argued that trying to sort Africans and their leaders into groups of resisters and collaborators of imperial expansion was “very misleading and, indeed, erroneous.”<sup>89</sup> Boahen believed that using the term collaborator was inaccurate, Eurocentric, and derogatory. He highlighted the fact that Africans allied with the European powers for various reasons but most often to further their own personal goals rather than the goals of the European empires. He also highlighted the fact that many African straddled the category of resister and collaborator during their lifetime.<sup>90</sup> This is important when we examine the motives of the men who entered company service.

During the 1970s, post-colonial writers were often critical of the focus on African resistance that dominated much of the work of earlier nationalist historians in the 1950s and 1960s. Allen and Barbara Isaacman argued that many historians, such as Terrance O. Ranger, overemphasized resistance as the prevalent African response to colonialism when collaboration was a common alternative. According to the Isaacman’s, studies of resistance exaggerate the

---

<sup>87</sup> Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,” in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 133–39.

<sup>88</sup> Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 27.

<sup>89</sup> Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 39.

<sup>90</sup> Boahen, 41–44.



unity and homogeneity of African social and political groups. Many factions within such groups did not view resistance as an attractive response but instead chose collaboration as a method of breaking up social and political structures that did not benefit them.<sup>91</sup>

Their work has recently been echoed by historians such as Eric Allina-Pisano, who urged historians to look beyond the categories of resistance, collaboration, and domination when analyzing the behaviour of Africans in the colonial system. He also criticizes the field for focusing too much on “acts of resistance” to the colonial order that has caricatured the daily lives of Africans as a constant struggle against the colonial regime.<sup>92</sup> This approach helps analyze the African reaction to the establishment of RNC administration. Rather than overemphasizing African “acts of resistance,” I focus on the contributions of Africans to the daily operations of the RNC and their motivations for throwing their lot in with the company. However, it is equally important to ask why some Africans chose to resist company encroachment on their territory and why they sometimes chose to take up arms against the RNC.

Another aspect of the colonial legacy debate relevant to our topic concerns the economic systems of imperialism. In his book *An Economic History of West Africa*, Anthony G. Hopkins examined commercial systems in Western Africa and how they developed from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. He concluded that before the advent of colonialism Western Africa had a market economy and a production system that was focused on agricultural production and local manufacturing. Hopkins did not believe that West Africa was on the verge of an industrial revolution when its development was interrupted by the incursion of Britain, Germany, and France. This was because there was not sufficient population density to push local industries

---

<sup>91</sup> Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, “Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, c. 1850-1920,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (1977): 32–34.

<sup>92</sup> Eric Allina-Pisano, “Resistance and the Social History of Africa,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 192–94.

towards mass manufacturing, and long distances restricted the region's trade capacity.<sup>93</sup> The limitation of Hopkin's analysis was that he did not fully expand upon the devastating effects many policies of the RNC had on the West-African economy. As we shall see, their monopoly policies were part of their campaign to eliminate local competition in their sphere of influence.

The school of colonial legacy is not without its critics. For example, Wiener argued that post-colonial scholars committed many of the same errors as their pro-empire counterparts had done before. They disregarded the legacy of the pre-colonial history of the colonial territories, exaggerated the power and influence of colonial empires, and dismissed the agency of colonized people. In their narratives, the people of the colonies became helpless victims of the colonizers, and their future development became determined by the actions of colonial empires decades before independence. This diminished the agency of the people of Africa and Asia and excused the corruption and violence rampant in the post-colonial world by putting the responsibility for the actions of post-independence rulers on European colonizers.<sup>94</sup> I will avoid some of these pitfalls by trying to present the actual power of the RNC and the severe financial restrictions under which its administration operated. This gives us a better picture of African agency under company rule and to what extent company incursion interrupted development in affected regions.

Much of the new research on African history has located the roots of the violence, racial distinction, and tribalism of post-colonial states in the pre-colonial history of these states. Many of the political structures of these new states are now seen to derive in large part from their pre-colonial structures. It has also shown historians how the colonizers interacted with and were influenced by the colonized people. According to Wiener, this new school of the historiography of empire promises us new insights into how colonizers and the colonized interacted and how the

---

<sup>93</sup> Antony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 75–77.

<sup>94</sup> Wiener, “The Idea of ‘Colonial Legacy’ and the Historiography of Empire,” 20.

modern nation-states of Africa are the product of pre-colonial as well as colonial political and economic structures.<sup>95</sup>

This chapter has examined the historical origins of chartered companies in Britain. The concept of chartered companies emerged in the late medieval period when the Company of Merchant Adventurers of London received a charter from the English king to trade in the Netherlands. As navigation and shipbuilding advanced, chartered companies were formed to trade in West Africa. The first was the Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa, chartered in 1660. The most powerful of Britain's chartered companies was the British East India Company. By the end of the eighteenth century, the company was a prominent political and economic power with a larger standing army than the British government.

After several failed attempts to bring the company to heel, including several company acts and the impeachment of Governor-General Hastings, the company's trade monopoly was struck down in 1813. No new charters were issued in the nineteenth century until the 1880s. This period saw the emergence of a new generation of four chartered companies—three in Africa and one in Asia. The decision to rent the empire out to chartered companies was the result of the unwillingness of the British government to spend resources on expanding its colonial empire. As crisis on the colonial periphery set off a Scramble for Africa, the British government was faced with the possibility of having its coastal colonies surrounded by French and German forces. Unwilling to devote its resources to imperial expansion in Africa, the British government delegated that task to the Royal Niger Company, the Imperial British East Africa Company, and the British South Africa Company.

---

<sup>95</sup> Wiener, 28–32.

The history of the RNC is part of the broader history of the British Empire in West Africa. This revised history of the company builds upon the historiography of the company and the empire. A revised history of the RNC is necessary because previous studies of the company have not included the perspectives and narratives of the Africans engaged with the company. They have also not engaged fully with the problematic aspects of Goldie's character or the long term effects of the Akassa War on the political structures of the Niger Delta. The roots of this historiography trace back to the early work of Gibbons and Macaulay. In the early twentieth century, two very different approaches to imperial history dominated the field. One, headed by scholars such as Seeley, Milner, Curtis, Amery, and Jebb, was focused on the possible future and the legal framework of the British Empire. The other, headed by Hobson and Lenin, introduced Marxist interpretations of history to the British Empire in Africa. In the interwar period, the debate about the imperial mission and the mutual benefits imperialism bestowed on Britain and the colonies was eminent. Critics such as Woolf argued that the empire had brought benefit to neither the metropole nor the periphery. On the other side, people such as Lugard, the former governor of Nigeria, defended the imperial mission as vital to the betterment of Britons and Africans alike.

After the Second World War, Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson's new economic approach to the history of the British Empire challenged both Marxist and Round Table views of imperial history. Gallagher and Robinson identified a continuous policy of formal and informal empire throughout the nineteenth century, which they dubbed the "official mind." The focus of the empire, they believed, was securing the lines of communications connecting India and the metropole. Imperial history in the nineteenth century could then be explained as a result of this policy reacting to events on the periphery.

The wave of national liberation in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s saw renewed interest in the history of the British Empire in West Africa. While historians such as Ranger sought to find common ground for the new nation-states in a shared history of resistance against colonial oppression, others like Fanon and Mamdani sought to demonstrate the stark contrast between the colonizers and the colonized. The problem was that this historiography had little room for African participation in the empire apart from the role of collaborator. A category that did not neatly fit the Anglicized Africans of West Africa or the African employees of the RNC.

The 1980s saw further innovation in the field of imperial history when Cain and Hopkins expanded on the work of Robinson and Gallagher with their theory of gentlemanly capitalism. According to Cain and Hopkins, Britain's foreign policy in the latter half of the nineteenth century was governed by the mutual interest and support of financiers in London and the government. The relationship between the RNC and the government and the structure of the RNC appear to confirm their position that companies represented a merger of the interests of city financiers and the government.

Three works dedicated to the history of the RNC and its founder George Goldie have been published in English, as well as Muffet's book on Goldie's views on empire building. *Sir George Goldie, Founder of Nigeria* by Stephen Gwynn and Dorothy Wellesley, was more of a memoir of the company and Goldie than academic work. *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* by John Flint and *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971* by Geoffrey Baker were good academic studies of the RNC's political and commercial history. However, they left some gaps in the company's history. Neither study addressed the relationship between the new class of Anglicized Africans in West Africa and the RNC. Nor did they devote any attention to the African employees of the company. They were

also light on detail on the African political entities the company engaged with in its commercial expansion on the Niger, never moving beyond the “kings and chiefs” narrative of British sources from the period.

New research, much of it by African scholars such as Alagoa, has shed new light on the inner workings of these African polities and given new insight into how the company's arrival affected the inner workings of African political systems. The organization and operations of the Royal Niger Constabulary and how greatly it influenced its successor, the West African Frontier Force, have also never been fully addressed in the history of the RNC. This dissertation aims to provide a history of the RNC that fills in these gaps in company history.

## Chapter Two: Chartering the Niger

Any discussion of the Royal Niger Company must begin with examining the geographical, political, and economic conditions in Britain and West Africa that made the company's existence possible. In this chapter, we will explore the post-slavery economy of the Lower Niger region, how the geography of the area and its distance from Britain made the double system of European and African middlemen necessary for commerce and how changing economic conditions in the late nineteenth century made the middleman system obsolete. It will be argued that when we talk of African middlemen, we must also keep in mind that the European traders in the area were also middlemen and that, therefore, there was a double system of middlemen in place.<sup>96</sup>

Next, we must examine the unique political and economic conditions that made a revival of the old charter company system attractive for both the British government and the British merchants engaged in the palm oil trade. Like Flint, I conclude that the unwillingness of the government to invest money into its West African colonies made the prospect of renting out imperial expansion to a chartered company attractive. The Anglicized Africans have hitherto been a neglected group in the company's story. I mainly diverge from previous works on the RNC by adding more detail to the narrative by going into greater specifics about local conditions on the Niger in the 1880s. There is more discussion on the African competitors in the palm oil trade, the firms of King Jaja and Nana. The migration of the Anglicized Africans from Sierra Leone to the Lower Niger in the second half of the nineteenth century is also included in the story. As the RNC would become utterly reliant on the Anglicized Africans to manage its trading operations, their return to the Niger Delta is a vital part of the company's history.

---

<sup>96</sup> Previous histories of the company have focused on the middlemen status of the African merchants, never exploring the middleman status of the European merchants in the region, see for example: Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 10–11.





Figure 1: Map of the Niger River imposed on the modern-day borders of West Africa (picture from Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 2: The personal standard of Nana Olomu. Such flags were used to identify vessels belonging to African trading firms (photo from the Royal Museums Greenwich)

Since humans first settled on its banks, the Niger river has been an avenue for commerce. The river itself originates in the Guinea Highlands, from where it flows northeast before turning southeast and flowing into the Atlantic in the Niger Delta. The delta is divided into two regions. The Western Niger Delta, whose rivers run into the Bight of Benin and the Eastern Niger Delta, whose rivers run into the Bight of Bonny, also known as the Bight of Biafra. The river is 4180 kilometres long, making it the 3<sup>rd</sup> longest river in Africa behind the Nile and the Congo rivers.<sup>97</sup> The first Europeans to sail to the Niger Delta were Portuguese explorers who reached it in the 1480s.<sup>98</sup> Various ethnic and linguistic groups had by then already inhabited the region. The largest of these were the Yoruba people in the Western Delta, the Igbo people in the Eastern Delta, the Ijaw people who lived in the delta's coastal regions, and the Edo of the Benin kingdom. Further inland could be found the Hausa and Fulani peoples to the north and the Nupe to the northwest.<sup>99</sup>

Politically these ethnic groups were formed into a variety of kingdoms, city-states, and village confederations. The Portuguese were quick to establish commercial relations with the Delta people to trade coral beads and iron bars for peppers and ivory. Once a Spanish expedition led by Christopher Columbus had plotted a navigable route between Europe and the Americas, enslaved people became an increasingly important component of international trade in the Niger Delta. Many cultures in the Delta had well-developed institutions of slavery, and European traders now tapped into these to supply their plantations in the new Caribbean and American colonies with enslaved labour.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Peter H. Gleick, *The World's Water 2000-2001: The Biennial Report On Freshwater Resources* (Washington: Island Press, 2000), 33.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Ekeh, "Benin, the Western Niger Delta, and the Development of the Atlantic World," *Umẹwaḡen: Journal of Benin and Edo Studies* 1 (January 1, 2016): 4.

<sup>99</sup> Rotimi T. Suberu, "Nigeria," in *Diversity and Unity in Federal Countries*, ed. Luis Moreno, César Colino, and John Kincaid (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 232–33.

<sup>100</sup> Ekeh, "Benin, the Western Niger Delta, and the Development of the Atlantic World," 11–13, 29.

Labour shortage in West Africa had long been a problem for the rulers of the region. The need for a steady supply of affordable labour force had, in some regions since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, been met with forced labour. Enslaved people were captured in conflicts between ethnic groups and as collateral for debts and then mobilized as a labour force. Many African societies, such as the Hausa and Fulani, actively integrated people from their system of slavery and servitude or their descendants into their societies, but that did not change the fact that forced labour was an essential resource for many states.<sup>101</sup> Because enslaved people were such a vital resource, centralized states such as Benin often resisted European demands for enslaved people, rightly believing that selling enslaved people to European merchants would deprive them of an important resource and contribute further to labour shortages in their territories.<sup>102</sup>

Lack of unskilled labour was also becoming a problem in the new Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. Disease and enslavement, in the form of the repartimiento system, had devastated the indigenous population as early as 1513. Colonial authorities began allowing the importation of enslaved Africans to Jamaica, where Spanish settlers had started to plant sugarcane and were building sugar mills. Sugar production was a labour-intensive industry, and as labour requirements could not be met locally, labour had to be imported from elsewhere.<sup>103</sup>

However, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, enslaved people were only one of many important trade goods from West Africa. When the first English expedition reached the area in 1536 under the command of William Hawkins, they did not come to buy enslaved people. Instead, they were mainly interested in purchasing gold, ivory, and peppers, paying for these with iron goods and

---

<sup>101</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 26–27.

<sup>102</sup> Ekeh, “Benin, the Western Niger Delta, and the Development of the Atlantic World,” 30–31.

<sup>103</sup> I. A. Wright, “The Early History of Jamaica (1511-1536),” *The English Historical Review* 36, no. 141 (1921): 71–72.

cloth. This changed in 1562 when John Hawkins's expedition to West Africa began capturing Africans to sell as slaves to Spanish colonies in the Caribbean.<sup>104</sup>

To regulate English trade in West Africa, royal charters were granted to groups of English traders who wished to do business in the area. From 1588 these charters gave groups of English traders exclusive rights to trade in various regions of the coast, free from their countrymen's competition. In 1660 the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa was granted a charter for all English trade on the west coast of Sub-Saharan Africa. By now, England had established its own colonial empire in the Caribbean. This empire was centred on Jamaica which was captured from the Spanish in 1655. Although initially formed to trade in gold, the new company's most lucrative asset was its monopoly on supplying the new English sugar plantations with enslaved Africans. A monopoly that was much resented by the planters who lobbied for the abolition of the charter.<sup>105</sup>

Although England had initially attempted to satisfy its Caribbean plantations' labour requirements with penal and indentured labour, these could not meet the enormous labour demand of the sugar industry.<sup>106</sup> The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa was therefore reformed into the Royal African Company and granted a charter for the transatlantic slave trade in 1672.<sup>107</sup> The company's main competitors were the chartered companies of other European nations, such as the Geocrooieerde Westindische Compagnie of the Netherlands, usually known as the Dutch West India Company and the French Compagnie des Indes Occidentalis or the French West India Company. All these companies suffered from similar

---

<sup>104</sup> Zook, "The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading Into Africa," 3–4.

<sup>105</sup> Zook, 5, 9, 96.

<sup>106</sup> Nini Rodgers, "The Irish in the Caribbean 1641-1837," *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5, no. 3 (2007): 146–47.

<sup>107</sup> Ann M. Carlos and Jamie B. Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company: Fringe Firms and the Role of the Charter," *Economic History Review* 49, no. 2 (1996): 291.

defects. They remained undercapitalized but saddled with the responsibility of maintaining forts and trading outposts on the coast of Africa. The cost of keeping these forts operational ate away the profits of the companies, often making the trade unprofitable.<sup>108</sup>

Although slavery was an important part of the West African foreign and domestic trade, gold, ivory, pepper, dyes, and leather also remained important exports throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Royal African Company did not establish any permanent stations or forts in the Niger Delta, preferring to trade from its ships when dealing with the region's inhabitants. The harbour towns of the eastern delta, such as Calabar and Bonny, had by now become important ports for slave traders, but the company declined all local requests for permanent stations in the area.<sup>109</sup>

The transatlantic slave trade had a significant impact on the economy of the Niger Delta. The domestic slave trade was transformed into an international business. This meant that enslaved people became an export, not a domestic product, and places like Bonny, Nembe, Calabar, and Brass in the eastern delta became important centres of international trade. As Africans were enslaved primarily by kidnapping, raiding, and warfare, these activities increased to meet the European demand for slave labour. Thus, the expansion of the slave trade negatively impacted other domestic production, such as agriculture, fishing, and domestic manufacturing in many regions.<sup>110</sup>

It is hard to accurately estimate the effects of the transatlantic slave trade on the delta regions. One issue was the statelessness of the hinterlands of Biafra, especially Igboland. Here

---

<sup>108</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 92.

<sup>109</sup> David Eltis, "The Relative Importance of Slaves and Commodities in the Atlantic Trade of Seventeenth-Century Africa," *The Journal of African History* 35, no. 2 (1994): 244.

<sup>110</sup> Odeigah Theresa Nfam, "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade from the 15th -nineteenth Centuries: A Major Setback to the Development of the Indigenous Economy of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," in *The African Conundrum: Rethinking the Trajectories of Historical, Cultural, Philosophical and Developmental Experiences of Africa*, ed. Munyaradzi Mawere, Tapuwa R. Mubaya, and Jowere Mukusha (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2017), 292–96.

autonomous village groups were the primary mode of organization. There was no overarching law enforcement or central authority. This had a marked impact on the region's economy. For one thing, the only way to collect debts was by force, especially by kidnapping the debtor or a member of his family and demanding payment for their release. This system has been described as pawnage.<sup>111</sup> But if payment was denied, the kidnapped individual would often be sold into slavery to redeem the debt, thus connecting the domestic pawnage system to the foreign slave trade. This culture of kidnapping meant that long-distance travel was rare, and people only travelled heavily armed.<sup>112</sup>

These conditions led to the creation of individuals who have often been called the African middlemen. These were merchants who travelled through the dangerous hinterland. Often the only way to do this was by marrying into families in all major villages on a merchant's trade route. The wife and her family would then be responsible for guiding the merchant's convoys through their territory before handing it over to guides from the family of the wife in the next town. In return, the merchant was expected to reward these families with gifts from his convoy.<sup>113</sup> As we can see, the middleman system was therefore not the sole domain of men as women often formed an important part of the commercial chain connecting hinterland to the coast. In fact, in the late nineteenth century, the British Army in West Africa often preferred to do business with women when buying supplies on the coast and hiring carriers, with army officers describing them as more reliable partners than men.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Larry W Yarak, "West African Coastal Slavery in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of the Afro-European Slaveowners of Elmina," *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 1 (November 26, 1989): 57.

<sup>112</sup> Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929* (Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1979), 25–28.

<sup>113</sup> Ofonagoro, 29–30.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Hammond Thomas, *A Full and Authentic Diary of the Ashanti Expedition By Joseph Hammond Thomas, 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade* (Pembroke: William Emblow, 1875), 9.

Another form of protection for Igboland merchants were organizations such as the Okonko and Ekumeku societies. These were a type of merchant guilds that collected tolls at toll booths on the trade roads and used the funds to maintain the roads and provide protection from bandits and highwaymen. Other merchants chose to enter blood covenants with influential people on their chosen route. These blood brothers would then provide escorts through their territories, and an influential merchant could therefore travel the hinterland by being ferried from one group of blood brothers to the next. Of course, anyone enjoying such protection would be expected to contribute to the cost of such security measures and the maintenance of the roads upon which he travelled. These protection and road care systems tended to drive up prices on trade goods and decrease the profitability of long-distance trade, something European and African merchants on the coast tended to complain about incessantly.<sup>115</sup>

We can infer that as demand for enslaved people went up, kidnapping became more profitable, making long-distance trade even more dangerous than before. However, enslaved people needed to be brought to the shore and trade goods brought inland, and this created the need for large trade convoys, which would have enough protection to safeguard them against attacks. Therefore, it is likely that the villager and small merchant suffered most from these dangerous conditions while large trading houses and societies reaped the benefits of the slave trade. It should also be clear that the African middlemen were not an isolated group but rather a network that included numerous towns, families, and alliances that profited from the trade between the coast and hinterland. Therefore, it was to be expected that members of this network would resist all European attempts to forge direct links with the hinterland to cut them out of the trade.

---

<sup>115</sup> Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, 30–34.

We should not assume that Africans gained no benefits from contact with Europeans, as the increased transatlantic traffic also had some positive effects on West Africa. Since Indonesian sailors had brought Asian yams, plantain, and bananas to Africa's east coast in the first century, there was no significant influx of new plants in Africa. This changed in the sixteenth century when the Portuguese brought maize and cassava to the coasts of West Africa. African farmers quickly adapted these plants due to their high yields. Initially, maize spread much more rapidly. Cassava was less favoured due to the presence of naturally occurring cyanide which causes toxicity in humans if not treated. However, cassava's drought endurance and its ability to thrive in meagre soils eventually made it a staple in the drier regions north of the Niger Delta.<sup>116</sup>

Cain and Hopkins have argued that there was a fundamental shift in British trade doctrine after the Napoleonic Wars. This hypothesis seems borne out by the decline of the Royal African Company. After transitioning into the Company of Merchants Trading into Africa in 1750, the company continued to trade along the western coast. However, its monopoly of supplying slaves to the Caribbean colonies had been revoked. Like its predecessor, the Company of Merchants Trading into Africa was mainly based on the Gold Coast, more than 800km west of the Niger Delta. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 caused a recession in the trade in Western Africa.<sup>117</sup> The company could now only maintain its forts on the West African coast with the aid of government subsidies. The opposition of independent merchants to such government assistance to a monopolistic company turned the political tide against the company as well, and

---

<sup>116</sup> John. E. Flint, "Economic Change in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century," in *History of West Africa, Vol II*, ed. Jacob F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman, 1974), 383–85.

<sup>117</sup> Ty M Reese, "'Eating' Luxury: Fante Middlemen, British Goods, and Changing Dependencies on the Gold Coast, 1750-1821," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 872.



in 1821, the company's charter was revoked.<sup>118</sup> All company holdings in Africa were transferred to the British government, and the coastal trade opened to all merchants.<sup>119</sup>

Although Britain abolished slave trading in 1807, the effects of this ban on the Niger Delta slave trade were negligible. The transatlantic slave trade continued to flourish, with American, French, and Spanish traders making frequent visits to the Delta slave ports such as Bonny and Old Calabar to pick up slave cargoes.<sup>120</sup> However, British merchants in the region had to find new goods to trade. The Oil Palm, *Elaeis guineensis*, is native to the Niger Delta region. Its nuts can be harvested each year. Palm oil is extracted from the soft outer part, or pulp, of the nut. This process leaves the palm kernel from which palm kernel oil can be extracted. Palm oil is edible and can be used as cooking oil. It can be saponified by mixing it with an alkali such as lye and turned into candles and soap or hydrogenated for use in margarine. It can also be used as a lubricant and was, in fact, a popular lubricant for early locomotives. The palm kernel oil can also be used as cooking oil or to create soap and detergent. It is also suited for use in pharmaceutical products, especially cosmetic products.<sup>121</sup> For most of the eighteenth century, the delta region had exported around 40 tons of palm oil per year to Britain. This rose sharply in the 1790s to 150 tons of oil per annum. By 1839 this had increased to 13.800 tons a year, and palm oil had by then become the main export of the Niger Delta, giving the region the name Oil Rivers.

---

<sup>118</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, "The Records of the English African Companies," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1912): 214–15.

<sup>119</sup> Reese, "'Eating' Luxury: Fante Middlemen, British Goods, and Changing Dependencies on the Gold Coast, 1750-1821," 872.

<sup>120</sup> David Northrup, "The Compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil Trades in the Bight of Biafra," *The Journal of African History* 17, no. 3 (1976): 355–56.

<sup>121</sup> S.O. Aghalino, "British Colonial Policies and the Oil Palm Industry in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, 1900-1960," *African Study Monographs* 21, no. 1 (2000): 19–21.

The Royal Navy had begun anti-slavery patrols in 1807, and by 1835 it had been authorized to seize French and Spanish ships outfitted for slavery, and this caused a drastic downturn in the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>122</sup> Domestic slavery in the African hinterland now became the focus of the abolitionists, many of whom believed that for the slave trade to be abolished, "legitimate trade" had to be introduced to the hinterlands of West Africa. The concept of "legitimate trade" or "legitimate commerce," which is frequently mentioned in writings from the nineteenth century, was simply the doctrine of free trade applied to post-abolition West Africa conditions. According to J. E. Flint, the British government had a consistent, if somewhat vague foreign policy in West Africa throughout most of the nineteenth century. This policy was to stamp out the slave trade and give all reasonable assistance to legitimate traders.<sup>123</sup>

To further this aim, private organizations and the government, sponsored a series of exploratory expeditions to chart the Niger river. Among the most influential of the private organizations was the Church Missionary Society (CMS). It was founded in London in 1799 as the "The Society for Missions to Africa and the East". Its name was later changed to the Church Missionary Society due to its close association with the Church of England since sixteen of its founding members were ordained Anglicans. According to historian Phyllis J. Wetherell the CMS was inspired by the evangelical revivalism and humanitarianism present in Britain during the eighteenth century combining the religious zeal of revivalism with the humanitarian ideal of promoting the welfare of all men. This meant that the CMS would promote both Christianity and education in its area of operations. Due to a lack of qualified British candidates the first missionaries dispatched by the organization were Germans accompanied by British teachers who

---

<sup>122</sup> Northrup, "The Compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil Trades in the Bight of Biafra," 357–59.

<sup>123</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 21–22.

would run the educational component of the mission.<sup>124</sup> This organization is evident in the CMS mission to Sierra Leone dispatched in 1814 which was composed of two German missionaries Schulze and Sperrhacken, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Huges who were to run a school at the mission station. Accompanying them as guide and interpreter was Jellorum Harrison, a young African from Sierra Leone who was returning to Africa after spending several years in the United States.<sup>125</sup>

The first European explorers to chart the Niger were the Lander brothers, Richard and John. Born in Cornwall, Richard Lander (1804-1834) first came to Africa as a servant of Scottish naval officer and explorer Hugh Clapperton (1788-1827). In 1830 he was commissioned by the British government to explore the Niger and, with his younger brother John Lander (1806-1839), sailed down the river from Boussa to the Atlantic on the Bight of Benin.<sup>126</sup> The Landers' navigational feat intrigued MacGregor Laird (1808-1861) of the Birkenhead shipbuilding company. Laird believed that great profits could be made in the Niger delta by bypassing the African middlemen of the coast and buying palm oil directly from the hinterland manufacturers. This, combined with his abolitionist beliefs and missionary zeal, inspired him to form a Liverpool company with Richard Lander with the intent of sending steamboats up the Niger to trade with the locals.<sup>127</sup>

Reaching the oil-rich provinces of the delta hinterlands, Laird and Lander concluded that palm oil was the future for British traders in the region. In 1834 palm oil exports from Western

---

<sup>124</sup> Phyllis Jane Wetherell, "The Foundation and Early Work of The Church Missionary Society," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 18, no. 4 (1949): 350–56.

<sup>125</sup> *The Missionary Register for the Year 1814: Containing an Abstract of the Proceedings of the Principal Missionary and Bible Societies Throughout the World* (London: L. B. Seeley, 1814), 412–13.

<sup>126</sup> Charles W. J. Withers, "Mapping the Niger, 1798-1832: Trust, Testimony and 'Ocular Demonstration' in the Late Enlightenment," *Imago Mundi* 56, no. 2 (2004): 183.

<sup>127</sup> MacGregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger, in the Steam-Vessels Quorra and Alburkah, in 1832, 1833, and 1834*, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), 2–3.

Africa were valued at £458,810. 42.5% of total exports from the area. In their account of the expedition, they argued that it was the British Empire's duty to pave the way for legitimate commerce in the hinterlands as this would surely be the death blow to the slave trade.<sup>128</sup>

In 1841 the British government backed an expedition proposed by the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilisation of Africa. The three ships of the Laird expedition made it up to Lokoja. The expedition commander then ordered all ships to head back down the river as most of the crews had been incapacitated by tropical disease, and mortality was rising sharply. The descriptions from the expedition of ship decks covered by sick and dying men only served to confirm the belief held by many that Africa's interior was the "white man's grave" and that British activity would have to be confined to the coast.<sup>129</sup>

It was not until 1854 that a British expedition would navigate the Niger without falling prey to tropical disease. Outfitted by Macgregor Laird but commanded by William Balfour Baikie (1825-1864), the expedition used quinine to keep away malarial fever and other ailments. It succeeded in sailing up to the Benue River, a tributary of the Niger, and back to the Atlantic without losing a single man.<sup>130</sup> As guide and navigator, the expedition brought along the Anglicized African Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1891), whose knowledge of the Yoruba language enabled the expedition to interact with many of the locals of the Lower Niger. There were also two other Anglicized African interpreters with the mission who spoke Igbo, Nupe, and Hausa.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> MacGregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger, in the Steam-Vessels Quorra and Alburkah, in 1832, 1833, and 1834*, Vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), 356–60.

<sup>129</sup> William Allen and T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841 under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1968), 363–67.

<sup>130</sup> William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue (Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854* (London: John Murray, 1856), 385–87.

<sup>131</sup> Baikie, 16, 23.

Crowther, who had first travelled the river with the 1841 expedition, reported that the banks of the Niger were more densely inhabited in 1854 than they had been in 1841 and that a lot of land on the riverbank had been cleared for agricultural production. The ships of the expedition regularly passed heavily armed trade canoes carrying palm oil to the coast.<sup>132</sup> This would suggest that the decline of the slave trade and the rise of the palm oil trade were increasing prosperity in some regions of the Lower Niger. At the same time, the fact that all trade boats were heavily armed suggests that the security situation was still somewhat volatile in the region, possibly due to a lack of a central government to enforce law and order.

European trade goods, clothes, and weapons were a common sight in most settlements of the Lower Niger region, visibly demonstrating their connection to the coastal market through the African merchant network. For example, in Idah, halfway between Lokoja and Onitsha, European muskets could be bought for 10.000-12.000 cowries each. This represented a price rise of about a 20% rise in musket prices compared to Abo, halfway between Onitsha and the coast, where European muskets went for 8000-9000 cowries. This price rise was due to the cost of transport, and the duties levied on river shipping by the trade towns on the Niger.<sup>133</sup>

Most Africans received the group of Europeans and Anglicized Africans in a friendly manner and, when asked if they were willing to trade with Britain, showed an interest in selling their local manufactured and agricultural products to the British. Baikie was mostly interested in establishing trade deals with local authorities, such as the elected king of the Abo Kingdom. When the Laird expedition reached the kingdom in 1841, King Obí had been happy to sign a trade deal with Captain Trotter of the expedition. Trotter had promised that Britain would send steamships up the river every year. His son Tshúkuma served as regent when the Baikie

---

<sup>132</sup> Baikie, 38.

<sup>133</sup> Baikie, 41, 294.

expedition arrived as his younger brother Ajé was touring the kingdom hoping to garner enough support to be elected king. Tshúkuma was advised by his wife and sister to sign a new trading deal with the British on behalf of his brother. He advised Baikie that for the deal to be valid British ships must make regular trips up and down the river.<sup>134</sup>

We can only speculate as to Tshúkuma and his family's motive for concluding a trade deal with Britain as their thoughts on the matter have not been preserved in writing, but the Abo Kingdom was a producer and exporter of palm oil.<sup>135</sup> The shipping of palm oil downriver from the hinterland was dominated by African merchant companies based in the coastal towns of the Niger Delta, such as Brass, Bonny, and Opobo.<sup>136</sup> The kingdom could therefore have benefited from Britain's entry into the river trade as British competition would challenge the market dominance of the African merchant syndicates. More competition on the Lower Niger might improve the negotiating position of producers and exporters like the Abo Kingdom, making it possible to secure higher prices for agricultural products such as palm oil.

Tshúkuma also concluded a deal with the CMS, which was represented by Crowther. This deal gave the CMS permission to open a mission school in Abo territory. This was part of Crowther's vision of establishing CMS missions at all major population centres on the banks of the Niger and Benue.<sup>137</sup> With trade relations with local authorities established and a proven way to stave off tropical disease on the river, the Niger was now open to British commerce, and several Liverpool firms had established trade stations and steamboats on the river by 1870. Through one of these firms, Holland Jacques and Company, George Taubman Goldie (1846-

---

<sup>134</sup> Baikie, 45–46.

<sup>135</sup> E. C. Merem et al., "Appraising the Changing Trends in Oil Palm Farming in Nigeria's Lower South Region," *International Journal of Ecosystem* 10, no. 1 (2020): 3.

<sup>136</sup> Sylvanus J. S. Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times, 1821-1891* (Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1974), 106.

<sup>137</sup> Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue (Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854*, 45–47.

1925), a minor nobleman and unlikely champion of British imperialism in Africa, first got involved in the affairs of the Niger Delta.<sup>138</sup>

## George Goldie Enters the Niger Trade

George Dashwood Goldie Taubman was born on the Isle of Man in 1846.<sup>139</sup> The Goldie Taubman family was, at the time, a minor aristocratic family. His great grandfather Lieutenant-General Sir George Goldie, KCB (1752-1841), had been a Scottish soldier whose son Major-General Alexander John Goldie (1779-1848), moved to the Isle of Man in 1804 and married Isabella Taubman (1781-1824) creating the Goldie Taubman family.<sup>140</sup> The Taubman family had made its fortune trading from the Isle of Man in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the mid-nineteenth century, its members mainly contented themselves with careers in the British military and local politics, often serving in the House of Keys, the Manx parliament. Little is known of Goldie's youth. In the 1860s, he spent two years in the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. After receiving an inheritance, he ran away from school and ended up in Egypt, where he spent three years. After returning home in the late 1860s, he began an affair with the family governess Mathilda Elliot, and the two ran away together to Paris. The two were eventually forced to marry in 1871, and Goldie was forced by his brothers to take part in the family's affairs.<sup>141</sup>

Goldie's personality traits bear mentioning as they would today probably warrant a diagnosis of a personality disorder of some variety.<sup>142</sup> From an early age, he showed little regard

---

<sup>138</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 29.

<sup>139</sup> Upon receiving his knighthood in 1887 he changed his name to Sir George Dashwood Taubman Goldie and later stopped using the German Taubman name entirely.

<sup>140</sup> Arthur W. Moore, *Manx Worthies* (Douglas: S. K. Broadbent and Company, 1901), 146–47.

<sup>141</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 2–6.

<sup>142</sup> It could be argued that this analysis of Goldie's character smacks of amateur psychology and has no place in a historical analysis. However, I would argue that one of the reasons we study the past is to understand the actions and motivations of historical figures. If Goldie had antisocial/dissocial/ psychopathic tendencies, they would have greatly affected his actions and motivations and thus we need to be aware of them in our analysis of Goldie as a historical figure.

for social norms and conventions. He struggled with substance abuse at a young age, showing up drunk for his final exams at Woolwich. He was quick to engage in new relationships throughout his life, especially sexual ones, but showed an inability to maintain long-lasting and deep relationships and friendships. He would never admit any fault in arguments but would often change his opinion entirely if he believed it would benefit him. He was frequently manipulative and dishonest. In one breath, he would declare himself to be but a simple patriot who wanted to serve and expand the British Empire in West Africa,<sup>143</sup> while in the next, he would describe patriotism as foolish sentimentality and threaten the British government that he would hand the Niger territory to the highest foreign bidder should his demands not be met.<sup>144</sup> He preferred aggressive altercation to reasoned argument, especially if he did not have much of an argument, to begin with. Rather than friends, he seemed to gather around him devotees who seemed almost hypnotized by him.<sup>145</sup> He was also extremely controlling, showing a “determination to dominate those who came into contact with him.”<sup>146</sup>

Dorothy Wellesley, who knew Goldie as a child, described him in the following manner “he combined uncontrollable passions, ruthlessness, indifference to individuals, contempt for sentimentality in any form, with the excitability and sensitiveness of a child; and a child's peculiar capacity for anger and pain.”<sup>147</sup> Now compare these descriptions with Professor Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries description of the successful non-criminal psychopath. “They are often described as daring, adventurous people who have a unique way of looking at the

---

<sup>143</sup> Mary H. Kingsley, *West African Studies*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), 261.

<sup>144</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Niger Charter by Lord Granville, H. P. Anderson and T.V. Lister, 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 82-85.

<sup>145</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 6–7.

<sup>146</sup> Wellesley, *Sir Georg. Goldie Found. Niger.*, 30–31.

<sup>147</sup> Wellesley, 113.



world.”<sup>148</sup> But he ventures, “they tend to be narcissistic, are exploitative, have a grandiose idea of self, and feelings of entitlement... in some ways they are like children, believing that they are at the center of the universe, unable to recognize the needs and rights of others. They appear to be charming yet can be covertly hostile and domineering”.<sup>149</sup>

This aspect of Goldie’s personality has so far not been prominent in historical writing on the RNC. For example, both John E. Flint and Dorothy Wellesley tended to downplay the more problematic aspects of Goldie’s character in their work and treated them as an idiosyncratic side effect of his “genius.”<sup>150</sup> A more nuanced understanding of Goldie’s character is vital to understand his motivations and actions more accurately, at least as far as such a thing is possible with historical figures.

By the age of 29, Goldie had never had any gainful employment since leaving Woolwich and lived off his inheritance. In 1875 this changed when his older brother John Goldie Taubman (1838-1898), who was now head of the family, bought out the small and near-bankrupt firm of Holland Jacques and Company, which had been engaged in the Niger Delta trade since 1869. Although Hobson, Lenin and their Marxist disciples have long argued that nineteenth-century imperialism was caused by the need of the European empires to export their excess capital, this theory was not borne out by the realities of the Niger trade in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>151</sup>

The fact was that British trade in the Niger Delta was carried out by small and chronically undercapitalized companies that in no way could be described as exporters of British excess

---

<sup>148</sup> Manfred Kets de Vries, “The Psychopath in the C Suite: Redefining the SOB,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 23, 2012, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Kets de Vries, 10.

<sup>150</sup> An example of these characterizations can be found in Flint’s *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* and in Wellesley’s *Sir George Goldie, Founder of Nigeria*.

<sup>151</sup> John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Pott & Company, 1902), 367 and Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 139..

capital. In 1875 three small British firms were trading in the Niger Delta. The Holland Jacques and Company, the Company of James Pinnock, and Alexander Miller, Brothers and Company.<sup>152</sup> There was also a British-African company founded in 1863 trading on the Niger. This was the West Africa Company Ltd., which was sponsored by the British CMS and operated out of the CMS missionary stations on the river. Its agents were often both missionaries and traders hoping to encourage the introduction of cash crops such as cotton and ginger in the Niger Delta in the belief that this would provide an economical replacement to the slave trade.<sup>153</sup> The West Africa Company often worked with the Christian Missionary Society to establish bases on the Niger River, such as the Kippo Hill Station. This station contained a CMS mission station and a West Africa Company trading depot, or "factory" as they were known. These community centres were also frequently visited by merchants of other companies and nations who also made money carrying passengers up and down the river.<sup>154</sup>

In the 1870s, the biggest African firm trading in the eastern delta region was the company of Jubo Jubogba (1821-1891), known to the English as King Jaja of Opobo. In the western delta, the company of Nana (also spelled Nanna) Olomu (1852-1916) was quickly monopolizing the palm oil trade on the Benin river. Both had signed treaties of friendship with the British government, and Jaja even contributed troops for the British expedition against the Ashanti in

---

<sup>152</sup> G L Baker, "Research Notes on the Royal Niger Company: Its Predecessors and Successors," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (1960): 154. This is in line with the conclusions of Davis and Huttenback whose research revealed that Africa received very little British investment in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century see: Lance E. Davis and Robert Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism, 1860–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 51–52.

<sup>153</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longmans, 1965), 210–12.

<sup>154</sup> Diagram of the Kippo Hill Station by Samuel Crowther Jr., 1876, CA3/O14, Church Missionary Society Archive, Birmingham, 22.

1873. Their shipping networks brought processed palm oil from the hinterland to the coast, where their agents traded with British merchants.<sup>155</sup>

Nana was the heir to a large Itsekiri trading family known as the Ologbotsere, which shared the governorship of the Benin River with the Emaye family. His business interests were centred on the Benin River, with his headquarters at Jakpa. When his father Olomu died, Nana broke with tradition and usurped his father's title of governor, which should have gone to Numa of the Emaye.<sup>156</sup> Nana then used his political and economic position to establish a monopoly for his company on buying palm oil in the Yoruba hinterland and shipping it to the coast by the Benin River. Nana's political position allowed him to recruit a paramilitary force, but this force, much like the Royal Niger Constabulary did for the RNC, mainly existed to enforce his monopolistic policies by punishing anyone in the Benin River territory who sold his palm oil to anyone but Nana's company.<sup>157</sup>

Jubo Jubogba was born in Igboland near Amaigbo and named Mbanaso Okwaraozurumba. As a young boy, he was kidnapped from his village along with his sister and sold to Aro slave traders.<sup>158</sup> Eventually, he ended up in service to a chief of the Anna Pepple House, one of the two royal houses of Bonny. From canoe paddler to independent trader, he worked his way through the ranks of his master's trading company, eventually earning his freedom in reward for his service to the company. In 1863 he was elected as head of the Anna Pepple House. By this time, he had taken on the praise name Jubo Jubogba which the English would shorten to Jaja.<sup>159</sup> In 1869 competition with the other major trading power of Bonny, the

---

<sup>155</sup> Kemi Rotimi and Olukoya Ogen, "Jaja and Nana in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Proto-Nationalists or Emergent Capitalists," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 7 (2008): 50–53.

<sup>156</sup> Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 46.

<sup>157</sup> General Staff, War Office, *Military Report on Nigeria* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1929), 14.

<sup>158</sup> Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times, 1821-1891*, 27.

<sup>159</sup> His birth name was most likely Mbanaso Okwaraozurumba, the name Jubo Jubogba was given to him by his first owner. Names given to enslaved people were referred to as "praise names".

Manilla Pepple House, erupted into a civil war between the factions of Jaja and Oko Jumbo, the head of the competing firm of Manilla Pepple house. Jaja, therefore, moved his headquarters and his trading house and founded the town of Opobo on the Imo River east of Bonny. From there, his trading canoes, backed by his personal paramilitary police force, monopolized the shipping of palm oil from producers in the area around the Imo River in the Igbo hinterland.<sup>160</sup>

While the African firms were organized differently from the European firms, we should still view them as commercial entities headed by capitalistic entrepreneurs. They connected people of different ethnicities and helped to formalize and regulate the "middleman" network that connected the coast to the hinterland and allowed traders to travel safely. At the same time, both Jaja and Nano aimed to establish an exclusive trading network that would give them a monopoly on the palm oil trade within their part of the delta region. Both men were very hostile to the attempts of European and African competitors to establish independent links between the coast and the palm oil production regions. Jaja even had plans to sell his product directly to Britain, thereby cutting out the European firms on the coast.<sup>161</sup>

While Jaja and Nano were middlemen between African raw material producers and merchants on the coasts, the European merchants on the shore were likewise middlemen between African traders and European manufacturers, which turned raw resources into manufactured goods. The middleman status of the European traders on the Niger in the late nineteenth century is further substantiated by the fact that they did not have the capacity to ship their cargoes themselves but rather contracted shipping out to companies like the African Steamship Company

---

<sup>160</sup> Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, "Notes on the Ancestry of Mbanaso Okwaraozurumba Otherwise Known as King Jaja of Opobo, 1821-1891," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 3 (1978): 146–48.

<sup>161</sup> Rotimi and Ogen, "Jaja and Nana in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Proto-Nationalists or Emergent Capitalists," 49.

and the British and African Steamship Navigation Company that operated most of the cargo steamers sailing between Britain and West-Africa.<sup>162</sup>

This two-tier middleman system had been made necessary by two factors. The African trader's lack of vessels capable of making the Europe-Africa voyage on a regular basis and the susceptibility of Europeans to the disease ecology of the West-African interior. These circumstances prevented the African companies from trading directly with European manufacturers and the European merchants from buying directly from African producers. But by the late nineteenth century, circumstances were changing. African trade companies such as Jaja's were now reaching a size where they could contract their own shipping to Europe, while advances in medical science allowed Europeans to travel safely to the African interior. By the 1880s, the two-tier middleman system was collapsing as only one group of middlemen was now necessary to handle trade between the Niger and Britain. This is what drove the European merchants to trade further inland than before, bringing them into conflict with the Africans who had traditionally monopolized trade in the West-African interior.

In this shifting environment, Goldie made his first trip to the Niger Delta in 1877 as a representative of the Holland Jacques and Company. On the Niger, Goldie concluded that over-competition was to blame for the trading companies' troubles there. Since the end of the slave trade, palm oil was the single most crucial resource in the region, but palm oil prices in Europe had been declining since 1851, cutting the British traders' profit margin to the bone.<sup>163</sup> In this market environment, the trading companies' cutthroat competition was driving them out of business. To adjust to changing market conditions, the European trade on the Niger would have

---

<sup>162</sup> Ini Akpan Udoka, "The Shipping Industry in the Lower Cross River Region, Nigeria: 1865-1955," *Transafrican Journal of History* 24 (1995): 206.

<sup>163</sup> Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, 11.

to be amalgamated into a single cartel to force African merchants and producers to accept lower prices for palm oil and palm kernels.

After travelling to the Niger with his younger brother Alexander, Goldie began to formulate a plan to make the Niger trade profitable again. The only solution he could see was to consolidate all British trade in the region in one company's hands and then use that company to monopolize the trade in the region by driving out European and African competition. To this end, in 1876, Holland Jacques and Company was folded into a new company, the Central African Trading Company Ltd. The new company's directors were George Goldie and Joseph Grove-Ross, former secretary of the Holland Jacques and Company and father-in-law of John Goldie Taubman.<sup>164</sup>

The next step in Goldie's plan was to negotiate an association with the other two British firms on the Niger, the Company of James Pinnock, and Alexander Miller Brothers and Company, as well as the CMS's West Africa Company. To facilitate the merger, the Central African Trading Company Ltd. was reorganized into the West African Company Ltd. in 1877, and its new charter gave the directors of the company power to amalgamate with other companies. After two years of negotiations, the four companies agreed to unite into the United African Company Ltd. in November 1879. This event was of such little political significance that the Foreign Office was not even informed that all the British companies operating on the Niger had merged until two years after the event.<sup>165</sup>

At that time, the British government's focus in Africa was on Egypt and South Africa, not West Africa. The naval station at Cape of Good Hope was vital to naval power projection in

---

<sup>164</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 29.

<sup>165</sup> Correspondence from the United Africa Company to the Foreign Office, nineteenth of January 1881, FO 84/1611, National Archives, London, 62.

the South Atlantic- and the Indian Ocean. Both of which contained important shipping routes to South America, India, and Southeast Asia. The Suez Canal finished in 1869 and operated by France was vital to communications with India. This made Egypt the most important section of Africa to the government as India was the most important imperial possession of the British Empire. Furthermore, the government of Isma'il Pasha (1830-1895) had borrowed heavily from British and French banks to finance its expansion south into Sudan. As its campaign in Sudan dragged on, it became ever more difficult to keep up payments on foreign loans. Increasing involvement in Egypt led Britain and France to insist on a regime change in 1879, and in 1882, Britain invaded Egypt and subjugated it to the British Empire. Compared to the logistical and financial importance of Egypt, West Africa was a sideshow where small British trading companies could trade and make deals with the indigenous population without much government oversight.<sup>166</sup>

The creation of the United African Company Ltd was, in fact, more of a business alliance than an actual corporate merger. No money changed hands. Instead, the new company was formed with a nominal value of £250,000. It then bought all the assets of the three companies, the payment consisting of shares in the United African Company. Because each of the three firms received shares proportionate to the assets it contributed to the company and no single company emerged with a controlling majority of shares, we should think of the United African Company as an alliance of the British firms on the river, negotiated to control the buying price of palm oil in order to force African traders and producers to accept a lower price for their goods.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Gallagher and Robinson, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 77–80.

<sup>167</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 30–32.

The new company was more successful in forcing the African traders to accept lower prices than before. In some cases, such as with ivory, the company was able to lower their buying prices by as much as 80 percent. This they did by standardizing the prices paid to indigenous traders across the company's thirty trading stations on the river. However, the UAC's success in forcing down local prices enticed new competitors to enter the Niger trade. The biggest of these was the French Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Équatoriale, founded in 1878, which opened eight trading stations on the Niger on the basis of treaties the French Explorer Charles-Georges de Semellé (1845-1880) had made with local inhabitants. This French commercial expansion was tied to the French government's ambition to expand its North African Empire.<sup>168</sup>

The foundation for the French Empire in Northern Africa was laid in 1830 when France invaded Algiers. In West Africa, France established a presence on the coast of Senegal. There the chartered Compagnie française des Indes occidentales, founded in 1664 managed France's colonial possessions. After its bankruptcy, the colony came into the possession of a series of chartered companies until the French government began expanding the colony in the 1850s. When the government of Jules Ferry (1832-1893) came to power in 1880, the French government adopted a policy of rapid expansion in Africa that would dominate French colonial thinking in the 1880s and the 1890s. In 1881 French troops invaded Tunisia and made it a French Protectorate. Expeditions were then launched to secure the interior of West Africa, threatening the hinterland of Britain's colonies on the coast. This expansion forced the British government to respond by taking control of the territory it claimed in West Africa. Unwilling to bear the cost of

---

<sup>168</sup> Antoine Mattei, *Bas-Niger, Bénoué et Dahomey* (Paris: Grenoble, 1890), 2, 142–43.



such expansion, the government was disposed to delegate imperial expansion on the Niger to a chartered company.<sup>169</sup>

There were also several smaller outfits, such as the African Company and Crowther Brothers Ltd, operating on the Niger. Crowther Brothers Ltd was founded by Josiah and Samuel jr., the sons of the Anglican bishop in Lagos Samuel Ajayi Crowther after they left the West African Company. They now operated from their vessel sailing up the river and traded directly from their steamer and at CMS mission stations, thereby bypassing the stations of the UAC.<sup>170</sup>

The Crowther brothers were representatives of a newly emerging class of Africans in the Niger region. This class can be called “Anglicized Africans” because while they were ethnically Africans, their education was based on European and American models. When referring to the newly emergent western-educated Africans in the Lower Niger region, I shall use the term Anglicized Africans because most of them considered themselves British subjects, and many of them had received British education. They were sometimes referred to as “British coloured men” during the period, and from 1884 they lived in a British protectorate. The Anglicized Africans were an emerging social elite in western Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Crowther Brothers' father, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was a native of Yorubaland but had been kidnapped and sold into slavery at a young age. While in transit to the Americas, he was liberated by the British Navy's Preventative Squadron, which was based in Sierra Leone. It patrolled the west coast of Africa to intercept illegal slave ships.<sup>171</sup>

Crowther was set free in Sierra Leone and taken in by missionaries of the CMS. He was baptized in 1825 and learned how to read and write as well as carpentry skills from the

---

<sup>169</sup> Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 59–61.

<sup>170</sup> “The Niger Trade,” *The Northern Whig*, August 28, 1884, 6.

<sup>171</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 25.

missionaries. In 1826 he travelled to England and attended the parish school of Islington before returning to Nigeria in 1827 to attend the school that was later to become Fourah Bay College. He then worked as a teacher for the CMS and as a linguist helping to collect a complete vocabulary of his primary language Yoruba.<sup>172</sup>

By 1841 a large group of Christian Yorubas who had been rescued by the Royal Navy had moved back to Yorubaland from Sierra Leone. Several of them had become prominent businessmen and now requested that the CMS send teachers to Yorubaland to open a school for their children. In 1844 the CMS responded to their request and opened the Yoruba Mission based in Abeokuta, west of the Niger Delta. There the Anglicized African community was quickly growing, and by 1851 the town was estimated to be populated by 3000 emigrants from Sierra Leone. Samuel Crowther was among the three missionaries sent to Abeokuta.<sup>173</sup>

There Crowther was united with his mother and two sisters. They spoke only Yoruba, while Crowther had become accustomed to speaking English on a day-to-day basis. They wore traditional Yoruba clothing, while Crowther wore European clothes. They had learned their trades locally; Crowther had received formal British education. They still practised the religious rites of the Yoruba; Crowther was a Christian. Crowther's relationship with his family demonstrates the unique position Anglicized Africans were caught between the two worlds of Africa and Britain. Personally, Crowther believed that the traditional society, culture, and power structures of the Niger region were incompatible with Christianity, saying, "Heathenism is the old system which invests the old men and priests with power, by which to rule, govern, and keep the population in awe under their control."<sup>174</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Ajayi, 26.

<sup>173</sup> Ajayi, 40.

<sup>174</sup> Annual Report of Bishop Crowther on the Niger Mission, 1875, 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1876, CA3/M3, Church Missionary Society Archive, Birmingham, 303.

The social change the missionaries sparked in Yorubaland has been designated “detrribalization” by Emmanuel A. Ayandele. According to him, “detrribalization” was a gradual process whereby African Christians transferred their loyalty from the tribal political structure to the missionaries and the British colonial government they agitated for. This was partly due to the close relationship between the structure of indigenous polities and the traditional religions of Yorubaland. As converts graduated towards Christianity, they also graduated away from the political system of the region. In this way, Crowther’s vision of Christianity transforming the political landscape of the Lower Niger was realistic. What was less clear was what sort of colonial government should replace the indigenous polities. Crowther had his own vision of what the British Empire should be in Africa. It should be a liberating and modernizing force overthrowing the indigenous political structures of the Niger Delta. But Crowther’s Empire and Goldie’s Empire could not co-exist, and this would lead to tension and conflict between the African missionaries of the CMS and the RNC.<sup>175</sup>

Scholars have often categorized Crowther as belonging to a new African social class. This new “Black Atlantic Intelligentsia,” as it is sometimes known, combined African culture and traditions with European influences. However, the term “Black Atlantic Intelligentsia” is ill-suited to this new social class. This is because the category of Anglicized Africans must include the skilled craftsmen that constituted the majority of its members. These craftsmen were educated in the missionary schools, and indeed, Crowther himself trained as a carpenter before continuing his education. This social group has had a somewhat mixed reputation in scholarship. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the new African nation states were separating from the colonial powers, they were sometimes classified into two categories, of “collaborator” or “nationalist.”

---

<sup>175</sup> Emmanuel A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914* (London: Longmans, 1966), 29–31.

The newly discovered proto nationalists were celebrated by the newly independent nations, while the “collaborator” was derided as a “deluded hybrid” by scholars such as Ayandele.<sup>176</sup> However, people such as Crowther and his family do not fit into such categories so neatly. Crowther did, in some respects, collaborate in the establishment of British authority on the Lower Niger, working as an interpreter on both the Laird and Balkie expeditions and helping organize the pro-British militia at Abeokuta. But Crowther’s vision of empire was very different from that of Goldie’s, and neither vision would be fully realized in what colonial Nigeria would later become.

This simplistic view of collaboration and resistance has come under increased criticism since the 2000s. The dubious practice of labelling some intellectuals as nationalists before the advent of African nationalism has rightly been criticized. Historians such as Frederick Cooper and Timothy Parsons have urged historians to focus more on the local context in which the “westernized Africans” of the European colonies operated. Doing so reveals how most of them shifted between collaboration and resistance as they responded to the colonial environment.<sup>177</sup>

This seems to be the preferable approach when examining the actions and motivations of the Anglicized Africans exactly because their vision of what the empire should be in Western Africa was so different from the views of people like Goldie. The Anglicized Africans, therefore, co-operated when the actions of Britain seemed to align with their goals and resisted when they felt the empire was moving away from what they thought it should be. This would explain their support for the overthrow of the Oba of Lagos when he threatened the existence of their Christian community,<sup>178</sup> as well as their opposition when Jaja of Opobo was arrested on false

---

<sup>176</sup> Philip S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 7–8.

<sup>177</sup> Timothy H. Parsons, “African Participation in the British Empire,” in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 260–61.

<sup>178</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 70.

charges. This was, of course, because the overthrow of the Lagos government helped secure their new commercial and political power, while the overthrow of Jaja only benefited the Liverpool merchants and alienated the rest of the African population.<sup>179</sup>

Despite their differences, Crowther maintained close ties to his Yoruba relatives after returning to Yorubaland, even ransoming his sisters and their families from slavers after their village was attacked.<sup>180</sup> But his children would be more British than Yoruba even though, as we shall see, the British Empire gradually became more racially intolerant and hostile towards its African subjects in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1857 the CMS decided to open a new mission on the Niger river. They commissioned a steamer, the *Daybreak*, and established a mission station at Onitsha in Iboland.<sup>181</sup> The CMS and the Church of England agreed that Samuel Crowther should lead this new missionary work, and in 1864 he was consecrated bishop of the West African Church by the Church of England. He set up his headquarters in Lagos, from where he supervised all indigenous missionaries and mission stations in an enormous area that included the Niger Mission.<sup>182</sup>

Crowther's sons, Josiah, Samuel jr., and Dandeson, were good examples of well-educated Anglicized Africans. Josiah was apprenticed as a trader, Samuel studied medicine in London, and Dandeson went to seminary school. Josiah and Samuel then worked together for the West Africa Company as its agents at Lokoja on the Niger River, while their brother-in-law James L. Thompson was the company's agent at Onitsha.<sup>183</sup> For the first seven years of its life, the West Africa Company was run at a loss. However, in 1870 the company switched away from cash

---

<sup>179</sup> “Deposition of King Jaja,” *The Lagos Observer*, February 11, 1888, 2.

<sup>180</sup> Jesse Page, *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1890), 66–68.

<sup>181</sup> Page, 90–92.

<sup>182</sup> “The West African Mission,” *The Manchester Guardian*, July 23, 1864.

<sup>183</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 212.

crops such as cotton and started trading shea butter and palm oil. This multiplied the company's revenue but made it a target of the other British companies trading on the Niger.<sup>184</sup> When the West Africa Company was folded into the United African Company Ltd. in 1879, Josiah and Samuel started the Crowther Brothers Ltd. to compete with the UAC. The monopoly established by the RNC would later force them from the Niger trade. The role of the Anglicized African merchant community as competitors with both the European and African middlemen has not been studied in detail and is underrepresented in scholarship of the nineteenth century Lower Niger.

Goldie, who was derisive of both Christianity and Africans, was incredibly hostile to the Anglicized Africans. He described competitors such as the Crowther brothers as "semi-educated, unreformed, and yet British coloured men."<sup>185</sup> He further accused them of stirring up unrest against Britain "under a mask of ardent piety."<sup>186</sup> Therefore, he urged the British leaders of the CMS to stop their support of Crowther's indigenous missionaries and convinced them to amalgamate the West Africa Company into the UAC in 1879.<sup>187</sup> Despite losing the help of the CMS, Josiah and Samuel Crowther Jr. appear to have continued to compete with the UAC as their new company the Crowther Brothers Ltd. appears in a list of traders active on the river in 1884.<sup>188</sup>

Sadly after 1884, we do not know much of the Crowther Brothers' business activities. Josiah would eventually relocate to Sierra Leone with his wife Margaret, where he passed away in 1910.<sup>189</sup> However, even at that time, he was still such an important part of the Anglicized

---

<sup>184</sup> Ajayi, 213.

<sup>185</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1886, FO 84/1796, National Archives, London, 205.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 242–43.

<sup>188</sup> "The Niger Trade."

<sup>189</sup> "Death of Mrs. Josiah Crowther," *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, April 5, 1910, 10.

African community in Lagos that the Lagos weekly published a notification of his death.<sup>190</sup> His brother Samuel Jr. moved to Abeokuta, where he was a regular fixture of the Anglicized African cultural community, although his business activities there are unknown.<sup>191</sup> We might venture to guess that the monopoly of the RNC eventually drove the brothers' business out of the Niger trade and made them focus their commercial activities on the freer markets of Sierra Leone and the Lagos Protectorate, which were more open to competition. The monopoly of the RNC forced out all African competition. Without the monopoly, African companies like the Crowther Brothers Ltd. might have gained more traction and slowly forced European firms out of the palm oil trade, eventually selling directly to British manufacturing firms. Instead, they were forced out of the trade, and the RNC became the sole buyer and seller of palm oil from the Lower Niger.

## Establishing a British Protectorate on the Niger

The arrival of the *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Équatoriale* on the Niger was a cause of concern for both the UAC and the British government. Ferry's government supported French colonial companies in the 1880s, and they had access to government-subsidized shipping for their cargoes, giving them an advantage over the UAC. The UAC had to contract with large English steamship companies such as the African Steamship Company and the British and African Steamship Navigation Company for their freight.<sup>192</sup> The Treaty of Nango, signed in March 1881, which had granted France a protectorate over the Niger from its source to Timbuktu, caused outrage in the Foreign Office because of its protectionist clauses. These

---

<sup>190</sup> "The Obituary List," *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 7, 1911, 4–5.

<sup>191</sup> "Marriage in High Life," *The Lagos Observer*, January 28, 1888, 3.

<sup>192</sup> Desmond C. M. Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 146.

favoured French traders to such an extent that it almost made it impossible for foreign merchants to operate in the new French protectorate.<sup>193</sup>

The Foreign Office feared that if the Niger River became a French protectorate, British trade in the region would be destroyed. To counter any such French move in the future, the Foreign Office advocated setting up a new British Protectorate in West Africa.<sup>194</sup> The Foreign Office had no interest in annexing the territories of West Africa. Instead, it planned to establish a nominal protectorate based on treaties with local sovereigns. This was favoured over establishing an official colony because the Foreign Office feared administering the country would be prohibitively expensive.<sup>195</sup> It is important to keep in mind that it was the government's unwillingness to invest resources into its empire in West Africa that created an opening for Goldie and his associates. Their priority was not to expand the empire but in accepting responsibility for imperial expansion they saw an opportunity to achieve their financial goals of establishing a monopoly on the Niger River.

As the British were panicking over French incursions into the Niger Region, the French government remained ambivalent toward French companies' interests on the river. Its man on the ground was Commandant Antoine Mattei, a former military officer turned consular agent of the government and an agent-general of the *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Équatoriale*. Mattei received no official instructions on how to conduct himself as a government agent between the years 1881-1884, while British officials haggled over how to secure British claims to the region.<sup>196</sup> It would therefore appear that the British government gave more attention to the area

---

<sup>193</sup> Barnett Singer and John Langdon, *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 123.

<sup>194</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the French Presence on the West Coast of Africa by T.V. Lister, 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1883, FO 84/1655, National Archives, London, 251-252.

<sup>195</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum by T.V. Lister, 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1883, 251-252.

<sup>196</sup> Paul Masson, *Marseille et La Colonisation Française: Essai d'Histoire Coloniale* (Marseille: Barlatier, 1906), 407-8.



than their French counterparts. However, we should not be misled into believing that the Niger territories were a priority for the British. It was more that while the French were content to do nothing, the British felt they had to do something.

The Foreign and Colonial Offices' reluctant officials were spurred on by lobby groups such as the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, whose members traded in the Niger and Oil River regions. Since the only territory on the Lower Niger administered by the Colonial Office was the Lagos Colony, the rest of the region was under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office. But since the Liverpool merchants had holdings in both Lagos and the rest of the Lower Niger, they lobbied both offices.<sup>197</sup> The newly formed United Africa Company still had little contact with the Foreign Office as Goldie and the other members did not have personal connections to the officials there. Edward Hyde Hewett, the Foreign Office's consul of the Bight of Biafra and the Bight of Benin, did keep up a steady correspondence with his superiors at home, urging them to take steps to establish a permanent British presence in the area.<sup>198</sup>

Firms from Liverpool were also involved in the Niger trade. From trading stations in Opobo, Bonny, New Calabar, Old Calabar, and Brass, these firms bought palm oil from the African middlemen firms such as those of King Jaja and Nana. In 1884 the Liverpool companies of Miller, Brothers and Company, George Watts, R & W. King, Thomas Harrison, Stuart & Douglas, Couper & Johnstone, British & Continental, Taylor Laughland, Holt & Cotterell, and Hatton & Cookson were all active in the palm oil trade. These firms were all part of the Liverpool chamber of commerce and eventually created the African Association of Liverpool to represent their interest to the government.<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> "Manchester Chamber of Commerce," *The Manchester Guardian*, May 1, 1884, 7.

<sup>198</sup> Consul Hewett Correspondence to the Foreign Office, 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1883, FO 84/1634, National Archives, London, 279-282.

<sup>199</sup> Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971*, 100-101.

As competition with the French and Liverpool firms began to take a toll on the UAC's profit margins, Goldie realized that corporate mergers could not achieve monopoly conditions on the Niger River. Surprisingly, it was events in southeast Asia that now began to show the possibility of a new solution to the UAC's problem. In 1877 a merchant syndicate led by Englishman Alfred Dent (1844-1927) and German Gustav Overbeck (1830-1894) bought the rights to govern and develop a large section of land on the northern coast of Borneo from the Sultan of Brunei and the Sultan of Sooloo.<sup>200</sup> Dent and a British merchant group then formed the British North Borneo Company. They petitioned the British government for a charter, modelled on the charters of old chartered companies such as the East India Company, to govern the territory as a part of the British Empire. Although the British North Borneo Company was not officially allowed to establish a monopoly on trade in its territories, it could charge customs on certain goods such as spirits, tobacco, opium, and salt.<sup>201</sup>

As Dutch and German alcohol was the main British import to the Niger Delta, Goldie quickly thought of a plan. If his company could charge duties on spirits imported by its competitors, it could make the trade unprofitable for the competitors. This would allow his company to monopolize the Niger trade. Therefore, a royal charter promised to be a political solution to the UAC's economic problem of too much competition in the Niger trade. However, the UAC corporate charter did not allow it to apply for royal charters from the government. The United African Company was therefore re-organized into the National African Company (NAC) in 1882.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> British North Borneo Company Charter, 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1881, 1878A, Cornell University Library, 1-3.

<sup>201</sup> British North Borneo Company Charter, 10-11.

<sup>202</sup> William N. M. Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule*, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965), 178.

If there was to be any hope of a successful charter application, the company needed direct access to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. Goldie found his man in the politician and former home secretary Henry Bruce, 1st Baron Aberdare (1815-1895). Aberdare was a friend of both Prime Minister Gladstone (1809-1898) and Foreign Secretary Granville (1815-1891). He invested £800 in the new company and accepted Goldie's offer of becoming chairman of the NAC board. Goldie, meanwhile, received the title of vice-chairman.<sup>203</sup> With a nominal capital of £1.000.000, a significant step up from the UAC's £250.000, and a baron as a chairman, the NAC was ready to enter British politics.<sup>204</sup>

The only problem with Goldie's plan was that the British government had little enthusiasm for handing the Niger Delta to a charter company. Consul Hewett believed that the British Empire should expand its territory from Lagos and claim suzerainty over all the territory from the Cameroons to the Benin River. He thought that the British government had three options for incorporating these territories into its existing empire. The first option was to create a protectorate administered by the Foreign Office and leave domestic affairs to indigenous rulers who would surrender their foreign policy powers to the British Empire. Britain would be represented in the protectorate by consuls who would advise the local rulers and mediate disputes between them. The second option was to create a colony which would be administered by the Colonial Office. This would entail setting up a British administration and justice system in the region to control domestic and foreign affairs. However, indigenous rulers might be integrated into the administration. The third option was to give the area to a chartered company of British merchants. The company would then be allowed to set up its own administration in the region and act as a sovereign power in local affairs while the terms of its charter would bind it to the

---

<sup>203</sup> Geary, 178.

<sup>204</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 44–46.

British Empire. Hewett believed this was the most cost-effective option because it would free the British government and taxpayers from financing the new administration and fund the cost of building up local infrastructure.<sup>205</sup>

Hewett's proposals were forwarded to the Colonial Office, where the Secretary of State for the Colonies, John Wodehouse (1826-1902), Lord Kimberley, reviewed them. Lord Kimberley informed the Foreign Office that the Colonial Office had no interest in taking on further responsibilities in West Africa and that he would not recommend the occupation of any further part of the territory between the Cameroons and the Benin river by the British government. He feared that if Britain claimed suzerainty over the region, it would eventually be forced to take sides in local conflicts. Even if regional disputes could be avoided, it would then come into conflict with the states in the hinterland.<sup>206</sup>

Now that the Colonial Office had made it clear there would be no British Colony on the Niger, two options remained: To establish a protectorate or hand the region over to a chartered company. The Prime Minister's Office advised that the best option was to establish a limited protectorate that should be "for the present under such control and supervision as the consul for the Bight of Benin and Biafra can exercise, by means of visits made as frequently as circumstances may permit."<sup>207</sup> Indeed this was colonialism on a budget. We must remember that the Berlin West Africa Conference and its stipulation for active occupation as a basis of colonial territory claims close to the coast were still two years away. Thus, for the British, a nominal

---

<sup>205</sup> Consul Hewitt Correspondence to the Foreign Office, 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1882, FO 881/4824, National Archives, London, 21.

<sup>206</sup> Memoranda from Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1882, FO 881/4824, National Archives, London, 28.

<sup>207</sup> Correspondence from the Prime Minister's Office to the Foreign Office, 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1883, FO 84/1681, National Archives, London, 2-3.

protectorate supervised by an absent consul was still believed to be a legitimate way to claim territory in Africa. This was established in 1884 with the creation of the Oil Rivers Protectorate.

But even this parsimonious colonial administration would have to be paid for somehow. While the Treasury, Colonial Office, and the Foreign Office were arguing over who should bear the new protectorate's cost, matters came to a head in Western Africa when a French Navy Steamer appeared at Porto Novo. The French agent on board then negotiated a treaty with Porto Novo's king granting France a protectorate over the port. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1883, Commander McLeod, commanding officer of the gunboat HMS *Algerine*, which was patrolling the Bight of Benin, reported that the same French vessel had proceeded east to Bonny, and attempts had been made to persuade the rulers there to acknowledge a French protectorate in their territories. The French advances had been rejected, but it was now clear that the French had designs on the Niger Delta region.<sup>208</sup> The Foreign Office was under no illusion of what would happen to English trade in the region should the French manage to claim a protectorate over it. Thomas Villiers Lister (1832-1902), Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, believed that a French protectorate would mean complete ruin for all British merchants operating in the Niger Delta and the loss of all capital they had already invested there.<sup>209</sup>

Goldie was also alarmed by the French activity on the Niger. He realized that it was the potential financial cost that was delaying British response in the region. Realizing that Hewett could not govern the entire protectorate by himself, the Foreign Office had decided to appoint three vice-consuls to the different parts of the protectorate. One for the Niger region, one for the Oil Rivers region, and one for the Cameroons. Sensing an opportunity, Goldie wrote to the

---

<sup>208</sup> Telegraph from Commander McLeod to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1883, FO 881/4825, National Archives, London, 11.

<sup>209</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on French Activity on the West Coast of Africa by T.V. Lister, 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1883, FO 84/1655, National Archives, London, 251-252.

Foreign Office offering to pay the administrative cost of a consulate on the Niger, which he estimated to be about £3000 per annum. His condition for this aid was that the government appointed the NAC's general agent on the Niger, David McIntosh (d. 1888), as vice-consul. Lister rejected this proposal on the grounds that the company would use any consular powers granted to their agents to monopolize trade on the Niger,<sup>210</sup> an astute observation since this was indeed Goldie's plan.<sup>211</sup>

Now that the NAC's offer had been refused, Consul Hewett proposed a plan to raise enough revenue to fund his proposed protectorate's governance. He suggested merely introducing an export duty on all exports from the protectorate, which he estimated might raise £3.750, enough to pay for administrative costs.<sup>212</sup> The Foreign Office rejected Hewett's proposal pointing out that the whole point of a protectorate was that the people living there were not British subjects. If the territory were a colony, then the British government would have every right to levy taxes, but if it was a protectorate, then all residents there were the subjects of local rulers who maintained an exclusive right to levy taxes.<sup>213</sup>

So, if the protectorate inhabitants could not be taxed, someone else would have to be found to bear administration costs. The natural answer seemed to be the British traders in the protectorate. They were British subjects; they were making money in the region, and it was mostly for their benefit the government was expanding its reach. The problem was that if the government opened negotiations with a large body with interests in the region, such as the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, word of their plans would get out, and France might

---

<sup>210</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Oil Rivers, Niger, and the Cameroons by T.V. Lister, 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1883, FO 84/1655, National Archives, London, 475-476.

<sup>211</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 30.

<sup>212</sup> Correspondence from Consul Hewett to the Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1883, FO 84/1634, National Archives, London, 299.

<sup>213</sup> Addendum to Correspondence from Consul Hewett to the Foreign Office by T.V. Lister, 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1883, FO 84/1634, National Archives, London, 300-301.

accelerate its plans and beat them to the punch. Goldie's idea of making a peer of the realm the NAC's director now began to pay off. Granville Leveson-Gower (1815-1891), Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary, needed to consult with someone who could speak for the merchants but could be relied upon to be discreet. He turned to his old friend Lord Aberdare and wrote to him saying that if the Niger were to be kept out of French hands, the traders would have to bear the cost of a consular administration in the new protectorate.<sup>214</sup>

The NAC was now in a difficult position. If they agreed to pay for consular administration, the Foreign Office would have the funds necessary to run the Niger Protectorate by itself. This would mean free access for other British traders to the region and increase competition. If they refused to pay for consular administration, the government might abandon the whole scheme. The Niger might become a French protectorate, and protectionist tolls favouring French merchants would then drive the company out of the Niger trade. In the end, the NAC decided to gamble all on the British government's unwillingness to abandon the region to the French. After consulting with fellow NAC members Goldie and James Hutton (1826-1890), a Manchester merchant who had become a fellow director of the Company, Aberdare wrote back to Granville. He informed him that the merchants would not agree to the government's idea of extra duties to pay for the consular government.<sup>215</sup> Hutton, in a separate letter, even suggested that a parliamentary grant would probably be the best way to fund the consular administration, knowing full well that not only was parliament likely to vote the proposal down but that submitting such a bill would reveal the government's intentions to the French.<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> Correspondence from Lord Granville to Lord Aberdare, 6th of February 1884, FO 84/1682, National Archives, London, 39-40.

<sup>215</sup> Correspondence from Lord Aberdare to Lord Granville, 25th of February 1884, FO 84/1682, National Archives, London, 369-370.

<sup>216</sup> Correspondence from James Hutton to Lord Granville, 24th of February 1884, FO 84/1682, National Archives, London, 372.

The NAC's refusal to help fund the consular government left the Foreign Office with no funds to finance its new protectorate. This penury soon turned in the NAC's favour as its proposal to make its general agent McIntosh vice-consul at no cost to the Foreign Office was dusted off, and the Assistant Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs T. V. Lister agreed to appoint him vice-consul of the Niger in July 1884.<sup>217</sup> This dropped the new protectorate's starting cost by one-third as the government now only had to pay for consular administration in the Oil Rivers region and Cameroon. Having its trading agent granted political consular powers was an important milestone for George Goldie and his plan for an NAC monopoly on the Niger. The Niger protectorate administration would now run on a different basis from the rest of the new protectorate as it was being controlled and funded by the NAC and its agents in the region. While the Foreign Office would have direct authority over its consuls in the Cameroons and the Oil Rivers, it had delegated its authority on the Lower Niger to a private company. Now that the company had *de facto* control of the Niger Delta, it just needed to secure its control *de jure* by receiving a royal charter to govern the region.

But first, the company needed a legal basis for its charter request. Remembering that the North Borneo Company's charter had been based on its treaties with the local sultans, the NAC sent McIntosh on a treaty-making expedition up the Niger as far as its confluence with the Benin River.<sup>218</sup> McIntosh's treaties were all based on a standard form which included the clause "we now cede the whole of our territory to the National African Company (Limited), and their administrators, for ever".<sup>219</sup> In return for control of the territory, the company vowed to "not

---

<sup>217</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1884, FO 84/1687, National Archives, London, 184-185.

<sup>218</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Earl of Iddesleigh, 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 30.

<sup>219</sup> Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 3rd ed. (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909), 137.



interfere with any of the native laws."<sup>220</sup> Although Hewett was on his own tour of the Oil Rivers negotiating treaties of protectorate with local authorities, he was well aware of McIntosh's activities as he had to ratify all treaties his vice-consul made. In total, McIntosh concluded 21 of these treaties in 1884, giving the NAC full control of the banks of the Niger from the delta to the Benue confluence.<sup>221</sup>

The company was somewhat cagey about who it was making these treaties with, often simply referring to them as “chiefs” of various districts or “kings” of certain towns. This, of course, completely ignored the various political structures in place in the Lower Niger and instead suggested that all territory in the region was ruled by various monarchies. In fact, the company’s printed treaty forms had the line “We the undersigned [Kings and] Chiefs of” in print, followed by a blank where the name of the territory could be written by a pen.<sup>222</sup>

When the company dispatched a new treaty expedition in 1888 to secure the areas around the Wari Branch and Forcados River, the company agent went from town to town, signing a treaty with whoever he deemed to be the “king” of the town and whatever local notables were deemed as “chiefs” of the town. In return for their signatures, these locals received gifts in the form of trade goods. These tributes were then labelled as subsidies in the company’s account books. When Major MacDonald, the government’s commissioner, toured the company’s territories in 1890, he discovered that the signatories were usually local notables whose authority rested on their status as officials or heads of local merchant houses. But the signatories often did not have any right to grant the RNC sovereignty over the territories they had signed away. For example, this was the case when the Sultan of Gandu signed over the sovereignty of the territory

---

<sup>220</sup> Hertslet, 137.

<sup>221</sup> Hertslet, 137–38.

<sup>222</sup> Schedule of Royal Niger Company Treaties, 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 254.

of Nupe to the RNC without consulting the Emir or Prime Minister of Nupe. While both the Emir and Prime minister of Nupe regarded the Sultan of Gandu as a religious authority, they did not consider him their sovereign and therefore refused to validate his treaty with the company.<sup>223</sup>

The wording of the company treaties makes the NAC's intent clear. The NAC did not have the capacity to govern the lives of the inhabitants of the region. That would be left to local authorities with whom they had made the treaties. They merely wished to control commercial access to and from the region to secure their monopoly on all trade in the region. In this form of company government, we have the beginning of indirect rule in the Niger region years before Frederick Lugard became a proponent of this form of colonial administration. The company's motive for this policy was commercial profit. Still, all the treaties in the world could not make them legal rulers of the region unless they also acquired a royal charter to legitimize the system of governance they were preparing to set up on the Niger.

Before the NAC could apply for a royal charter, an unexpected event changed the course of British policy in Africa. In July 1884, having finished his protectorate negotiations on the Oil Rivers, Hewett headed to Cameroon. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, he wrote to Lord Granville from the corvette HMS Opal describing his journey. "In the afternoon of the nineteenth we reached Cameroon where we found the German gunboat "Möwe" at anchor, and the German national flag flying at Bell and Akwa towns."<sup>224</sup> While the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and the Treasury had been arguing over who should pay for a Cameroon protectorate, the Germans had sprung into action. The man in charge of the German expedition was a medical doctor turned archaeologist and explorer Gustav Nachtigal (1834-1885). Formerly the German consul in

---

<sup>223</sup> Report by Major MacDonald of His Majesty's Commissioner to the Niger and Oil Rivers, March 1890, FO 403/5913, National Archives, London, 17-19.

<sup>224</sup> Second Correspondence from Consul Hewett to Lord Granville, 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1884, FO 84/1660, National Archives, London, 184.

Tunisia, he had been appointed Germany's commissioner in West Africa by Chancellor Bismarck (1815-1898) and sent to establish protectorates in Togoland and Cameroon.<sup>225</sup>

The presence of the Germans came as a shock to Hewett and the British government. Prior to 1884, Bismarck opposed establishing a German colonial empire, despite pressure from commercial lobbies in Germany's coastal cities such as Hamburg. However, in 1884 he switched his position. Germany would establish a colonial empire, but it would do so by imitating the British charter company model, which had proven its recent validity with the establishment of the North Borneo Company only three years earlier. His hope that German charter companies would be formed to develop all the territories Germany intended to claim was quickly dashed. Only two charters were issued, one for the Neuguinea-Compagnie to develop German New Guinea and one for the Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft to develop German East Africa. In the newly occupied Cameroon, Germany would eventually be forced to establish a proper colony in the region, something they had not wanted and what the British had been trying to avoid by establishing a protectorate instead of a colony.<sup>226</sup>

All hope of Hewett setting up a protectorate in Cameroon was now dashed, and he wrote to Lord Granville stating that he could not complete his mission "in consequence of these countries being already in the occupation of the Germans."<sup>227</sup> The British Protectorate would only reach as far east as the region around Old Calabar, where Hewett had concluded a preliminary treaty with Orok Edem-Odo (d. 1896), the Obong or ruler of Old Calabar, whom the British referred to as the King of Calabar. The negotiations were attended by the heads of the

---

<sup>225</sup> "Obituary: Dr. Gustav Nachtigal," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 7, no. 7 (1885): 466.

<sup>226</sup> Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, "Domestic Origins of Germany's Colonial Expansion under Bismarck," *Past & Present*, no. 42 (1969): 149–50.

<sup>227</sup> First Correspondence from Consul Hewett to Lord Granville, 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1884, FO 84/1660, National Archives, London, 180.

local trading and noble houses, which had to ratify the treaty before the Obong could accept it. However, Hewett worried that because the leaders of the Barbey House had not ratified the treaty, it would not be valid for all the territories claimed by Old Calabar. He, therefore, made a special trip to gain their support for the treaty.<sup>228</sup> This would suggest that in Old Calabar, the Obong did not have the authority to bind his nobles to treaties with foreign powers without their consent. The new protectorate would be further split into the Oil River region administered by the Foreign Office consuls and the Niger River region administered by the NAC employees, deputized by the FO.

## The Berlin Conference and the Lower Niger

Manoeuvring the government into deputizing the NAC in the Niger region had been a diplomatic success for the company. Germany's entry into the colonial race threatened to undo all their work. In October 1884, Bismarck invited representatives of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, the United States, France, Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Sweden-Norway, and the Ottoman Empire to convene in Berlin to discuss the question of trade and commerce in Africa and how the claims of competing powers should be negotiated.<sup>229</sup>

Most significant for the NAC was the British government's approval of a program of discussion that included "the application of the stipulations of the Vienna Congress as respects freedom of river navigation to the Congo and the Niger; and determination of formalities under which new acquisitions on the coast of Africa are to be considered effective."<sup>230</sup> This had serious

---

<sup>228</sup> First Correspondence, 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1884, 179-180.

<sup>229</sup> Matthew Craven, "Between Law and History: The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the Logic of Free Trade," *London Review of International Law* 3, no. 1 (2015): 31-32.

<sup>230</sup> Draft of Foreign Office Memoranda, 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1884, FO 84/1813, National Archives, London, 33.

implications for the NAC. If France and Germany both demanded that the Niger River be declared a free trade zone governed by an international committee, the British government might have to acquiesce. This would mean that all the NAC's work to gain political control of the region to create a trade monopoly would be for naught. However, there was a possible silver lining in the clouds now gathering on the NAC's horizon. This lay in the debate on what should be considered an effective acquisition of African territory. Suppose the Germans and the French were to insist on effective occupation as a basis of acquisition. In that case, the Foreign Office might become even more reliant on the NAC in the Lower Niger. After all, the company's ships regularly navigated the river, and its agents crewed numerous trading stations on its banks. The FO had already deputized the company's agent in the region. If the area's administration had to be expanded, the parsimonious FO might have no option but to charter the NAC to run the region.

The NAC, therefore, had much to gain and everything to lose from the Berlin conference. Lord Aberdare wrote to Lord Granville advising him that it was imperative for British interests that the Niger and the Congo be treated as separate subjects in the upcoming negotiations. While a free trade zone in the Congo would not hurt British businesses, British merchants had already invested heavily in the Niger trade. They were the dominant trading power in the region. Therefore, there was no reason for the British government to allow them to be treated like identical cases at the conference.<sup>231</sup>

To drum up popular support for the NAC, an anonymous letter was published in *The Times*. The author, identified only as "a correspondent," claimed that Royal Navy gunboats and NAC agents were responsible for maintaining order and suppressing the slave trade in the region.

---

<sup>231</sup> Correspondence from Lord Aberdare to Lord Granville, 15th of October 1884, FO 84/1813, National Archives, London, 197-199.

He further questioned the motives of the French, asking if the Niger should be "withdrawn from the protection of Great Britain to be treated as a no man's land and to be internationalised, while France expressly excludes from discussion both the Senegal River... and the Gaboon River."<sup>232</sup>

The author finished by hinting that a chartered company would be best suited for administrating the Niger saying "none but a commercial company would care to pay sufficiently the best class of officials."<sup>233</sup> Historian John Flint believed that Aberdare was the author of the anonymous letter because its contents matched his previously mentioned letter to Lord Granville. If Flint is right, this was the first time that the NAC directors publicly suggested that their company should receive a charter to govern the Niger region.<sup>234</sup>

But if a charter were to be granted and the French kept out of the Niger at the Berlin Conference, the French trading companies on the Niger would have to be removed. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, *the Times* reported that the French companies had agreed to sell their assets on the river, and their owners would receive shares in the NAC and two Frenchmen would become board members of the NAC. Seemingly having lost faith that the French government would support them on the Niger, the French investors decided to throw in their lot with the NAC that seemed primed to become to dominant trading power on the Niger. *The Times* report added that although this made the NAC the only trading power of the river, there was no monopoly on the Niger trade as the company was publicly traded. Anyone who wished to trade there could buy stock in the company and thereby enter the Niger trade.<sup>235</sup> This was an unusual interpretation of what constituted free trade. If access to the market was only available to the owners of a specific

---

<sup>232</sup> "The West African Conference And The Niger," *The Times*, October 15, 1884, 12.

<sup>233</sup> "The West African Conference And The Niger," 12.

<sup>234</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 67.

<sup>235</sup> "The West African Conference And The Niger," 12.

company, then all other companies were excluded from the trade—a monopoly by any other name.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1884, Goldie wrote to the Foreign Office to inform them that the last French company, the *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Équatoriale*, had agreed to sell to the NAC. This meant that once the Berlin conference began, no other nation would be able to claim possession of the Niger on the basis of active occupation. In the margin of Goldie's letter, Lord Granville wrote: "the N. African C. are now alone on the Niger."<sup>236</sup> It was fourteen days until the conference opened, and everything was coming together for the NAC. Foreseeing that some European powers might question whether an unchartered company constituted an active British occupation on the Niger, Goldie wrote another letter to the Foreign Office on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November. He now asked permission for the NAC to hoist the British flag at their trading stations and declare their stations to be a part of the British Protectorate on the Niger.<sup>237</sup> Now that the British government had deputized its staff, the company wanted the government to acknowledge that its trading stations and their surroundings were British territories, further cementing its role as the government's representative in the region.

Thomas V. Lister responded to this request on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November. He declared that in the eyes of the Foreign Office, there was "no objection to allowing the Company to hoist the British flag and declare the British protectorate at all stations to which they have an individual title."<sup>238</sup> This made clear that the company's rights in the region derived from the treaties it had made with local rulers. And it was only in the areas in which it ruled by rights granted by these

---

<sup>236</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1884, FO 84/1814, National Archives, London, 129-131.

<sup>237</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1884, FO 84/1814, National Archives, London, 212-213.

<sup>238</sup> Correspondence from Foreign Office to the National African Company, 10<sup>st</sup> of November 1884, FO 84/1814, National Archives, London, 213.

treaties that it could proclaim a British protectorate. From the company's perspective, this was no hindrance since McIntosh's treaty campaign had brought both banks of the river under independent company control as far north as the confluence with the Benin River.

The British government was now much more confident in its position on the Niger since the Germans had justified their protectorate over Angra Pequena on the basis that it was the site of a German trading station. This fact was not lost on the NAC, and Lord Aberdare wrote to Lord Granville explaining that if the company were granted permission to hoist the British flag at its stations, the British government could claim to have an active presence in the region.<sup>239</sup> We can now see how the NAC used the panic in the Foreign Office concerning the upcoming Berlin conference to coax more concessions from the government and take on more and more of a chartered company's characteristics. But although the NAC was acting more and more like a chartered company, it still had no legal charter.

The company had at least managed to make itself a vital part of the government's plans for the Niger, and Goldie now accompanied the British delegation to Berlin in the capacity of special advisor. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, eight days before the conference started, the British delegation head Edward Malet (1837-1908), received his final instructions from the Foreign Office. They explained that on the Niger, "commerce owes its development almost exclusively to British enterprise; the trade is altogether in British hands; and the most important tribes... placed formally under the protectorate of Great Britain."<sup>240</sup> Of course, this was thanks to the work of the NAC and its agents in 1884, without which the British position on the Niger would have been much weaker, and France might have had an equal claim to control of the river. But the French

---

<sup>239</sup> Correspondence from Lord Aberdare to Lord Granville, 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1884, FO 84/1814, National Archives, London, 207.

<sup>240</sup> Correspondence from Lord Granville to Edward Malet, 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1884, FO 84/1814, National Archives, London, 234.



had been forced out by the NAC, and so Granville's instructions continued, "On this river therefore, a difference of application of the principles of the congress of Vienna is imperative; the coast-line and lower course of the river are sufficiently under British control for Her Majesty's government to be able to regulate navigation."<sup>241</sup> The NAC had been able to influence the Foreign Office to take a stand on Britain's claim to the Niger. Due to the NAC's efforts, the British government now had a good case for refuting any French or German demands that the Niger River be declared an international free trade zone, which would have established an international committee to manage all navigation on the river and ruin the company's efforts to control the Niger trade.

The conference began on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. France and Germany opened with a proposal to have both the Congo and the Niger governed by international commissions that would regulate all navigation on the river. This was what the British had been expecting. A few months earlier, this might have been a reasonable request to which the British would have to acquiesce. But thanks to the NAC, they were one step ahead of the game. There was no longer any French or German presence on the Niger. Therefore, the British delegation immediately refused to consider such a proposal and moved that the two rivers be treated as separate subjects due to Britain's domination of the Niger.<sup>242</sup> By December, Malet wrote back to his superiors to inform them that he had successfully persuaded the other powers to accept British hegemony on the lower Niger. The delegates agreed that "all nations shall be free to navigate and to carry on coasting trade without differential treatment, and shall be entitled to free transit, no tolls or duties

---

<sup>241</sup> Correspondence from Lord Granville to Edward Malet, 234.

<sup>242</sup> Protocols and general act of the West African Conference, March 1885, Parliamentary Command Papers 1884-1885, Vol. 55/C.4361, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, London, 105-106.

begin [sic] exacted... except such as may be necessary to provide for payment for services rendered to navigation."<sup>243</sup>

It is clear that events at the Berlin Conference concerning the Niger do not align with Robinson and Gallagher's or Bernard Porter's idea of imperial policy being dictated by an official mind isolated from voters and lobbyism. The leading influencers on British negotiations about the Niger were not Malet, Granville, or Aberdare. It was George Goldie, the director of the NAC's operations in Africa and the NAC's general agent McIntosh who had made all the treaties with local rulers whose territories bordered the Niger. They had shaped London's negotiating standpoint at the conference. Without them, Britain would probably have been forced to accept an international commission on the Niger, severely limiting Britain's influence in the region. The officials and ministers were indeed acting independently of parliament, but not independently of lobbyists and actors on the periphery, such as on the Niger.<sup>244</sup>

These events, therefore, challenge some of Robinson and Gallagher's conclusions. They also indicate that Desmond Platt was right when he theorized that annexation and the delimitation of spheres of interest in the interest of commerce were a new development in the 1880s. Before the 1880s, the British government had not pursued hegemony in the Niger Delta and had been content to allow French and German merchants to trade freely on the river. It was Goldie who realized that dropping palm oil prices in Europe were forcing the British companies on the Niger out of business. The only way to make the trade profitable again was to monopolize the trade, allowing the monopolizing company to force the African traders and producers to

---

<sup>243</sup> Correspondence with Her Majesty's Ambassador at Berlin Respecting West African Conference, March 1885, Parliamentary Command Papers 1884-1885, Vol. 55/C.4284 House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, London, 2.

<sup>244</sup> John Flint, "Chartered Companies and the Transition from Informal Sway to Colonial Rule in Africa," in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, ed. Stig Förste, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 78–80.

accept lower prices for their products, making the trade profitable for the European merchants again. It was then Goldie and his associates in the NAC that pushed the British government to claim the Niger region as a delimited sphere of interest where British interests would be favoured above all else. This is in line with Flint's analysis of the NAC as the primary influencer of government policy on the Lower Niger in the 1880s. Ofonagoro's research tends to view the activity of the traders in a more passive light portraying the British government as the primary policymakers in the Niger Delta, but this might be explained by the fact that his research was more focused on the early twentieth century, when the government took a more active role in shaping British policy on the Lower Niger than it did in the 1880s. The shift in government policy under Joseph Chamberlain's leadership, that sidelined the trading companies from the decision-making process will be covered in chapter five.

The wording which was included in the Act of Navigation for the Niger passed by the Berlin conference left open the possibility of charging duties and tolls on river traffic. The delegates had meant this clause to provide Britain with the ability to leverage small tolls to pay for stations on the river and for dredging operations. But for the NAC, this clause could be utilized to eliminate all competition on the Niger by charging other traders' duties and tolls, thereby making trade on the river unprofitable for its competitors.

The Act of Navigation for the Niger further stated that Britain was to "apply the principles of freedom of navigation enunciated in Articles 26, 27, 28 and 29 on so much of the waters of the Niger, its affluents, branches and outlets, as are or may be under her sovereignty or protection."<sup>245</sup> So Britain was to be responsible for the lower Niger, but so far, the Colonial Office had refused to take responsibility for a colony in the region, and the Foreign Office had

---

<sup>245</sup> "Act of Navigation for the Niger," General Act of the Conference at Berlin, 1885, <https://www.thoughtco.com/general-act-of-the-berlin-conference-4070667>.

refused to pay for a protectorate in the area instead, it delegated its responsibilities to agents of the NAC. The only reasonable course of action for the penny-pinching government was to grant the NAC a charter for governing the region in the name of Britain and thereby have the company shoulder the responsibilities Britain had taken on at the Berlin conference.

## Negotiating a Charter

In January 1885, Thomas V. Lister circulated a memo to the Cabinet where he explained that fulfilling the responsibilities the government had taken on would require a river fleet on the Niger and colonial administration at the main trading stations. He argued that the NAC already had agents, stations, and ships on the river and that by its treaties with the locals had acquired legal authority over the territories bordering the river. Lister concluded that the easiest and cheapest option for the government was to place the administration of the Niger in the company's hands by granting them a royal charter.<sup>246</sup>

However, this idea was opposed by the man who would become one of Goldie's most intransigent opponents in the upcoming negotiations, Julian Pauncefote (1828-1902), who was the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Pauncefote argued that before a charter could be considered, the NAC would have to give up all independent political power on the Niger by transferring its treaty claims to the crown. After that, the government would grant them a limited charter, but ultimate control would rest with the British government.<sup>247</sup>

Pauncefote's position of using government control to enforce free trade principles is in line with Cain and Hopkin's argument that after the Napoleonic Wars, the British government

---

<sup>246</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Government of the Niger and Benue by T.V. Lister, 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 1-2.

<sup>247</sup> Addendum to Foreign Office Memorandum on the Government of the Niger and Benue by Julian Pauncefote, 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 3-4.

gradually favoured the expansion of world trade based on the free trade maxims of no tariffs, duties, or monopolies.<sup>248</sup> Several members of the Cabinet were opposed to granting the NAC a charter because they feared that doing so would allow the company to establish a monopoly on the Lower Niger trade to the detriment of both the locals and other British traders. Pauncefote's opposition to the company's plans was partly based on his belief in free trade maxims. He also seems to have believed that allowing the NAC to operate independently on the Lower Niger would undermine the British Empire's sovereignty. Britain had already declared the area to be a British protectorate. Pauncefote seems to have believed it would be a mistake to now hand over complete control of the region to a commercial entity.<sup>249</sup>

For the NAC, an agreement that guaranteed free trade on the Lower Niger would undo all their efforts to control the river trade. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of February, Lord Aberdare wrote to Lord Granville to inform him that the company would soon apply for a royal charter. Aberdare explained that the company now had more than 1500 employees on the river and, by rights granted by its treaties with the local chiefs, acted as an independent organization. According to Aberdare, the NAC was now also the primary legal authority in the region and responsible for arbitrating local disputes as local rulers had agreed by the treaties to submit all conflicts with their neighbours to company arbitration. However, local "robber barons" still threatened peace and commerce on the river and the "peaceful locals," and the NAC wished to bring those troublemakers to justice. Only a charter would allow the company to expand its role in the region to act as both judiciary and police and allow it to expand its trade into the interior of Africa.<sup>250</sup>

---

<sup>248</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 650.

<sup>249</sup> Addendum to Foreign Office Memorandum on the Government of the Niger and Benue by Julian Pauncefote, 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1885, 4.

<sup>250</sup> Correspondence from Lord Aberdare to Lord Granville, 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 11-13.

We can infer that the "robber barons" Aberdare referred to were just African merchants competing with the company, such as the merchants from Brass. In reality, the policing actions Aberdare was referring to were military operations meant to destroy the African traders in the Niger Delta. This would allow the company to trade directly with the interior without competition from "African middlemen." As we have seen, advances in technology and medicine were opening Africa's interior for Europeans, while the availability of shipping was making it possible for African traders to sell directly to manufacturers in Europe. Neither side needed the other to act as a commercial middleman any longer, and it seemed inevitable that only one side could emerge victorious from this commercial rivalry. The NAC had no intention of allowing African competition on the Niger any more than it would tolerate other European traders. For its monopoly plans to work, its control had to be absolute.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, the company filed an official petition for a royal charter. The application was based on the charter granted to the North Borneo Company in 1881. Aberdare signed it as chairman and Goldie as vice-chairman. Article 4 of the application made clear that the company already held rights to rule the Niger region because of the treaties McIntosh had concluded with local rulers. Therefore, the government would not be granting the company powers to govern the area but merely acknowledging the NAC's existing rights in the region.<sup>251</sup> This was precisely the sort of charter Pauncefote had been opposed to. Nevertheless, the company's proposal was circulated in the Cabinet for discussion.

Although the Colonial Office and the India Office had no objections to the NAC's proposal, several Cabinet members were hostile to the idea of granting a new charter. Roundell Palmer (1812-1895), Lord Selbourne, who was Lord Chancellor at the time, implied that the

---

<sup>251</sup> To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty in Council: The Humble Petition of the National African Company Limited, 15th of February 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 14-15.

NAC's treaties might be fraudulent. Even if they were not, there was no guarantee that the local rulers who had signed the treaties had any authority to sign away their people's sovereignty.<sup>252</sup>

Thomas George Baring (1826-1904), Lord Northbrook, former Viceroy of India and current First Lord of the Admiralty, agreed with the Lord Chancellor and added that he believed the whole charter application might be a scheme by the NAC to get rid of foreign competition on the Niger.<sup>253</sup> He was not far from the truth, although the NAC also meant to get rid of all British competitors.

Seizing on the Cabinet members' objections, Pauncefote suggested that the British government conclude its own treaties directly with the local rulers of the Lower Niger.<sup>254</sup> This suggestion was unacceptable to the directors of the NAC. They had been put in charge of the Lower Niger because the government did not want to pay for the consular government in the protectorate there. The treaties of their agents had secured the British position on the lower Niger at the Berlin Conference while the government vacillated in its position towards the region. Now the cabinet wanted to bypass them and their treaties and make its own treaties in the region to make the company's position on the Lower Niger completely dependent on the goodwill of the government.

Pauncefote's charter based on British sovereignty on the lower Niger would be worse for the NAC than no charter at all. It would shoulder the company with administrative duties in the region while providing no means of bringing in revenue to meet administrative costs. It would also grant other British merchants free access to the area, destroying the monopoly the company

---

<sup>252</sup> Lord Chancellor Memorandum on the Niger Charter by Lord Selbourne, 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 30.

<sup>253</sup> First Lord Memorandum on the Niger Charter by Lord Northbrook, 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 32.

<sup>254</sup> Correspondence from Julian Pauncefote to Lord Granville, 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 35-36.

was trying to create. In an interview with the Foreign Office, Goldie doubled down on the NAC's request for a charter based on the North Borneo Company charter and pointed out that the German government had just granted a similar charter to the Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft in German East Africa. When asked if the company would use its position to establish a monopoly on the river trade, Goldie pointed out that the NAC had a legal right to monopolize trade on the river because of a clause in the treaties it had signed with African rulers. But he added that the company was willing to graciously drop its monopoly rights and guarantee the principles of free trade on the Niger in exchange for a charter.<sup>255</sup>

Of course, Goldie had no intention of doing anything of the sort. After all, he only applied for a charter to acquire the political power necessary to create monopoly conditions on the Lower Niger.<sup>256</sup> But it was a useful promise to placate the Liberal government until he found a way to bypass it by including exemptions from such a clause in the charter. When asked why the government should not establish direct rule in the region and bypass the company, he responded, "the ignorant natives, who know only 'the company,' would look upon independent officials as usurpers, who had no benefits to confer on them in return."<sup>257</sup> Now Goldie must have known this was incorrect. He was acting like the NAC was an established power on the Niger when the truth was it was a relative newcomer to the region. Knowing this, he changed tack and pointed out that the government could not hope to gain more than £60,000 in annual revenue from the Lower Niger. In comparison, government administration costs were estimated to be

---

<sup>255</sup> Foreign Office Interview with the Vice-Chairman of the National African Company Limited Concerning the Lower Niger, 15th of May 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 78-79.

<sup>256</sup> Correspondence from the Rio Bente Kernel Company to Baron Henry de Worms, 15th of January 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 98.

<sup>257</sup> Correspondence from the Rio Bente Kernel Company to Baron Henry de Worms, 15th of January 1887, 80.



around £116,000 per annum. He further hinted that should the British government not support the NAC on the Niger; the company might have to "make terms with some foreign power."<sup>258</sup>

Goldie's position shocked the officials at the Foreign Office. If the NAC sold out to the German or the French government, that power would instantly have dozens of stations and hundreds of agents on the lower Niger, making any British claim to control of the river a joke. The Foreign Office sent one of its civil servants, Sir Henry Percy Anderson (1831-1896), head of the Foreign Office African Department, to reason with Goldie. But Goldie would not budge an inch. He put on the act of a simple company man that had no choice but to serve the interests of his associates and investors. Of their meeting, Anderson wrote: "Sir George Goldie is an honourable man. But he is body and soul, devoted to the interests of the company and finds it difficult to comprehend the necessity of bending to the considerations of policy."<sup>259</sup> Goldie may have been a lot of things, but simple was not one of them. He was the man who had accompanied the British delegation to Berlin to advise on affairs on the Niger, and he must have been more than able to comprehend all matters of policy. But he was also able to understand that the Pauncefote charter would bankrupt the NAC within a few years and, therefore, could not accept it under any circumstances.

Given Goldie's obstinacy, the Foreign Office decided to change tack. Anderson and Lister suggested that the only man who could prevent the NAC from making deals with foreign powers was the company chairman Lord Aberdare. Being an old friend of Lord Granville, he might be able to persuade Goldie to change his position or bypass the vice-chairman altogether and convince the rest of the directors to agree to Pauncefote's charter.<sup>260</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> Correspondence from the Rio Bente Kernel Company to Baron Henry de Worms, 15th of January 1887, 80.

<sup>259</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Niger Charter by Lord Granville H. P. Anderson and T.V. Lister, 84.

<sup>260</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Niger Charter by Lord Granville H. P. Anderson and T.V. Lister, 85

In hindsight, we can see the government's position was unrealistic. While the Lower Niger was low in its list of priorities, the government had been able to claim it at Berlin because of the actions of the NAC. Now the government wanted to have its cake and eat it too by claiming direct control over the Niger while forcing the NAC to pay for administration costs. It might have worked had the company been free to impose duties and tolls to secure its trading position on the river. But the wording of the Berlin agreement greatly limited the extent to which custom fees could be collected. This was the same unrealistic attitude the government would take with the short-lived Imperial British East Africa Company a few years later. There the company was quickly bankrupted, and the government was forced to formally colonize the company's territories in East Africa to keep them out of the hands of the Germans and the Italians. It appears that once British control of territory had been established, the government was unwilling to cede authority there to a foreign power. When the preferred economically expedient solution of chartered rule fell apart, the government felt compelled to step in and take over the administration of the territory.<sup>261</sup>

The government's plan to have Aberdare bypass Goldie and convince the company directors to accept a charter on the government's terms also showed the Foreign Office's limited understanding of the NAC's nature. Although by all accounts a wastrel when he entered the Niger business, Goldie had now invested most of his own money into the NAC and worked long hours administering the company. He had brought Lord Aberdare into the firm to serve as its frontman, but Aberdare's real power in the company was limited. Most of the directors and shareholders were small-time merchants and financiers whose activities in the previous years had

---

<sup>261</sup> Raj Kumar Trivedi, "The Role of Imperial British East Africa Company in the Acquisition of East African Colony in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 33 (1971): 620–21.

been on too small a scale to even register with the government. The career politician Aberdare was hardly their spokesman. They had much more in common with the gaunt, ill-tempered, minor nobleman turned financier, Goldie. He was their natural spokesman and had their support. The NAC's finances were another cause for concern. Buying out the French competition and establishing new stations on the Niger was expensive, and in 1885 the company would be run with a £40,000 deficit.<sup>262</sup> The NAC was not a company that was willing or able to take on administrative duties for the government without significant financial gain.

In any case, Aberdare may have agreed with Goldie's position, and the NAC maintained its opposition to the government's scheme. Political changes in Britain now began to affect the charter negotiations. In June 1885, Gladstone's Liberal government was forced to step down, and Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (1830-1903), Lord Salisbury, formed a Conservative government. Lord Granville lost his position as Foreign Secretary and was replaced by Lord Salisbury, who held both the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary's office. More favourably for the NAC, Lord Selbourne was replaced as Lord Chancellor by Hardinge Giffard (1823-1921), Lord Halsbury, who had formerly been the NAC legal advisor responsible for drafting its charter petition.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, Goldie wrote to Pauncefote and asked that the new Lord Chancellor review the company's charter application.<sup>264</sup>

Pauncefote, knowing that the Lord Chancellor would likely look favourably on a proposal he himself had written, had no intention of bringing the matter to Lord Halsbury's attention. Instead, he consulted the Crown's Law Officers. He then informed Goldie that the only

---

<sup>262</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 325–27.

<sup>263</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Salisbury, 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 105-106.

<sup>264</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Julian Pauncefote, 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 110-111.

charter the government would consider would bring the company and its officers under direct government control, and their actions would be controlled by orders in the council.<sup>265</sup> This would bring the company under the British government's legislative control and strip away the political autonomy that was vital to the NAC's commercial success on the Niger.

Upon receiving this letter, the short-tempered Goldie stormed to the Foreign Office and informed the unsuspecting clerk on duty that "if the charter was not granted it might be necessary in the interests of the shareholders to hand over the Co's treaty rights to the French."<sup>266</sup> Having been informed of Goldie's threats, Pouncefote decided to ignore him and continue with his plans of making the NAC a governmental instrument on the Lower Niger. He was probably right to ignore Goldie's threats. It was a bluff; even if Goldie might have been willing to sell out to the French, it was improbable that the rest of the directors felt the same way. As for the chairman Lord Aberdare, he was a peer of the realm, and it would have been political suicide to agree to such a suggestion. If Goldie had been considering such a move, he also would not have been foolish enough to announce such a decision to the Foreign Office beforehand. He probably would have worked in the same way he did when he sent McIntosh on the treaty expedition up the Niger: concluded the deals first and then announced them to the government.

In September, Pouncefote made his final negotiating position clear. Either the company would submit to be governed by a council made up of company directors, but which the government could bypass in favour of direct rule at any time, or the Foreign Office would establish direct government through its consular offices in the region.<sup>267</sup> It is hard to imagine that

---

<sup>265</sup> Correspondence from Foreign Office to the National African Company, August 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 152.

<sup>266</sup> Correspondence from Joseph W. Warburton to Julian Pouncefote, 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 153.

<sup>267</sup> Correspondence from Julian Pouncefote to the Legal Officers of the Crown, 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 133.

the penny-pinching officials of the Foreign Office and the Treasury had any interest in funding a direct consular administration on the Lower Niger, a scheme they had rejected a year earlier. The threat to take direct control of the territory must have been a bluff, just like Goldie's threat to sell the NAC's treaty rights to the French government. This was probably the lowest point for Goldie in the negotiations. No one in the government seemed to support his application for a charter based on the North Borneo Company model. It seemed he would be forced to agree to governmental political control lowering his chances of establishing a dominant position for the NAC on the Niger. But although neither Pauncefote nor Goldie realized it, the tide was about to turn in the company's favour.

Realizing that nothing was going the company's way, Goldie began to rethink his negotiation strategy. If the company could not gain the necessary political power to enforce a monopoly on trade, perhaps such power could be gained by economic means. He wrote to Pauncefote and explained that the NAC had already incurred more than £200.000 in costs by its efforts to secure the British Protectorate on the Lower Niger. £100.000 for buying up the French companies on the river and more than £100.000 on McIntosh's treaty expedition. The company must, therefore, be provided with some method of recouping these costs. He proposed that the company be granted exclusive rights to trade alcohol and weapons on the Lower Niger since trade in these materials had to be controlled anyway in the interests of public safety.<sup>268</sup>

This was a clever continuation of Goldie's original plan for a charter. It had been the North Borneo Company's right to charge customs duties on spirits that gave him the idea that a company with such rights on the Niger would be able to eliminate all competition on the Niger since alcohol was the main European import in the region. On the Lower Niger, British

---

<sup>268</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Julian Pauncefote, 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 200-201.

merchants had been importing German alcohol in large quantities since the 1860s to trade for palm oil and palm kernels. It was also used by the local people as a popular transactional currency, much to the dismay of the missionaries of the CMS, who largely opposed the liquor trade.<sup>269</sup>

Control over the importation of modern weapons was also crucial for the company but for different reasons. The company currently possessed a small private security force that guarded its trading stations and its ships. But these were nowhere near enough to police the entire Lower Niger, let alone fight off African competitors such as Jaja and Nano. Their African companies had private river navies and could muster several companies of irregulars for military service.<sup>270</sup> Goldie, therefore, suggested to the government that once a charter had been acquired, the company should be allowed to organize a paramilitary police force "for the maintenance of order" with a naval and artillery component. The officers would be former officers from the Royal Navy and the British Army, while the soldiers would be Africans.<sup>271</sup> Controlling access to modern weaponry on the Lower Niger would be an essential part of establishing company rule on the river. Of course, only "for the maintenance of order," by which was meant company control of all commerce on the river.

Pauncefote took Goldie's letter for the conciliatory gesture it was, and the Foreign Office decided to write a charter based on Pauncefote's model of direct government control but with some accommodations to the NAC's commercial interests.<sup>272</sup> The charter would be composed by

---

<sup>269</sup> Simon Heap, "'A Bottle of Gin Is Dangled before the Nose of the Natives': The Economic Uses of Imported Liquor in Southern Nigeria, 1860-1920," *African Economic History*, no. 33 (2005): 69–70.

<sup>270</sup> Special Report of the Board of Directors of the National African Company Limited, 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 205.

<sup>271</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Salisbury, 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 107.

<sup>272</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on a Draft of a Charter for the National African Company Limited by Julian Pauncefote, 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 225.

the Treasury's legal expert on charter law R. S. Wright. However, when examining Pauncefote's proposal, Wright ruled that there was no legal foundation for the government's idea of running a chartered company through orders in council. For Pauncefote's proposal to work, the law would have to be changed. Looking at the charter draft Goldie had originally submitted, Wright wrote: "the wisest plan is a vague, indefinite charter like this draft, confirmed by act of parliament."<sup>273</sup>

An act of parliament was hardly a feasible option for the government at this point. Salisbury's government was a caretaker ministry and did not have a majority in parliament.<sup>274</sup> The idea of a charter for the NAC on the Lower Niger would rile the Manchester and Liverpool commercial chambers. For if a charter was granted, their members might be excluded from the Niger trade. The commercial lobbies set to lose revenue by the granting of a charter might then be able to rally enough parliament members to block the government's proposal. This would create a political crisis, and the government might be forced to abdicate before a new general election could be held.

By January, Pauncefote had relented, and a charter draft acknowledging the company's political sovereignty on the Lower Niger had been written. Just as Goldie had requested, the company's authority was based on the rights granted to it in treaties with local rulers.<sup>275</sup> But Goldie was now on the offensive again and requested that the government also acknowledge the company's rights to monopolize all trade in weapons, alcohol, tobacco, and opium on the Lower Niger.<sup>276</sup> Goldie's suspicions were justified. The months of negotiations had shown that the government was perfectly willing to subject the NAC to conditions that would bankrupt it

---

<sup>273</sup> Correspondence from R. S. Wright to Julian Pauncefote, 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1885, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 223-224.

<sup>274</sup> Wangteh Yu, *The English Cabinet System* (London: P. S. King & Son, Ltd, 1939), 12.

<sup>275</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Directors of the National African Company Limited, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1886, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 16-17.

<sup>276</sup> Correspondence from Julian Pauncefote to Lord Salisbury, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1886, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 43-44.

quickly. What if the next government found the company's operations objectionable? Would it be free to revoke the charter and ruin the company? Goldie understandably wanted guarantees in writing that the government could not cancel the charter at a whim or object to the NAC's monopolistic operations.

Pauncefote refused to grant Goldie's request for an official monopoly, stating that the Anglo-German Treaty of 1885 forbade the British government from granting monopolies on the Niger.<sup>277</sup> But Pauncefote, having lost the fight over political control, was willing to compromise on the economic issues. Even though a monopoly could not be granted, the company must be allowed to recover the £300.000-£500.000 it had, according to Goldie, who had upped this estimate from his original sum of £200.000, spent on securing the Lower Niger for Britain. Goldie now offered the Foreign Office a bargain. The company would lower its demands to £150.000. This could either be reimbursed by the government in a lump sum, or the company could be granted the right to "debit its territories with the amount expended and to raise sufficient revenue to cover either five percent interests on this amount in perpetuity, or eight percent per annum... for a term of twenty years."<sup>278</sup>

Goldie must have known that a Foreign Office that had refused to expend a few thousand pounds to establish a consular government on the Niger in 1884 was not about to spend £150.000 on a charter company administration in 1886. That was not the point; the point was to get the government to allow the company to raise revenue through duties and tolls on imports to the Lower Niger. This right could then be used to make trading in the region unprofitable for all

---

<sup>277</sup> Correspondence from Julian Pauncefote to Lord Salisbury, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1886, 44-45.

<sup>278</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Julian Pauncefote, 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1886, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 98.



competitions giving the company a de facto monopoly, even if the government could not grant a de jure monopoly.

Further, this arraignment would be fully compatible with the Anglo-German Treaty of May 1885. The treaty's wording allowed for duties to be levied to "to cover the expense arising from the taking over of the Protectorate."<sup>279</sup> The Foreign Office, now helmed by Archibald Primrose (1847-1929), Lord Rosebery, who had succeeded Lord Salisbury after a Liberal victory in the general election of 1886, agreed to Goldie's proposal. By March, it had drafted a final charter meeting almost all of Goldie's original demands.<sup>280</sup> Goldie's stubborn refusal to make any concessions to the government, as well as some luck, had secured for the NAC a financially viable charter. This charter would allow them to legally accomplish their aims of monopolizing the trade on the Lower Niger. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, the Foreign Office announced that it had formally granted a charter to the NAC.<sup>281</sup> The company now had its charter and political autonomy in its area of operations. The next thing to do was to establish an administration, recruit an army, and then finally bring to heel all opposition to their new mercantilist regime on the Lower Niger.

The end of the slave trade permanently changed the economic landscape of Western Africa. The political instability of the indigenous polities of the Lower Niger made long-distance trade expensive and complicated. The difficulties involved in trade between the coast and the hinterland led to the rise of sizeable African mercantile organizations that could organize and protect transport between European merchants on the beach and the African producers in the hinterland. On the Lower Niger, palm oil emerged as the region's leading export in the 1830s.

---

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>280</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Rosebery, 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1886, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 155.

<sup>281</sup> Extract from the London Gazette, 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1886, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 257.

During the 1800s, a new social group emerged in West Africa. These were the Anglicized Africans. The members of this social group were Africans who were educated in the new mission schools established by the CMS in Sierra Leone at the beginning of the century. As the mission grew, more schools were established, and higher education became available. The Anglicized Africans, many of whom were originally from the Lower Niger, began to emigrate back in large numbers during the 1840s. Settling in Abeokuta, their arrival sparked unrest in the region, and with their aid, Lagos became a British colony in 1861. The Anglicized Africans established the Niger Mission, and in 1864, Samuel Crowther became the first African bishop of a vast territory in West Africa.

From 1851 declining palm oil prices in Europe made it difficult for the small British firms operating on the Lower Niger to turn a profit. When Goldie investigated the trade on behalf of his brother in 1875, he concluded that the only way to make the trade profitable again was to force the African producers to accept a lower price for their products. The only way to do this was to monopolize all business on the Lower Niger in the hands of a single company. Goldie first tried to create this monopoly by merging all British companies in the region into the United African Company. The new company successfully forced down palm oil prices in its area of operations. But this success enticed other companies to enter the trade.

The greatest threat to British merchants in the region came from the French *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Équatoriale*. France embarked on a campaign of rapid imperial expansion in Northwest Africa in the 1880s, and Goldie feared that if France established a protectorate on the Lower Niger, its protectionist policies would force the British merchants out of the trade. In preparation for the Berlin Conference of 1884, the NAC bought out the French company. Britain entered the conference as the only European power with a large established presence on the

Lower Niger. During the conference, the other powers were forced to accept British hegemony in the region.

The NAC could use the British government's anxiety over possible French or German incursion on the Niger to maneuver itself into a position of strength. The company was granted the right to fly the British flag over its stations, and the British consular government in the region was left to company agents. In return, the company shouldered the responsibility for administering the area. The only thing left for the company to fully secure the territory was to receive a royal charter for its administration. The negotiations for a charter took almost two years, but through perseverance and luck, the company achieved its goal of becoming a sovereign political power in Western Africa. The government had rented out imperial expansion on the Lower Niger to the company, and the company now turned its attention to turning political power into financial profit.

The history of the early years of the companies that would become the RNC has not engaged sufficiently with the history of the Anglicized Africans who made the establishment of the company possible. Including them in the narrative also makes it possible to show the threat their independent companies posed to British traders. If the RNC had not monopolized the trade companies such as the Crowther Brothers Ltd. might have flourished eventually taking over the role of established indigenous corporations such as those of Jaja and Nana as well as the middlemen role of the British traders on the coast. As it turned out the issuing of a charter destroyed these young firms and consolidated the river trade in the hands of a small group of British merchants. The discussion of Goldie's character in previous histories has been superficial and has not engaged with the problematic aspects of his character. This has led to misleading comparisons with other historical figures. In this chapter a more detailed analysis of his character

has been attempted. Finally, the events at the Berlin conference challenge the narrative that government decision making in the British Empire was isolated from lobbyists and agents on the periphery. By demonstrating the impact Goldie and McIntosh had on British negotiations in Berlin a more balanced narrative appears where decision making was influenced both by the “official mind” and “the man on the spot”.

# Chapter Three: Administering the Niger

This chapter will focus on the establishment and evolution of company administration on the Lower Niger. The emergence of a new social group, here referred to as Anglicized Africans, coincided with the RNC's need for skilled African labour. The creation of the Royal Niger Constabulary, the company's private armed force, and how, despite opposition in the metropole, the company managed to expand its territory by annexing the Forcados regions,<sup>282</sup> thereby securing its commercial control of the Niger will also be covered. After receiving its charter, the RNC's first task was to establish an administration to rule the territory it claimed in West Africa. Since the company was founded to establish a monopoly on the palm oil trade in the Niger Delta, this chapter argues that administering its territory was never a priority. This explains why the company only established enough of an administration to maintain control of the river trade. The RNC administration was the first British administration in what became company territory. It is therefore clear that it strongly influenced its successor, the British administration of the Southern- and Northern Nigerian Protectorates, by establishing a proto-indirect rule that was further developed by Lugard when he became high commissioner of the region.

The participation of the emerging class of Anglicized Africans in the company's running has so far been missing from the history of the RNC. The company's need for skilled African labor coincided with the emergence of this new social class, and most of the company's middle managers and skilled artisans were Anglicized Africans. The Anglicized Africans were both a threat to company rule and vital to its success. This becomes apparent when we examine Goldie's attitude towards Anglicized Africans as he was opposed to Crowther's Nigerian Mission and any independent African organization or company operating in company territory while simultaneously being utterly dependent on them for the running of the RNC. But as will be

---

<sup>282</sup> Under RNC rule this region was also referred to as the Wari District because it was connected to the Nun River by the Wari Branch.

demonstrated, working for the company, both in its commercial and military branches, gave Anglicized Africans opportunities for material and social advancement not available to other indigenous people.

The establishment and evolution of the Royal Niger Constabulary have never been prominent in the historiography of the RNC. Yet it was a vital branch of the company. This chapter will show that the company could only establish and enforce its monopoly by using force. This made the Constabulary necessary for the company's commercial success. The Constabulary was a privately operated corporate army and the largest British force on the Niger until the formation of the West African Frontier Force, which in many respects was modelled on the Constabulary. I contend that the Constabulary was an effective fighting force whose purpose was always to safeguard the company's commercial interests and that this was evident in the missions it undertook and the tactics it employed. Territorial administration was never a priority for the company and this is evident when examining the operations of its armed forces.

The emergence of the RNC as a commercial and political power in Africa caused its commercial competitors to rally against them in Britain. The leading group lobbying against the company were the Liverpool firms united in the African Association of Liverpool. This was a lobby group created by the Liverpool trading firms operating in the Delta region. Worried that a company monopoly would bankrupt the independent firms and their African partners, the firms of Jaja and Nana, the Liverpool companies lobbied the government to stop RNC expansion in the Lower Niger. As we shall see, this opposition was limited in its effectiveness as it did not check RNC expansion westwards into the Forcados region. But it did manage to halt the RNC's eastward expansion, and as a result, the Oil River's Protectorate remained under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office.

## The Establishment of Company Administration

With a charter in hand, the directors were faced with the task of establishing an organized administration in the territories they had been granted. Because of its treaties with local rulers, the NAC claimed exclusive trading rights and territorial sovereignty over a Y-shaped stretch of land incorporating much of Ijawland, the eastern part of Yorubaland, and the western part of Igboland. Its territory ran in a straight line north from Akassa on the coast up to the Niger's confluence with the Benue River. From the confluence, its territory stretched east up the Benue River until its confluence with the Katsina-Ala River. Company territory also stretched west from the Niger, Benue confluence to the Niger's confluence with the Kaduna River. However, the company had not yet adequately mapped that portion of its claimed territory.<sup>283</sup>

Administering more than 1000 kilometres of waterways and the land of the adjoining banks would have been a monumental task. Enforcing any form of direct rule was out of the question. The company did not have the funds for such an exercise and did not have the means to collect the taxes necessary to fund such an effort. Instead, the company would remain a trading company and limit its administrative measures to controlling commercial activity on the waterways. This allowed the company to concentrate its limited resources on administering the part of its territory which was most significant to its bottom line.<sup>284</sup>

Before continuing to the structure of the company's administration, it is worth examining the unique nature of the NAC in relation to the other three British chartered companies of the late nineteenth century. These were the North Borneo Company, the Imperial British East Africa

---

<sup>283</sup> Enclosed Map in Correspondence from George Goldie to Julian Pauncefoot, 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 63-64.

<sup>284</sup> Proposed Regulations for the Levying of Customs and Licence Duties in the Niger Territories, 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 54-55.



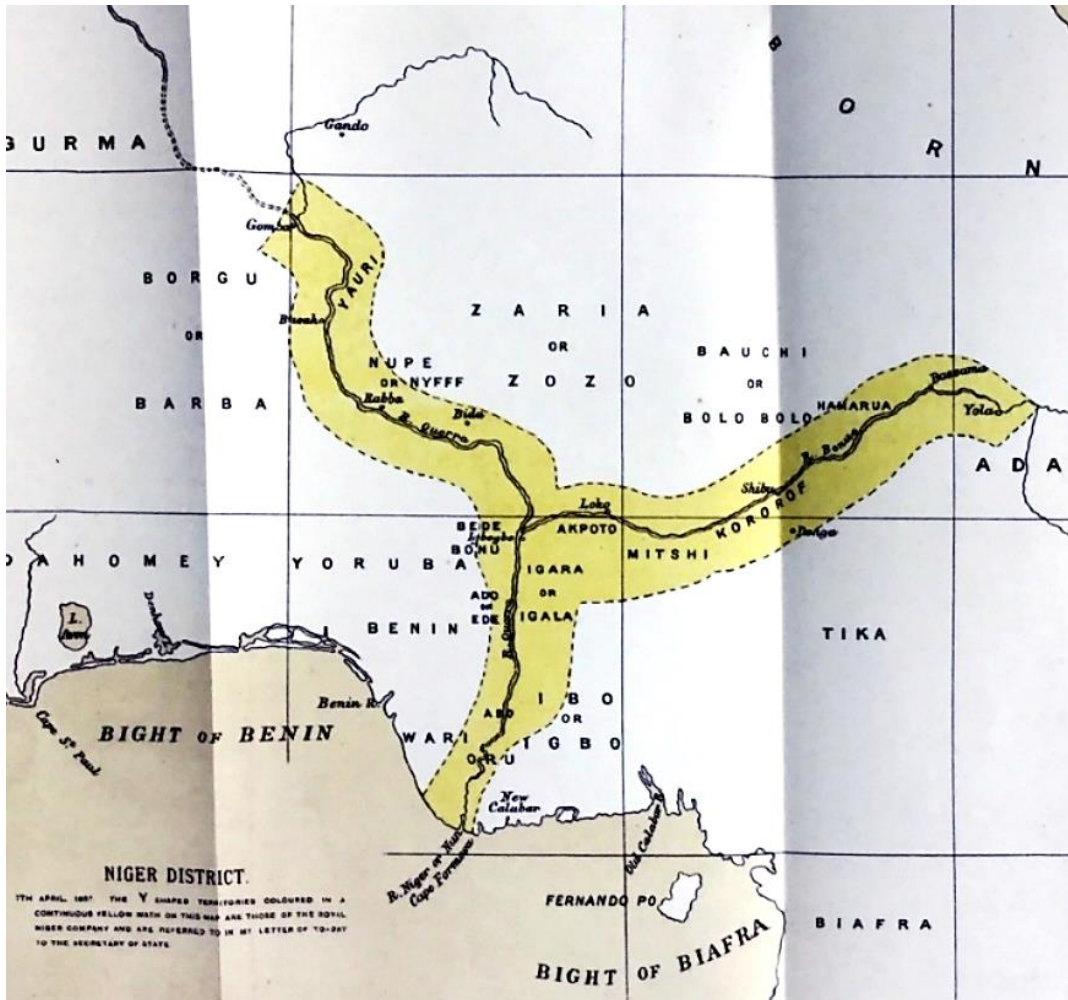


Figure 3: A map showing the territorial claims (yellow) of the RNC in March 1887 (map from FO 403/537).

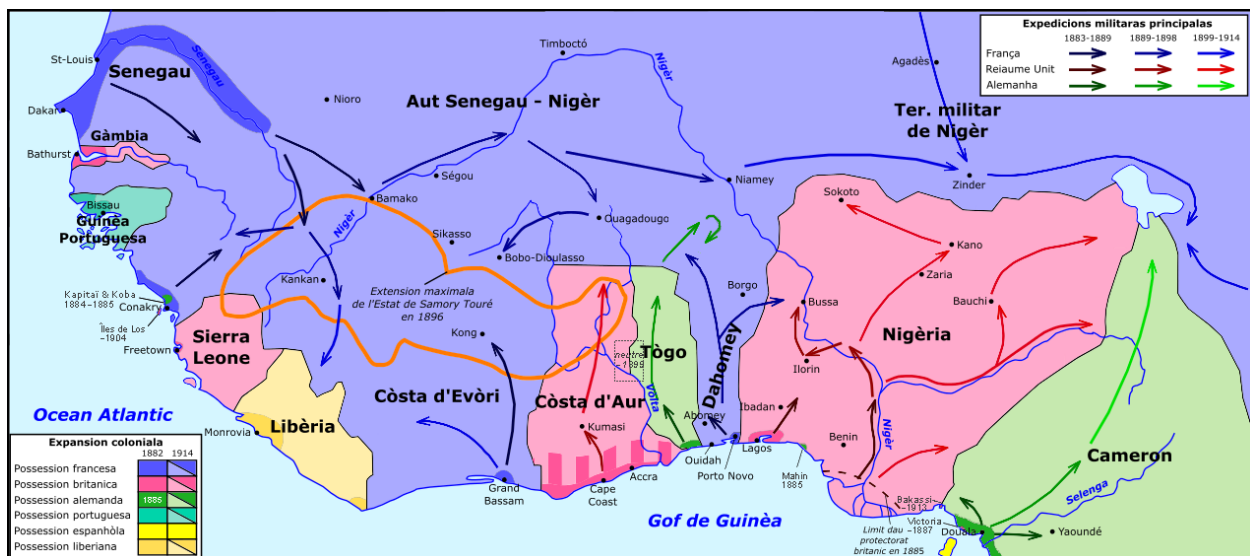


Figure 4: A map showing the eventual division of West Africa by 1914 into French (blue), German (Light Green,) and British (Red) colonies (picture from Wikimedia Commons).

Company, and the British South Africa Company. All the companies established political administrations for economic purposes. After all, the chartered companies were established to make a profit from imperial expansion on the colonial periphery. But they each had unique financial structures that reflected their different approaches to revenue creation. The RNC was unique because its primary source of revenue was the palm oil trade. With its control of all traffic up and down the Niger, it could force African producers to accept a lower price for their product to counteract the dwindling sale price of palm and palm kernel oil in Europe, which dropped by 33% between 1851 and 1885.<sup>285</sup>

By comparison, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) was a mining consortium turned charter company. Its financial model relied on the exploitation of mineral resources in its territories. It made its revenue by selling mining licenses in its region and being entitled to 50% of successful mining claims' sale price.<sup>286</sup> The North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC) was a land development company. Its primary focus was clearing land in Borneo for Tobacco plantations which were worked by a labor force imported from China.<sup>287</sup>

The Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) was closest in character to the RNC but with several key differences. Like the RNC, the IBEAC drew its revenue from custom duties and trade. However, the IBEAC was spread too thin. Unlike the RNC, it did not have a central waterway on which it could focus its attention. It had less starting capital than the RNC and could never become a dominant trading firm in Eastern Africa. The IBEAC's main export, ivory, was only available in limited quantities and could never match palm oil exports in total value.<sup>288</sup>

---

<sup>285</sup> Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, 11.

<sup>286</sup> Imperialist, *The Pioneers of Empire: Being a Vindication of the Principle and a Short Sketch of the History of Chartered Companies, with Especial Reference to the British South Africa Company* (London: Methuen & Co, 1896), 116–17.

<sup>287</sup> *Handbook of British North Borneo* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1890), 13–15.

<sup>288</sup> Roland Oliver, “Some Factors in the British Occupation of East Africa, 1884-1894,” *The Uganda Journal* 15, no. 1 (1951): 56.

In fact, the RNC and IBEAC make a good comparison between a successful and failed charter company. Goldie's realistic and ruthless vision of what it would take to make the RNC successful would serve it well in the years to come, and it was this vision that would shape the company's administration of its territories.

Having received a government charter for a large part of the Lower Niger, the NAC's first step in establishing an administration was to call a general meeting that passed a series of administrative regulations. The National African Company Limited was renamed the Royal Niger Company, Chartered and Limited (RNC). The Board of Directors became the Council, and Directors were now Members of the Council. Shareholders became members, and the Chairman became the Governor of the Company. George Goldie went from being Vice-Chairman to being the Deputy Governor of the

Company.<sup>289</sup> Goldie was also granted the ambiguous title of Political Administrator of the Company.<sup>290</sup> This made him responsible for all administrative and political matters in the RNC's territories, in effect making him the highest-ranking officer of the company with far



Figure 5: The organization of the RNC's administration, note the dual role of the District Agents as members of the judicial and executive branches of the administration (graph by author).

<sup>289</sup> The National African Company, Limited: Special Report of the Directors to the Shareholders on Matters Relating to the Charter, 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 26.

<sup>290</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 195.

more actual power than Lord Aberdare.

David McIntosh continued to be the highest-ranking trading officer on the Niger with the title of Agent-General of the Company.<sup>291</sup> He oversaw the District Agents who served as trading agents for the company as well as magistrates and judicial and executive officers of the administration in their districts. The authority of the district agents was limited to the stations and riverways where the company exerted its authority. Most districts had several company trading stations. These were run by Company Agents. While the District Agents were Europeans, the Company Agents were Anglicized Africans, mainly expatriates from Sierra Leone.<sup>292</sup> Along with Agent-General McIntosh, there were two other high-ranking company officers in the Lower Niger. These were the Supreme Judicial Officer, also known as the Commissioner of the Company, and the Commandant of the Constabulary.

The Supreme Judicial Officer was the highest-ranking judicial officer on the Niger, and District Agent verdicts could be appealed to him. Like the Agent-General, the Supreme Judicial Officer reported directly to the Council of the Company.<sup>293</sup> The Commandant of the Constabulary was a subordinate of the Agent-General and Supreme Judicial Officer. However, neither could interfere with the company's military force's day-to-day running. Due to the difficulty of finding qualified candidates for the post of Supreme Judicial Officer, the Commandant of the Constabulary often served as the acting Supreme Judicial Officer combining supreme military and legal authority in company territory. The ad-hoc security forces of the company, remained under the command of their local District Agent and were now called the

---

<sup>291</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1887, FO 84/1793, National Archives, London, 144.

<sup>292</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to Lord Iddesleigh, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 36.

<sup>293</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1886, FO 84/1793, National Archives, London, 115.

civil police. However, this irregular security force would now be supplemented by a uniformed, paramilitary force called the Company Constabulary Force.<sup>294</sup>

The colonial administration of the company had three branches. The Council served as the legislature. Its decisions were legally binding in its territories. Its powers were only limited by the charter, which served as a constitution and prohibited the company from interfering with African religious practices and forbade slavery within its area of operation.<sup>295</sup> The Political Administrator, the Agent-General, and the Commandant of the Constabulary were officers of the executive branch. The Political Administrator was the highest-ranking officer of the executive branch. Still, since Goldie, the Political Administrator, was based in the Metropole, the Agent-General and the Commandant had considerable autonomy as they were situated on the Lower Niger. The Supreme Judicial Officer was the head of the judicial branch of government. His was mainly an appellant court where the District Agents' decisions could be appealed. All criminal cases and cases involving foreigners and sums larger than £50 were automatically referred to the Supreme Judicial Officer.<sup>296</sup>

These three branches became muddled when it came to the District Agents' office, which had both executive and judicial functions, not to mention their roles as commercial agents of the company. District Agents were supposed to judge all cases between "native" Africans and between "native" Africans and the RNC. They were also supposed to investigate all criminal activity in their district, decide on bail, and hear minor criminal cases. The District Agents also commanded the company's local irregular "police" force. Still, they could not give orders to the Company Constabulary Force since the three European Officers of the Constabulary outranked

---

<sup>294</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to Lord Iddesleigh, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, 45.

<sup>295</sup> Charter of the Royal Niger Company, 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1886, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 174.

<sup>296</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1886, 115-119.

them in military matters. Finally, the District Agents were responsible for collecting taxes and duties in their districts unless vessels could produce certificates from the customs stations at Lokoja or Akassa to prove they had already paid all company duties.<sup>297</sup> This monumental list of duties, as well as most regulations of the company, was drafted by Goldie and his associates John Edgar, Alex Miller, James A. Croft, and Charles W. Mills and then passed as legislation by the RNC council.<sup>298</sup>

The RNC's primary objective was to turn a profit, so an ad hoc judicial system dominated by company interests was perfectly acceptable. When justifying these regulations to the Foreign Office, Goldie maintained that they were made necessary by the "abnormal conditions of a Central African state."<sup>299</sup> He further explained that because of the large size of company territory, the ethnic and religious fragmentation of the people living in it, and a dearth of qualified candidates available for judicial work in the Lower Niger, a justice system resembling the British one was unworkable, and a more autocratic system was necessary.<sup>300</sup> The Foreign Office seems to have accepted Goldie's view as none of the company's regulations were challenged by the government, apart from a few clauses dealing with the handling of foreigners in company territory and the jurisdiction of the British government on ships navigating through company territory.<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>297</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1886, 119-120.

<sup>298</sup> Draft of Royal Niger Company Regulations by Charles W. Mills, John Edgar, and George Goldie, 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1886, FO 84/1792, National Archives, London, 124-125. See also: Complete Set of the Regulations of the Royal Niger Company by Lord Aberdare, George Goldie, Alex Miller, and James A. Croft, 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 18-19.

<sup>299</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Earl Iddesleigh, 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 33-34.

<sup>300</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Earl Iddesleigh, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 36.

<sup>301</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Earl Iddesleigh, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 36.

The company administration and Constabulary's headquarters were at Akassa, which now became the RNC's administrative center. A large customs station was built on the riverbank, and all ships heading up the Niger were required to stop at Akassa for cargo inspection. A second customs station was established at Lokoja at the Niger and Benue's confluence to examine ships bringing cargo down the river. No cargo could pass up or down the river without inspection. Duties were collected on all goods. Company vessels were credited on the company account for duties on their cargo, while all competitors had to pay the duties in cash. Any ship that failed to pay company duties or carried prohibited goods such as firearms was liable to seizure by the company.<sup>302</sup>

All non-company merchants who wished to trade in company territory had to pay £100 for an annual trading license and a further £100 for a spirit trade license, a necessity for independent merchants since alcohol was the Lower Niger's main import. Connecting the two main stations of Akassa and Lokoja were smaller trading outposts called factories. There, Anglicized African agents of the company handled the company's day-to-day commercial operations with the help of staff hired from the local population.<sup>303</sup> The dependence of the RNC upon Anglicized African employees for its day-to-day operations has so far been largely missing from scholarship on the RNC. This is regrettable since, for most people living on the Lower Niger, the Anglicized African agents were the face of the company and the only RNC employee they would ever meet. In their research on the company, both John E. Flint and Geoffrey L. Baker focused on the British side of things, neglecting the African perspective.<sup>304</sup> African

---

<sup>302</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1886, FO 84/1792, National Archives, London, 80.

<sup>303</sup> Correspondence from Richard E. Webster and Edward Clarke to Lord Salisbury, 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 46-48.

<sup>304</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*; Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971*.

historians of the RNC, such as Ebiegberi J. Alagoa, have focused their research on the African enemies of the company showing limited interest in the stories of the African employees of the company.<sup>305</sup> This lack of attention to the company's African employees is probably due to the dichotomy, identified by Adu Boahen, between, what some scholars have termed, resisters and collaborators so dominant in historical research in Africa since the nationalistic wave of the 1960s and 1970s. The African employees fell into the collaborator category and have therefore been neglected when the history of the company is discussed.<sup>306</sup>

The Lokoja and Akassa stations provided a stranglehold on the Lower Niger. No European or Anglicized African competitors could enter the river without paying the company's duties, and no African could bring his cargo downriver without company inspection and duties unless they diverted to the Wari Branch (now known as the Warri branch) to enter the Forcados river.<sup>307</sup> The establishment of Lokoja and Akassa stations was clearly meant to throttle competition from European and African competitors. Any African merchant on the Niger who wanted to emulate King Jaja and try to ship his goods directly to Europe could not do so unless he paid prohibitive duties to the company. From his commercial headquarters at Opobo on the Iwo River, Jubo Jubogba, the region's premier political figure known to the British as King Jaja of Opobo, had monopolized the shipping of palm oil from the interior to the coast. The area had become a part of the Oil River Protectorate after King Jaja concluded a treaty of friendship with Consul Hewett on the nineteenth of December 1884.<sup>308</sup> With its fleet of river vessels and a small private military force, Jaja's company had monopolized the palm oil trade on the Imo River. His

---

<sup>305</sup> Ebiegberi J. Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964).

<sup>306</sup> Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, 39.

<sup>307</sup> Correspondence from the Foreign Office to the Royal Niger Company, 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 217.

<sup>308</sup> "Deposition of King Jaja," 2.



company bought produce in the Igbo hinterlands and shipped it down to Opobo, where it was sold to Jaja's main European partners, the Miller brothers. Due to its control of traffic on the Niger River, the RNC was able to destroy or usurp the African middlemen network, making it possible to buy directly from the oil producers in the hinterland.<sup>309</sup>

The RNC was the first British administration to claim political and commercial control over any part of the region that would eventually be known as Northern Nigeria. Although Frederick Lugard has traditionally been considered the pioneer of indirect rule in Nigeria, Flint was right to point out that the company had begun to formulate indirect rule years before Lugard came to the British protectorates of what is now Nigeria.<sup>310</sup> The company had neither the capacity nor inclination to interfere in the people of the Lower Niger's daily lives and preferred to leave the existing power structures of the Lower Niger with all its variety of city-states, emirates, and ethnic confederations in place. If the people the company agents had identified as local rulers signed the company's treaties and respected its monopoly on river trade, the company was happy to stay out of their way. That the region might legally be under RNC control probably meant little to the average inhabitant whose local form of government remained unchanged. Only inhabitants who had connections to existing African trade networks were likely to feel the company's stranglehold. To clarify, the organized "Native Authority" through which the domestic affairs of the British colonies of Nigeria would later be ruled had not been established yet. Therefore, we might call the company administration a proto-indirect rule since it lacked the

---

<sup>309</sup> Tekena N Tamuno, "Some Aspects of Nigerian Reaction to the Imposition of British Rule," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (1965): 273–74.

<sup>310</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 94.

structured network of chiefs and notables that the colonial government would later commission.<sup>311</sup>

## The Advent of the Anglicized Africans

The people most invested in British rule on the Niger were a population with which the company had a mixed relationship. These were the Anglicized Africans whom the company relied on for its middle managers. At the same time, it feared that Anglicized Africans not associated with the company might lobby for a more direct form of British government that paid more respect to British traditions of governance and law. Despite employing Anglicized Africans as managers of its trading stations, the company considered them foreigners in its territory. This gave them a different legal status than the "natives" of the Lower Niger.<sup>312</sup>

Having foreigners' status might have been helpful for company employees because this put them beyond the local District Agent's jurisdiction. All legal matters concerning foreigners, that is, anyone who was not classified as a "native" of company territory, were automatically forwarded to the Supreme Judicial Officer. This meant that skilled labourers and managers could not be tried by their immediate superiors meaning disputes between European and Anglicized African employees of the company had to be judged by the Supreme Judicial Officer. This is evidence of the dual legal system for citizens and subjects of empire Mamdani considered synonymous with the apartheid mentality of indirect rule. Anglicized Africans do not fit neatly into Mamdani's categories of citizens and subjects or Fanon's dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed. The company classifying them as foreigners in RNC jurisdiction sent a message to

---

<sup>311</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 53.

<sup>312</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to T.V. Lister, 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1887, FO 84/1876, National Archives, London, 55-56.

the CMS missionaries of the Niger mission that they were interlopers in company territory. Their interests were not the same as the interests of the "natives" under company "protection."

According to Emmanuel A. Ayandele, the first four centuries of European contact had little effect on the social and political institutions of the Niger Delta. This situation changed in the 1840s when permanent Christian missions were established in Badagry, Abeokuta, and Old Calabar.<sup>313</sup> By the 1860s, most Anglicized Africans living and working in the Lower Niger region belonged to two groups. These were the employees of various European trading firms operating on the river and the British Church Mission Society's missionaries. Sadly, most of the company employees' writings have not survived. This is ironic given that they were employed because of their ability to read and write in English. However, the writings of the missionaries have been preserved. Therefore, their view will dominate any examination of the Anglicized Africans of the Lower Niger. We are also aided by the fact that many Anglicized Africans, such as several Crowther family members, belonged to both groups and their writing, therefore, gives us a small window into the mind of the Anglicized African trader. The majority of the first generation of Anglicized Africans in the Lower Niger region originally hailed from Yorubaland but had been sold into slavery. The Royal Navy had liberated many on the way to the Americas, while others were freemen returning from North- and South America.<sup>314</sup>

Many of these emigrated Yoruba settled in Freetown, Sierra Leone, a city of around 42,000 people in the 1840s and British West Africa's administrative center. This was usually the first port of call for those liberated by the Royal Navy. In fact, since they were so prominent in Sierra Leone, British sources from the late nineteenth century refer to all Anglicized Africans as "Sierra Leonians" or "Saros." In the 1840s, the CMS ran around 50 primary schools in and

---

<sup>313</sup> Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914*, 3–4.

<sup>314</sup> Jean. Herskovits, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 3–4.

around the city with approximately 6000 students. It also ran two higher learning institutions, the CMS Grammar School and the Fourah Bay College.<sup>315</sup> In these educational and missionary institutions, much of the Anglicized African identity was forged. The people referred to as Anglicized Africans differed from other Africans in three significant respects. They were Christians, they could read and write in English, and they had learned European skills or trades.

They were introduced to Christianity, the English language, and western education in mission schools. From this came their consciousness of being connected to the British Empire, and therefore in a certain sense, British as well as belonging to an ethnic group such as Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, etc.<sup>316</sup> However, we should also be mindful that the Anglicized Africans were a minority group in Western Africa. Even in Freetown, where many of them settled, the CMS churches only had around 1500 attendants in 1841. If we acknowledge that protestant Christianity was central to the Anglicized African identity, they made up only approximately 3.5% of the town's population.<sup>317</sup>

As British control and influence gradually spread east along the coast towards the Niger, many of the Yoruba residents of Sierra Leone moved back to Yorubaland. In 1844 the CMS established the Yoruba mission by building a school and mission station in Abeokuta, around 60 kilometers north of Lagos and a coastal base at Badagry to administer to the needs of these Anglicized Africans.<sup>318</sup> The Anglicized Africans were not settling in Terra Nova. Instead, like Crowther, they reconnected with their old families creating new social networks between the

---

<sup>315</sup> James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, Who With the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1842), xvi.

<sup>316</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 29–31.

<sup>317</sup> Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, Who With the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society*, xvi.

<sup>318</sup> Page, *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger*, 67.

Anglicized Africans and the rest of the African population. Some returnees abandoned the British part of their identity and picked up their old lives. In contrast, others gathered in Anglicized African communities often centred on the local church and mission school.<sup>319</sup>

The Christian returnees around Lagos and Abeokuta soon became an influential political group in the region. When civil war erupted in Lagos between two claimants to the title of king or Oba of Lagos, the Anglicized Africans lobbied for British intervention. This they did on the ground that they were British subjects, given legal status by British courts when they were freed from slavery, and therefore entitled to protection by British armed forces.<sup>320</sup> In December of 1851, a mixed force of Royal Navy personnel and Anglicized African militiamen from Abeokuta succeeded in capturing Lagos and installing Oba Akitoye (d. 1853) as king. The Royal Navy had, after consulting with Samuel Crowther, decided to arm the Anglicized African militia, and together, they fought the forces of Oba Kosoko, the other claimant to the throne of Lagos. Having secured the town, the militiamen fought off an expeditionary force sent by Gezo, the King of Dahomey, in support of Kosoko. Their success ensured British control over both Lagos and Abeokuta. The cities became part of Britain's sphere and, after a political crisis in 1861, became the Lagos colony with a British colonial administration.<sup>321</sup>

With Lagos under British control, many Anglicized Africans used the new social networks between themselves, their African relatives, and the British to establish new businesses, often focusing on the import-export industry. Import-export firms dominated the advertising section of the Anglicized African-run newspaper, *The Lagos Observer*. By looking at the advertisements, we see that the indigenous mercantile elites focused on exporting agricultural

---

<sup>319</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 34.

<sup>320</sup> Ajayi, 70.

<sup>321</sup> Herskovits, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria*, 79, 142.

produce and importing German and Dutch alcohol.<sup>322</sup> With Lagos securely in the British sphere of influence, the Anglicized Africans' attention shifted east towards the Niger River, which seemed open for religious and economic expansion.

In 1857 the CMS established the Niger Mission by building a mission station at Onitsha. In 1859 the mission was expanded, and mission stations were built at Akassa and Lokoja.<sup>323</sup> Despite advances in western medicine, the Lower Niger's disease climate remained dangerous to Europeans, and the responsibility for running these missions was placed on Anglicized Africans. Most of these had been trained as missionaries in the CMS Grammar School and Fourah Bay College in Freetown and to the CMS represented the best and the brightest of a new generation of Anglicized Africans. To govern the new mission in Yorubaland and on the Niger, Samuel Crowther was ordained bishop in 1864 over a vast "native" bishopric in West Africa. He was not given authority over mission stations run by European missionaries in his bishopric, and these remained under the control of Edward Beckles (1816-1902), bishop of Sierra Leone.<sup>324</sup>

The fact that the European missionaries refused to answer to Crowther might indicate the split that already existed between the European missionaries and the Anglicized African missionaries in the CMS. The CMS categorized its missionaries as clerical and lay missionaries, female missionaries, and native clergymen.<sup>325</sup> The CMS's 19<sup>th</sup>-century hierarchy was as follows: European male, European female, Anglicized African male, Anglicized African female, African "native" male, and African "native" female. An Anglicized African bishop like Crowther was really the bishop of all Anglicized Africans and Africans classified as "native" in his diocese. At

---

<sup>322</sup> "Agencies at Liverpool and Hamburg," *The Lagos Observer*, January 7, 1882.

<sup>323</sup> Page, *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger*, 92, 112.

<sup>324</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 206.

<sup>325</sup> *Register of Missionaries, (Clerical, Lay, and Female), and Native Clergy, From 1804 to 1894* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1904) viii.

the same time, European missionaries reported to a separate white bishop, even if their stations were in Crowther's bishopric.

The Niger mission steadily expanded, and by 1875 there were nine active mission stations on the Lower Niger. These were at Bonny, New Calabar, Brass, Akassa, Onitsha, Osamare, Asaba, Lokoja, and Eggan. These were usually operated by one or two ordained missionaries and one to three laypeople who worked as teachers for the mission school. These educated Anglicized Africans made up the heart of the Anglicized African community at the mission station. These stations also provided a community center for Anglicized Africans, trading agents, clerks, and skilled craftsmen who were employed there.<sup>326</sup> Of these stations, Akassa, Onitsha, Osamare, Asaba, Lokoja, and Eggan stood on land that the RNC would administer.

The relationship between the British traders and the missionaries was always complicated. On the Niger, the missionaries had established a foothold before the merchants. In the 1850s, when the missionaries had advanced as far as Lokoja, the only British trading firm on the river was MacGregor Laird's Company. This was because missionaries such as Crowther had accompanied the exploration missions of 1841 and 1854 up the river to act as interpreters and then established mission stations. In the 1860s, when British traders began operating more frequently on the Niger, they chose the mission stations' locations as good places to moor trading hulks from which their Anglicized African employees could work. These companies, such as the West Africa Company, also employed large numbers of Anglicized Africans, including two of Crowther's sons and his son-in-law.<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>326</sup> Annual Report of Bishop Crowther on the Niger Mission, 1875, 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1876, Niger Mission CA3/M3 Mission Book 1873-1876, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 309.

<sup>327</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 212.

The companies and missionaries soon became reliant on each other. The European trading companies recruited much of their skilled African labour force directly from the missionary schools. Emmanuel Ayandele has pointed out that this became so prevalent that in 1900 the CMS shut down its grammar school in Asaba because all the graduates took employment with the RNC or started their own businesses rather than becoming missionaries.<sup>328</sup> For the missionaries, the only way to travel up and down the Niger was to book passage on a merchant ship. The only way to get western goods was to buy them from the local company agent. And the only way to transport heavy equipment upriver was to pay one of the companies to haul it from the coast up to the mission station. For the merchants, there was also good business to be made servicing the mission stations' needs. For example, the CMS Niger mission purchased over £980 worth of goods and services from the West Africa Company between 1865 and 1866.<sup>329</sup>

In these days, all the Niger missionaries were Anglicized Africans. The first European missionary would not enter the region until 1880.<sup>330</sup> From 1857 until 1880, the main contention between British traders and missionaries was relations with the local population. The missionaries were on the Niger to sponsor religious, cultural, and political change. The traders, however, were content to make a profit. Any action by the traders that undermined the missionaries' effort or showed any preference for local customs was greatly resented by the missionaries. An example of this occurred in 1875 when a Liverpool merchant joined one of the semi-religious secret trading societies common among African traders in the Niger Delta. The

---

<sup>328</sup> Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914*, 288.

<sup>329</sup> Correspondence from Samuel Crowther to Thomas Clegg, 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1867, Niger Mission CA3/O4 Letters and Papers of Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther 1857-1882, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 218.

<sup>330</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 208.



initiation into the secret society involved a series of pagan rituals, and Crowther believed that such actions by Britons undermined the work of the CMS.<sup>331</sup>

Despite such differences, the relationship between the various British traders and the Anglicized Africans remained one of mutual dependence. Without the traders, the Anglicized Africans living in the Lower Niger would have been cut off from the rest of the British world. Through the traders, they received British goods and news of the wider world and the latest trends in the Metropole. Meanwhile, the traders would not have been able to run their businesses without Anglicized Africans. Most of the company's middle managers and trading agents were Anglicized Africans. They were perfect for the job due to their education and ability to communicate in English and languages the people living on the riverbanks could understand, usually Igbo or Yoruba. However, in the 1870s, the Anglicized Africans' situation within the empire and the Lower Niger began to change. This was due to two significant factors, a change in racial attitudes in the British Empire and the RNCs coming to the Lower Niger.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a sea change in racial attitudes in the British- and French Colonial Empires. This change began after the abolition of the slave trade. In the 1840s, the debate between Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) indicated disillusionment with the abolitionist cause as Carlyle openly challenged whether black people, which he considered intellectually inferior to other races, could be incorporated in a civilized society.<sup>332</sup> Whereas in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the new "westernized Africans" had been at the forefront of imperial policy, they were increasingly seen as a threat to the empire they had helped build. This coincided with the scramble for Africa, where the colonial empires claimed

---

<sup>331</sup> Annual Report of Bishop Crowther on the Niger Mission, 1875, 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1876, 303.

<sup>332</sup> The debate took place in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*. Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" was published anonymously in December 1849. Mill's rebuttal "The Negro Question" was published anonymously in January 1850.

sovereignty over vast swathes of African land. According to Mamdani, it was the need to stabilize these new fragile African empires that caused the Metropole to push the westernized Africans, their most fervent supporters on the colonial periphery, to the side in favour of new systems of decentralized despotism.<sup>333</sup>

The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a new formulation of existing racial theories that soon became mainstream in academia and popular culture. This was the idea of the racial supremacy of “the white race.” Such ideas had already existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were a prominent feature in the debate on “human verities” between the polygenists who argued that humanity had multiple ancestors and monogenists who believed mankind had a single ancestor. Both groups classified “blacks” at the lower end of the human spectrum, although they disagreed on what had caused the “debased” state of the “black human variety.”<sup>334</sup> In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of Social Darwinism became prominent. This theory posited that individuals, groups, and peoples are subject to the same Darwinian laws of natural selection as plants and animals. Darwin's ideas of natural selection were then applied to the evolution of the various races of Homo Sapiens to explain the superiority of some races over others.<sup>335</sup>

The result was a racial hierarchy that placed Caucasians in the position of a "master race," destined to rule over and guide all the "lesser races." Social Darwinism viewed the missionaries' work as pointless, as it was impossible for non-Europeans to equal Europeans in intellect and civilization. To the Social Darwinists, the Anglicized Africans were inherently inferior to Europeans, and this new phase of prevailing racial ideology slowly made its way into

---

<sup>333</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, 76.

<sup>334</sup> Snait B Gissis, “Visualizing ‘Race’ in the Eighteenth Century,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 41, no. 1 (April 22, 2011): 42.

<sup>335</sup> Rutledge M Dennis, “Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 3 (April 22, 1995): 244–45.

the ranks of the European missionaries and traders. It was this ideology that motivated the CMS's attack on the African-led Niger Mission on the basis that true Christianity could only be spread by European missionaries. As part of its "Europeanization" of the Niger Mission, the CMS further demanded that all CMS personnel boycott the firm of Crowther Brothers Ltd and trade only with the UAC.<sup>336</sup>

"African Character" slowly became synonymous with lying, hypocrisy, and immorality. Anglicized Africans were slowly seen as more African than Anglicized, "savages" masquerading as "civilized" men.<sup>337</sup> By 1892, the same CMS that had made Crowther a bishop in 1864 published a letter from the European missionaries on the Niger. In this letter, they claimed that the churches in Africa were "infant Christian communities" and that "Englishmen have had the benefit of a Christian civilization for many centuries... those who have had this blessing have certain gifts and talents to use in the Master's service which you do not possess."<sup>338</sup> This was an odd position for a protestant mission as scripture makes no allowance for superior Christian civilization granting religious benefits. Statements such as these owed more to contemporary racial theories than they did to protestant theology, which argues that all church doctrine and policy must have a scriptural foundation. It also teaches that salvation is by faith and grace alone, not connected to race, rank, or civilization.<sup>339</sup>

The RNC's decision to classify all Anglicized Africans as foreigners in its territories validates Mamdani's theories in the context of the Niger. The company viewed the Anglicized African population as a threat to its interests. The company did not want to take on any

---

<sup>336</sup> E A Ayandele, "Background to the 'Duel' Between Crowther and Goldie on the Lower Niger, 1857-1885," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 1 (April 22, 1967): 62–63.

<sup>337</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 261.

<sup>338</sup> Christian C. Fenn and Frederic E. Wigram, "Letter to the West African Christians Connected With the Church Missionary Society," *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* XLIII, no. XVII (1892): 61.

<sup>339</sup> Michael Beintker, "Was Ist Das Reformatorische? Einige Systematisch-Theologische Erwägungen," *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 100, no. 1 (August 7, 2003): 51, 63.

administrative responsibility in its territory that did not concern its control of trade on the Lower Niger. Meanwhile, Anglicized Africans wanted to implement widespread social and political change in the region. Men such as George Alfred Williams (b. 1851), who had relocated from Sierra Leone to Lagos and founded the newspaper *Lagos Standard*, demanded that British rule of law should be established on the Lower Niger. In response to the judicial irregularities evident in the trial of Nana, he demanded that the British Constitution be the benchmark for all judicial proceedings in the Lower Niger.<sup>340</sup> He was also opposed to the RNC administration, calling it a “Company-mongering civilization”, and describing the RNC employees as a “marauding crew” preying on the indigenous population of the region.<sup>341</sup>

The last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the high tide of Anglicized African influence in West Africa until their resurgence as Africanists and African nationalists in the 1950s.<sup>342</sup> In 1892, nearly half of the senior political posts in Sierra Leone, the bastion of Anglicized Africans, were held by Anglicized Africans. By 1912 they only held one-sixth of senior political positions. Anglicized African constitutional plans for the African territories, such as the one proposed by Africanus Horton (1835-1883) for Sierra Leone in 1868, were dismissed, and decision-making moved increasingly to the Metropole.<sup>343</sup> The conflict between the missionaries and the RNC must be put into this context as the Anglicized Africans' marginalization on the Lower Niger was part of a more extensive development within Britain's West African Empire.

The relationship between the trade firms and the Anglicized African missionaries began to sour in the 1870s. The decreasing profitability of the Niger trade put pressure on the trading

---

<sup>340</sup> “Lagosian on Dits,” *The Lagos Standard*, February 20, 1895, 2.

<sup>341</sup> “News, Notes and Comments,” *The Lagos Standard*, October 16, 1895, 2.

<sup>342</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 271–73.

<sup>343</sup> Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 41–42.

firms. Palm oil prices in Britain had peaked in the 1850s when the Crimean War put a stop to the importation of Russian tallow to Britain. With tallow, a competitor in the oil and fats market, scarce, palm oil prices rose sharply. After the 1850s, there was a steady decline in the sale price of palm oil in Britain. Palm oil had by then become the primary export of West Africa, and increased production saturated the British market leading to reduced sales prices for palm oil.<sup>344</sup> At the same time, increased importation of manufactured British goods in West Africa led to reduced prices for British goods in the region. This meant that trade steamers needed to carry larger cargoes to make trips profitable.<sup>345</sup>

Transporting goods and passengers for the missions was now seen as a burden, while earlier, it was considered a profitable business. This was probably because British traders wanted to fill their holds as much as possible with palm oil and palm kernel loads. However, this does not explain their unwillingness to carry luggage upriver since most of the CMS cargoes must have been going upriver to supply the stations while palm oil loads were mainly shipped downriver. There was also resentment that their African competitors who used canoes on the river did not carry any missionary cargo or passengers. Relations between the West Africa Company and the CMS, which had earlier co-operated closely, became so bad that Crowther asked the CMS to buy a small steam vessel for the Niger Mission so it could be less reliant on the company.<sup>346</sup>

To further appease the British firms, Anglicized Africans working for the Niger Mission were prohibited from trading activities. Many of its employees, such as the Crowther brothers,

---

<sup>344</sup> Palm oil exports from West Africa to Britain increased from the 1790s to 1895 when they peaked at approximately 53,800 metric tons a year. See: Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13–14.

<sup>345</sup> Martin Lynn, “The Profitability of the Early Nineteenth-Century Palm Oil Trade,” *African Economic History*, no. 20 (April 22, 1992): 78–79.

<sup>346</sup> Correspondence from Samuel Crowther to J. Edgar, 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1875, Niger Mission CA3/O4 Letters and Papers of Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther 1857-1882, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 497D.

ran successful trading businesses alongside their CMS work. This ban meant that most of the Anglicized Africans engaging in trade on the Lower Niger had to choose between being employees of the European companies, employees of the Niger mission, or establishing their own businesses. This was an odd ban since commerce had been part of the Niger Mission's operations since its founding. The original missionaries had envisioned legitimate commerce supplanting the slave trade in the region. Now that British companies had entered the Niger trade, trading activities were suddenly considered unsuitable for missionaries, and all trading activity in the mission stations was forbidden.<sup>347</sup>

For most of the 1870s Anglicized African missionaries tended to view the British traders positively. Their yearly reports highlighted conflicts between the missionaries and local Africans and confrontations between Anglicized African employees of the mission and Anglicized African employees of the trading companies.<sup>348</sup> Yet, their view of traders tended to be more positive, at least in their official reports. At Onitsha, the mission church was the center of a community of Anglicized African carpenters, coopers, and interpreters who made their living selling their products and services to the British merchants. The interests of the congregation and the European trading companies were deeply connected, and the missionaries at Onitsha, therefore, had good relations with the British merchants.<sup>349</sup> The missions endeavoured to maintain good relations with local notables and the merchants and festival days, such as the day of public examination of the mission school, often featuring both parties as honoured guests.<sup>350</sup>

---

<sup>347</sup> Report of Deputation appointed by the committee of the C.M.S. to confer with Bishop Crowther and others on the present position and prospects of the Niger Mission, February 1881, GAZ1/4 Circular Book, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 158.

<sup>348</sup> Yearly Report of Asaba Station by Edward Philips, 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1875, Niger Mission CA3/M3 Mission Book 1873-1876, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 298.

<sup>349</sup> Yearly Report of Onitsha Station by John Buck, 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1875, Niger Mission CA3/M3 Mission Book 1873-1876, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 301.

<sup>350</sup> Yearly Report of New Calabar Station by Walter E. Carew, 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1878, Niger Mission CA3/M4 Mission Book 1877-1880, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 277.

The UAC transformation to the NAC in 1882 weakened the Anglicized African position in the river trade. The new company was formed to implement Goldie's plan of monopolizing trade on the Lower Niger. This left no space for the competition from Africans or Anglicized Africans. However, the NAC could not operate without the Anglicized Africans. Therefore, the company pursued a policy of employing Anglicized Africans while suppressing competition. These were men like Louis M. Moses and Matthew Benson Nicol, who in 1885 travelled to Illorin on behalf of the RNC to make a treaty with King Alihu Illorin. Both Sierra Leonians Moses was an agent of the company, and Nicol, who was fluent in the Yoruba and Nupe languages, acted as his interpreter. The vital contributions of employees such as these has never been incorporated into histories of the company but can be gleaned from the limited sources available about their activities.<sup>351</sup>

Anglicized African traders on the Niger, in fact, now had only two options: join the company or leave. However, opportunities for advancement in the company were limited, and Anglicized Africans such as Josiah Crowther, who had held positions of responsibility in the companies that originally amalgamated into the UAC, were dismissed.<sup>352</sup> Another Anglicized African forced out of business was Theophilus C. Bishop of Freetown. He had begun his work as a clerk of the company in the 1860s, finally becoming the purser on one of the trade ships. In 1874 he became the West African Company's main agent in Egga. In 1885 just before the UAC became the RNC, he resigned from the company and started his own trading company. Seeing the writing on the wall, he left the Niger Delta and moved his company to Freetown, running his business successfully until his death in 1898. Not just a commercial figure, he became a member

---

<sup>351</sup> Treaty Between the King and Chiefs of Illorin and the Royal Niger Company, 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1885, FO 403/114, National Archives, London, 8-9.

<sup>352</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 253.

of the legislative chamber of Freetown and served as a justice of the peace.<sup>353</sup> The Anglicized African missionaries on the Niger were seen as a commercial and political threat to the NAC. They tended to side with locals in disputes with the company and reported back to Britain abuses by company agents. The company, therefore, actively encouraged the CMS to bring the Niger mission under British control and did all it could to discredit the Anglicized African missionaries.<sup>354</sup>

When the NAC was granted a charter in 1886, this did not come as a complete surprise to the region's inhabitants. Rumours that a British company might apply for a charter for the Lower Niger territory had been spreading in the Anglicized African community since the founding of the United Africa Company in 1879. In October of that year, Bishop Crowther, in a letter to the CMS's lay secretary Edward Hutchinson, reported rumours that "the company is contemplating to get a charter of the Niger trade to the exclusion of others entering."<sup>355</sup> Crowther dismissed these rumours as sensationalist nonsense. At that time, it had been decades since the British government chartered a company on the colonial periphery, and the UAC's articles of incorporation did not grant its directors the authority to apply for a government charter.<sup>356</sup> So the rumours did probably not originate with the new UAC employees. Crowther only states the rumours were started by "busy bodies to stir up the feelings of the rabble."<sup>357</sup>

We have already established that Crowther had a low opinion of the indigenous authorities in the Niger Delta, believing that they would need to be overthrown if Christianity were to triumph in the region. It is possible that the rumours of charter and monopoly did not

---

<sup>353</sup> "Obituary: Honorable T. C. Bishop," *Lagos Weekly Record*, December 10, 1898, 6.

<sup>354</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, 243.

<sup>355</sup> Correspondence from Samuel Crowther to Edward Hutchinson, 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1879, Niger Mission CA3/M4 Mission Book 1877-1880, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham, 223.

<sup>356</sup> Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule*, 178.

<sup>357</sup> Correspondence from Samuel Crowther to Edward Hutchinson, 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1879, 223.



originate with Europeans or Anglicized Africans but among the Africans of the Lower Niger. It is conceivable that such rumours represented the African middlemen network's anxiety about the possible consequences of the strengthening of the European middlemen network. Crowther's "busy bodies" were to be proven right, even if the possibility of a charter company taking over the Niger must have seemed farfetched in 1879.

When the company established its administration, it was clear that Anglicized Africans would not be able to advance beyond the rank of Company Agent. These were the station masters responsible for the RNC's trading outposts' day-to-day running. Europeans, mainly British but also a few Germans, staffed all positions above Company Agent.<sup>358</sup> This kept executive and judicial authority out of Anglicized Africans' hands while saddling them with most of the administrative work. The company's monopoly also forced Anglicized African competition, such as the Crowther Brothers Ltd, out of the Lower Niger trade. Any Anglicized African merchant trying to bypass the RNC monopoly risked their vessel and goods being confiscated as well as violent action from company enforcers.

In 1887 the RNC went a step further to discourage Anglicized Africans from working independently or settling in its territories. At the beginning of that year, the company passed laws that all foreigners above the age of 16 must register with the local District Agent and receive a pass granting them the right to live and work in company territory. For this pass, each Anglicized African had to pay 5 shillings a year to the company. Anyone caught without a company pass would be fined £5. The same company regulations also stipulated that foreign "associations" must also be registered with the District Agent before operating in company territory and paying the 5-shilling fee. The regulations did not specify that the District Agent had to issue registration

---

<sup>358</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to Lord Iddesleigh, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, 36.

certificates, only that foreign individuals and associations had to apply for them.<sup>359</sup> This gave the company the means to keep any individual or organization considered undesirable out of company territory. If the District Agent refused to issue an individual a certificate, that person could always appeal to the local judiciary, which was also the District Agent. After a request was denied the second time, the individual would have to travel to Akassa and try to get a hearing with the Supreme Judicial Officer.

This system increased company control of travel into its territory and placed an additional financial burden on Anglicized Africans working or selling their services in company territory. Mamdani has pointed out that indirect rule was a form of apartheid. There are similarities between the RNC certificates for foreigners and the pass laws that would become a symbol of apartheid in South Africa. The main difference is that in South Africa, pass laws were meant to control the African urban population and labour force. On the Lower Niger, the certificates system was aimed at the Anglicized Africans and the missionary societies they ran in company territory.

Although Goldie felt a special antipathy for Anglicized Africans, they were far from the only threat the RNC had identified. Before its dreams of monopoly became real, the local traders would also have to be suppressed, hostile neighbours would have to be pacified, and its administration, which in 1886 existed mostly on paper, would have to be established and its rule entrenched. Once a charter was granted in 1886, this became the central focus for Goldie and the company's agents on the colonial periphery.

---

<sup>359</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 103.

## The Establishment of the Royal Niger Constabulary

While the protracted negotiations for a charter were underway, the company had established a rudimentary administration to enforce the political rights provided by treaties with local rulers. This administration mainly consisted of harassing non-company traders and discouraging the inhabitants of the Niger from trading with other merchants. Their most notable targets were the Liverpool merchants, in particular John Lander and Company. On the sixteenth of March 1886, Lander's trading agent on the Niger was attacked by European and African employees of the NAC and severely beaten. His crime had been to challenge the NAC's exclusive trading rights in the lands of the Emir of Bida. The Emir, Maliki dan Usman Zaki who the British called the King of Bida, had indeed signed one of McIntosh's treaties, although he had insisted on retaining the right to levy tolls on all merchant traffic passing through his territory.<sup>360</sup> But Maliki remained friendly to other British merchants and allowed them to operate in his territory. The company's response was to threaten to block all trade with Bida and physically assault Lander's agent to force him to leave town.<sup>361</sup>

On his way down the river, the agent met with further misfortune as his boat and cargo were seized by the residents of M'Blama, who thought Lander's agent was an NAC employee. The people of M'Blama and the NAC were engaged in a trade dispute, and the NAC had kidnapped three local boys.<sup>362</sup> We must remember that kidnapping had long been a standard method of debt collection in the Niger Delta as part of the pawnship system of holding people as

---

<sup>360</sup> Correspondence from Baron Plessen to Lord Salisbury, 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 172c.

<sup>361</sup> Correspondence from John Lander to the Foreign Office, 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1886, FO 84/1785, National Archives, London, 264.

<sup>362</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on an Inquiry by William F. Lawrence, 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1886, FO 84/1789, National Archives, London, 127.

a guarantee for credit.<sup>363</sup> It would appear that the company had adopted this custom to collect debts from its creditors. These events suggest that the company's ruthless actions towards African and European competitors and creditors were quickly making the Lower Niger a hostile environment for non-company traders.

The RNC quickly discovered that writing up administrative policies in the Metropole was one thing. Enacting such policies on the colonial periphery was quite another. By September 1886, all station agents in company outposts had received orders to charge duties on all imports and exports into company territories that had not passed through the big custom stations at Akassa and Lokoja. This quickly caused unrest in company territory. Of course, this was what the directors had expected; it was the main reason they were assembling their own army. But they acted somewhat hastily when they ordered their agents in distant stations to start collecting tolls before the Constabulary had been fully trained and deployed.<sup>364</sup> It also did not help that the planned Constabulary force of 150 men was far too small to meet the company's demands.

This new force, as envisioned in the first regulations passed for its creation, was to be commanded by a veteran officer of the British army who held the rank of Commandant. He would be assisted by two European officers, the Sub-Commandant, and the Gunnery Instructor. The Gunnery Instructor was responsible for the training and maintenance of the force's artillery component, while the Commandant and Sub-Commandant commanded the Constabulary. These three European officers commanded around 150 Africans, 1 Sergeant-Major, 7 Sergeants, 7 Corporals, and 135 privates. These were divided into seven sections of 20 men. Their equipment was modelled on the British Army. The force was exclusively male, and every man was

---

<sup>363</sup> Paul E Lovejoy and David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810," *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 67.

<sup>364</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 86.

equipped with a breech-loading rifle, originally the old Snider-Enfield rifle that was then slowly phased out for the newer Martini-Henry rifle, a bayonet, belt, and ammunition bag. Their training was based on British infantry training and devised and overseen by the European officers.<sup>365</sup>

By 1888 the company was willing to admit that it had vastly underestimated how many men it would need for its Constabulary and was finally taking steps to enlarge its armed force.<sup>366</sup> Most of the original force was recruited from the Fante people living in the British Gold Coast Colony and were referred to as "Elmina Men" in British sources.<sup>367</sup> Getting competent British officers to serve on the Niger also proved to be so tricky that the office of Supreme Judicial Officers and Commandant of the Constabulary were held by the same man, Major Veitch.<sup>368</sup>

A competent military officer who had served in South Africa, Veitch swiftly succumbed to the climate and was dead within a few months of coming to the Lower Niger.<sup>369</sup> Although a good military commander, his complete ignorance of local laws and indigenous legal systems on the Lower Niger's made many Anglicized Africans question his competence for the role of Supreme Judicial Officer. His replacement Captain Harper was hired by the company after having served in the Congo Free State. Harper was also appointed Commandant and Supreme Judicial Officer, much to the chagrin of the newspaper correspondents of *the Lagos Observer*, who believed he was utterly unsuited for both his judicial and military role due to his lack of experience.<sup>370</sup>

---

<sup>365</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to Lord Iddesleigh, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, 46-48.

<sup>366</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 332.

<sup>367</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 109.

<sup>368</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1887, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 18.

<sup>369</sup> Africa (West Coast)—The Royal Niger Company —Sentence of Death on Shaw, 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1887, Volume 313, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 1788.

<sup>370</sup> "A Patent Cause of Miscarriage in the Administration," *The Lagos Observer*, June 4, 1887, 2.

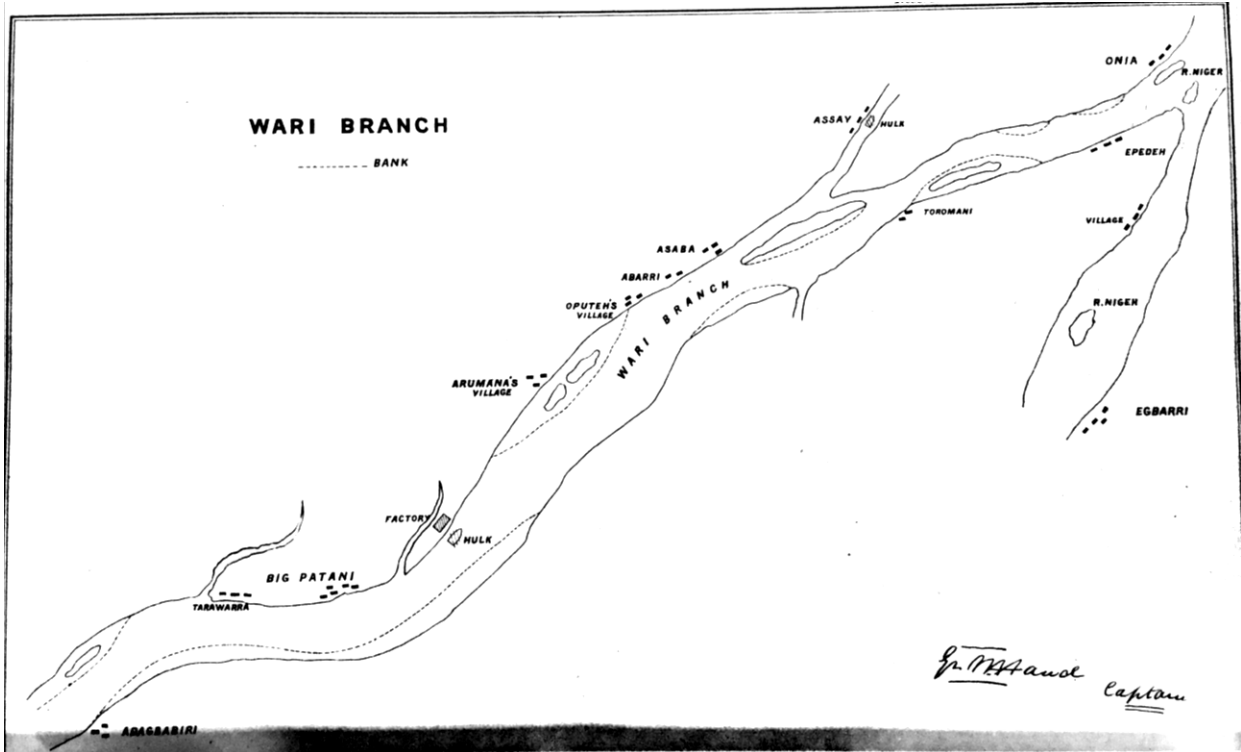


Figure 6: A sketch of the Wari (now known as Warri) branch of the Niger River made by the British Admiralty (photo from the National Archives, Kew).



Figure 7: A photo showing palm kernel trade at the RNC's Aboh station in the late 1880s. Note the Moreton sheds on the left and the station masters house behind them. The barrels stacked on the right are probably palm oil casks (photo from the British Museum).

As the company began to enforce its laws and trade regulations, it met increasing African resistance. Most of the opposition was focused on the company's attempt to collect duties on all imports and exports from its territory. The flashpoint was the territories around Patani and Abari, which the British called Big Patani and Abarri, on the western border of company territory. These towns had a unique geographical position within the company's administrative region. The company's central station of Akassa was at the mouth of the Nun River in the Niger Delta. One hundred twelve kilometers north-northeast of Akassa, the Niger splits into the Nun and Forcados rivers. The British called this part of the Forcados the Wari Branch. The Nun runs south while the Wari Branch or Forcados runs west into the western regions of the Niger Delta, areas the company did not claim. Downriver from Patani and Abari, the Forcados splits, and part of it runs south, where it joins the Nun again.<sup>371</sup>

The Ijaw inhabitants of this region had longstanding trade relations with their Yoruba neighbors to the west, as the Forcados river provided their trade canoes with easy access to Yorubaland. Like most Ijaw political entities, Big Patani and Abarri were part of the shifting confederation of towns and city-states that characterized Ijawland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the municipalities of Ijawland shared a common culture, language, and religion, they lacked a central authority.<sup>372</sup>

Because there was no central government, roads and waterways were the responsibility of local communities. To fund necessary maintenance, tolls were charged on vessels and convoys travelling within Ijawland and between Ijawland and the neighbouring Yorubaland and the Edo Kingdom. While there were frequent disagreements and sometimes outright conflict over what

---

<sup>371</sup> Sketch of the Wari Branch of the Niger River, 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 110-111.

<sup>372</sup> Ebiegberi J. Alagoa, "The Niger Delta States and Their Neighbours, 1600-1800," in *History of West Africa, Vol I*, ed. Jacob F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 278.

constituted an appropriate toll, there was a general agreement that a toll should be paid when transporting goods through a village's or town's territory. The proceeds of that toll went to the local settlement and were used for the maintenance of infrastructure.<sup>373</sup>

The RNC's toll was different. The RNC insisted that tolls should be paid on all goods entering and leaving company territory. To the Ijaw, this was a foreign notion. Tolls were paid to maintain infrastructure. The only thing the company maintained was trading outposts and steamers, not roads and waterways. Paying a toll for crossing an invisible line that only existed on a map in London smacked of robbery to the Ijaw merchants. Once company agents started to demand tolls on all goods passing through their stations, there were bound to be protests. And in the territory of Big Patani and Abari, those objections turned to violence.

McIntosh had visited the Patani and Abari in October 1884. Having identified suitable "kings" and "chiefs" of the towns, he signed a treaty with them. In return for a gift of trade goods, the signatories promised not to trade with other foreigners. Who these signatories were is hard to tell as the company did not always report their names to the British government, a practice that led some government officials to question the validity of the NAC's treaties.<sup>374</sup> In exchange for the promise of exclusive trade rights, the company vowed not to "interfere with any of the native laws, and also not encroach on any private property."<sup>375</sup> The company had then built a trading depot halfway between the towns of Big Patani and Abari, designated the Patani Wari Branch Factory. Three Anglicized African company employees operated this station, and locals were hired to load and unload cargo. The Constabulary was still being organized and was

---

<sup>373</sup> Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, 144.

<sup>374</sup> Lord Chancellor Memorandum on the Niger Charter by Lord Selbourne, 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1885, 30.

<sup>375</sup> Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 137.



in any case not meant to garrison remote outposts. There were, therefore, no constables at Patani station when it was attacked.<sup>376</sup>

The RNC never documented exactly what the dispute between its agents and the Ijaws was about. When explaining the reasons for the outbreak of violence, Goldie simply explained that the people of Big Patani and Abari were "slave-raiders" and "pillagers," the usual dismissive description of anyone opposed to company rule.<sup>377</sup> However, we can conjecture that the cause might have been differences concerning toll collection on trade and interpretations of the treaty of 1884. Company law classified all Africans living in company territory as "natives," while all Africans living outside of it were classified as foreigners. In the 1890s, the only categories used in company law were "native" and "foreigner," as the more nebulous term "native foreigner" was introduced after the company had lost its charter.<sup>378</sup> Because shipping between Ijaw settlements inside RNC territory and Ijaw settlements in the Oil River Protectorate was legally trading between "foreigners" and "natives," the company felt entitled to collect duties on all goods traded. From the RNC's perspective, the Ijaw merchant's refusal to pay such duties was a violation of the 1884 treaty. But for the Ijaw merchants who needed no company assistance to ship palm oil from Big Patani to the coast or transport European goods from the coast to Big Patani, this demand for duties must have seemed like extortion. The Ijaw merchants might have felt that the company's new demands violated the pledge the RNC had made in the 1884 treaty to not "interfere with any of the native laws, and also not encroach on any private property."<sup>379</sup> The Forcados was the Ijaw merchants' trade route. They resisted any interference from their

---

<sup>376</sup> Correspondence from Evan Macgregor to Villiers Lister, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 85.

<sup>377</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Hamilton, 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 153.

<sup>378</sup> Charles Mwalimu, *The Nigerian Legal System: Public Law* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 250.

<sup>379</sup> Hertset, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 137.

competitors, be it from Nana Olomu's company on the Benin River or the RNC on the Nun River.<sup>380</sup>

There was also a long tradition of river towns collecting tolls on passing traffic, often putting up obstacles on the river to force boats to stop. The British government and RNC strongly opposed the levying of such tolls, believing they hindered commerce.<sup>381</sup> Instead of levying tolls, these river towns were offered small subsidies to compensate them for lost revenue.<sup>382</sup> The hypocrisy and double standard involved in the RNC demanding that its vessels pay no local tolls while levying heavy duties on everyone else was probably not lost on Goldie, who used custom duties as a weapon. This double standard was probably also apparent to the inhabitants of the river towns. It was probably more profitable for them to ship palm oil down the Forcados towards Warri, outside company territory, than to sell it to the RNC because of the RNC's pricing scheme. The company exchanged barter goods for palm oil for a fixed rate at all its stations and used its monopoly on the market to force palm oil producers to accept a lower price than had been offered when more firms were operating on the Niger. Palm oil shipments taking the Forcados route was a threat to the RNC's control of trade on the Lower Niger. Therefore, control of the Wari Branch was vital to make sure African producers in the Oil Palm Belt did not divert their shipping down the Forcados, bypassing the custom station at Akassa. The Ijaw merchants taking this route could sell their goods in Warri, a town open to both European traders and Anglicized African traders from Lagos, avoiding the RNC's monopoly.<sup>383</sup>

---

<sup>380</sup> Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*, 23.

<sup>381</sup> Correspondence from Consul Hewett to Lord Salisbury, 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 345.

<sup>382</sup> Treaty Between the National African Company and the King and Chiefs of Alenso, 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1884, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 71.

<sup>383</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 323-324.

Things boiled over at Patani Wari Branch Factory in November 1886. A large force from Big Patani and Abari attacked the factory. The Anglicized Africans in the stations only had hunting guns and whatever personal weapons they had brought for self-defence. Meanwhile, the attackers had French breech-loading rifles as the French trading companies had made a brisk trade selling old Chassepot service rifles on the Niger before they amalgamated with the NAC. The RNC station was quickly overrun, and the company agent in charge was executed while his two clerks were taken away and later killed. The attackers then burned the station to the ground and left. In response to this, the company would pass gun control legislation a few days after the attack. Anglicized Africans, as legal foreigners, could possess European weapons, but the new regulation prohibited the sale of all firearms and ammunition, apart from outdated muskets and low-quality black powder, to local Africans.<sup>384</sup>

On the twenty-first of November, McIntosh, at Akassa, received word that Patani station had been overrun and destroyed. McIntosh feared that the whole Wari district might rebel against company rule and that other stations on the Wari Branch would be attacked. Major Veitch was immediately ordered to assemble as large a strike force from the Constabulary as was possible. At the same time, McIntosh wrote to the Royal Navy Squadron currently visiting Akassa to take on coal and asked Captain George W. Hand, the commanding officer, for assistance. As the water level of the Niger was falling, the river was too shallow for proper gunboats to sail up to the Forcados-Niger confluence where the Wari Branch could be entered. McIntosh, therefore, offered the Royal Navy the use of the company's armed trade steamers, which had a much shallower draft.<sup>385</sup>

---

<sup>384</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to David McIntosh, 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 58-59.

<sup>385</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to David McIntosh, 58-59.

Both McIntosh and Hand agreed that the only way to quell the growing rebellion was to make a show of force on the Wari Branch by launching an attack or "punitive expedition" on Abari and Patani.<sup>386</sup> However, the Royal Navy squadron was low on food and ammunition. Also, several of the company steamers, the only vessels with a shallow enough draft to enter the river at this time of year, were being repaired as the trading season was drawing to a close. Veitch went ahead with the steamers *SS Kano*, *SS Niger*, and *SS Yakoba* and about 100 men. On arriving at Egbarri near the entrance to the Wari Branch station, he met Edward A. Bedford, the District Agent for this region. Bedford warned Veitch that several heavily armed vessels armed with cannons and rifles were defending the entrance to the Wari Branch. Veitch did not have full confidence in the Constabulary since, in October, his troops had been routed under fire from river pirates after their European officer went down. He, therefore, decided to wait for reinforcements from the Royal Navy.<sup>387</sup>

On the first of December, the crew of the corvette *HMS Royalist* disembarked and took over the RNC steamers *SS Boussa* and *SS Hamarona*, which had been outfitted as gunboats. Each carried a seven-pounder naval gun, four rapid firing guns, and a rocket tube to launch incendiary rockets.<sup>388</sup> Although Captain Hand does not specify, the rapid firing guns were probably of the Gardner or Nordenfeldt variety since these were the rapid firing guns used by the Royal Navy in the late 1880s.<sup>389</sup> The rocket tube was for the Hale rocket system. It fired 6- and 24-pound rotary rockets with a maximum effective range of around 1500 yards. With their small

---

<sup>386</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, 85.

<sup>387</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 109.

<sup>388</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, 109.

<sup>389</sup> *Handbook for Gardner and Nordenfeldt Rifle Calibre Machine Guns* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1889), x, xxi.

warhead, rockets were useful against personnel. Furthermore, their incendiary capability could easily set fires to wooden structures like those popular on the banks of the Niger.<sup>390</sup>

On the third of December, the RNC and Royal Navy forces met at Egbarri, and on the fourth, they entered the Wari Branch of the Niger, leading to the Forcados River. Their first target was the small agricultural village of Oputeh. The villagers fled when they saw the company steamers. A small landing party went ashore and set fire to the boats, houses, and palm oil fields in the village. The next target was Big Patani, the main trading town in the region. When the convoy reached the town, "the natives opened fire from small cannon on the ship... they thus prevented the possibility of a peaceful palaver being held, and of our discovering the cause, if any existed, for the recent outrage."<sup>391</sup> Hand, of course, seems to have failed to consider that burning Oputeh to the ground might have caused the Patani to think he did not want a peaceful meeting to discuss the Patani and RNC dispute.

Deciding to bypass Patani for now, Hand sailed past the settlement and towards Adagbabiri, a town south of Patani. Forgetting his earlier wish for a peaceful palaver, he immediately attacked the town. The inhabitants hid in the undergrowth on the riverbanks and fired their rifles at the company and navy troops while the steamers swept the banks with gun and rocket fire. When the African fire slackened, a landing party went ashore and burned the buildings on the shore. The force then anchored in the middle of the river for the night. In the morning, the Patani had brought cannons to the northern bank of the river, but the company steamers were out of range, and only one man was hurt by shrapnel skipping across the water.<sup>392</sup>

---

<sup>390</sup> C E Franklin and W Johnson, "William Hale's 'Improvements in Rockets,'" *International Journal of Impact Engineering* 18, no. 2 (1996): 232, 239.

<sup>391</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, 109.

<sup>392</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, 109-110.

Most of the fifth of December was spent burning boats and cutting down oil palms at Adagbabiri. On the sixth, the convoy headed back north towards Patani, stopping only to burn down the village of Tarawarri. Big Patani was then attacked. As the Ijaws had positioned their artillery well, a large party led by Veitch landed downriver and attacked the town from the rear while the steamers bombarded it from the river. Company forces then raided the town and carried off four cannons, and several large trading canoes were confiscated by the company and towed away. Every oil palm tree near the town was cut down, and small boats and buildings burned. On the eighth of December, the expedition headed back to the Niger, stopping only to attack Abari. After a short firefight between company troops and locals, the town was taken and destroyed. By the ninth of December, the expedition was back at Akassa, having in five days killed an unknown number of Ijaws and burned down both Big Patani and Abari as well as the neighbouring villages of Oputeh, Tarawarri, and Adagbabiri. The expedition losses were seven company troops and one company sailor wounded.<sup>393</sup>

Goldie characteristically seems to have felt little gratitude towards the Royal Navy for its assistance and sent the navy a bill for the coal its ships had taken at Akassa. Although the Royal Navy ships had been at Akassa to assist the company, Goldie charged them 55s per ton of coal, the same rate at which the company sold coal to its competitors. This was an 83% mark-up from the cost of buying the coal in England and shipping it to the Lower Niger, which Goldie estimated to be around 30s per ton of coal. A few months later, the RNC was forced to refund £162, 10s to the Royal Navy after Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, outraged by Goldie's

---

<sup>393</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, 110.

rapacity, threatened to cut the RNC off from any future naval assistance unless the navy paid for coal at cost prices when assisting the company.<sup>394</sup>

The fact that company forces focused on destroying boats and oil palms is noteworthy. It can take the West-African oil palm up to eight years to reach full size and productivity.<sup>395</sup> Therefore, the destruction of the mature trees was a long-lasting blow to the economic well-being of the people of the region. The destruction and confiscation of their boats also reduced their ability to trade. We can, therefore, conclude that economic considerations guided the company's military actions. Hostilities had begun due to economic competition between the RNC and the communities of Patani and Abari. This resulted in an attack on the company's trading post. The company now responded by targeting the economic foundations of the locals by burning their boats and cutting down their oil palms. Doing so prevented them from trading in competition with the company and slowed down their agricultural production. From the fact that no garrison force was left in the area we can conclude that the company had no interest in permanently occupying any territory in the region. It would seem that it only wanted to protect its economic interests by enforcing its control of the river trade and discouraging further attacks on its trading outposts and personnel.

This form of expeditionary warfare aimed at destroying the economic capabilities of their enemies would become typical of company military operations in the 1880s. This form of warfare had the benefit of being cost-effective, as it only required a small strike force operating for a limited time. An expeditionary force usually consisted of a few company steamers, armed

---

<sup>394</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to George Hamilton, 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 153 and Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe to Admiralty, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 127-128.

<sup>395</sup> J H Holland, "The West African Oil Palm. (*Elaeis Guineensis*, Jacq.)," *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)* 1920, no. 6 (1920): 200.

with artillery and rapid firing guns carrying a landing party from the Constabulary, sometimes supported by personnel from the Royal Navy. The pattern of operations usually consisted of an initial bombardment from the steamers followed by an attack by the landing party, which went ashore to engage with the enemy and destroy boats, houses, and oil palms.<sup>396</sup>

This was the pattern followed in the Beaufort Island expedition of 1886 and in six RNC expeditions in 1888. These 1888 punitive expeditions were launched to punish locals for "piracy," "stopping legitimate trade," and "attacking stations." These were all small-scale engagements resulting in the loss of one constable killed, one constable injured, and two "native" allies killed, and one "native" ally wounded.<sup>397</sup> The list of offences provoking these campaigns suggests that they were meant to counter any challenge to the RNC's commercial interests rather than maintain any order or direct control in the region. To follow up its punitive action vis-à-vis the Ijaw, the company embarked upon a new treaty-making campaign. It concluded new treaties with all the major communities on the Wari Branch and the Forcados down to the Bight of Benin.

Most of the treaties were signed by a "king" and at least five "chiefs." This would indicate that the company made some attempt to identify local notables in communities it signed contracts with. There were some language difficulties involved in this treaty-making. Former District Agent, now Senior Executive Officer Edward A. Bedford handled negotiations for the RNC. His English deputy, Edward Alexander Malcolm Spearman, could not communicate in Ijaw. He, therefore, had to rely on his translator Allalie. At Goolah they met with King Okeseh and his son Ogo Kisch. With them were chiefs Abosoh, Syereh, Agioh, Perepereh, Fich, Sipeh,

---

<sup>396</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, 86.

<sup>397</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Returns, Causes, and Results of Engagements of the Royal Niger Constabulary, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 47-48.



Abada, Apoch, Beku, and Tebuki. Since most of the Ijaw polities in the Niger Delta were city-states organized around the local Canoe Houses, it is probable that this was a gathering of the elected leader of the town and the heads of the local Canoe Houses.<sup>398</sup> Allalie served as an interpreter explaining the treaty to the assembled dignitaries. The RNC promised to pay an annual tribute in trade goods to anyone who signed the treaty if they promised not to trade with any foreigners.

When a treaty was signed, the company made the first payment in goods, usually gin, as a sign of good faith and then travelled to the next town to repeat the whole process.<sup>399</sup> In total, Bedford, Spearman, and Allalie visited at least 32 towns, always signing a treaty with a "king" and his "chiefs."<sup>400</sup> This treaty expedition enlarged the RNC's territory about 100 kilometres westwards and prevented African and European competitors from bypassing the company monopoly by shipping their goods down the Wari Branch to the Forcados River.<sup>401</sup> It was no coincidence that while Bedford was signing treaties, an RNC gunboat with 20 soldiers began to patrol the Forcados River, stopping all vessels it met and interrogating its occupants on their destination and purpose for their travel. The communities on the Forcados were all aware of the example that had been made of Patani. With no hope of successfully challenging the combined might of the Constabulary and the Royal Navy, the leaders of the river towns had little choice but to choose friendship with the company and sign Bedford's treaties.<sup>402</sup>

---

<sup>398</sup> Nimi Wariboko, "A Theory of the Canoe House Corporation," *African Economic History*, no. 26 (1998): 141.

<sup>399</sup> Treaty Made Between the Natives of Goolah (Forcados River) and the Royal Niger Company, 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 212-213.

<sup>400</sup> Schedule of Treaties, 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 215.

<sup>401</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Treaty Map of the Wari District, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 41-42.

<sup>402</sup> Correspondence from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 207.

An unexpected effect of the Patani campaign was the reorganization of the recruitment practices of the company's Constabulary. On the advice of the British Army, the first recruits the RNC recruited for its Constabulary were Hausas. However, the Hausa had a long history of serving in British forces in West Africa and being considered the best "native" troops in the region by the British, expected to be well paid.<sup>403</sup> For economic reasons, the company had dismissed its Hausas and recruited Fante soldiers from the Gold Coast. However, offering low pay did not attract the highest quality of troops, and the RNC was disappointed in the performance of the Constabulary both on Beaufort Island, where river pirates routed them, and in the Patani campaign. Rear-Admiral Grubbe did not believe that offering low pay had affected the quality of recruits. Instead, the force's failure was blamed on the ethnicity of its recruits, who being Fante, were "totally unfit from their craven propensities, to be policemen."<sup>404</sup> Therefore, a decision was made to dismiss some of the Fante troops and recruit a hundred Hausas into the Constabulary.<sup>405</sup>

This move was part of a larger pattern within the British Empire of singling out "martial races" in its territories and exclusively recruiting these into its local armed forces. The Hausa were not indigenous to the Lower Niger. Their heartland lay further to the north, where the primary Hausa/Fulani political entity was the Sokoto Caliphate. The caliphate had been established at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and dominated the territory known as Northern Nigeria. The Hausa were heavily influenced by the Arab Muslim culture of North Africa and had converted to Sunni Islam around the fifteenth century.<sup>406</sup> Sharing neither culture, language, nor

---

<sup>403</sup> Henry Brackenbury, *The Ashanti War: A Narrative* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 118.

<sup>404</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe to the Admiralty, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, 128.

<sup>405</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe to the Admiralty, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, 128.

<sup>406</sup> David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 140–41.

religion with the peoples of the Lower Niger, they had no loyalties there except to their employer, the RNC.

The search for "martial races" took on new urgency in the British Empire after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Ethnic and religious groups that had sided with the British during the rebellion were identified as martially superior to those who had rebelled and therefore better suited to military service.<sup>407</sup> British military authorities also realized that they would need imperial troops if they were to match the new conscripted armies of the other European powers. Therefore, the British armed forces began to look for "martial races" that would be militarily equal to Europeans and would consequently be able to beat them on the battlefield.<sup>408</sup>

According to Pradeep Barua, categorizing the multiple ethnicities of the empire into martial and non-martial races helped imperial officials make sense of and organize the colonial periphery's multiple ethnicities by creating recognizable organizational units. After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the Brahmin social class that had dominated the British Army in India was now seen as inherently treacherous. Meanwhile, Britain's old foes, the Gurkhas, Sikhs, Marathas, and Rajputs, having no common cause with the Indian proto-nationalists, stayed loyal to the empire. This loyalty was now explained as resulting from the inherent honour, discipline, and loyalty of these ethnic groups, qualities that made them "martial races."<sup>409</sup>

In British West Africa, the Hausa were picked as the "martial race." However, British officials worried that once the empire pushed further north, the Hausa's Islamic faith might become a liability. In 1889 Commandant Seymour U. Saulez (1848-1930), a former captain of

---

<sup>407</sup> Pradeep Barua, "Inventing Race: The British and India's Martial Races," *The Historian* 58, no. 1 (February 17, 1995): 109.

<sup>408</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 87–88.

<sup>409</sup> Barua, "Inventing Race: The British and India's Martial Races," 110–11.

the Royal Bombay Fusiliers, replaced Harper as Commandant.<sup>410</sup> When reviewing the RNC's Constabulary composition, Saulez noted that it was composed of 100 Hausas, 250 Fantes, and 70 Yorubas. In Saulez's opinion, the Hausas were "of course, the best fighting material, but are Mahommedans."<sup>411</sup> Explaining why, if the Hausa were the best soldiers, they did not make up the entirety of the force, Saulez continued, "It is an open question whether the Houssas would fight against their co-religionists; I am inclined to think that the experiment would be fraught with... danger."<sup>412</sup> From this, we can gather that although picked as the supreme "martial race" of Western Africa, there was something inherently foreign about the Hausa's faith that made them untrustworthy in the eyes of their British employers and other ethnicities were therefore kept on hand to check them should they turn traitor in a war with the Hausa and Fulani emirates of Northern Nigeria.

After the Patani campaign, the company's army was reorganized and strengthened. By 1889 it was composed of four European officers and around 420 Africans.<sup>413</sup> The pay was good, one shilling a day for a private in the force, comparable to the one shilling two pence per day received by a private soldier in the British Army.<sup>414</sup> The African soldiers of the British government in the neighbouring Niger Coast Protectorate were also paid a shilling per day, so the company's armed forces offered competitive pay for young African men looking for work as soldiers. It was also much higher pay than that received by the labourers in company and government service, the so-called "Krooboys" or "Krumen," who were paid half a shilling a

---

<sup>410</sup> W. E. Jinks, "Alleged Massacre by the Royal Niger Co's Employees," *Lagos Weekly Record*, April 25, 1893, 2–3.

<sup>411</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1889, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 76.

<sup>412</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 76.

<sup>413</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 77.

<sup>414</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 133–35.

day.<sup>415</sup> The company's artillery was mostly outdated Whitworth and smoothbore muzzle-loading guns mounted on its steamers and its fortifications. However, it was being improved with the purchase of more mobile artillery pieces. These were five, seven-pounder mountain guns, light enough to transport over rough terrain, and five hand-cranked Gardner rapid firing guns.<sup>416</sup>

The African recruits signed on for three years to start with, but many served much longer than that. For example, a Yoruban named Addoi signed up for the force in Oyo sometime in the 1880s. He served for three years with the force but then left for Dahomey, where he signed on with the French army. There he served for many years in both West Africa and Madagascar before being sent with the expeditionary force to the Boussa region in 1898. Having by this time been promoted to Sergeant, he was elected to speak to the French officer of his company about the unpaid wages and lack of food troubling the soldiers of the expedition. The French officer responded by physically assaulting him. This Addoi found unacceptable, apparently being unused to such treatment in the Constabulary and Madagascar garrison. He, therefore, hiked to the nearest RNC fort and presented himself in full French uniform, asking to join the new West African Frontier Force he had heard was being formed to garrison the region. Remarkably many of the men that had signed up with the Constabulary at the same time as him were still serving with the Constabulary and immediately recognized their old comrade Addoi. These men must therefore have been serving with the Constabulary for at least nine years, having renewed their contracts at least twice. This indicates that a large number of the force were veterans with

---

<sup>415</sup> Niger Coast Protectorate: Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure for 1896-1897, 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, FO 403/248, National Archives, London, 54, 59.

<sup>416</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, 76-77.

considerable experience and that service in the company's army was a sought-after trade due to good pay and conditions for the soldiers.<sup>417</sup>

The British focus on recruiting "martial races" into their service had long-lasting effects in the territories that would become Nigeria. Fighting for the RNC Constabulary or the British Army was a well-paying job and the highest paying unskilled labour job an African could have in the British colonial economy.<sup>418</sup> The Hausa, therefore, took pride in their position as the new military elite, and this pride made them even better recruits for the colonial army, seemingly justifying the decision of the colonial authority to recruit them. Once Southern and Northern Nigeria became full colonies, the policy was continued by Lugard with the aim of keeping the militarily strong groups politically weak and the politically strong groups militarily weak.

## British opposition to RNC expansion

The new RNC administration was not just opposed in company territory. In Britain, several groups believed that the newly chartered company threatened their interests. The first to voice their opposition were the Liverpool merchants operating in the British Oil River Protectorate. The Oil River Protectorate consisted of all territory between "Lagos and the Cameroons... not included in the Royal Niger Company's territory."<sup>419</sup> The British firms operating in the region were organized into the African Association of Liverpool, which was more of a lobby group than an actual amalgamation of trading firms such as the NAC had been. Before the charter was issued, these merchants had been the NAC's biggest British competitors in the palm oil trade. They understood that the purpose of the charter was to exclude them and

---

<sup>417</sup> *Precis of Statements made at Jebba by Deserters from the French, June 1898, CO 446/1, National Archives, London, 323-324.*

<sup>418</sup> Timothy H Parsons, "'Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen': The Evolution of the Kamba as a Martial Race, 1890-1970," *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 4 (1999): 674.

<sup>419</sup> Africa (West Coast)—The Royal Niger Company —The Oil Rivers Territory, 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1888, Volume 332, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 90.

their African partners, such as King Jaja, from the trade on the Lower Niger. They also worried that the RNC would soon be able to expand west and east into the association trading regions. This threat soon materialized when the RNC annexed the Wari Branch and Forcados River regions to secure its control of the Niger trade.<sup>420</sup>

To neutralize the threat, the Liverpool merchants requested all territories south of Onitsha be removed from company administration and integrated into the Oil River Protectorate.<sup>421</sup> To achieve this goal, the African Association of Liverpool launched a two-pronged attack. The first was a parliamentary campaign to challenge the sovereignty of the RNC and promote government oversight. The second was a media campaign run through British newspapers to discredit the RNC in the eyes of the public. The parliamentary opposition to the company was initiated by the African Association of Liverpool, which urged William F. Lawrence (1844-1935), a Conservative Party MP for the Liverpool Abercromby constituency, to act on its behalf.<sup>422</sup> The associations also lobbied Stephen Williamson (1827-1903), Liberal Party MP for Kilmarnock, who was also one of the owners of the Liverpool trading company of Balfour Williamson & Co, to act on its behalf.<sup>423</sup> Lawrence frequently brought the more questionable policies of the RNC, such as kidnapping children to use them as pawns during negotiations, to the attention of the British government. He further criticized the government for sending troops at the public's expense to aid the RNC in the Patani Campaign.<sup>424</sup> Williamson meanwhile complained of the company's inept running of its justice system. He alleged that the RNC had failed to abide by its own legal code and that the Agent-General, not the Supreme Judicial Officer, often oversaw

---

<sup>420</sup> The Liverpool Courier News Paper Clipping, 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1887, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 381.

<sup>421</sup> Questions Asked in the House of Commons, 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 150.

<sup>422</sup> Correspondence from the Liverpool African Association to W. E. Lawrence, 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1886, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 397-399.

<sup>423</sup> "Stephen Williamson," Methil Heritage, 2021, <http://www.methilheritage.org.uk/content/pages/santiago.php>.

<sup>424</sup> Africa (West Coast)—Kidnapping on the Niger —Native Reprisals, 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1887, Volume 313, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 676.

trials and pronounced judgments. These accusations were successfully rebutted by the RNC, which explained that Veitch had been the acting Supreme Judicial Officer when overseeing trials and that the Agent-General did not involve himself in judicial matters.<sup>425</sup>

While Lawrence criticized the company in parliament, the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce kept up a steady campaign against the RNC. At first, most of their complaints were focused on the company's monopolistic operations and the legitimacy of the company's treaties with African rulers.<sup>426</sup> Once the RNC launched the Patani Campaign, the tone of the campaign changed. The Liverpool lobby now actively sought to vilify the company in the eyes of the British public. The "African merchants of Liverpool" now accused the RNC of sparking a conflict that had cost the lives of several European traders and their African employees.<sup>427</sup> This was, of course, false as the casualties were the three Anglicized Africans killed when the Wari Branch station was stormed.<sup>428</sup> In its reprisal against the Patani, the company was also accused of attacking "defenceless villages" and willfully killing and maiming women and children in its military operations.<sup>429</sup>

The divergent attitudes of the Liverpool merchants towards the RNC undermined the campaign against the company. For example, the Scottish Miller brothers, Alexander and George, ran the Alexander Miller, Brother & Co in the Oil Rivers region, where they were King Jaja's main European partners. On the Lower Niger, however, they had joined Goldie's amalgamation scheme, and George Miller had been one of the original subscribers of the NAC

---

<sup>425</sup> Africa (West Coast)—The Royal Niger Company —Sentence of Death on Shaw, 1788.

<sup>426</sup> "Affairs on the Niger," *The Morning Post*, September 1, 1886, 2, "From Our London Correspondent," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, November 17, 1886, 5 and "News from the Niger," *The Sunday Times*, May 22, 1887, 2.

<sup>427</sup> "Disturbances on the Niger," *The Times*, January 1, 1887, 10.

<sup>428</sup> Correspondence from David McIntosh to Captain Hand, 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1886, 100.

<sup>429</sup> Josh G. Lovell, "The Trade War in the Niger," *Daily News*, March 11, 1887, 6.



and one of its first directors.<sup>430</sup> Once the NAC was reformed into the RNC, Alexander Miller replaced his brother on the board of directors.<sup>431</sup> The brothers did not join the African Association, probably due to their relationship with the RNC and King Jaja.

Other merchants though chafing at the RNC's monopolistic operations on the Niger, wondered if it would be possible to set up a similar operation in the Oil River Protectorate. Some Liverpool merchants advocated for a new African Association, modelled on the NAC that would amalgamate the British traders operating in the Oil Rivers region and then apply for a charter to govern the territory in the name of Britain. Such a company would then be able to impose the same kind of monopoly the RNC operated on the Lower Niger. This is probably why the Liverpool lobby never questioned the legitimacy of charter companies. Instead, it focused its attacks exclusively on the RNC, accusing it of failing to uphold the conditions of its charter.

Despite their media campaign, Lawrence, Williamson, and the African Association failed to gain any ground with the Foreign Office. The head of the African department, Henry P. Anderson was dismissive of their complaints. In his mind, the Liverpool merchants represented the old European-African middleman system of commerce that was no longer commercially viable on the Niger. Their interests were the interests of their African trading partners, who in his opinion opposed the march of progress. In his opinion, the Scramble for Africa had broken up "this little family party."<sup>432</sup> It was Anderson's belief, the RNC on the Lower Niger and the Deutsch-Westafrikanische Gesellschaft, a German chartered company operating in Cameroon

---

<sup>430</sup> The National African Company's Articles of Association, 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1882, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 18.

<sup>431</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Earl of Iddesleigh, 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 36.

<sup>432</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Petition of the Liverpool Merchants Against the Royal Niger Company by H. P. Anderson, 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 394.

and Togo, had demonstrated that large companies trading directly with the producers in the interior were the way forward for colonial commerce.<sup>433</sup>

Although the Liverpool lobby was making little progress in their campaign against the RNC, Goldie was not one to tolerate opposition. He, therefore, decided on a maneuver that would silence the Liverpool lobby while opening new areas to company control. In the fall of 1887, he approached the African Association with a new proposal. If they agreed to amalgamate their companies into the RNC, the RNC charter might be expanded to cover all of the Oil River Protectorate. The Liverpool merchants would run the new territories as representatives of the RNC. In return, the RNC's monopoly would face no challenges from neighbouring British firms, and Goldie would maintain his stranglehold on Lower Niger commerce.<sup>434</sup>

Goldie also reminded the Liverpool merchants of another danger. If the Oil Rivers became a fully-fledged colony like Lagos, the area would be open to the Anglicized African merchants from Sierra Leone and Lagos. Instead of facing this onslaught on new competitors with local connections, the association might be better off negotiating a deal with the RNC.<sup>435</sup> Such an arrangement would enable the Liverpool merchants to force out Anglicized African competition like the RNC had done on the Niger. For negotiations to be successful, the Liverpool firms trading in the Oil River region had to be willing to join forces and amalgamate with the RNC. If the companies of the African Association or the firm of the Miller brothers refused to join, those firms would be big enough to challenge attempts to create a monopoly on the Oil

---

<sup>433</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum on the Petition of the Liverpool Merchants Against the Royal Niger Company by H. P. Anderson, 394-395.

<sup>434</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Salisbury, 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1887, FO 84/1880, National Archives, London, 451-452.

<sup>435</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 104–5.

Rivers. However, in September 1887, any hope of a united Liverpool front was shattered by events on the periphery.

The trouble began in Igboland, east of RNC territory. There the Imo River ran 240 kilometres from the coast, connecting the hinterlands of Igboland to the Bight of Biafra. At the mouth of the river sat Opobo, King Jaja's capital. From there, Jaja's middleman network stretched to the coast connecting the palm oil producers with soap manufacturers in Britain. But, as on the Niger, technological advances and dropping palm oil prices in Europe were making this system untenable. The Liverpool merchants were as resentful of Jaja's monopoly on the Imo as they were of the RNC's on the Niger. But while the British government was unwilling to act against the RNC, its agents on the periphery seemed more willing to strike at African companies such as Jaja's.

The Liverpool merchants approached Harry Johnston (1858-1927), the acting consul of the Oil River Protectorate. They complained that Jaja and his employees had obstructed their efforts to open trading stations on the creeks of the Imo River, stations that would have allowed them to bypass Jaja's company to trade directly with the palm oil producers of the hinterland. When Johnston attempted to sail up the river in September 1887, his vessel was stopped at Azzomley Creek, where booms had been placed across the river to block the passage of ships. Jaja was accused of having provided the villages and towns on Azzomley Creek with weapons in return for blocking the passage of British ships.<sup>436</sup>

It was true that Jaja's troops had been harassing and punishing palm oil producers in the Igbo hinterland that tried to sell their wares directly to the Liverpool merchants. But the treaty between Jaja and Britain did not oblige him to open the Imo River to British shipping.<sup>437</sup>

---

<sup>436</sup> "Deposition of King Jaja," 2–3.

<sup>437</sup> Cooley, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times, 1821-1891*, 107–8.

Nevertheless, his competition with the British companies and the closing of Azzomley Creek were deemed illegal "obstruction of trade" by consul Johnston. Johnston issued a secret order for Jaja's arrest. He was captured when attending a meeting at the wharf of Thomas and James Harrison & Company, which was part of the African Association of Liverpool. The arrest was followed by a Kangaroo court. The government ordered Rear-Admiral Grubbe (1833-1922) of the Royal Navy to act as judge in Jaja's trial as Johnston would be prosecuting his case against the defendant. Jaja was accused of violating article V of his treaty with the British government, which stated:

The Kings and Chiefs of Opobo hereby engage to assist the British Consular or other officers in the execution of such duties as may be assigned to them; and further, to act upon their advice in matters relating to the administration of justice, the development of the resources of the country, the interests of commerce, or in any other matter relating to peace, order, and good government, and the general progress of civilization.<sup>438</sup>

Before the trial, Jaja was transported to Accra, almost a thousand kilometers from Opobo. He was only notified of his trial a day before it began, which made it impossible for him to call any witnesses for his defence after hearing the testimony of Johnston and of Captain Hand, who was called upon to testify that Jaja's troops had blockaded Imo River. Grubbe found Jaja guilty of violating article V and sentenced him to exile. Grubbe also forbade the people of Opobo from electing a new leader to replace him.<sup>439</sup> As a new leader of Opobo would also have been the new head of Jaja's company, it seems likely that the intent of the British authorities was to dismantle Jaja's commercial organization, thereby allowing the British traders to dominate the palm oil trade on the Imo River.

The Anglicized African community was outraged by Jaja's case. Many, like Crowther, wanted British rule in West Africa to represent Christianity, liberty from the old religious and

---

<sup>438</sup> Africa (West Coast)—King Jaja, 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1888, Volume 323, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 372.

<sup>439</sup> Africa (West Coast)—King Jaja, of Opobo, 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1888, Volume 323, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 24-25.

political oligarchy, and the rule of law.<sup>440</sup> Arbitrary justice did nothing but alienate the African population and caused it to view the Anglicized Africans and their cause with suspicion.<sup>441</sup> The case would continue to haunt the British colonial administration in West Africa for a long time. Ten years later, in 1898, Anglicized African newspapers still used the Jaja case as a prime example of the British administration's misrule in Africa and its unreasonable hostility to all forms of African authority.<sup>442</sup>

Much like the Anglicized African community, the Miller Brothers were shocked by this miscarriage of justice and started a public campaign to have Jaja exonerated and returned to Opobo. They wrote to the Foreign Office accusing consul Johnston of incompetency and collusion with the Liverpool merchants seeking to break Jaja's monopoly of the Imo River trade by fair means or foul.<sup>443</sup> These public accusations angered the African Association. At the same time, the Elder Dempster & Co. and the African Steam Ship Company, which together dominated shipping between Britain and West Africa, made clear their opposition to the enlargement of RNC territory in a series of missives to the Foreign Office. The shipping companies worried that if it were allowed to expand unchecked, the RNC would soon be able to run its own shipping service, excluding its competitors from the West African shipping business just as it had excluded competition from the trade on the Lower Niger.<sup>444</sup> The discord within the Liverpool merchant community and the opposition from the shipping companies doomed the merger negotiations between the RNC, African Association, and Alexander Miller, Brother &

---

<sup>440</sup> Annual Report of Bishop Crowther on the Niger Mission, 1875, 303.

<sup>441</sup> "Fortunately for the Cause of Truth and Justice," *The Lagos Observer*, February 25, 1888, 2.

<sup>442</sup> "British Rule in Africa," *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 23, 1898, 4–5.

<sup>443</sup> Correspondence from Alexander Miller, Brother & Co to Lord Salisbury, 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1888, FO 84/1916, National Archives, London, 106-108.

<sup>444</sup> Correspondence from the Elder Dempster & Co. to the Foreign Office, 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1888, FO 84/1917, National Archives, London, 394. And Correspondence from the African Steam Ship Company. to the Foreign Office, 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1888, FO 84/1917, National Archives, London, 396.

Co. The Oil River Protectorate remained under the administration of the Foreign Office and its consuls. Even as the RNC crushed African opposition to expand westward, its British opponents had successfully checked the eastern expansion of RNC territory.

This chapter has shown that the RNC did not apply for its charter because it wanted to develop its territory or expand the British Empire. The purpose of the charter was to create a monopoly that could make the palm oil trade profitable again despite palm oil sale prices in Europe steadily dropping since the late 1850s. The truth of this statement becomes apparent when examining the administration, the company established in the territory where it claimed exclusive trading rights and political sovereignty. The company administration was large enough to govern the riverbanks and trading stations but nothing else. The only regulations the administration passed concerned the river traffic and trading, and so the administration only had to be large enough to enforce those laws, which were meant to ensure an RNC monopoly of the river trade.

To run its trading network and maintain its stations and vessels, the company needed skilled labourers and managers that were resistant to the disease climate of the Lower Niger. The RNC's need for such labour coincided with the formation and diaspora of a new social group here referred to as Anglicized Africans. The first Anglicized Africans were granted legal status by British courts in Sierra Leone when freed from slavery and brought there by the Royal Navy. Many of them were educated in missionary schools, and when they returned to their old homes in the Lower Niger, they spoke some English and developed a unique identity that was a mixture of their African culture and the British education and traditions they had encountered. This new class became the new mercantile elite in Crown Colonies such as Lagos and Freetown. It made up most of the managerial staff of the RNC apart from the highest offices reserved for Europeans

and the manual labour force, which was primarily composed of labourers from the West Coast of Africa called "Krumen" by the British. While Goldie opposed all attempts by the Anglicized Africans to establish independent organizations in company territory, such as the Niger Mission, his company could not have functioned without their contribution. Anglicized Africans were the face of the company on the Lower Niger as they were the Agents in charge of local trading stations. At the same time, service with the RNC with corresponding pay and authority over other workers offered opportunities for material and social advancement not available to other Africans living in company territory. Despite their importance to company history Anglicized Africans have so far been missing from the history of the RNC.

As the company had neither the capacity nor inclination to establish an administration that controlled more than river traffic and trade, the existing power structures of the Lower Niger, with all its variety of city-states, emirates, and ethnic confederations, remained in place. This meant that as long as its exclusive trading rights were honoured and its property and employees were not interfered with, the company was happy to stay out of the way of local rulers. I have argued that the administration established by the company was a proto-indirect rule. While the structured network of chiefs that the British would later establish had not emerged, the indirect rule principle of indigenous government with British oversight had already emerged during the years of company rule.

When the company received its charter, there was already a system of trading in place on the Lower Niger. The only way the company could break up the old trading network and enforce its exclusive right to trade on the river was with violence. For this task, the RNC needed its own military force to enforce its trade regulation and suppress all local opposition to its rule. The Constabulary was modelled on the British army, equipped with British weapons and equipment,

and trained by British officers. Modern weapons combined with British training and tactics made the Constabulary an effective fighting force able to consistently defeat their numerically superior opponents on the battlefield. At first, the force was too small for the task of securing the waterways of the Niger and suppressing all resistance to the RNC monopoly. The Constabulary's first successful campaign was the expedition against Patani. Victory there allowed the company to engage in a treaty-making expedition on the Forcados River, which coincided with regular Constabulary patrols of the Forcados River. This combined political and military pressure allowed the company to extend its westward and guarantee the company's monopoly on the Niger by securing control of the Forcados River.

The expansion of RNC territory further fuelled British opposition to the company that came mainly from the Liverpool trading firms united in the African Association of Liverpool. These firms competed with the RNC in the Lower Niger palm oil trade and feared that expansion of the company's trading monopoly threatened their interest. Their campaign was limited in its effectiveness. Even though a public campaign against the RNC was waged both in the media and in parliament, the British opponents of the company could not stop the RNC's annexation of the Forcados River region. While ineffective in stopping the RNC's expansion into the Forcados region, British opposition did scuttle company plans for eastward expansion into the Oil River Protectorate. Opposition from the British shipping firms operating in West Africa and discord within the Liverpool merchant community meant that the RNC's plans to create a new combine combining Liverpool and RNC interests in the Oil River Protectorate never gained much traction.





# Chapter Four: Fighting for the Niger

The Royal Niger Company could not have functioned without its African employees. Having examined the establishment of the RNC administration, its expansion to the east and west, as well as the opposition to its growth on the colonial periphery and in the metropole, we need to take a closer look at the day-to-day operations of the company and daily life in RNC territory. This is because, in the daily activities of the company, we find its African employees, from the locals and “Krumen” hired as laborers in their trading stations and ships to the Anglicized Africans operating as clerks, skilled artisans, and station agents. This chapter will demonstrate

how the company's need for managers and skilled craftsmen that could work in the disease climate of the Niger coincided with the advent of the new social class of Anglicized Africans. This adds a previously missing perspective to the history of the company.

This chapter also examines the administration of the RNC in the 1890s as well as the operations of its trading stations and employees at the height of its power. The main imports and exports of the company will be discussed since the RNC tried to diversify its exports in the 1890s to reduce its reliance on the palm oil trade and make its stations north of the palm oil belt profitable. The relationship between the RNC and the Nembe Kingdom will then be explored, featuring an analysis of how the deterioration of the relationship between the two powers led to the Akassa War of 1895. This war is important because it marks the high tide of the conflict between one of the old trading powers on the Niger – the Great Canoe Houses of the Nembe state – and the new monopolistic power of the company. This war will be examined in more detail than has previously been done in the history of the RNC, including the strategic situation and the African point of view. Finally, the British invasion of the Nembe state will be discussed.

The military operations in the Akassa War were a cooperation between the British Navy, the British Niger Coast Protectorate, and the Royal Niger Company, and understanding this conflict helps explain the lasting impact of military operations on the Niger Delta. Comparing this operation to contemporary military operations in West Africa allows us to demonstrate that its aims and strategy were typical of British military operations in West Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This is necessary to refute the view popularized by Flint's work that the British response to the attack on Akassa was extraordinarily light. The long term effects of the war on the political structure of the Nembe state will also be examined as the Akassa war permanently changed the political structure of the Nembe state. This impact has not been

examined in enough detail but is an essential part of the RNC's legacy in West Africa. The chapter will demonstrate the RNC's reliance on its African employees and how they contributed to the trading and military operations of the company. It will also examine how the Royal Niger Constabulary performed as a fully functioning semi-autonomous army, operating within the confines of British Imperial policy in West Africa for the company's commercial benefit.

While the RNC claimed political sovereignty and exclusive trading rights over a vast territory, its administration was concentrated on controlling the riverbanks and river traffic. By 1890 the RNC's territory stretched from Akassa on the coast to Rabba in Nupe territory, a distance of more than 1600 kilometers of sailing on the Niger. The Benue River from Lokoja to Garua was also patrolled by company vessels.<sup>445</sup> On the river, company control was almost absolute. River pirates and people hostile to company presence had been fought off, and steamboats could safely navigate in company territory if they had the permission of the RNC. However, apart from the immediate region around the 36 trading stations that the company operated in 1890 and along the riverbanks, company authority, further inland, was almost nonexistent. This state of affairs suited the company well; it did not have the resources to govern this vast area, and trying to undertake such an administration would have necessitated raising heavy taxes on the populace to pay for the administrative and police force necessary for such an effort. Instead, the company concentrated its limited resources on securing the rivers, which was essential to maintain the trading network that provided most of its revenue.<sup>446</sup>

The 36 trading stations varied in size. The largest were the stations at Akassa, where the company's trading administration was headquartered, and at Asaba, where the judicial

---

<sup>445</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on the Benue Treaties, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 14.

<sup>446</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Budget of 1887, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 91.

administration was based. Akassa was the berth of the company's trading fleet, which in 1890 consisted of four large steamships capable of making ocean voyages. These were able to carry between 400-600 tons of cargo. It also had six smaller river steamships whose shallow draft made it possible to navigate the smaller tributaries. These could carry around 100 tons of cargo. Finally, there were eight steam launches, small vessels capable of navigating the shallow creeks, which had before only been accessible by canoe. These could carry around 3-5 tons of cargo.<sup>447</sup>

Although the company had four ships capable of making the voyage to Britain, it was more economical to unload the exports at Akassa. At Akassa, they were picked up by the steamships of the Elder Dempster & Company and the African Steam Ship Company, which carried the palm oil and the palm kernel oil to Britain, where the company sold them. The company's ships stayed on the river transporting cargo between stations for the five months the river was navigable to steamships. The Lower Niger has two seasons, a dry season and a rainy season. The rainy season begins in April and lasts until October. The dry season begins in November and lasts until March.<sup>448</sup> The Niger only became navigable once the precipitation of the rainy season had raised the water level of the river. Once the dry season began, water levels dropped, making the river too shallow for steamships. The ships were kept at Akassa for repairs and maintenance in the dry season or moored offshore of vulnerable stations in the interior to act as fortresses.<sup>449</sup>

---

<sup>447</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Company's Fleet, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 46.

<sup>448</sup> Theophilus Odekunle, "Rainfall and the Length of the Growing Season in Nigeria," *International Journal of Climatology* 24 (March 30, 2004): 467–68.

<sup>449</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Budget of 1887, 92.

## The Company's Employees and Trading Stations

By 1890 the RNC's territory had been divided into the districts of Ekow, Wari, Aboh, Igara, Anambara, Nupe, and Benue. Each district was governed by a European District Agent, assisted by the company's European Senior Executive officers. The Senior Executive Officers were the deputies of the Agent-General and were responsible for carrying out the duties of the Agent-General when he was absent from the district. In practice, this meant that the District Agent was the supreme commercial officer in his district while the Senior Executive Officer was the top administrative official in the area.<sup>450</sup> Senior Executive Officers' salaries ranged from £240-£800 per annum.<sup>451</sup>

By 1890 the company's stations had taken on a uniform appearance. The small stations usually consisted of a small house with a wooden frame supporting adobe walls. The roof was made of thatch and kept the house cool in the summer and dry in the rainy season. This was the station agent's house, manned by the Anglicized African in charge of the station. His dwelling was split into the front room used for dining and for conducting business. In the back were two bedrooms, one for the agent and one for visiting company dignitaries such as the district agent. The ground around the house would be cleared of vegetation and fenced off. Within the fence would be a few small buildings, usually a kitchen and an outhouse. The defining feature of all company stations was the warehouse. These were the same in all stations regardless of size. The warehouses were prefabricated in Britain and then assembled on site. Known as Moreton Sheds, they were composed of an iron frame with walls and a roof of corrugated iron. They were all a

---

<sup>450</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 102.

<sup>451</sup> Niger Government: Revenue and Expenditure Account, 1887, 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 252.

standard size of 60 by 30 feet. On his inspection of the stations, Major MacDonald estimated that a small station would cost around £200 to establish.<sup>452</sup> These stations were run by Anglicized Africans, such as Agent Lewis of the Bakundi station, who had emigrated from Sierra Leone to work for the company. The RNC agent at Ekow, whose name was not recorded, was another Sierra Leonean. He lived in the trading station with his wife, where they also raised chickens and pigeons to supplement their income. They were both Christians, and their neighbours frequented their house, coming to hear them play hymns on their harmonium. These gatherings took place in a sitting room whose walls were decorated with portraits of the British royal family.<sup>453</sup> The station agents were well paid, earning around two shillings sixpence a day. However, this may have varied between stations as the RNC always presented wages paid to its station agents as a lump sum that grouped the total salaries of all station agents. However, it published a detailed pay chart for jobs held by Europeans.<sup>454</sup>

The agents running the small stations were assisted by a few "Krooboyes" and local labourers who loaded and unloaded trading canoes and company vessels stopping to trade at the stations, took care of daily maintenance, and acted as the local security force of the RNC.<sup>455</sup> The "Krooboyes" or "Krumen," also sometimes called "Elminamen" in company records, had been recruited from the coastal regions of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast since the 17th century.<sup>456</sup> Their nicknames derive from the fact that they were originally recruited from the

---

<sup>452</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 49-51.

<sup>453</sup> Augustus Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa* (London: George Phillip & Son, 1892), 12.

<sup>454</sup> Niger Government: Revenue and Expenditure Account, 252.

<sup>455</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 51, 58.

<sup>456</sup> Rosalinde G. Wilcox, "Commercial Transactions and Cultural Interactions from the Delta to Douala and Beyond," *African Arts* 35, no. 1 (2002): 53.

towns of Settra Kru, Nana Kru, Little Kru, Krobab, and King William's Town.<sup>457</sup> They were the foundation of the RNC's labour force in their steamship fleet and trading stations, and their wages were usually half a shilling a day in Britain's West African Colonies. It was considered safer to recruit “Krumen” than locals as the “Krumen” hailed from coastal communities far from the Niger Delta and therefore had no loyalties to any indigenous polity on the Lower Niger. The British also seem to have considered the “Krumen” “good natured, hard-working, but anything but a warlike people.”<sup>458</sup> In the British mind, they made for a stable labour force that was unlikely to rebel against the company. This also explains why they were chosen for the local security forces of the stations, such as the one which would take part in the massacre of the rubber gatherers under the command of William Wallace.

It was necessary for the company to recruit local people for certain jobs. The most important of these was the role of the navigator on company vessels. Navigators needed to have intimate knowledge of the river to guide the heavy steam vessels through the deepest part of the river. When Seymour Vandeleur travelled up the river as a Constabulary officer, he noted that the pilot of the company's ship was an old African who was an expert on navigating the upper sections of the river and had been in company service for several years.<sup>459</sup> “Krumen” wages were mainly paid in gin at least until 1890 when George Goldie told government agents that the company was attempting to pay the “Krumen” in other trade goods such as salt, tobacco, and cloth. However, he admitted that so far, these measures had proven unpopular among the

---

<sup>457</sup> Jane Martin, “Krumen ‘Down the Coast’: Liberian Migrants on the West African Coast in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18, no. 3 (1985): 402.

<sup>458</sup> Correspondence from Acting Consul George F. Annesley to Lord Salisbury, 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1890, FO 403/149, National Archives, London, 141.

<sup>459</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging on the Upper Nile and Niger* (London: Methuen & Co, 1898), 231–32.



"Krumen." This was because gin bottles were usable as a transaction currency in many regions of West Africa and were always in demand.<sup>460</sup>

The RNC's bigger stations were identifiable by the larger dwelling houses constructed for the European employees of the company. These houses had wooden frames with either wood or Adobe walls and corrugated iron roofs. They were the residences of the British District Agents, Executive Officers, the Agent-General, the Commandant, and the Judicial Officer. The larger stations were at Akassa, Oguta, Abutshi, Utshi, Asaba, Lokojah, Egga, and Ibi. These often had a small barrack for stationed constabulary forces and an armory for company artillery. The warehouses were the same standard Moreton Sheds as at the small stations, but there would be three to five storehouses instead of one or two. These larger stations often formed the core of a local European community. At Utshi, the firms of T. Harrison & Company and Hatton and Cookson & Company had trading stations that were built within the RNC compound. At Abutshi, now known as Obosi, two Botanists from Kew Gardens had been hired by the RNC to establish a fifteen-acre experimental plantation of coffee and cocoa to determine if these plants could be grown commercially in the regions above the Niger Delta.<sup>461</sup>

Another defining feature of the larger stations was the presence of workshops for coopering and engineering work. Palm oil was brought to the company's stations by African-owned canoes in locally made casks. However, these were not suitable for the long voyage back to Britain, so the company employed coopers in each of its large stations whose job it was to make barrels. The coopers were usually Anglicized Africans from Sierra Leone, Accra, and Lagos. Like the carpenters responsible for erecting the company's buildings, they had studied

---

<sup>460</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa*, 232.

<sup>461</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 52.

their trade in the mission schools of the CMS.<sup>462</sup> They made the large barrels used to ship oil and kernels down to Akassa by steamer and from there to Britain by steamship. The company's engineers were responsible for the maintenance of its fleets of ships. The largest engineering workshop was at Akassa. Built on the model of British workshops, it had a steam sawmill, bending equipment, and furnaces for brass and iron. These were the tools necessary to make boilers for the company's ships. These three engineers and one boilermaker, all Europeans, worked to keep the company's fleet afloat. As the company's fleet never left the river, all maintenance had to be done in company territory, which necessitated a significant investment in repair facilities.<sup>463</sup>

The stations sometimes witnessed scenes of violence between company officers and employees. In 1888 a violent dispute between the officers of the company and its employees took place at Lokoja. The situation, originally a contract dispute, escalated when William Wallace, a Senior Executive Officer, shot and killed Baccary Sanacoh, the foreman of a party of rubber gatherers hired by the RNC in Sierra Leone. The workers believed the company had violated the terms of their hiring contract, refused to work, and wanted to be returned to Freetown.<sup>464</sup>

When Wallace heard of trouble with an expedition of rubber gatherers in company territory, led by Joshua Zweifel, he asked that the party of striking workers, around 160 men, report to the company station at Lokoja for a meeting. When they arrived, Wallace was there with eight European employees of the RNC and several African employees. All were armed. Armed guards were then posted by the exits. Wallace began by ordering the strikers to return the

---

<sup>462</sup> Henry Proctor, "From H. Proctor, Brass (Tuwon), Niger," in *Extracts from the Annual Letters of the Missionaries for the Year 1895* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1896), 269.

<sup>463</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 49-50.

<sup>464</sup> Depositions taken before Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus of Freetown, 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 129-131.

tools and weapons they had received from the company. When the machetes and rifles had been collected, Zweifel, a German employee of the company and the man responsible for the expedition, pointed out Baccary Sanacoh and stated he was the “headman” responsible for the strike. Wallace then walked up to Sanacoh, put a revolver to his ear and fired, scattering his brains over the assembled men. Wallace’s security personnel then opened fire with their rifles killing six men and wounding around thirty.<sup>465</sup>

Sir James Marshall, (1829–1889) Chief Justice of the Niger Territories and the acting Supreme Judicial Officer, the head of the company’s justice system, came to Lokoja to hold an inquiry into what had happened. He concluded that Wallace had “interfered for the protection of the lives of the officers connected with the expedition.”<sup>466</sup> Relying solely on the testimony of Zweifel, who claimed the strikers had attacked the armed RNC employees, Marshall stated that the African witnesses had obviously given false evidence. Marshall ruled that the company employees had acted in self-defence and had been justified in their actions. He further found two survivors of the massacre, Bambolli and Fodey Cecey, guilty of “mutinous and insubordinate conduct” and ordered them to be imprisoned until they could be shipped back to Sierra Leone. The survivors were kept under guard for a week and then sent downriver with an armed escort and put on a ship bound for Sierra Leone.<sup>467</sup>

When the survivors of the rubber gathering expedition eventually made it home to Freetown, they reported the murder of Baccary Sanacoh and the six rubber gatherers to the British police. Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus handled the investigation. Testimonies were taken from James A. Mason, Sumanah Carpenter, Baccary Masseka, Bambolli, Amadu Camara,

---

<sup>465</sup> Depositions taken before Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus of Freetown, 129-131.

<sup>466</sup> Report of Sir J. Marshall, 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 132.

<sup>467</sup> Report of Sir J. Marshall, 132.

and Cecey, all inhabitants of Freetown who had been hired by Zweifel to gather rubber in RNC territory.<sup>468</sup> The Colonial Office did not agree with Marshall's interpretation of events. Henry Thurstan Holland (1825-1914), the Viscount Knutsford, asked that Zweifel and Wallace be indicted for murder. His argument was that British subjects from one colony could not be freely murdered in another colony. He suggested that Lord Salisbury, serving as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary at the time, work out a solution to enforce justice in such cases.<sup>469</sup> Goldie, however, disagreed. He pointed out the RNC was a sovereign power and operated an independent legal system. There had been a legal inquiry, and both Zweifel and Wallace were found not guilty. No other court had jurisdiction in company territory. He urged Knutsford to dismiss the testimonies of the African survivors as malicious slander spread by the ringleaders of the "mutiny." Wallace's conduct had been "justifiable and proper," and the company considered the matter closed.<sup>470</sup> It would seem that at this point, Marshall had changed his mind about the verdict he pronounced as Goldie cautioned that "The distinction cannot be too clearly drawn between the views of Sir James Marshall at the time of holding the inquiry and those put forward by him after his visit to Lagos on his way home."<sup>471</sup>

It seems clear from this incident that the RNC's legal system operated to protect corporate interests, not administer justice. There is nothing in the archival records to suggest that the African witnesses were lying. Yet their evidence was dismissed, and the judge accepted Zweifel's testimony as the truth. Later Marshall seems to have changed his mind about the affair as Goldie urged Knutsford to ignore all statements made by Marshall after leaving company

---

<sup>468</sup> Depositions taken before Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus of Freetown, 129-131.

<sup>469</sup> Correspondence from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 174-175.

<sup>470</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Knutsford, 19<sup>th</sup> of November 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 281-283.

<sup>471</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Lord Knutsford, 282.

service. Questions linger, why were the mutineers called into the walled compound of the company station if they were considered so dangerous? Why do all African witness testimonies agree that the violence began when Wallace shot Sanacoh in the head with a revolver? Might that suggest that the event was staged to break the strike? We shall never know exactly what happened, but clearly, Knutsford believed Sir Marshall's inquiry was a farce and wanted to prosecute Zweifel and Wallace. His efforts were hindered by the fact that the RNC was a sovereign power, and the murders were carried out in their jurisdiction. Goldie saw nothing wrong with the actions of his officers and refused to cooperate with the Colonial Office. This meant that neither Wallace nor Zweifel were ever punished for their crimes. This incident has so far been missing from the histories of the RNC but deserves to be included as it demonstrates the draconian measures the company was willing to employ to keep its African workforce in order. It is also an example of the consequences of allowing a private corporation to act as a sovereign power, putting its employees beyond the reach of the law.

Corporal punishment and the withholding of wages seem to have been the standard measures to maintain discipline on company stations and ships. So, while the violent response of William Wallace to the strike of the rubber gathers was the exception, further evidence of violent punishment can be found in the RNC's records. An example of this is the case of George S. Burgess, acting captain of the SS Nupe. He was convicted by the company court of having tortured and assaulted two of his "Krumen" in 1887. These "Krumen" were John Duncan of Cape Coast and Herifogah of Brass. The company's judicial court, in this case, was made up of two Senior Executive Officers of the company, C. W. McIntosh and Walter S. Rugg, and Station Agent W. M. Sargeant. They heard witness testimony and then found Burgess guilty but decided



*Figure 8: Sir William Wallace, Senior Executive Officer of the RNC and eventually its highest-ranking officer in Nigeria in the late 1890s. After the loss of the charter, he became Deputy High Commissioners of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (photo from The Graphic).*

*Figure 9: The SS Nupe in drydock at Akassa station sometime in the late 1880s. The man in the foreground appears to be a cooper while the man standing further away is probably one the RNC's engineers. To the right is the steam engine used to haul the ships into the drydock (photo from British Museum)*



his sentence should be decided by the Council of the Niger Company in London. The facts of the case were that Burgess's female companion was staying in his cabin on the ship, and Burgess suspected Duncan and Herifogah of having made advances toward her. He, therefore, chained them on deck for several days, where he repeatedly flogged them with a whip. However, Burgess was considered to have gone too far when he beat Duncan's and Herifogah's genitals with a cudgel before seizing the cloth they had been paid in wages and throwing it in the river. He then cut off their ears and had them put ashore.<sup>472</sup>

The ship's clerk, Frederick H. Trinity of Freetown exposed Burgess's conduct and reported him to District Agent Egbert Dangerfield. Dangerfield arrested Burgess and submitted the case to McIntosh. McIntosh ordered that the wages of Duncan and Herifogah be repaid. In the end, the Council of the Niger Company in London refused to pass sentence because the *S.S. Nupe* had not been a registered British vessel when Burgess committed his crimes. When Burgess assaulted the men, the *S.S. Nupe* was registered as a French vessel, having been previously owned by a French company. There was, therefore, some doubt over who had jurisdiction over Burgess when he committed his crimes.<sup>473</sup> After sitting five months in the RNC jail, where he contracted malarial fever, Burgess was sent back to Britain. Burgess's exile and trial contrast starkly with the whitewash of Sir Marshall's report on the murder of Sanacoh and the rubber gatherers. This suggests that the company frowned upon gratuitous use of violence toward its African employees for personal reasons. But it did not oppose the use of violence against its African employees when that violence was used to further its commercial interests, such as breaking a strike. The fact that the local Anglicized African Station Agent kept a whip in

---

<sup>472</sup> Proceedings of a Judicial Court held at Ibi, River Benue, Niger Territories, 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 226-227.

<sup>473</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1888, FO 403/76, National Archives, London, 2.

his quarters would also suggest that flogging was a common punishment for the company's African employees.<sup>474</sup>

The RNC's justice system was heavily criticized by the Anglicized Africans of the Lower Niger, especially in the way it treated its African employees and the indigenous population. The Lagos correspondent of *The Lagos Observer* condemned the company for its "prolonged course of downright, systematic villainy on the natives."<sup>475</sup> The editor of *The Lagos Observer* was highly critical of the company's justice system, saying, "the administration of justice on the Niger is a farce. If we analyze the composition of the 'disordered organization' of the company we see plainly that its judges for the most part consist of naval, military or business men, picked from every quarter of the globe, its courts located anywhere within its territories, its gallows made of palm oil sheds, casks, and spars."<sup>476</sup> This criticism seems fair given the ad hoc nature of Marshall's inquiry into the murder of the rubber gatherers in Lokoja. The composition of the court that found Burgess guilty of assaulting his employees, being made up of Senior Executive Officers and a Station Agent, further points to the disorder of the court system, as does the confusion surrounding who should decide Burgess's sentence.

While Akassa station was the RNC's commercial center on the Niger, its administrative heart was at Asaba. This was about ten kilometers up the river from Onitsha, which had hosted a company station until 1884, when the station was moved to Asaba. When MacDonald and Ferryman visited Onitsha, the company station was closed, and the company was blockading all river traffic to and from the town. This was the result of a violent confrontation between company employees and the local people. According to Ferryman, a "Kruman" of a company

---

<sup>474</sup> Memorandum by Sir J. Marshall, 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 154.

<sup>475</sup> "Keep Your Own Side of the Way: From Our Lagos Correspondent," *The Lagos Observer*, May 21, 1887.

<sup>476</sup> "A Patent Cause of Miscarriage in the Administration of Laws on the Niger," *The Lagos Observer*, May 21, 1887.



steamer and a local woman had an argument that spiraled out of control and caused a local militia to attack the steamboat injuring the company agent in charge when he attempted to prevent them from entering the vessel.<sup>477</sup>

By 1890 Asaba had become the administrative center of the RNC. It was the headquarters of the Royal Niger Constabulary and the residence of the Agent-General. Igbo people chiefly inhabited the town itself and, in 1888, comprised a population of around 8000.<sup>478</sup> Politically the area had a very decentralized government. To the British, it seemed that the town's governance was divided between about 500 minor chiefdoms. According to Mockler-Ferryman, these 500 chiefs elected a council of 50 chiefs to govern the city and surrounding area.<sup>479</sup> It was this council of 50 that had agreed to a *pro forma* treaty with the NAC in August 1884, ceding "the whole of our territory to the National African Company (Limited), and their administrators for ever."<sup>480</sup>

However, the British idea of 500 chiefs of the town seems to have been based on a misunderstanding of the local political system. According to Elizabeth Isichei, the Asaba Igbo polity was tied together by three overlapping systems of authority. The first was the authority of the Diopka. This was the oldest living member of an extended family. Their duties were to settle inter-family disputes and allocate family land. The second was the system of age groups for men and women. Each age grade had responsibility for specific functions in the town's running, such as defence, maintenance, and public health. At the age of 58-68, all males in the town served in the Oturaza, the council responsible for running the settlement. They elected the Onoi, Oloto,

---

<sup>477</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa*, 19.

<sup>478</sup> Report by Vice-Consul Johnston on the British Protectorate of the Oil Rivers (Niger Delta), 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 292.

<sup>479</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa*, 27.

<sup>480</sup> Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 459.

and Ayiwe. These were in order, the town's chairman, spokesman, and high priest. These were traditionally male, while the title of Omu, the person responsible for the regulation and operation of the town market, was usually held by a woman. The third was a system of individual titles which free males in the town could buy. The highest rank available for purchase was that of Eze. This was an expensive rank to buy because it required the ritual sacrifice of enslaved people to attain and could therefore only be afforded by wealthy individuals.<sup>481</sup>

By 1879 around 500 Eze were living in Asaba.<sup>482</sup> This would suggest that when the RNC stated that a group of 50 chiefs, out of the 500 living in Asaba, signed their treaty, they were talking about a delegation of 50 men of the Eze rank. Their peers probably nominated them to negotiate with the company, and they were authorized by the Oturaza to make deals with foreigners on behalf of the town. This would have been men like Obi Cidozie, Obi being his honorary title. He was probably an Eze of Asaba, although the English missionary Henry Huges Dobinson translated his title as King of Asaba.<sup>483</sup> However, missionary records also speak of the 500 kings of Asaba, so it would seem that while RNC employees referred to the Eze's as chiefs, the missionaries referred to them as kings.<sup>484</sup> Cidozie was interested in the work of the missionaries who taught him how to read in Igbo. He regularly attended service reading from the Igbo prayerbook of the CMS and wearing a sizeable red fez, apparently a popular garment among the Eze of Asaba. His sons were baptized and sent away to study with the missionaries.<sup>485</sup>

---

<sup>481</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, "Historical Change in an Ibo Polity: Asaba to 1885," *The Journal of African History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 423–24.

<sup>482</sup> Isichei, 424.

<sup>483</sup> Henry Huges Dobinson, "Notes of a Second Journey Into Ibo Land," *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* April (1892): 276.

<sup>484</sup> Henry Johnson, "The Missions on the Upper Niger: Report of Stations in the Archdeaconry of the Upper Niger," *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* September (1882): 547.

<sup>485</sup> Dobinson, "Notes of a Second Journey Into Ibo Land," 281.

In 1887, due to its central location in company territory, Asaba was chosen as the RNC's administrative center. It stood on 40 acres of cleared land and served as the headquarters and barracks of the RNC's Constabulary.<sup>486</sup> In this military compound was the house of the Commandant and that of the Supreme Judicial Officer. Their 68 by 52 feet timber frames had been imported from England, but their adobe walls and thatched roofs were made of local materials. The two other European officers and the gunnery officer shared a house and mess hall. There was also a tiny jail and a hospital run by the Constabulary's medical officer. Smaller buildings included guardhouses, magazines, storehouses, kitchens, and latrines. Unmarried soldiers slept in three Moreton Sheds converted into barracks, although new barrack houses were constructed in 1889. The married soldiers, when off duty, slept in Soldier Town, a small village next to the military compound. This was a collection of 300 houses made in the local style. Each married soldier and their family had a home to themselves. Soldier town was split into two. On one side were the houses of the Islamic Hausas, and on the other, the houses of the Elminas and Yorubas who followed either Christianity or traditional African religions. MacDonald was struck by the cleanliness and orderliness of both Asaba Station and Soldier Town and the success of the neighbouring experimental coffee and cocoa plantation.<sup>487</sup>

One final type of company station must be mentioned. These were the semi-permanent trading and custom hulks moored on the river. A hulk is a ship without the means of propulsion or steering. It must therefore be towed to its permanent location by another vessel. In 1890 the company operated the hulks, Massaba (also known as King Massaba), Emily Waters, White Rose, Africa, and Nigretia. They were used as portable trading stations and were considered

---

<sup>486</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 246.

<sup>487</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 54-55.

preferable to riverbank stations in territories the company considered dangerous or in places where company authority was not legally established. For example, one hulk was moored at Garoua in the Cameroons, which was technically German territory, although the RNC was the only European firm trading in the area.<sup>488</sup> *SS Massaba* was the only hulk not used as a portable trading station. Instead, it was used as a mobile guard post for the Constabulary and, in 1890, was stationed at Ekole as a "customs hulk." Its designation as a "customs hulk" was a misnomer as it was not used as a customs station. Instead, it kept Nembe merchants from entering RNC territory without first stopping at Akassa to clear customs for company territory.<sup>489</sup>

## The Imports and Exports of the Lower Niger

Now that we have discussed the facilities and employees of the company, a closer look at the state of the company's commercial operations at the height of its power in the 1890s is required. This will provide an insight into how Africans viewed and interacted with the company since many of the RNC's trading practices were controversial. It also demonstrates how the company was trying to move away from the complete dependence on the palm oil trade. Alcohol was a key but controversial part of all commercial transactions in the Lower Niger during the company's reign. The RNC never released detailed customs records for its territory. Still, the neighbouring British Niger Coast Protectorate, nestled between the RNC-controlled Niger Delta and the German Cameroons, kept a public custom revenue register. In 1894-1895 the total revenue collected on Dutch Gin or Jenever in the protectorate was £61,417. This accounted for 52% of total import customs revenue. Given that the duty on spirits was 1 shilling per gallon, we

---

<sup>488</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on the Benue Treaties, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 14.

<sup>489</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Revenue and Customs, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 82.

can estimate that around 1.2 million gallons of Dutch Gin were imported to the protectorate during this period. When the figures for rum, whiskey, beer, and wine are added, alcohol accounted for 78% of import revenue. Secondary imports were firearms, gunpowder, lead to make musket ammunition, salt, and tobacco.<sup>490</sup> West of company territory in Lagos, Gin was also the primary imported good. The manifest of the *SS Abassa* in 1882 states that it unloaded 7500 cases of gin, 5250 demijohns of rum, 200 kegs of gunpowder, and 200 bags of salt at Lagos. Therefore, it seems safe to say that there was a great demand for imported Gin in the protectorates west and east of company territory.<sup>491</sup>

The liquor trade in Western Africa was hotly debated in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The image of British merchants importing liquor in Africa to trade for Palm Oil was hardly congruent with the ideology of "the civilizing mission." The CMS and the Aborigines Protection Society were critical of the alcohol trade, viewing it as the imperial metropole infecting the periphery with the worst of its vices.<sup>492</sup> Herbert Tugwell (1854-1936), the British-born bishop of Lagos, argued in 1894 that the African people "previous to the protectorate had no craving for drink and were sober and industrious, but who soon became inebriates after their country were declared protectorates."<sup>493</sup> The Anglicized African community in Lagos was split in its opinion. The journalists of *The Lagos Observer*, one of the leading newspapers of English-speaking Africans in Lagos, sided with the CMS in the debate. In 1887 its editors wrote, "we feel confident there are many in this community who are decidedly opposed to the liquor traffic, we would respectfully urge upon them the desirability of co-operating with

---

<sup>490</sup> Niger Coast Protectorate: Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure, 1896-1897, 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1896, FO 403/233, National Archives, London, 140.

<sup>491</sup> "News Items," *The Lagos Observer*, May 18, 1882, 4.

<sup>492</sup> Heap, "A Bottle of Gin Is Dangled before the Nose of the Natives": The Economic Uses of Imported Liquor in Southern Nigeria, 1860-1920," 70.

<sup>493</sup> "The Drink Traffic," *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 7, 1894, 3.

the forces at work in England so that by united effort this abominable traffick will be repressed."<sup>494</sup> Their competitors at *The Lagos Weekly Record* did not take part in this moral crusade. Although it reported on the activities of the prohibitionists, it also published letters to the editor ridiculing Tugwell's rhetoric. One correspondent challenged Tugwell to identify the previously sober region where all people had become inebriated. He could not recall any such place existing in the British Protectorates of West Africa.<sup>495</sup>

*The Lagos Weekly Record's* opposition to the CMS's prohibition campaign can probably be traced to its editor, John Payne Jackson (1848-1915). He was the son of Thomas John Jackson, an African-American who emigrated from the United States to Liberia to work as a methodist preacher. John P. Jackson was educated at a missionary school and then moved from Liberia to Lagos to work in the palm oil trade. His business failed allegedly due to Jackson's heavy drinking. He then worked briefly for Richard Beale Blaize (1845-1904), an Anglicized African of Yoruban origins who, after being educated in a missionary school, had become one of the wealthiest merchants of Lagos. In 1890 Jackson convinced Blaize to fund a new newspaper in Lagos to replace the defunct *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser* and compete with the pro-missionary *Lagos Observer*. The result of their cooperation was *The Lagos Weekly Record* which was first published in May 1890.<sup>496</sup> It soon became a counterpoint to *The Lagos Observer*. Jackson was openly hostile to the CMS and its mission in his editorials stating that in Africa, "Christianity has so far produced but money grubbers, closefisted groveling, sneaking men, and usurers."<sup>497</sup>

---

<sup>494</sup> "We Have Much Pleasure," *The Lagos Observer*, May 7, 1887, 3.

<sup>495</sup> Oto, "The Drink Traffic," *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 7, 1894, 3.

<sup>496</sup> Fred I. A. Omu, "Journalism and the Rise of Nigerian Nationalism: John Payne Jackson, 1848-1915," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7, no. 3 (1974): 521–23.

<sup>497</sup> "Our Islamic Prospects," *Lagos Weekly Record*, August 26, 1893, 2.

Even MacDonald's party was split on the effects of the alcohol trade in Africa. MacDonald was no supporter of the business, saying he opposed making gin more accessible to the African buyer.<sup>498</sup> But in his official report, he stated that he saw no evidence of any moral decay or social crisis and "saw but a little drunkenness" in the Oil Rivers region which he estimated to import around one and a half million gallons of spirits annually.<sup>499</sup> His assistant Captain Ferryman did not share this view in his popular account of the expedition, which was published in London. He described the inhabitants of the Niger Delta as living in a "state of utter degradation... doubtless their miserable physique and their low moral conditions is the result of the enormous consumption of vile spirits which have been forced upon them from time immemorial by the trader".<sup>500</sup> There are no corresponding descriptions in MacDonald's official reports, so we might hypothesize that Ferrymen was pandering to the prejudices of his readers in the metropole rather than accurately describing conditions on the periphery.

The custom and record documents of the British protectorates indicate that alcohol, especially Dutch Gin, was a popular trade item in the Lower Niger. We know that both the British and Anglicized African public was split in their attitude toward the Gin trade. But this opposition does not seem to have diminished the scale or success of the liquor trade. The Netherlands was a large-scale exporter of Gin in the late nineteenth century, especially the Juniper flavoured Gin known as Jenever. Bottles of Dutch Gin from the late nineteenth century are common archaeological finds in places as far distant as Höfn, Iceland,<sup>501</sup> and New Calabar, Nigeria.<sup>502</sup>

---

<sup>498</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Revenue and Customs, 84.

<sup>499</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Revenue and Customs, 84.

<sup>500</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa*, 6.

<sup>501</sup> "Brúsi," Sarpur, 2017, <https://www.sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=1856953>.

<sup>502</sup> "Gin Bottle," Royal Museum Greenwich, 2021, <https://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/2816.html>.

What distinguishes the gin trade in Lower Nigeria from the gin trade in places like Iceland was the popularity of Gin as a transactional currency. Before the introduction of standardized currency in the Lower Niger, Gin served as a popular and widespread currency. As mentioned earlier, the RNC had a pay chart for its European employees and not for its African employees. This was probably because only its European employees were paid in British currency. There was no standard currency in the politically and ethnically fragmented Lower Niger, and trade was therefore based on barter. Brass rods, manillas, and cowries were widely used but far from universal. Full bottles of alcohol were used in the palm oil trade. Known as "Gin Currency," it was used in personal transactions and could even be used to pay government fines in the Niger Coast Protectorate until the early twentieth century. The British trading companies paid their African employees in trade goods, usually a mix of dry goods and gin, which could be used as currency in the trading harbours of the RNC and neighbouring local markets where most of the company's employees spent their wages.<sup>503</sup>

Despite its active participation in the liquor trade, the RNC made great efforts to minimize its role in importing alcohol. This was done in an attempt to drum up support for the company both in Britain and Africa from the missionaries who were the most vocal critics of the liquor trade. In 1890 the company banned all sale of spirits in its territory north of the 7<sup>th</sup> northern parallel. This limited alcohol sales to the Niger Delta region of RNC territory. This was, of course, the biggest liquor market in company territory. There was little demand for spirits in the Islamic Hausa and Fulani territories which made up the northern sphere of company territory.<sup>504</sup> When MacDonald inspected the company's stations in 1890, the officials he

---

<sup>503</sup> Heap, "A Bottle of Gin Is Dangled before the Nose of the Natives": The Economic Uses of Imported Liquor in Southern Nigeria, 1860-1920," 77-78.

<sup>504</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1890, FO 84/2089, National Archives, London, 166.



interviewed were at pains to explain how the RNC's efforts had successfully reduced the alcohol trade in the Upper Niger. Although MacDonald saw cases of Gin in every company station in the Lower Niger, the station agents assured him that the liquor trade of the company was negligible as its high prices put Gin out of the reach of regular buyers.<sup>505</sup> The regulation also served a more sinister purpose. It prohibited the competitors of the company from buying palm oil north of the 7<sup>th</sup> parallel as palm oil was usually paid for with Gin. While other merchants risked a fine of £100 and a month of imprisonment, agents of the RNC could invoke article F of the regulation and claim that all alcohol onboard their ships was for the consumption of "non-natives." Invoking the exception provided by article F required authorization from the Agent-General and was therefore entirely at the RNC's discretion.<sup>506</sup>

The German government certainly believed that the company was unfairly targeting the foreign merchants still operating in RNC territory. Emil Steurich of the German Colonial Service claimed that the RNC's talk of cutting down on the liquor trade was nonsense as he had proof that the company was annually buying 300.000 litres of Gin from a German distillery and probably more than that from Dutch distilleries. All this Gin was then being shipped to the Delta from where it made its way inland through the indigenous retail network.<sup>507</sup> Interestingly the Niger Delta retail was mainly handled by women. While the large, male-dominated firms focused on the wholesale import and export of goods, women dealt with almost all retail sales. In many Igbo polities of the Delta, female retailers organized societies to safeguard their interests. An example of such a society was the Otu Omu Society of Onitsha. This political and economic group was exclusively made up of women and was in charge of the marketplace and local trade.

---

<sup>505</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Revenue and Customs, 82.

<sup>506</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1890, 166-167.

<sup>507</sup> British Embassy Memorandum on a visit by Herr Steurich by Charles Sleath, 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1888, FO 84/1892, National Archives, London, 144-145.

The society mediated trade disputes and enforced pricing guidelines for all major goods traded in the town.<sup>508</sup> This was a similar arrangement to the local markets in neighbouring Asaba, which were regulated by an elected female official who held the title of Omu.<sup>509</sup>

Women also played an important part in the industries of the Niger. At Egga, which had a company station, the dye and cosmetic industry were mainly in the hands of women. Cloth was an important export of the town, and the town, therefore, supported a dying and weaving industry. While the men did the weaving, local women collected indigo to make blue dye and African sandalwood for red dye. Sandalwood was also ground down into a powder and mixed with clay to make rouge.<sup>510</sup> In the palm oil belt, palm oil was mainly processed from the fruit by women, who then sold the oil to traders on the river. Originally the buyers were African merchants, but as they were forced out of the river trade by the RNC, it is likely that company stations became collection points where women could bring palm oil and trade it for goods.<sup>511</sup>

It was not only large trading houses that kept the wheels of the economy running. Circulating these local markets were many independent African traders. These men moved from town to town, buying and selling goods. An example of this was Bengiman Theophilis Coker. Born in Lagos, he was educated in a CMS school and learned to read and write English as well as mathematics. After his education, he appears to have opened a shop in the Eriko market, Lagos, with his relative John F. Coker. It seems that Bengiman travelled the countryside buying goods while John kept the shop running in Lagos. After a trading trip to Cotonou went badly,

---

<sup>508</sup> Gloria Chuku, "Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800s-2005," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2009): 85.

<sup>509</sup> Isichei, "Historical Change in an Ibo Polity: Asaba to 1885," 424.

<sup>510</sup> Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, Who With the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society*, 174.

<sup>511</sup> Report by Vice-Consul Johnston on the British Protectorate of the Oil Rivers, 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1888, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 313.

Bengiman enlisted in the French Army. Bengiman quickly learned French and became a quartermaster's clerk. Sent with the French expedition to Boussa, he then left the French army after being assaulted by a French officer. His crime had been to advise the officer that their position at Boussa was untenable as both rations and pay were insufficient to maintain the force there. After his desertion, he reported to a West African Frontier Force (WAFF) outpost and offered to join the WAFF or else be allowed to go home to Lagos.<sup>512</sup>

While the main export from company territories remained palm oil, the company made some efforts to seek out or create new export products. Company expansion up the Niger and the Benue expanded RNC territory away from the oil belt. This created a need for new exports to support trading stations on the Upper Niger and Benue Rivers. The RNC's most successful effort in creating new exports was the Cocoa plantation at Abutshi. A native of Mexico, the Cocoa tree took well to West African soil. By the 1890s, it had become a popular cash crop among Yoruban farmers and was being exported to Europe.<sup>513</sup> The company also tried to establish a rubber industry in its territory; some of its employees, such as Captain Harper, who briefly commanded the Constabulary were former agents of King Leopold's company in the Belgian Congo. They, therefore, had some familiarity with the industry and Agent Zweifel was tasked with hiring professional rubber gatherers to get the new industry started.<sup>514</sup> However, there was not a sufficient concentration of rubber vines in company territory to support a profitable enterprise. Due to a lack of processing equipment, Nigerian rubber was of poor quality, and it contained too much water to be marketable in Europe. The supply of vines was also quickly exhausted. Little

---

<sup>512</sup> Precis of Statements made at Jebba by Deserters from the French, June 1898, CO 446/1, National Archives, London, 323-324.

<sup>513</sup> Sara S Berry, "The Concept of Innovation and the History of Cocoa Farming in Western Nigeria," *The Journal of African History* 15, no. 1 (1974): 84–85.

<sup>514</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1887, 92.

effort was made to cultivate new rubber vines. The violent suppression of the workers' strike by William Wallace robbed the company of the workforce necessary to maintain further development of the industry.<sup>515</sup>

A new export that was becoming increasingly more important in the 1890s was Shea Butter. The product is extracted from the seeds of the Shea Tree, which grows naturally in the regions north of the Niger Delta. Shea Butter processing has a long history as one of the major industries of the Middle Belt of modern Nigeria, and especially of Nupe. It was an essential domestic trade item as early as 1800 when British explorers first published descriptions of the industry.<sup>516</sup> Shea butter oil can be used as a luminant and cooking oil, but in European industry, it was mainly used as a base for soft soap and medicinal ointments.<sup>517</sup> The Shea Butter trade was important for the profitability of the company's trading stations on the Niger River above Lokoja and on the Benue River because the climate there was too dry to support palm oil production.<sup>518</sup> To consolidate its control of these new resources, the RNC taxed all exports of Shea Butter at the same rate as palm oil, one penny per gallon.<sup>519</sup>

On the Benue, especially the eastern RNC stations at Garua, Donga, Bakundi and Ibi, Ivory was still an important trade item. Hausa traders sold it in exchange for salt, which the Hausa then brought to Ilorin to trade. In 1888 the company bought 26 tons of Ivory, and in 1889 27 tons. The company offered a high price for Ivory, between £500-£600 a ton, to match the prices offered by German merchants in the Cameroons. Prior to the company's involvement,

---

<sup>515</sup> Edmund Dene Morel, *Affairs of West Africa* (London: William Heinemann, 1902), 122–23.

<sup>516</sup> “Account of the Butter, or Shea Tree,” *The Scots Magazine*, March 1, 1800, 175.

<sup>517</sup> Judith Carney and Marlène Elias, “Revealing Gendered Landscapes: Indigenous Female Knowledge and Agroforestry of African Shea,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 40, no. 2 (2006): 236.

<sup>518</sup> Correspondence from Major MacDonald to Lord Salisbury, 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1889, FO 403/122, National Archives, London, 239.

<sup>519</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Revenue and Customs, 82.

Ivory had been worth around £200 a ton in the Benue district, while the retail price in Europe remained around £1000-£1200 per ton in the 1890s.<sup>520</sup> Another new product the company encountered because of its expansion up the Benue was Gum Arabic. Gum Arabic is produced from the sap of the *Acacia Senegal*, which grows in the dry forests of Northern Nigeria.<sup>521</sup> It can be used as a water-soluble binder in food, paint, ink, and ceramic glaze. By 1890 the RNC stations on the Benue were buying around 187 tons of Gum Arabic a year for £30 per ton and selling it in Britain for £70 per ton.<sup>522</sup>

It is impossible to estimate how much of the company's revenue could be traced to each individual export. This was because the RNC refused to release any detailed accounts of its commercial and administrative operations. The British government made several requests for the company's accounts, but Goldie refused to provide anything more than a spreadsheet listing revenue from import duties, export duties, licenses, and miscellaneous. Expenditure was split into the categories of staff, steamers, stations, and miscellaneous. No effort was made to separate administrative and commercial expenditure, nor was any further documentation provided to show how the listed figures were calculated.<sup>523</sup> John Flint has made a convincing argument that Goldie's reluctance to give any details of the RNC's finances to the government was because the company's monopoly depended on the ability to collect customs duties on its competitors' trade. This was justified on the grounds that the RNC had a right to recoup its administrative costs in the region. Suppose the company had provided the exact figure of its administrative costs. In that case, the government might have limited its authority to collect customs as the figures would

---

<sup>520</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Trade, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 86-87

<sup>521</sup> E. O. Egbah, "The Nigerian Gum Arabic Industry : A Study in Rural Economic Development Under The Colonial Régime (1897-1940)," *Présence Africaine*, no. 108 (1978): 93.

<sup>522</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Notes on Trade, 87.

<sup>523</sup> Niger Government: Revenue and Expenditure Account, 1887, 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1888, FO 84/1925, National Archives, London, 178.

probably have demonstrated that the duties collected were far higher than administrative costs. No detailed accounts of the company's exact revenue from each of its imports and exports have survived in government records.<sup>524</sup>

## Relations with the Nembe Kingdom

When the British firms operating in the Niger Delta formed the RNC and received a charter for the territory in 1886, their main commercial rival in the region was not another European firm but rather the mercantile houses of the city-state known as Nembe. The Nembe merchants traded from the towns of Nembe and Brass (also known as Tuwon-Brass, after the mythical founder of the settlement Tuwon or Twon). The city-state of Nembe was composed of sixteen major towns and numerous small villages in the Niger Delta, centred on the capital of Nembe. Before the formation of the RNC, the merchants of Nembe and Brass, or Brassmen as they were colloquially known to the English, were the dominant trading and shipping power in the southeast Delta. The capital of the state, Nembe, was positioned on a tributary of the Niger and was split into two townships, Ogbolomabiri to the west and Bassambri (also known as Bassambiri) to the east. A small creek separated the townships, and Ogbolomabiri was usually considered the greater power in Nembe politics. More than thirty kilometers downriver, the town of Brass, situated on Brass Island (also known as Tuwon Island and Twon Island) in the estuary of the Niger, served as the kingdom's sea harbour.<sup>525</sup> Liverpool companies such as Thomas Harrison & Co maintained permanent outposts at Brass to trade with the Nembe merchants.<sup>526</sup>

---

<sup>524</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 112–14.

<sup>525</sup> John Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass" (London: Harrison and Sons, 1896), 4–5.

<sup>526</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Brass Complaints, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 33.

Before the granting of the RNC charter, the Nembe trade network stretched as far as Idah and was firmly established in Onitsha, on the east side of the Niger facing Asaba on the west side. From this position, their war and trade canoes dominated the shipping of palm oil from the oil-producing regions to the coast. The primary industries of the kingdom were commercial fishing and salt production through seawater evaporation.<sup>527</sup> The Nembe were part of the Ijaw ethnic group. Their language was similar enough to many of the Ijaw variants of the interior to allow for easy understanding, which facilitated trade. The Nembe's dependence on trade probably stemmed from the fact that agricultural lands around Nembe and Brass were of poor quality and could not sustain the cultivation of yams, a staple food in the area. The only locally produced food was fish and bananas, and some cassava, but meat and yams had to be imported from the fertile agricultural regions north of the Niger Delta.<sup>528</sup>

The trading companies of the Nembe Kingdom were split into Houses. Charles Alfred contends that among the Ijaw People, a House was a "federation of families." Each House was composed of many interconnected families and employees ruled over by a Head of the House. The highest rank a merchant House could achieve was that of War Canoe House. This title was granted to a house if it could, when called upon, furnish the Nembe kingdom with a war canoe.<sup>529</sup> This system of mercantile houses has been described as a Canoe House Corporation. According to Nimi Wariboko, the Canoe House Corporation system had a mercantile, social, and political purpose. The Houses had a hierarchy of apprentices, minor traders, managers, and wealthy traders, all answering to an elected chief. Advancement was by merit, and the

---

<sup>527</sup> Charles Alfred, *A Comprehensive History of Twon-Brass: From the Pre-Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Era To 2010* (Wukari: The Federal University, 2015), 13.

<sup>528</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 5.

<sup>529</sup> Alfred, *A Comprehensive History of Twon-Brass: From the Pre-Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Era To 2010*, 19–22.

chieftainship was open to all members of the house. A chief who mishandled his authority would swiftly find himself replaced by a more competent member of the House.<sup>530</sup>

Each House maintained a fleet of canoes. These were of many different types, from small canoes that could carry one or two people to larger canoes that could carry heavy cargoes and up to the large war canoes. Canoes were the primary mode of transportation on the rivers of West Africa until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The people of the Niger Delta were not seafarers, and their canoes were designed for conditions on the river and lagoon networks of the region. Their canoes, therefore, often had raised platforms for the storage of cargo and defence. The means of propulsion were rowing and punting, and large trading and war canoes consequently needed a large crew of rowers.<sup>531</sup>

The war canoes of the eastern Delta of the Niger tended to follow the same design. The rowers would sit on each side with their paddles. Above them was a canvas awning to provide shade, and at the helm, the personal flag of the House Chief would be displayed. The primary weapon of the canoe was the forward cannon, although some canoes mounted a cannon fore and aft. The guns were in fixed positions, and the rowers needed to manoeuvre the vessel to align the cannon with the target. For close ranges, most war canoes had riflemen and sometimes mounted small swivel guns amidships. Depending on the size, most war canoes needed between 20 and 32 paddlers and two helmsmen to operate the steering oars.<sup>532</sup>

Although the Nembe Kingdom was an Ijaw state where the most common language was the Nembe-Brass variant of Ijaw, many employees of the Houses were ethnically Igbo. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Houses regularly replenished their ranks by buying enslaved

---

<sup>530</sup> Wariboko, "A Theory of the Canoe House Corporation," 142–43.

<sup>531</sup> Robert Smith, "The Canoe in West African History," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 4 (1970): 517–18.

<sup>532</sup> Smith, 527.



people and "adopting" them into the House. The chief of the House became the new member's "father," his wife their "mother," and all members of the House their "kinsmen."<sup>533</sup> When John Kirk interviewed the representatives of Brass, Chiefs Warri, Karella, Nathaniel Hardstone, and Thomas Okea in 1896, they told him that the merchants of the Nembe Kingdom regularly purchased enslaved people in Igboland for around £10-£20 for each person. They also said to him that there was no limit to the social rank an enslaved person could reach in their society and that many of their headmen and chiefs were formerly enslaved people.<sup>534</sup> In this regard, the indigenous slave system of the Niger Delta somewhat resembles the slavery practised by the old Norse cultures like the one in Iceland. Enslaved Celtic people, captured in Viking raids on the British Isles, were frequently "adopted" into the Germanic families of their captors after a period of service, becoming their social equals.<sup>535</sup>

The Kingdom of Nembe practised a coparcenary style of rulership. Both Ogbolomabiri and Bassambri had a right to name an amanyanabo or King. Both kings then had to share power over the kingdom, although when both parts of the capital supported a single candidate, the kingship of one township might go vacant for several years. When the RNC received its charter, the throne of Ogbolomabiri was empty. King Josiah Constantine Ockiya had died in 1879, and the rulers of the great canoe Houses had not been able to agree on a successor. The King's brother Luwe sought nomination to the kingship. However, he was an opponent of the Christian chiefs and was supported by the traditional religious faction in Nembe politics. Therefore, the Christian chiefs refused to endorse Luwe and Ockiya's junior King Ebifa (d. 1894) of Bassambiri

---

<sup>533</sup> Wariboko, "A Theory of the Canoe House Corporation," 143–44.

<sup>534</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 5.

<sup>535</sup> Bogi Melsteð, *Íslendinga Saga* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1903), 229.

exercised royal power and remained commander-in-chief, while most local governance remained in the hands of the Canoe Houses.<sup>536</sup>

By the 1890s, a growing religious and cultural divide had become a significant issue in Nembe politics. This is apparent when examining the five major houses that had come to dominate foreign trade in the Nembe Kingdom from their position in Brass. These were the houses of Spiff, Ishidi (now known as Shidi), Sambo, Kemmer, and Cameron (also known as Cameroun). Christian chiefs led the Houses of Spiff, Kemmer, and Sambo in the 1890s.<sup>537</sup> Before his death, King Ockiya had converted to Christianity and been baptized by Samuel Crowther. After his public conversion, many of his loyal chiefs followed suit. Samuel Sambo, the head of House Sambo, lived in a well-furnished European home in Brass with every modern convenience and a home chapel for his family members.<sup>538</sup>

Chief Thomas Adda Spiff (d. 1882) valued education and spoke fluent English.<sup>539</sup> He sent two of his adopted sons to study with the CMS missionaries at the Grammar School in Lagos. One of these, James Allen Spiff (d. 1930), replaced his foster-father as chief in 1882, while the other, D.C. Spiff, became a missionary and CMS interpreter. He would later become the schoolmaster of the CMS's Grammar School in Brass. Both spoke fluent English and had received a European education, making them prime examples of the new social class here referred to as Anglicized Africans. Chief Daddy Kemmer Oruwari, the head of House Kemmer, had been the last of the three to convert, breaking down his Juju houses and denouncing the traditional Nembe religion in 1875. Three houses embracing parts of British culture and religion

---

<sup>536</sup> Livingston Borobuebi Dambo, *Nembe: The Divided Kingdom* (Port Harcourt: Paragraphics, 2006), 142–43.

<sup>537</sup> Report of a Visit to the Niger Mission by Rev. J. B. Wood, 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1880, A3/1/1J, Church Missionary Society Archive, Birmingham, 5.

<sup>538</sup> Page, *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger*, 134–36.

<sup>539</sup> “The Editor’s Monthly Chat,” *The Church Missionary Juvenile Instructor* XI (1890): 94–95.

while the rest remained skeptical created a strain in the relationships between the large Canoe Houses.<sup>540</sup>

It was not until 1889 that the chiefs of the Nembe Kingdom could agree on a new candidate for the title of Amanyanabo of Ogbolomabiri. The candidate was William Frederick Koko (1853-1898). He was an ethnic Ijaw who had converted to Christianity and studied at a mission school. He had then worked as a schoolteacher at a mission school and was well-liked by the Christian chiefs Thomas Adda Spiff, Samuel Sambo, and Daddy Kemmer Oruwari, who recommended him for kingship.<sup>541</sup> Speaking English was an important asset for the new King as the relationship with Britain, and her merchants was the main foreign policy issue of the Nembe Kingdom from the 1870s to the 1890s. In 1876 the Nembe tried to solve the problem by force. Their armed forces established forts on the Lower Niger and attacked British ships trying to pass. This they did to protect their control over the palm oil trade in the Delta Region. By 1879 it had become clear that the UAC was becoming too powerful to be contained by force and the Nembe and their Liverpool allies began to seek a political solution to the monopolistic behaviour of Goldie and his associates.<sup>542</sup>

They became the principal backers in the political campaign against the company in Britain. The testimony of the Nembe and the Liverpool firms was the foundation of William F. Lawrence's failed parliamentary campaign against the RNC. In 1884 the Nembe Kingdom had signed a protectorate treaty with Consul Hewett. In 1893 it was then incorporated into the Niger Coast Protectorate. The protectorate was governed from Lagos by Claude MacDonald, now Sir

---

<sup>540</sup> G. O. M. Tasié, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta, 1864-1918* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 58–59.

<sup>541</sup> Tasié, 61–62.

<sup>542</sup> The Royal Niger Company: Concise History by the Deputy Governor (George Goldie), 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1887, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 144.

Claude MacDonald. This change had little effect on the Nembe Kingdom, and the British presence remained confined to a small consulate in Brass.<sup>543</sup> The language of the treaty between the British government and the Nembe government, much like the charter of the RNC, guaranteed free travel and commerce on the Niger. The Nembe Kingdom now demanded that Britain fulfil its promise of free trade for all. Of course, we can infer from their military blockade of the Lower Niger in 1876-1879 that the Nembe were about as interested in free commerce as the RNC. This was not a struggle between free trade and monopoly but rather a conflict between two monopolistic factions.<sup>544</sup>

That was certainly the view of the British Foreign Office. The requests of the Brass merchants for unhindered access to the Niger River fell on deaf ears. In 1891 King Koko allegedly hatched a bold scheme to get the attention of the British government. Knowing that the consulate at Brass was only defended by four men of the Protectorate Police Force, Koko planned to kidnap Captain MacDonald, the British vice-consul and hold him hostage until the British government met his demands.<sup>545</sup> However, King Ebifa was still commander of the armed forces of the Nembe kingdom. Ebifa was on good terms with the vice-consul, who described him as a "good-hearted drunkard." According to the account of Captain MacDonald, when Ebifa discovered the plot, he confronted his co-king and threatened open war between their two

---

<sup>543</sup> Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 154–55.

<sup>544</sup> <sup>544</sup> Correspondence from Messrs, Stuart and Douglas to Mr. W. F. Lawrence, 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 90-93.

<sup>545</sup> Some sources seem to have confused Captain MacDonald with Sir Claude MacDonald; however, they do not seem to have been the same person as Captain MacDonald was still titling himself as Captain in 1895 while Claude MacDonald had by then been knighted and was always referred to in official correspondence as Sir MacDonald. Had he chosen to identify himself by his old army rank he would have used the rank of Major not Captain. The conclusion that these were different individual seems corroborated by the Correspondence from Captain MacDonald (late Vice-Consul, Brass) to the Foreign Office, 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 48.

factions should Koko go on with his plan. Koko, not wanting to risk a civil war in the Nembe Kingdom, cancelled the kidnapping.<sup>546</sup>

During the first years of his reign, the new King and former Christian schoolteacher had had a personal conversion and renounced Christianity, which he now called "the white man's god," in favour of the traditional religion of Nembe, which centred on the national god Ogidiga. He ordered the rebuilding of many of the old juju houses. He restored the religious role of the King as high priest of Ogidiga to supplement his more secular authority as King. This decision seems to have been caused by personal conviction as it reduced his support among the Christian chiefs who had been his primary backers. While it may have cemented his support by the traditionalist faction, it probably weakened him politically as the King could only govern with the consent of his chiefs, and his power base was now eroding. The only thing now uniting the ruling class of the Nembe was their opposition to Britain.<sup>547</sup>

As opportunities for legal trade dwindled, the merchant houses of Brass turned increasingly to smuggling to support themselves. The only legal way for them to trade was to sail along the coast to Akassa instead of the usual direct route between Nembe and the rest of the Lower Niger, the Ekole Creek. At Akassa, the merchants had to declare their cargo, buy an annual trading license and liquor trading license for £150 and then sail up the Niger. Two things made legal trade an unfeasible option for the Nembe merchants. In the first place, the high entrance fee for each merchant made it impossible for them to offer competitive prices for palm oil in the Lower Niger. In the second place, the trading canoes of the Nembe Houses were ill-suited for ocean travel. This meant that to get to Akassa, they had to navigate the 12-hour voyage

---

<sup>546</sup> Correspondence from Captain MacDonald (late Vice-Consul, Brass) to the Foreign Office, 25th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 48

<sup>547</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 9.

from Brass to Akassa by the shallow Akassa Creek, a challenging undertaking for their vessels since the water levels of the creek were governed by the tide, making it very shallow at low tide.<sup>548</sup>

The Nembe chiefs admitted to John Kirk that they still used the Ekole Creek route for smuggling because of this. They bought tobacco and gin from Liverpool firms in Brass and traded for palm oil upriver, but they claimed to have not smuggled any guns into RNC territory.<sup>549</sup> However, the RNC was convinced that the Brass smugglers were responsible for the thriving trade in Snider–Enfield military rifles on the Lower Niger. These rifles were sold by independent British traders in the Niger Coast Protectorate and then smuggled into company territory.<sup>550</sup> Viewing this smuggling activity as a serious threat to its monopoly, the RNC moored its customs hulk *SS Massaba* at Ekole Creek. Ekole Creek connected the Brass River with the Nun River, allowing Brass traders to enter RNC territory. The *SS Massaba* was garrisoned by the Constabulary and acted as a floating fortress.<sup>551</sup> Any boat that did not pull up and declare its cargo was fired upon, and this resulted in several casualties among the boat crews of the Brass merchants.<sup>552</sup>

## The Akassa War Begins

Studies of the Akassa war have tended to focus on one perspective, either just that of Britain and the company like Flint or just on the Nembe side of the war, like Alagoa. I will incorporate both perspectives in my recounting of the war. Using archival materials this chapter will provide a more rounded and detailed account of the Akassa War than has previously been done.

---

<sup>548</sup> Kirk, 2.

<sup>549</sup> Kirk, 5.

<sup>550</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Agent-General or Senior Executive Officer, Niger Territories, 26th of November 1886, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 58

<sup>551</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Company's Fleet, 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1890, 45.

<sup>552</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 10–11.

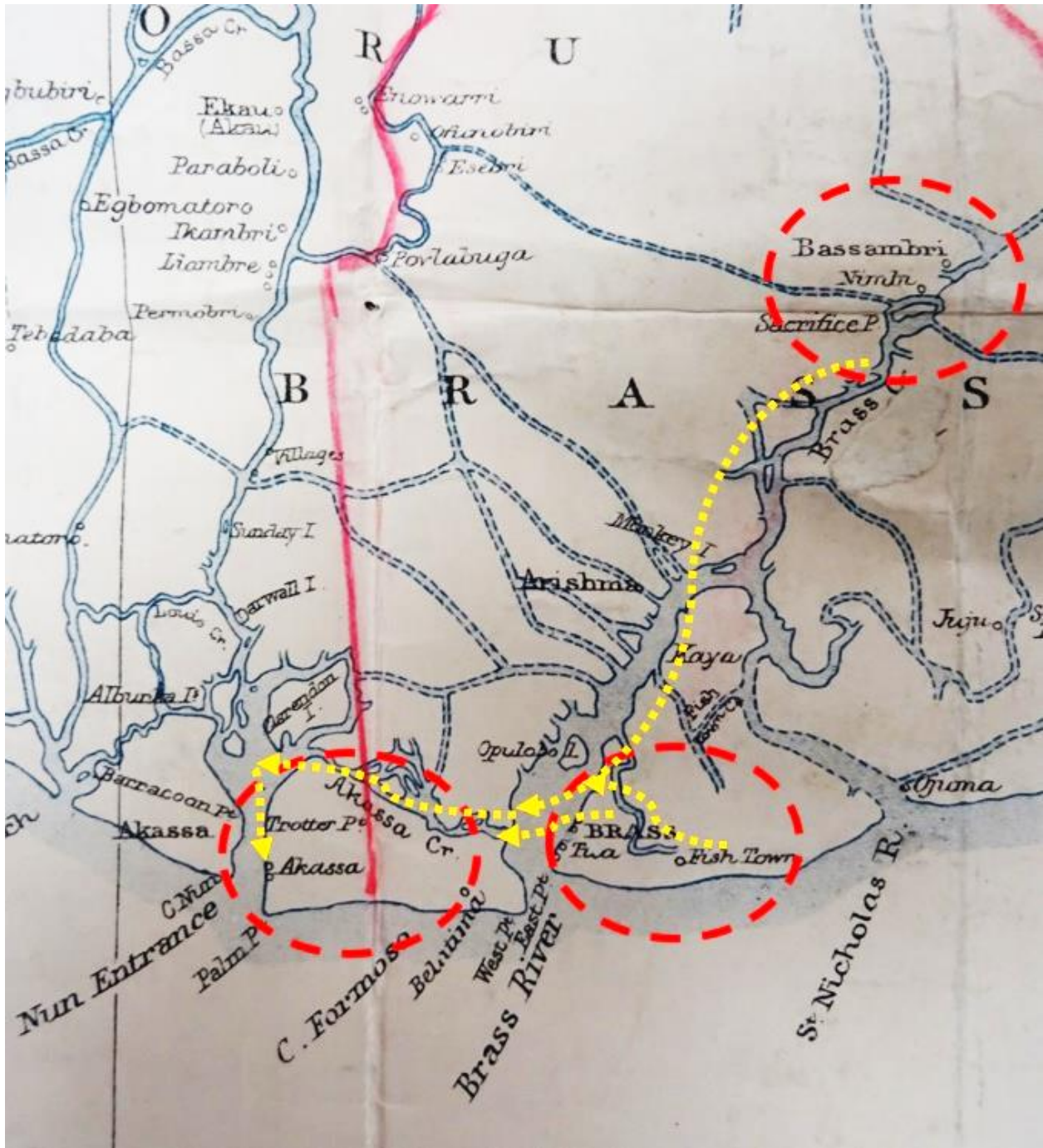


Figure 10: A map of the waterways connecting the Nembe State and RNC territory. Note the position of Nembe in the northeast, Brass and Fish Town (Okpoma) in the southeast and Akassa in the southwest. The yellow dotted line shows the approximate routes taken by the Nembe fleet when it attacked Akassa Station (graphics by author, map from FO 925/646).

This more rounded approach allows for a deeper understanding of the course and the long-term effects of the conflict. The main new contribution of this section is the discussion of the Nembe Kingdom's strategic position and what options King Koko had in the conduct of the war. With relations between the Nembe Kingdom and the RNC deteriorating and no political solution in sight, King Koko and the chiefs of Nembe began to consider a more drastic course of action. On a visit to them in 1894, MacDonald, the consul-general of the Niger Coast Protectorate, admitted that he could not change the RNC's monopolistic practices. A political solution, therefore, seemed impossible.<sup>553</sup> Matters were made worse by an outbreak of smallpox in 1894, which caused further suffering and strain on the Nembe economy, which was already in a downward spiral because of the trade recession.<sup>554</sup> In their correspondence with British officials, the Nembe chiefs maintained that the kingdom's people were suffering from widespread food shortages and that starvation was killing the Nembe people. However, when John Kirk inspected Brass after war broke out, he discovered that most households seemed to have plenty of fish as well as plantain and cassava. According to Kirk, the main effect the RNC blockade of Ekole Creek had on the Nembe diet was that yams, which had been a staple food of the Nembe and played an important part in their culture, were no longer available on the Brass market.<sup>555</sup>

The underlying political issue was probably the fact that the Nembe governmental system centred around the Great Canoe Houses. The state was a federation of these trading houses. The only way to maintain these houses was by trade, and if they could not be sustained, the political system of Nembe would have to be completely restructured. The heads of the Canoe Houses only had two options, wait for a political solution or go to war. If they chose to wait, they risked a

---

<sup>553</sup> Correspondence from King F. H. Koko to Sir C. MacDonald, 4th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 72.

<sup>554</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 9.

<sup>555</sup> Kirk, 19.



financial collapse of their houses which would cause a general collapse of the Nembe Kingdom's political system and administration. Or they could go to war with the RNC and hope they dealt a hard enough blow to the company to force it to allow them access to the Niger. If the RNC refused to budge, there was always the chance that open war in the Niger Delta would force the British government to reform the region's administration. Such reform might weaken the RNC's monopoly and allow the Nembe merchants to re-enter the Niger trade.<sup>556</sup>

The armed force of the Nembe Kingdom was mainly a river navy. The core of this force was the wooden war canoes of the Canoe Houses. The war canoes were accompanied by lighter canoes carrying infantry that could make landings on the riverbank if needed.<sup>557</sup> We can hypothesize that since the main route from Brass and Nembe to the Niger was by the Ekole Creek, the obvious move was to assemble the fleet and try to launch a surprise attack on the customs hulk there. Having overrun the Constabulary forces there, the Nembe fleet could have entered the Niger and attacked the trading stations on the river.

However, there were several problems with this plan. The first was the customs hulk blocking the Ekole Creek. The *SS Massaba* was an old ship, originally the property of Holland Jacques and Company, the firm that had brought Goldie to the Niger. It was a large ship with a raised stern and aft, making it a formidable fortress. It sheltered Ekowe Station, a trading post of the company run by S.R. Savage of Sierra Leone. The garrison of the *SS Massaba* was commanded by another Sierra Leonian whose name was not recorded. The Constabulary garrison was armed with new Martini-Henry rifles. In contrast, the Nembe troops were armed with the older Snider-Enfield rifles and various percussion cap rifles.<sup>558</sup> Unlike the war canoes,

---

<sup>556</sup> Wariboko, "A Theory of the Canoe House Corporation," 168–69.

<sup>557</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 22.

<sup>558</sup> Inquiry held by Sir John Kirk, 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1895, FO 403/216, National Archives, London, 154, 160 and Constabulary Report by Claude MacDonald, 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1895, FO 403/216, National Archives, London, 114.

the thick hull of the *SS Massaba* would reflect fire from light cannons and rifles, giving the defenders the advantage in a fight.<sup>559</sup> The garrison of the *SS Massaba* also had a machine gun which they had used on previous occasions to strafe the Nembe canoes successfully. It, therefore, seems inevitable that attacking the ship would have involved a bloody battle for which the Nembe armed forces were ill-suited due to their lack of heavy weapons.<sup>560</sup>

The second issue was that even if the *SS Massaba* was captured, the next logical target, the company's administrative headquarters at Asaba, was heavily fortified. If Asaba was taken, the RNC's administration would be dealt a severe blow. This might have inspired other polities on the Upper and Lower Niger to evict company personnel, forcing the company to abandon the river. But the river fleet of the Nembe was poorly suited to attack a fortified position like Asaba. The administrative centre was also guarded by the heavily armed steel-hulled steamers of the Constabulary, who would have quickly defeated the wooden war canoes of the Nembe.<sup>561</sup>

King Koko, therefore, decided to hit the vulnerable underbelly of the company at Akassa. This might seem like the obvious target, but we must keep in mind that the war canoes of the Nembe were not ocean-going vessels. The only way they could get to Akassa from Brass was by Akassa Creek. When the tide was low, this waterway could become too shallow for the heavy war canoes, and they would be unable to retreat. Because the Nembe did not possess an ocean-going fleet and the West African Squadron of the Royal Navy and the Niger Coast Protectorate Force at Lagos could be quickly called on to assist the company at Akassa, the company did not

---

<sup>559</sup> Drawing and description of the steam ship King Massaba by Samuel Crowther Jr, 1876, CA3/O14 Letters and Papers of Samuel Crowther Junior 1864, 1875-1876, Church Mission Society Archives, Birmingham.

<sup>560</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 5.

<sup>561</sup> General Remarks by Sir C. MacDonald, 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1895, FO 403/216, National Archives, London, 142.

keep a Constabulary garrison there. The only garrison at Akassa was a small uniformed civil police force of thirteen "Krooboys" under the command of the local station agent.<sup>562</sup>

Akassa was the only company station capable of handling the maintenance of the RNC's steamers. Its destruction would cause the company considerable financial damage and might reduce their fighting and trading capabilities on the river until it was repaired.<sup>563</sup> Holding Akassa and thereby blockading the RNC forces upriver from supplies and support was not an option. The Royal Navy would react quickly to an attack on Akassa, as would the heavily armed Constabulary. Therefore, the attack would have to be a swift raid, doing as much damage to the company's station in as short amount of time as possible. Because this was Koko's chosen tactic, the Nembe-Akassa War is sometimes referred to as the Akassa Raid. I have used the term Akassa War for the conflict between the Nembe Kingdom and the Royal Niger Company because it acknowledges the scope of the conflict and is the preferred term of African historians of the war.<sup>564</sup>

There was no standing national army for the King of Nembe to call upon. Instead, he had to visit the towns of his kingdom to meet with the heads of the local Canoe Houses. He would explain his plan of attack to them, and they would then decide whether to support his war effort or not. The chiefs of Okpoma, which the British called Fishtown, agreed readily to the King's plan, and King Obu and the chiefs Iti and Digiboerigha pledged their war canoes to the King's cause.<sup>565</sup>

When Koko came to Brass, the five chiefs of Houses Spiff, Ishidi, Sambo, Kemmer, and Cameron came to meet him. House Ishidi, Sambo, and Cameron agreed to lend the King all of

---

<sup>562</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 50.

<sup>563</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 49-50.

<sup>564</sup> Alfred, *A Comprehensive History of Twon-Brass: From the Pre-Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Era To 2010*, 22.

<sup>565</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 99.

their canoes and fighting men for the expedition. The new chief of House Spiff, James Allen Spiff, refused to participate in the venture. His reasons for doing so were probably twofold. He had close commercial ties with the British firms of the Liverpool merchants, who would not condone an attack on a British-controlled settlement. And, as a devout Christian, he was firmly opposed to the apostate king. Chief Daddy Kemmer Oruwari also refused to aid the King. He was also a Christian, and the main British compound in Brass containing trading stations and the consulate was built on land leased from him. This meant that he stood to lose financially if the British were forced out of the Niger trade. It seems that the religious divide in Nembe politics prevented King Koko from unifying the kingdom for his war with the RNC. All the chiefs who refused to join him were Christians who had formerly supported him when he was a Christian but now fiercely opposed him.<sup>566</sup>

Koko also tried to form an alliance of African polities to aid him in his struggle against the RNC. He sent messengers to New Calabar and Bonny to explain his situation and ask for their support. However, the councils of both towns decided to hand over his correspondence to Niger Coast Protectorate officials and did not send any aid to Nembe. The Ijaw people of the villages surrounding Akassa and the indigenous people of Akassa were more supportive. Koko's messengers brought gifts to the local towns and promised them a share of the plunder if they joined the Nembe in their attack.<sup>567</sup> It was a mixed fleet of 31 war canoes and numerous smaller vessels that assembled on the Brass River on the 28th of January 1895. There were undoubtedly more than 1000 fighting men assembled on those vessels. The King performed a religious rite at the main juju houses to invoke the protection of Ogidiga for the fleet. His principal wife then

---

<sup>566</sup> Alfred, *A Comprehensive History of Twon-Brass: From the Pre-Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Era To 2010*, 30, 45.

<sup>567</sup> Correspondence from Sir C. MacDonald to the Foreign Office, 25th of May 1895, FO 403/216, National Archives, London, 1-2.

showered him and the royal war canoe in brown chalk as water was sprinkled on the assembled fighters to bless them. The Nembe vessels then rendezvoused with the fleets from Brass and Okpoma before silently paddling past Brass, covered by thick fog. They entered the Akassa Creek at high tide and began the last section of their voyage, hoping to catch the company forces at Akassa off-guard.<sup>568</sup>

The assembly of the Nembe war fleet did not go unnoticed, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, an anonymous note in English was left for Vice-Consul Cuthbert E. Harrison of the Brass consulate. The message said, "Brass people leaving tomorrow at noon to destroy Niger Company's factories and lives at Akassa on Tuesday morning. Be sure you send at once to stop them."<sup>569</sup> Vice-consul Harrison had just recently arrived at Brass. He had four men of the Niger Coast Protectorate Force to guard the consulate and no interpreter. He had no way of gauging the threat's seriousness and therefore sent his "Krumen" on a small canoe to Akassa. On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>, after getting lost in one of the tributaries of the Akassa Creek, the messengers finally reached Akassa and handed the message to Agent-General Joseph Flint (d. 1925). Flint had replaced David McIntosh as Agent-General in 1888 after McIntosh's death. On the evening of Monday, 28 January, the "Krumen" returned to Brass with a reply from the Agent-General. Flint dismissed the anonymous message, writing, "These rumors are generally in evidence at this time of the year...but, for an armed force to leave Brass to attack an adjoining friendly government without your knowledge I can scarcely deem credible."<sup>570</sup>

---

<sup>568</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 98–99.

<sup>569</sup> Correspondence from Sir C. MacDonald to the Foreign Office, 4th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 66.

<sup>570</sup> Correspondence from Agent-General Joseph Flint to Vice-Consul Harrison, 28th of January 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 68.

Agent-General Flint was oddly complacent for a man who regularly heard rumours that his undefended naval headquarters might be attacked. There was no Constabulary garrison at Akassa, nor had any measures been taken to fortify the location. Unlike the RNC base at Asaba, there was no barbed wire fence surrounding the base and no blockhouses for riflemen to occupy should an attack occur. The only gun emplacement was a small naval gun mounted near the pier to protect ships in drydock from attack. This gun had a limited field of fire and would only be useful if enemy forces tried to attack the harbour area directly. Rear-Admiral Frederick Bedford (1838-1913), the commander of the West African Squadron of the Royal Navy, was astonished at the lack of preparation by the RNC, saying "the attack on Akassa was rendered possible by the almost criminal negligence of the officials of the company in allowing their principal repairing station...to be left without any kind of defence."<sup>571</sup> He further remarked that "This outbreak on the part of the Brass people had been threatening for a long time, and yet no precautions appear to have been taken."<sup>572</sup>

Goldie certainly never entertained the idea that Akassa might be attacked as he believed the Nembe could not muster an attacking force sufficient for the task. Joseph Flint seems to have shared his superior's view, and the staff at the Akassa Station was not informed of the possibility of an attack. Although Flint had a Gardner machine gun posted at an exposed location overlooking the river, no extra guards were posted. No service or inspection seems to have been done on the weapon before its placement on the riverbank, as it would jam immediately and play no role in the battle. Flint also ordered that one of the steam launches, the *SS Yakoba*, be kept ready with steam up. The rest of the launches, six or seven in total, remained laid up on shore as

---

<sup>571</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 128.

<sup>572</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 128.

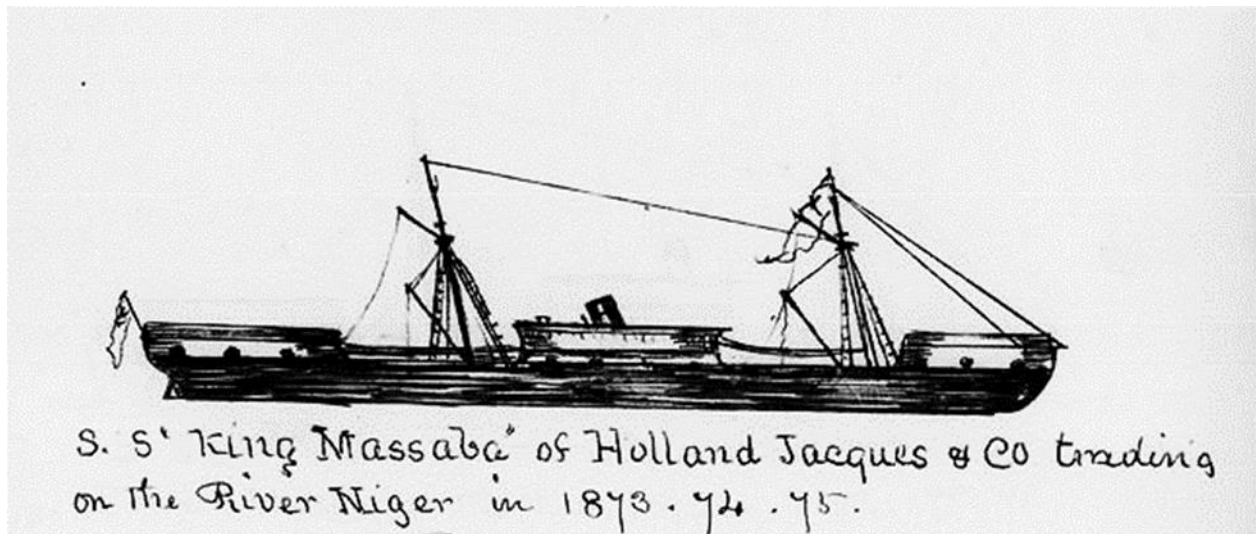


Figure 11: A drawing of the SS King Massaba, more commonly known as the SS Massaba by Samuel Crowther Jr. A typical screw propelled steamer used on the Niger in the late nineteenth century. It was originally operated by the Holland Jacques & Co. and eventually became a customs hulk of the Royal Niger Company (photo from CA3/O14).

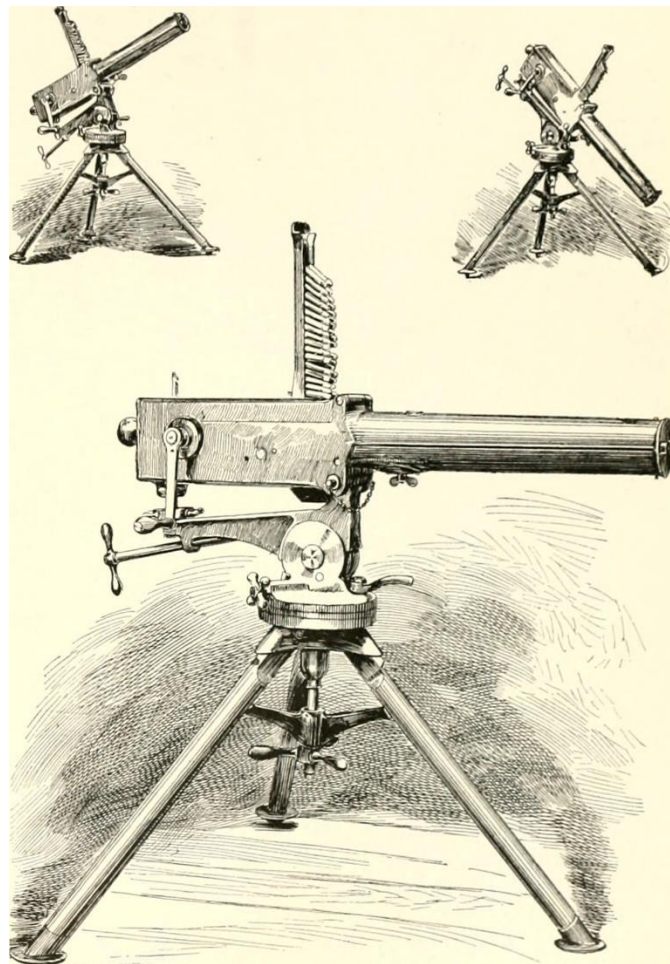


Figure 12: A double barrelled Gardner Gun on a land service carriage. This was the main rapid firing gun of the Constabulary until the mid-1890s when it was slowly phased out in favor of the more reliable Maxim gun. Note the inserted magazine for the .45 calibre ammunition on the top and the hand cranked firing handle (photo from Abraham Lincoln and the battles of the Civil War).

this was the dry season, and most of the boats were undergoing maintenance.<sup>573</sup> When the Nembe fleet reached the confluence of the Akassa Creek and Nun River, the estuary was still shrouded with a thick layer of fog. There were no sentries posted at the intersection despite it being the obvious route for an attack fleet from Nembe. The fleet, therefore, silently paddled south towards the station. The Nembe commanders had often visited the company compound and knew the layout well. Consequently, they decided to approach from a direction that the shell gun on the pier could not cover.<sup>574</sup>

By 4:30, the Nembe force was in position, and the attack was launched. The war canoes opened fire with their cannon as the men in the smaller boats went ashore to assault the compound. The cannon fire was loud enough to rouse vice-consul Harrison at the consulate in Brass, 22 kilometers away. Realizing that Akassa was being attacked, he immediately telegraphed the British admiralty to ask for assistance.<sup>575</sup> Almost everyone in Akassa station was still asleep when the firing broke out, and the Nembe attackers were inside the compound before any defence could be organized. The Gardner gun having jammed and attackers streaming into the station Flint and his companions ran to the pier and boarded the *Yakoba*. Having secured the only vessel with steam up, they sailed north towards Asaba, leaving their companions in the compound with no means of escape.<sup>576</sup>

Many African and European RNC employees were killed in their beds, and the engineers of the repair shop were cut off from the main station and killed in their sleeping quarters a few hundred meters away from the main camp. The confused survivors converged on the main

---

<sup>573</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 6th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 30-31.

<sup>574</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 23.

<sup>575</sup> Correspondence from Vice-Consul Harrison to Sir. C. MacDonald, 5th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 68-69.

<sup>576</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 23.



building where Captain Morgan and Captain Hughes of the Constabulary and two visiting French naval officers were sleeping. The Frenchmen were from the gunboat *Ardent* and had been left ashore, perhaps to recover from illness. They were joined by Russel, a company employee and about 50 Africans, the company's employees and their families. These survivors barricaded themselves on the upper floor of the main building in the centre of the factory. Because they only had a few sidearms to defend themselves, they had no means of protecting their position from a heavy attack. Luckily for them, the attacking Nembe were more focused on looting the Moreton storehouses and destroying the workshops than killing and capturing this last group of defenders.<sup>577</sup>

By 6:00, the main battle was over. 24 RNC employees had been killed, seven wounded, and around 70 taken prisoner.<sup>578</sup> The Nembe lost only four men killed and a few lightly wounded. The people of the neighbouring Ijaw villages, many of whom had their own grievances against the RNC's monopolistic trading practices and rough and ready justice system, saw that Akassa had been overrun and paddled their own canoes over to take part in the looting.<sup>579</sup> There is some debate over how much the local Ijaws participated in the attack. The company claimed that they had joined Koko's anti-RNC alliance. This claim was supported by the fact that King Koko had sent messengers to Bonny and New Calabar to seek their support against the RNC. Three days after the attack on Akassa, Koko's messengers also came to Ekowe with gifts and asked the local chief to assemble a force to destroy the local company station.<sup>580</sup>

---

<sup>577</sup> “The Recent Fighting on the Niger,” *The Times*, March 12, 1895, 10.

<sup>578</sup> Correspondence from William Wallace to Sir. John Kirk, 13th of June 1895, FO 403/216, National Archives, London, 166-167.

<sup>579</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 100.

<sup>580</sup> Kirk, “Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass,” 17.

Ebiegberi Alagoa has argued that these accusations were false and that the local people's contribution to the fight was only some opportunistic looting after the Nembe fleet overran Akassa.<sup>581</sup> However, Alagoa's statements that there was no pre-attack planning between the Ijaw in RNC territory and the Nembe are undermined because several of the villages that were later burnt down by RNC forces in retaliation for the attack on Akassa are some distance away from Akassa. It would have taken the people of these villages, such as Tombia, a long time to reach Akassa. If they were present for the attack, they must have been forewarned that it would take place. Of course, it is just as likely that Tombia's only crime was to be in possession of items looted from Akassa that they could have purchased from people present during the attack. Being in possession of loot, they might then have become targets of an RNC reeling from its defeat at Akassa and lashing out against any perceived perpetrators.<sup>582</sup>

Just before 7:00, the steamer *SS Bathurst* of the Elder Dempster & Company entered the Nun Estuary. The sun was coming up, but the estuary was still covered with heavy fog. The ship's lookout spotted several barrels and crates floating down the river and notified Captain Norman. Fearing that something was wrong, the captain ordered the vessel's signal gun to be fired as he neared Akassa. When the Nembe forces saw the grey ship come out of the fog firing a gun, they feared it might be a ship of the Royal Navy. King Koko had given strict orders that no British vessels or personnel should be attacked except those belonging to the RNC. This he probably did, hoping he might be able to strike at the company without provoking a full-scale war with the British Empire.<sup>583</sup> Therefore, the Nembe forces withdrew to their vessels and paddled onto the middle of the river to gain some distance from the *Bathurst*. Captain Norman

---

<sup>581</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 103.

<sup>582</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 17.

<sup>583</sup> Correspondence from King F. H. Koko to Sir C. MacDonald, 4th of February 1895, 72.

now brought his ship to a halt directly opposite the RNC pier and blew his steam whistle. The survivors in the main building now came running towards the riverbank, waving their handkerchiefs and shouting. All three launches of the *Bathurst* were now launched, and the survivors, which Captain Norman estimated to be at least 50, including five white men, were brought on board without casualties, although the Nembe opened fire on the boats when the survivors were being ferried to the *Bathurst*.<sup>584</sup>

The Nembe then went back to shore to finish the destruction of the station. The fleet of heavily laden canoes returning from the attack was spotted at Brass at around 18:00. The last of the heavy war canoes came out of Akassa Creek at around 19:15, signalling the return of the whole fleet.<sup>585</sup> The attack on Akassa had been a significant victory for the Nembe. They had achieved their objective of dealing a heavy blow to the company without suffering significant losses. The only prize that had escaped their grasp was failing to capture the highest-ranking RNC employee on the Niger, Joseph Flint, who had escaped. They had destroyed the only steamship maintenance facility on the river and seized a machine gun, rifles, ammunition, trade goods, and £2000 in currency. They had also captured or destroyed almost all the company's paperwork, a significant loss to any corporation.<sup>586</sup>

The fleet was slow in making its way back to Nembe and did not reach the town until the morning of 30 January. There they were observed by Father Buhendorfe, a missionary staying at Chief Warri's house. Christopher Warri was the foremost Christian chief of Nembe, but unlike Spiff and Kemmer, he had joined the king's war effort against the RNC. Once the fleet returned to Nembe, King Koko demanded that all prisoners be brought to Sacrifice Island. He reasoned

---

<sup>584</sup> “The Recent Fighting on the Niger,” 10.

<sup>585</sup> Correspondence from Vice-Consul Harrison to Sir. C. MacDonald, 5th of February 1895, 69.

<sup>586</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 100.

that as the national god Ogidiga had delivered a great victory, the prisoners must be sacrificed to him and then ritually eaten by the warriors. This demand outraged several chiefs, the most senior of which was Warri. Warri personally stated he was against the murder of unarmed prisoners and that if kept alive, the prisoners might prove useful later. He probably understood that the prisoners might be helpful as bargaining chips in the upcoming negotiations with the British government and that their murder would harm the Nembe cause. Another chief, Nathaniel Hardstone, fortified himself in his house and refused to participate in any of the slaughter.<sup>587</sup>

Ebiegeri Alagoa has estimated that the murder of the prisoners resulted in eight Houses splitting from the king's cause. The decision to ritually sacrifice the prisoners could therefore be considered a political blunder by Koko. Although it appeased his supporters in the traditionalist faction, it further fragmented the national alliance he had tried to assemble for the war.<sup>588</sup> There was now an unbridgeable gap between the Christian faction and the traditionalist faction, and Warri and Hardstone would later state that their disagreements with the king were so severe that the Nembe state was on the verge of civil war. We should also keep in mind that each House contributed at least 30 soldiers to the army, enough to crew a war canoe. This means that the defection of eight chiefs meant that at least 240 soldiers left the national army because of this dispute. Eventually, 25 of the prisoners were spirited away by Warri's party and smuggled back to the British consulate at Brass. The rest were ritually executed, and parts of their bodies were consumed by Koko and his supporters.<sup>589</sup>

---

<sup>587</sup> Statement of the Rev. Father Buhendorfe, 4th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 70-71.

<sup>588</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 70–71.

<sup>589</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 9 and Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 69–71.

## The British Counteroffensive

Joseph Flint had utterly failed to respond to the threat from Nembe and had now paid the price. In hindsight, Flint should have fortified the company station at Akassa. The company had all the materials required to construct a barbed wire fence around the compound, which would have presented a formidable barrier to the light infantry of the Nembe. Flint should also have either stationed a company of the Constabulary at Akassa or at least expanded the civil police force and trained them as riflemen. If he did not want to expand the police, the more than a hundred employees at the station should have been incorporated into a militia to help defend the station in case of attack. He should also have constructed a position such as a blockhouse where rifle-armed defenders could easily have held off attacking infantry that possessed no heavy weapons. Given that he was warned an attack might happen, he should have tried to formulate a strategy for countering or limiting the damage from such an attack. He could have called all RNC personnel in for the night and ordered them to sleep in the main building. The fact that 50 lightly armed survivors managed to hold the upper floor of the main building for two and a half hours shows how effective this might have been in limiting casualties, even if it would have left most of the facilities and workshops at Akassa undefended. He could also have ordered steam kept up on some of the seven vessels laid up by the river. He could then have safely evacuated most of the personnel when the Nembe attacked, as their canoes could not have kept up with the company steamers.

Flint's precaution of stationing a Gardner Gun on the riverbank would likely not have changed the outcome of the battle even if the gun had been functional, which of course, it was not. African irregulars had already demonstrated an ability to flank and destroy isolated gun positions like Flint had set up. This happened at the Battle of Isandhlwana in 1879 when a rocket

battery and artillery battery of the Royal Artillery were overrun by Zulu infantry. The same would happen in 1896, during the Battle of Adwa, when the guns of the Italian Army were destroyed by Ethiopian infantry. Although the machine gun might have caused some casualties among the Nembe, they would have easily been able to land assault parties to the north and south of the gun position, cut it off from the rest of the compound and then overrun it. The Gardner did not have a longer effective range than the Snider rifles of the Nembe, and riflemen could have easily picked off the exposed crew.<sup>590</sup>

In African nineteenth-century warfare, it was a well-known principle that irregulars such as the Nembe infantry had great difficulty attacking fortified positions. This knowledge was the foundation of the Boer's "laagering" tactic, whereby mounted infantry and cavalry would create wagon fortifications at the end of a day's march. The Boers used this tactic to achieve victory at the Battle of Blood River in 1838. When the British Empire expanded into the African interior, its officers quickly learned the value of "laagering." In 1879, they adapted it to their advantage at the Battle of Kambula.<sup>591</sup> Armed with this knowledge Flint and his subordinates, many of whom were veterans of Britain's wars in Africa, should have understood the importance of fortifications in African warfare and prepared accordingly. Although John Kirk absolved Flint of any mishandling of the situation in his official report on the attack, many British officers did not share this view.<sup>592</sup> Indeed Rear-Admiral Bedford was astonished by the RNC's lack of defences or any viable strategy to counter an attack on Akassa.<sup>593</sup> Our final summary must be that Flint

---

<sup>590</sup> G. F-H. Berkeley, *The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik* (London: Archibald Constable & Company, 1902), 341–42.

<sup>591</sup> Alexander Wilmot, *History of the Zulu War* (London: Richardson and Best, 1880), 99–100.

<sup>592</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 23.

<sup>593</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 128.

failed to protect a vital station of the company. In the end, his negligence contributed to a devastating loss of life and property for the company.

One of the most severe long-term effects of the attack may have been the British government's loss of confidence in the RNC's administration. The company's monopolistic commercial operations were a flagrant violation of the wording and spirit of its charter.<sup>594</sup> It was only possible to maintain the monopoly as long as the British government took no steps to rectify the situation or address the complaints of the Liverpool merchant lobby. The reason the government had agreed to a charter was to avoid establishing yet another colony in West Africa. But the company did not have the armed forces necessary to invade the Nembe state. Therefore, its directors had to ask the Royal Navy and the Niger Coast Protectorate Force for assistance in their war with Nembe. This placed responsibilities on the government, which the charter system had meant to avoid. After all, what was the point of handing over large swathes of territory to the RNC if the RNC still had to ask the government for help? Might it not be easier to incorporate the region into the new protectorate that had now been established on the Niger Coast?

This was precisely the sort of thinking of which Goldie was afraid. The Nembe Kingdom was situated inside the Niger Coast Protectorate, and no reprisal attacks by the company would be possible without the assent of the British government. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, he wrote to the Foreign Office to explain that the vulnerability of Akassa had been a fluke. He stated that the Nembe's expedition "against Akassa may be fairly attributed to their having discovered the fact that Akassa was less protected this dry season (by steamers lying up) than has been the case in the past, and to their anxiety for loot."<sup>595</sup> This was, of course, not true; the company had never

---

<sup>594</sup> Article 14 of the charter stated that "Nothing in this our charter shall be deemed to authorize the Company to set up or grant any monopoly of trade" see: Charter of the Royal Niger Company, 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1886, FO 84/1879, National Archives, London, 175.

<sup>595</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 6th of February 1895, 31.

adequately protected Akassa. In his 1890 military report, Captain Ferryman had pointed out the defenceless state of Akassa and warned that it would be hard to defend it against an attack.<sup>596</sup> But in the five years since the publishing of that report, the company had taken no steps to rectify the situation. Also, the attack was not motivated by an "anxiety for loot." It was a direct result of the company's monopolistic practices and its trade dispute with the Nembe.<sup>597</sup> Goldie also urged the government to join forces with the RNC for a retaliatory strike saying:

The Brassmen... naturally declare that they have no quarrel with the British Government; but the council [the governing council of the RNC] cannot doubt that the British Government will have a quarrel with the Brassmen for invading a neighboring British settlement, nor that the British naval forces and the coast Protectorate forces, aided by the launches, guns, and men of the Niger Company, will be able to exterminate the Nimbe [sic], a nest of pirates who have been the bane of the Niger since, at any rate, the days of Lander.<sup>598</sup>

Goldie clearly wanted to destroy the Nembe state as a local power and expected the Royal Navy and Niger Coast Protectorate Force to join the RNC's Constabulary for a decisive blow. MacDonald, however, had little interest in a campaign of extermination against people who at least nominally were under British protection. His priority was to secure Brass to protect the British diplomatic and trading personnel there. Therefore, on 1 February, he dispatched the steam yacht, *Evangeline*, with 100 Hausa troops, two seven-pounder guns, and a Maxim machine gun of the Protectorate force. When they arrived in Brass on 2 February, there was no resistance. The king's fleet had no intention of making a stand at Brass and had retreated up Nembe Creek. Brass's proximity to the sea and the wide estuary of the Brass River made the town very vulnerable to attack by steamships which had greater mobility and more firepower than the

---

<sup>596</sup> Military Notes on the Countries of West Africa visited by Major MacDonald, July to November 1889, 18th of August 1890, FO 403/149, National Archives, London, 87.

<sup>597</sup> Correspondence from Sir C. MacDonald to the Foreign Office, 11th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 78.

<sup>598</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 6th of February 1895, 31.



Nembe War Canoes. The political climate in town was also problematic. The forces of House Spiff and Kemmer occupied the settlement and might have sided with the British had Koko attempted to fortify the town. Spiff and Kemmer certainly put up no resistance when the protectorate force arrived, and the town was swiftly turned into a forward operating base for the campaign against Nembe.<sup>599</sup>

The British counteroffensive against the Nembe state has also often been dismissed as a minor operation or as “extraordinary light” by contemporary standards, such as in the work of Flint.<sup>600</sup> However, when compared to other British military operations in West Africa during the period, it seems quite typical of the military expeditions launched by the British Empire in the region. The RNC's Constabulary came down the river from Asaba and began its campaign by raiding all Ijaw towns suspected of taking part in the attack on Akassa. By the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, the towns of Boas, Apre, Kiama, Sabagreia, Tombia and Permoberi had been destroyed, and some of the goods looted at Akassa had been recovered.<sup>601</sup> The Constabulary had gone through some changes since its first establishment. For one, it was now a uniformed force. The men wore khaki breaches and jackets in the French Zouave style, which meant that while the jackets were

---

<sup>599</sup> Annual Report for 1894-1895 of the Administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate by Sir C. MacDonald, 25th of July 1895, FO 403/216, National Archives, London, 128.

<sup>600</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 205.

<sup>601</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 130 and Kirk, “Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass,” 17.

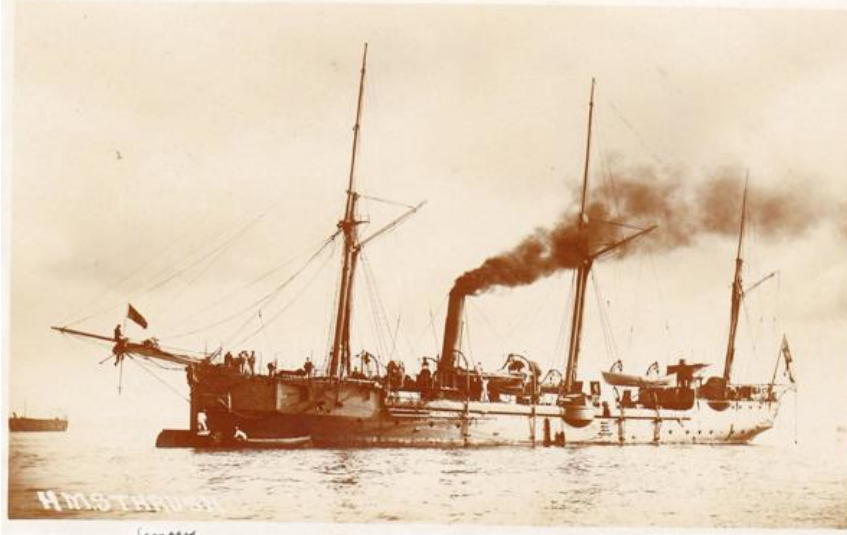


Figure 13: The HMS Thrush with steam up, it served as Bedford's flagship for the attack on Nembe (photo from the Royal Navy).

Figure 14: Although originally credited as a soldier of the Niger Coast Protectorate Force, the khaki uniform, red fez and cummerbund, black belt and ammo box and lack of footwear suggest this soldier is wearing a uniform almost identical to the one issued to the RNC Constabulary. His rifle is the Martini-Henry used by the Constabulary (photo from the Hulton Archive).



ROYAL NIGER HAUSA

Figure 15: A drawing of a Constabulary soldier who took part in the celebration of the diamond jubilee of 1897. The Constabulary soldiers were mislabelled as the Royal Niger Hausa (photo from the Graphic).



form-fitting, the trousers were loose and baggy. Their Cumberbunds and fez hats were red, and their leather ammunition belts black. A white haversack, water bottle and tin cup were also issued to each recruit. No shoes or boots were provided, and the soldiers were barefoot, as were most people living in the Niger Delta. In the 1890s, the Snider–Enfield rifle was phased out in favour of the Martini-Henry, and the new Maxim machine guns slowly replaced the Gardner machine guns. This made supplying ammunition easier as both the Martini-Henry and the Maxim fired the .577/450 Martini-Henry Black powder cartridge.<sup>602</sup>

Having swiftly conducted their reprisal campaign in company territory, the Constabulary rendezvoused with the Royal Navy at Akassa. Several of the company's steamers were moored upriver and could not be brought down because the Niger was in its low season. The only undamaged company steamer in the Lower Delta was the SS *Yakoba*, Flint's escape vessel. If Nembe were to be reached, the shallow draught steamers of the company would be needed. Therefore, the SS *Nupe*, which had been badly damaged in the attack, was repaired by an engineering party from the Royal Navy's West Coast of Africa Station in Freetown, the company's engineers being either dead or captured. Both ships were armed, the *Yakoba* being fitted with two seven-pounder cannons and the *Nupe* with a Maxim gun. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, the British fleet was ready to sail up Nembe Creek and engage the main Nembe force that had fortified the city. The attack force was a mix of Royal Navy, RNC Constabulary, and Niger Coast Protectorate Force troops aboard the vessels SS *Nupe*, SS *Yakoba*, HMS *Widgeon*, the steam yacht *Evangeline*, and the Protectorate launch *Violet*. The flagship of the fleet was the HMS *Thrush*, under the command of Rear-Admiral Bedford.<sup>603</sup>

---

<sup>602</sup> Military Notes on the Countries of West Africa by Sir C. MacDonald, 18th of August 1890, FO 403/149, National Archives, London, 102.

<sup>603</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 129-130.

Claude MacDonald had arrived in Brass on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February and began negotiations with King Koko's party. The King made it clear that there could be no peace between the RNC and the Nembe state unless Nembe merchants were guaranteed complete and unrestricted access to the Niger market. He also maintained that his war was not with the British government and that he did not wish to fight the government's forces. MacDonald explained his negotiating position to the King in a series of letters. He made it clear that there would have to be consequences for the attack on Akassa and the murder of the prisoners and that the British government would take punitive measures. If the Nembe surrendered unconditionally, the government might show some leniency and respond to some of their demands. This was not satisfactory to Koko since he had begun the war because he realized MacDonald was powerless in company territory. Any promises to "look into" the situation of the Niger trade must consequently have been meaningless to him. We can hypothesize that had the prisoners been alive, their release and the payment of war damages by the Nembe, as well as the surrendering of weapons in exchange for some sort of legal access to the Niger trade, could have been negotiated. But neither side was willing to give ground, and Bedford and MacDonald agreed that the naval campaign would have to go ahead before peace could be made.<sup>604</sup>

On 20 February, MacDonald and his officers, Captain Dundas and Lieutenant Child, had scouted Nembe Creek aboard the *Evangeline*, and the British fleet moved on Nembe. Their first target was Sacrificial Island just south of the town. To defend the approach into town, Koko's forces dammed Nembe Creek near the island and were in the middle of building wooden fortifications on the island when the British arrived. When the British approached, several canoes came out from Nembe, probably with troops to defend the fortifications on the island. They

---

<sup>604</sup> Correspondence from Sir C. MacDonald to the Foreign Office, 28th of February 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 104-105.

advanced steadily, firing their artillery. However, the British seven pounders had a higher rate of fire, and the War Canoes withdrew after three of them were hit in quick succession. Engineers from the Royal Navy then detonated several explosive charges to clear the dam, and the island was captured with the loss of only Lieutenant Taylor, who was killed by a shell from the Nembe canoes.<sup>605</sup>

Nembe is so close to sea level that the waterways around it are affected by the tide. A low tide brought all operations to a halt as, the water was too shallow to allow the British vessels to navigate. On the morning of 21 February, Bedford sent a message to Koko demanding the unconditional surrender of all Nembe forces. The Nembe, who were well fortified in the stockades and trenches, refused, and British forces began to bombard the town with the mountain guns they had placed on Sacrifice Island. This had little effect on the fortifications, and Bedford sent the *Evangeline* downriver to bring up more rowboats and more men to storm the town. These reinforcements arrived on the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup>. At 5:45 the following morning a final attack was launched.<sup>606</sup> Although Bedford never made it clear in his report, the attack focused only on Ogbolomabiri. The approach to Bassambri was considered too dangerous as the Y section where the waterway that separates Ogbolomabiri and Bassambri joins the Nembe Creek could be brought under accurate rifle fire from the Warri compound. In the compound, chief Warri's troops, separated from Koko's forces, had fortified their positions to defend their homes.<sup>607</sup>

Rowing through rifle and artillery fire, the British troops reached the shores of Nembe and stormed into the town. By 10:30, artillery and rocket batteries had been set up on shore to

---

<sup>605</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 130-131.

<sup>606</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 131-132.

<sup>607</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 2.

destroy the fortifications in front of the troops. This allowed the infantry to make a final assault on the defensive line the Nembe had established by the two-story European-style houses of chiefs Kalango and Egbelo. Having stormed the last position in Ogbolomabiri, the British artillery began to shell Bassambri, and the infantry engaged in a rifle duel with the defenders. So well were the defences of Bassambri thought out that the rifle and shell fire made no impression on the defenders and only managed to punch a few holes in the walls and roofs of the European-style houses of chief Warri and chief Kari. By 15:00, the British decided against an attack on Bassambri and instead began to set fire to the structures of Ogbolomabiri. At the same time, the engineers used explosives to destroy the homes of Koko, Egbik, Opoue, and Hardstone. The entire British force then embarked on their ships at 16:30 and sailed down to Brass. An examination of the archival sources allows for a new interpretation of the conduct of the war. We can conjecture that Rear-Admiral Bedford decided not to press the attack on Bassambri because he was worried about suffering severe casualties storming the barricades protecting the town. Furthermore, if things had gone badly, the low tide in the evening would have made it impossible for the British forces to reembark on their ships and fall back down the river until the following morning.<sup>608</sup> This is what limited the military operations against the Nembe, not just that Bedford felt that “the punishment inflicted was sufficient,” as Flint has argued.<sup>609</sup>

The Nembe losses in the battle were reported by the British as 25 men killed and many more wounded, especially from artillery shrapnel that wreaked havoc on the crews of the War Canoes that engaged the British fleet off Sacrifice Island. The British force lost three dead and five wounded. The British did not report any civilian casualties. It is possible that civilian casualties were light because the Nembe local population had evacuated the city before the battle

---

<sup>608</sup> Correspondence from Sir C. MacDonald to the Foreign Office, 28th of February 1895, 107-108.

<sup>609</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 205.

began. It is equally possible that the British did not want to report civilian casualties as this might make their campaign unpopular at home. Claude MacDonald, who surveyed the region after the war, certainly believed more people had died than had been reported saying “hundreds have been killed.”<sup>610</sup> The last target of the British force was Okpoma or Fishtown. Sitting east of Brass Okpoma was a thorn in the side of both the company and the protectorate. In 1893 the chiefs Okpoma demanded that the British remove their consulate from Brass as they were opposed to British rule. This forced MacDonald to station 200 protectorate troops at Brass until the crisis subsided. The company wanted to destroy Okpoma because of their involvement in the attack on Akassa. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, an ultimatum was issued to the people of Okpoma to lay down their arms and surrender. This ultimatum was not answered, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, British troops went ashore. They discovered the town abandoned and a large and well-defended artillery position unmanned. The artillery pieces and fortifications were destroyed with explosives, and the settlement burned to the ground. After this, Bedford considered the campaign concluded and dismissed the RNC constabulary part of his force which headed back to Akassa. Meanwhile, at Brass, the houses of chief Sambo and a minor chief named Uriah were blown up on 26 February to punish them for taking part in the attack on Akassa.<sup>611</sup>

There has been some disagreement on the effectiveness of the British counterattack. In his study of the RNC, John Flint dismissed the campaign as inflicting an "extraordinary light" punishment by contemporary standards.<sup>612</sup> Flint's conclusion was probably based on the findings of the investigation of Sir John Kirk. Kirk maintained in his conclusions that the Nembe state

---

<sup>610</sup> Correspondence from Claude MacDonald to Earl Kimberley, 9th of April 1895, FO 403/215, National Archives, London, 128.

<sup>611</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 132-134.

<sup>612</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 205.

had "suffered comparatively little" from the British counterattack.<sup>613</sup> Nevertheless, there are some significant issues with this conclusion. Ebiegberi Alagoa was more realistic in his estimation of the effects of the campaign, and his conclusion is in line with that of MacDonald, who saw the effects of the war firsthand. Both estimated that several settlements were destroyed, hundreds of people killed, and trade ruined.<sup>614</sup> Alagoa also considered the £516 levied on the Nembe state to pay for the damages at Akassa, as well as the fact that 23 War Canoes were confiscated by the forces of the Niger Coast Protectorate. Along with the three War Canoes destroyed in the fighting, this accounted for most of the 31 War Canoes that took part in the attack on Akassa. The displacement of a large section of the population and a disruption to the food supply system during a smallpox epidemic also caused the death of many people. Finally, there was the psychological shock of having their capital destroyed. One of the central tenets of the national god Ogidiga was that he would never allow the capital to be attacked by a foreign enemy. Since the founding of Nembe, no foreign enemy had managed to strike the capital. But now, half of it had been sacked and razed.<sup>615</sup>

To gauge whether or not the British counteroffensive was "extraordinary light" it needs to be compared to other campaigns in West Africa during the late nineteenth century. In the Ashanti War of 1873-1874, British forces and their Fante (also known as Fantse, or Mfantse) allies fought the Ashanti state. The dispute, like the Akassa War, was about free trade. The Ashanti demanded that Britain honour its free trade agreement with them and allow their merchants free access to Elmina. As the relationship between the two parties deteriorated, Ashanti forces invaded the British Colony of the Gold Coast. After they were driven back,

---

<sup>613</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 25.

<sup>614</sup> Correspondence from Claude MacDonald to Earl Kimberley, 9th of April 1895, 128.

<sup>615</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 106–11.



British forces under the command of Major General Garnet Wolseley fought their way to Kumasi, forcing King Kofi's army to retreat. Having secured the capital, they blew up the King's palace, burned the town, and then retreated to British-controlled territory. In both campaigns, the archival sources are clear that destroying the enemy's capital was the objective of the war and doing so was considered a victory. In both campaigns, there was little hope of destroying the enemy's armed forces in a decisive battle. There are some obvious comparisons between the Akassa War and the Ashanti War of 1873-1874. Both were fought over African access to markets controlled by the British. In both cases, the primary British war effort involved a counterattack into hostile territory. In both wars, the capital of the African state was destroyed, but their armed forces remained mostly intact despite skirmishes and battles with the British troops.<sup>616</sup> It is also worth noting that these strategic goals would also be pursued in the RNC's upcoming campaigns against Bida and Illorin. This would suggest that there was nothing comparatively light about the Akassa War and British efforts there. Instead, it was a typical war between British and African forces in West Africa in the late nineteenth century. This seems to have been the view of Rear-Admiral Bedford, who commanded the operation. Although he glossed over his failure to destroy Bassambri, he considered the burning of Ogbolomabiri to be a natural end to a successful campaign.<sup>617</sup> The conduct of the campaign was also very similar in tactics and results to the more small-scale punitive expeditions of the RNC against its opponents in the Niger Delta, which usually involved capturing and destroying the towns and villages of their enemies with limited loss of life for both indigenous and RNC forces.<sup>618</sup>

---

<sup>616</sup> Thomas Snape, *The Ashantee War: Its Causes and Results* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co, 1875), 34–37.

<sup>617</sup> Correspondence from Rear-Admiral Bedford to Admiralty, 26th of February 1895, 128.

<sup>618</sup> Correspondence from Captain Hand to Rear-Admiral Walter Hunt Grubbe, 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1886, 86.

The real winner of the Akassa War was neither King Koko nor the RNC, the two parties whose conflict had sparked the war. Rather it was the Christian faction in Nembe politics. When negotiations began between the Nembe and the British, it became clear that Koko had lost his grip on power. His enemies in the Christian faction handled negotiations on behalf of their state. The reason behind the sudden resurgence of the Christian chiefs, previously sidelined by Koko after he embraced the traditional Nembe religion, was probably threefold. Firstly, King Koko and his hardliners had been forced to retreat from the capital to escape capture by the British forces. Second, in Brass and Bassambiri, the Christian chiefs and the chiefs who had sided with Warri in the capital were the only factions with intact military forces. Thirdly, the political and economic connections between the Christian faction and the Liverpool merchants and the ability of men like James A. Spiff to speak English naturally pushed them to the forefront of negotiations with British administrators. As a result, when negotiations for a political settlement began, the head of the Nembe delegation was Chief Warri, who was by now a sworn enemy of Koko. Accompanying him were three chiefs who had supported Warri against Koko: Hardstone, Karella, and Okea. The head of the British delegation was Sir John Kirk, who had been dispatched from London to Brass to investigate the causes of the war and bring it to a halt. He chose James Allen Spiff as the official translator of the negotiations despite objections from William Wallace, the RNC's representative at the talks, that Spiff could not be a neutral translator.<sup>619</sup>

Despite his rhetoric of "extermination" Goldie was willing to make some concessions to the Nembe in exchange for peace. He offered to open Ekole Creek to Nembe merchants and allow them to trade duty-free on the east bank of the Niger south of Ekole Creek. As a more

---

<sup>619</sup> Kirk, "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass," 5, 10.

long-term solution, Goldie suggested that the RNC territory and the Niger Coast Protectorate form a customs union. This would end the company's monopoly on palm oil purchases, allowing African buyers to buy palm oil in company territory. In fact, the company would cease all trading operations and become a purely administrative entity. In exchange for this concession, the RNC would be compensated for its lost profits through a share in the customs revenue of the entire region. If agreed to, this would have moved the RNC away from a dependence on a technically illegal monopoly. Instead, its administration would become a private government like the one the East India Company had operated in British India prior to 1857. The new administration would be funded by customs revenue like the administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate, and the Niger trade would be opened up to both African and European traders.<sup>620</sup> But now, a new problem emerged. Back in the metropole, the Liberal government lost power and a new Conservative government under Salisbury was established. The new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914), was more willing than his predecessors to invest resources in developing and expanding the British Empire. His approach was not compatible with renting out the empire to chartered companies to limit expenditure. There was, therefore, no final diplomatic solution to end the war. Instead, Ekole Creek was opened to Nembe merchants on a temporary basis.<sup>621</sup> King Koko was officially deposed on the first of April 1896, and the throne of Nembe would remain vacant until 1926. In place of the monarchy, a ruling council was established under the command of Warri, who emerged from the war as the new leader of Nembe.<sup>622</sup>

---

<sup>620</sup> Temporary Arrangement and Scheme for Adjusting Difficulties by George Goldie, 11th of March 1896, FO 403/233, National Archives, London, 209.

<sup>621</sup> Alagoa, *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, 114–18.

<sup>622</sup> Correspondence from General Consul Moor to the Foreign Office, 9th of April 1896, FO 403/233, National Archives, London, 245-246.

As we have seen, the mid-1890s marked the high tide of company rule. The RNC established a network of trading stations to control all commerce of the river, and its trading and administrative network was run by its Anglicized African employees. These worked as trading agents, station supervisors and skilled craftsmen. Alongside them worked the African employees of the company called “Krumen.” At the higher level, the offices of the company were held by European officers. The Constabulary had been strengthened and evolved into a uniformed force using modern rifles, machine guns, and artillery. New exports were being developed both by the company and African producers, especially in the company’s northern territories where palm oil could not sustain its commercial operations.

This whole system could function because of the company’s African employees, yet their perspective has been missing from the company’s history. The company’s labour force was made up of “Krumen” recruited from the West Coast of Africa as well as some indigenous people recruited in company territory. The RNC’s management, office staff, and their skilled artisans were almost exclusively Anglicized Africans, apart from a few Europeans occupying the top managerial positions. They have been excluded from the history of the company because their voices are often not included in the archival material available. But by re-examining the archives, we can find occasional glimpses into the role of Africans in RNC history. We now know that many of them were educated in the missionary schools of the CMS and that many of them had emigrated from Sierra Leone and taken employment with the company. We have also seen that the Anglicized Africans living in the Lower Niger were highly critical of the RNC’s justice system. Its treatment of its African employees and the indigenous population was especially criticized and described as villainous and chaotic. This work has also brought to light the debate within the Anglicized African community in Lagos about the liquor trade of the RNC in its

territories. Some considered it a moral evil, while others believed that the apparent moral panic caused by the company's trade was baseless.

Even at the height of its power company authority was still fragile. This was exposed by the Nembe state when it attacked the poorly defended Akassa station. The strategic considerations of the Nembe have so far been missing from the history of the company. This has also been the case with the failures of the company's administration to defend one of its most important bases in Africa. The destruction of the station and the RNC's need for government assistance to fight the Nembe exposed the weaknesses of company rule. The Akassa War also exposed the rifts in Nembe politics between the Christian faction and the traditionalist faction. The true winners of the war were Warri, Spiff, and their allies, as they emerged from the war as the leading power in Nembe politics. Warri became the head of the council established to rule after the exile of King Koko. The effects of the Akassa War on the internal political structure of the Nembe state have never been examined in the context of the wider history of the RNC.

By comparing the Akassa War with other conflicts in West Africa in the late nineteenth century, we can see that in its war aims and the strategy employed, it was typical of colonial conflicts fought by British and RNC troops during the period. This suggests that it should not be considered "extraordinary light," as Flint has suggested. Flint seems to have underestimated the damage caused to the Nembe state and, at the same time, overestimated the effects of other contemporary military operations in the region.

The change in government in Britain and the weaknesses of the company exposed by the Akassa War worked against the company as it entered the latter half of the 1890s. Although the southern front of the company had been stabilized by temporary settlements with the Nembe and the removal of King Koko from power, trouble now began to brew in the north. Having

appraised the company's administration in the 1890s and its conflict with the Brass, we must now turn to the increasing competition with European powers in its northern territory and increasing pressure from home to take more forceful measures to enforce its administration on the upper Niger. These pressures slowly began to tear away at company rule until, in the end, the charter was revoked, and the RNC entered a new phase of its life as a purely commercial company.

# Chapter Five: From Chartered to Commercial Empire

Having examined the day-to-day operations of the RNC during the high tide of company rule in the mid-1890s, we now turn to the last years of the charter. The chapter will begin with a description of local conditions in the emirates of Bida and Illorin in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This will be done to explore what motivated the Hausa and Yoruba volunteers of the Constabulary to fight for the company against local African states. An examination of the motives of African soldiers of the Constabulary has so far been missing from the history of the company and is needed to understand how and why they became participants in the British Empire.

The chapter will explore how from 1896, the fragmentation of the Sokoto Caliphate, increasing French expansion in the Upper Niger, and changing colonial policies in the metropole led to the end of chartered administration on the Niger. The hostility of the Emirate of Bida, itself a part of the politically unstable Sokoto Caliphate accompanied by the French occupation of Boussa, created a crisis on the northern frontiers of the RNC. We will examine how in response to the crisis, the company launched its last major military campaign against the Bida Emirate (sometimes called the Nupe Emirate in British sources) and the Illorin Emirate, severing them from the power of Sokoto and thus strengthening the British position in what was to become Northern Nigeria. The preparations for the campaign and its conduct will be examined. We will also examine how the composition of the RNC's expeditionary force ties into the history of private military contractors in Africa. The Constabulary as a private military force in Africa has not been examined in this context.

We will look at the conduct of the campaign itself and how the tactical mistakes made by Emir Abu Bakr and his generals allowed the Constabulary to play to its strengths while Emirate commanders failed to take advantage of the superior maneuverability and numbers of their force.



Such an examination has been missing from the history of the war, but it is necessary to understand that the conflict was not a one-sided affair. An RNC victory was not a foregone conclusion as both sides had the capacity to achieve victory. The RNC expedition against Bida and Illorin will be put into context by comparing it to Garnet Wolseley's expedition against Ashanti in 1873. This will show how the operation was, in many ways, typical of British late nineteenth-century colonial operations in West Africa. The contrast also allows a better understanding of the unique characteristics of the RNC's operation.

After a successful expedition against Bida and Illorin, the company mounted a joint offensive with the newly arrived government forces of the West African Frontier Force against the French in the Boussa region. This chapter will examine the close cooperation of the two forces in 1898 and 1899. This successful campaign forced the French government to sign the Anglo-French Convention of 1898. This chapter will demonstrate that the British triumph in the Boussa dispute was the result of a more aggressive colonial policy in the metropole spearheaded by the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain. This is in line with John Flint's conclusions.<sup>623</sup> Chamberlain favoured direct government control of colonial territory, and chartered companies like the RNC did not fit into his vision of empire. The limitations of company rule exposed by confrontation with Nembe, Sokoto, and France, coupled with a new direction in the metropole, caused the company to lose its charter.

The loss of the charter forced the RNC to transition from a chartered company to a purely commercial entity. The second half of this chapter will cover the last years of the charter from 1897 to 1900. The fate of the company's military branch has been overlooked in previous histories but needs to be included. This is because the last years of the Constabulary were the

---

<sup>623</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 292–94.

first years of its successor, the West African Frontier Force, whose Nigerian regiments were influenced by the structure and tactics of the Constabulary as veterans of the company force transitioned into imperial service. This will demonstrate that the early colonial administration of Nigeria was more of a continuation of RNC military and political doctrine than a fresh start. The last section of the chapter will then explore how the RNC successfully transitioned to a new purely commercial entity that managed to keep its grip on the Niger trade long after it lost the political power to enforce its monopoly. The continual monopoly of the RNC illustrates that the economic policies advocated by the RNC continued to dominate the economic and trade policies of the early colonial state in Nigeria.

## The RNC's Northern Frontier

After the campaign against the Nembe state and the temporary political solution by which Nembe merchants were given limited access to the Niger trade via Ekole Creek, the company's focus shifted north. The political instability of the Sokoto Caliphate, combined with increasing pressure from the Foreign Office on the RNC to establish administrative control in northeast Yorubaland, forced the company to launch a military expedition against the southern emirates of the caliphate. The Sokoto Caliphate had been established in the series of military campaigns known as the Sokoto or Fulani Jihad. The Sokoto Jihad lasted from the 1800s to 1840s was the result of the fracturing of the Kanem–Bornu Empire.<sup>624</sup> As the empire fell, the Fulani religious revivalist and revolutionary Usman Ibn Fodio, also known as Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817), gained a following in Gobir. His mujahideen (the Islamic term used for the members of a Jihad, translates as strugglers for justice) movement overthrew the leadership of the Gobir state and

---

<sup>624</sup> Most of the fighting took place between 1804 and 1808 but the expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate continued well into the 1840s.

embarked on a series of wars with its Hausa and Yoruba neighbours. With victory achieved, the new Caliphate was divided into twenty emirates with ultimate religious and political authority invested in the Sultan of Sokoto.<sup>625</sup>

The government of the new Sokoto Caliphate promoted the development of plantation agriculture, especially under the leadership of Muhammed Bello (d.1837), the second Sultan of Sokoto. A series of Ribats, or military settlements, were established to settle his fellow Fulani people into the Hausa social structures that predated the establishment of the caliphate. Enslaved people of both Yoruba and Hausa ethnicities were transported to these new plantations to produce indigo, cotton, and cereals.<sup>626</sup> The need for forced labour combined with the weak authority of the central government created conditions where slave raiding was rampant both against neighbouring states and between emirates. The eyewitness accounts of Baba of Karo (1877-1951), a Hausa woman born in Karo north of Illorin and west of Bida, illustrate the effects of slave raiding and lawlessness on the people of the region. Baba's family suffered greatly from the constant slave raiding plaguing the region. Her father's second wife was captured by slave raiders and sold into servitude in Maska. Later her aunt was captured while travelling with her husband and sold into servitude at Abuja. Her father, a freeholder who worked the land alongside enslaved people he had purchased for farm labour, had to collect 400.000 cowries' worth of goods to buy his wife back from slavery. In the exchange rate of the 1870s, this was the equivalent of about 2000 British pennies or roughly £8 6s 8d.<sup>627</sup>

---

<sup>625</sup> Hamza Muhammad Maishanu and Isa Muhammad Maishanu, "The Jihad and the Formation of the Sokoto Caliphate," *Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 126–29.

<sup>626</sup> Mohammed Bashir Salau, ed., "The Roots of Sokoto Caliphate Plantations," in *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study*, vol. 80 (Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 51–52.

<sup>627</sup> Mary F. Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 80–81.

This expenditure put Baba's family into severe debt and illustrates how negatively affected the freeholding Hausa farmers in the Illorin and Bida emirates were by the public disorder and slave raiding plaguing the caliphate. According to Baba, this was one of the main reasons the Hausa freeholders did not oppose the establishment of British authority in what would become Northern Nigeria. While the ethnic Fulanis who dominated the upper reaches of the caliphate's government opposed British expansion, Hausas had been serving in the British army for decades. They viewed the British more positively than the Fulani, whom they blamed for the state of government in the Sokoto Caliphate.<sup>628</sup> The Hausa in Karo hoped the arrival of the British would break the power of the Fulani and usher in a period of peace and economic prosperity.<sup>629</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, two of these emirates were of great importance to both the RNC and the British government. These were the emirates of Bida and Illorin. Both bordered the Niger river, Bida territory stretching north and south of the river and Illorin south of the Niger. During the Jihad, these emirates had occupied much of the northern lands of the old Yoruba Oyo Empire and therefore controlled the northeastern part of Yorubaland. In the Emirate of Illorin, Emir Moma dan Zubayru (d.1895), also known as Momo of Illorin, advocated for a policy of reconciliation and cooperation with the British colony of Lagos. He was opposed by his Balogun (which translates roughly as Warlord or War Chief) high ranking noblemen with their own military retinues with whom the emir had to share power. Their opposition stemmed from the fact that the Balogun profited by slave raiding south into Yorubaland. They launched a coup in 1895 led by Balogun Alanamu and Balogun Gambari Adamu. Seeing his cause was lost, Moma

---

<sup>628</sup> Smith, 67.

<sup>629</sup> Smith, 66–67.

committed suicide, and Sulaymanu dan Aliyu (d. c. 1914), also known as Sulieman of Illorin and Suliman of Illorin, was installed as emir.<sup>630</sup>

The new emir pursued a cautious policy towards Britain. The Balogun of Illorin viewed the establishment of a Niger Coast Protectorate Force base at Odo Otin as a check on Illorin's southward expansion.<sup>631</sup> In 1896, armed forces dispatched by Balogun Alanamu and Balogun Adamu attacked the outpost at Odo Otin but were repulsed. Open war now existed between the Niger Coast Protectorate and the Emirate of Illorin.<sup>632</sup> Illorin's closest ally, the Emirate of Bida, was not free of its own civil strife. In Bida, two Fulani families, the Masaba and the Omru dominated the politics of the state in the 1890s. In 1895 Abu Bakr dan Masaba (d. 1919), also known as Abu Bokari and Abu Bekri, became Emir following the death of Emir Maliki (also spelled Meliki). The head of the Omru family, Muhammed, retained his rank of Markum during this succession. The title of Markum might be translated as general or commander in chief and made him the head of Bida's armies south of the Niger, where the main cavalry army was permanently stationed for raids south into Yorubaland. As the title of Shaeba or heir apparent was vacant, Markum Muhammed was next in line to the throne. Power in the Bida emirate was thereby effectively divided between two factions. Goldie would take full advantage, attempting to convert Markum Muhammed to his cause.<sup>633</sup>

The first treaty between the British merchants that would form the RNC and the Sokoto Caliphate came in 1885. The National African Company, the precursor of the RNC, hired Scottish explorer Joseph Thomson (1858-1895) to travel to the caliphate and sign commercial

---

<sup>630</sup> Ann O'Hear, "British Intervention and the Slaves and Peasant Farmers of Ilorin, c. 1890-c. 1906," *Paideuma* 40 (1994): 129–30.

<sup>631</sup> Z. O. Apata, "Ilorin-Lagos Relations in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of British Imperial Struggle in Yorubaland," *Transafrican Journal of History* 20 (September 19, 1991): 149–50.

<sup>632</sup> Correspondence from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, 14th of April 1896, FO 403/233, National Archives, London, 217.

<sup>633</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaigning Up. Nile Niger*, 235–36.

treaties with its rulers.<sup>634</sup> His expedition was accompanied by a European agent of the company named W. J. Seago, who, as an employee of the NAC, represented the interests of the company. With them were two interpreters, D. Z. Viera from Accra and T. F. Joseph of Sierra Leone, both Anglicized Africans, the first of whom could speak and write Arabic and the other Hausa.<sup>635</sup> Reaching the court of Sultan Umaru bin Ali (1824-1891) in May 1885, they opened negotiations with the monarch. Umaru was interested in expanded trade with Britain, explaining that he knew the Emir of Bida had significantly profited from the European trade.<sup>636</sup>

After presenting their gifts to the Sultan, an agreement was struck whereby the NAC was granted “the sole right, among foreigners, to trade in our territory”<sup>637</sup> Umaru further promised that “no communication will be held with foreigners coming from the rivers except through the above mentioned company.”<sup>638</sup> In return for these rights, the company promised Umaru an annual subsidy of 3000 bags of cowries. This treaty was made in both Arabic and English and then signed and sealed by Thomson and Umaru.<sup>639</sup> As each bag of cowries contained 20.000 cowries, these subsidies would be paid in trade goods as transporting 60.000.000 cowries upriver annually was not economical. Therefore, we can infer that a subsidy of 3000 bags of cowries was really a subsidy of trade goods worth approximately £1250 in the 1890s.<sup>640</sup>

---

<sup>634</sup> J. G. Bartholomew, “Joseph Thomson,” *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 11, no. 10 (1895): 526.

<sup>635</sup> It is quite possible that D.Z. Viera is the same man as Henry Zuzer Viera of Accra who two months later accompanied another NAC treaty expedition as interpreter see: Agreement Between the Kings and Chiefs of Achiagi and the National African Company: Declaration of Interpreter, 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1885, FO 403/537, National Archives, London, 75.

<sup>636</sup> J. B. Thomson, *Joseph Thomson: African Explorer*, 2nd ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1897), 158.

<sup>637</sup> Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 121.

<sup>638</sup> Hertslet, 121.

<sup>639</sup> Hertslet, 122.

<sup>640</sup> Marion Johnson, “The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa. Part I,” *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 1 (1970): 30.

The weak central authority of the Sokoto Caliphate allowed the Emir of Bida to contest the Sultan's authority to cede land in his emirate. This forced the company to make a separate treaty with the Emir of Bida in 1885 and again in 1889 and pay him a separate subsidy for trading in his lands.<sup>641</sup> But despite the treaty, troops from Bida continued to raid from their base in northeast Yorubaland into RNC and Niger Coast Protectorate territory. The Sultan did not intervene as his attention was focused on the Kano Civil War and constant fighting on the eastern border with the forces of Rabih az-Zubayr (1842-1900), who had conquered the Kingdom of Bornu. The Kano Civil War raging in the Sokoto Caliphate was a dynastic struggle within the Kano Emirate that began in 1893 when Mohammed Tukur (d. 1894) was installed as emir to replace his father Muhammed Bello (d. 1893). The war plunged Kano Emirate into chaos until Tukur was defeated, and Ali Babba Ali (d. 1903), also known as Aliyu Babba, became emir in 1895.<sup>642</sup> An Arabic traveller named Sharif Hassan travelled through Bornu, Kanu, and Sokoto in the late 1890s as an emissary of the Egyptian government. His letters paint a picture of constant raiding, lawlessness, and warfare in the eastern part of the Caliphate and considerable tension between the new Fulani ruling class and the Hausas.<sup>643</sup>

With the Sultan's attention in the east, the Emirs of Bida and Illorin were able to act autonomously. In June 1896, a military detachment from Bida ambushed an RNC constabulary patrol. Forty-seven men, their rifles, and a machine gun were captured and held for ransom. Acting agent-general William Wallace did all he could to keep the incident quiet, and the British government was not informed. So successful were Wallace and Goldie in silencing the news of this incident that historian John. E. Flint only discovered its existence when going through

---

<sup>641</sup> Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, 154.

<sup>642</sup> Paul E Lovejoy and John Edward Philips, "Five Letters from the Sokoto Archives Bearing on the Kano Civil War," *Sudanic Africa* 4 (June 29, 1993): 77-78.

<sup>643</sup> Translation of an Arabic Letter, 11th of April 1896, FO 403/233, National Archives, London, 212-214.

personal correspondence between Aldred Lumley (1857-1945), Lord Scarbrough, and Goldie. Scarbrough was informed of the incident because of his position on the RNC's governing council. No reference to it can be found in the archives of the Foreign Office. Wallace decided to withhold the annual subsidy due to the Emir of Bida until the men were returned, and this worked, although the emir kept the captured weapons. The decision to muzzle reports of the incident is understandable. Reports of it would only have served to substantiate the accusations by both the British and Niger Coast Protectorate governments that the company had no actual authority or administrative power in its northern territory.<sup>644</sup>

The situation on the northern frontier was further complicated by the entry of French Colonial troops into the region. The relationship between France and Britain was strained throughout the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Many in France felt that British foreign policy was tilted in favour of the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Italy. France and Britain were commercial and naval rivals, and Britain seemed to outperform France in both categories. This rivalry was not helped by numerous small confrontations where British and French colonial forces found themselves in close proximity to each other in Asia and Africa. The British occupation of Egypt and subsequent control of the Suez Canal was also a sore spot as the Suez Canal had been a French-Egyptian project. This rivalry would eventually lead to two armed standoffs in Africa in 1898, one on the Nile at Fashoda and the other on the Niger at Boussa.<sup>645</sup>

In West Africa, the signing of the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890, which had been negotiated without the French government being consulted, alarmed the French government. One

---

<sup>644</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 240.

<sup>645</sup> Claire Hirschfield, *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France and the Creation of Nigeria 1890-1898* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 31–32.



stipulation of the agreement, that of free access for both Germany and Britain to Lake Chad seemed to threaten French designs to claim the region around Chad to connect French territories in west, north, and equatorial Africa. As French forces headed southwest from the Niger Basin, the RNC expanded northwest, claiming the Boussa region in 1889. The demarcation line in West Africa agreed to in the Anglo-French agreement of 1890 did not ease relations between France and Britain. This demarcation line ran west-east from Lake Chad to Say on the Upper Niger, leaving the most fertile part of the Middle Niger to Britain. French public opinion was against the agreement, and many in the French government felt they had been cheated. French forces, therefore, sidestepped the agreement by advancing north from their possessions on the coast, expanding the French Empire south of the demarcation line.<sup>646</sup>

The boundaries between the Niger Coast Protectorate and the French Colony of Dahomey in the African interior had never been formally established. The Niger River was the easiest route to the interior north of the French Colonies, and French forces now moved to secure a foothold on the navigable part of the Niger. The furthest navigable point on the river was the town of Bussa, also spelled Boussa. West of Bussa was the Bussa Rapids, an 80-kilometre stretch of water that, before the construction of the Kainji Dam, posed a serious obstacle to navigation.<sup>647</sup> Suppose a French outpost was established at Bussa; in that case, the French government might have demanded free navigation for its vessels on the Niger under the guise that they were necessary to supply their inland territories. This would have broken the RNC's monopoly on river commerce, and Goldie had made it clear to the British government that if that happened, he would "sell up the whole business and clear out."<sup>648</sup>

---

<sup>646</sup> Hirschfield, 24–26.

<sup>647</sup> P J Wagland, "Kainji and the Niger Dams Project," *Geography* 54, no. 4 (1969): 459–60.

<sup>648</sup> Correspondence from the Intelligence Division to the Foreign Office, 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1896, FO 403/234, National Archives, London, 155.

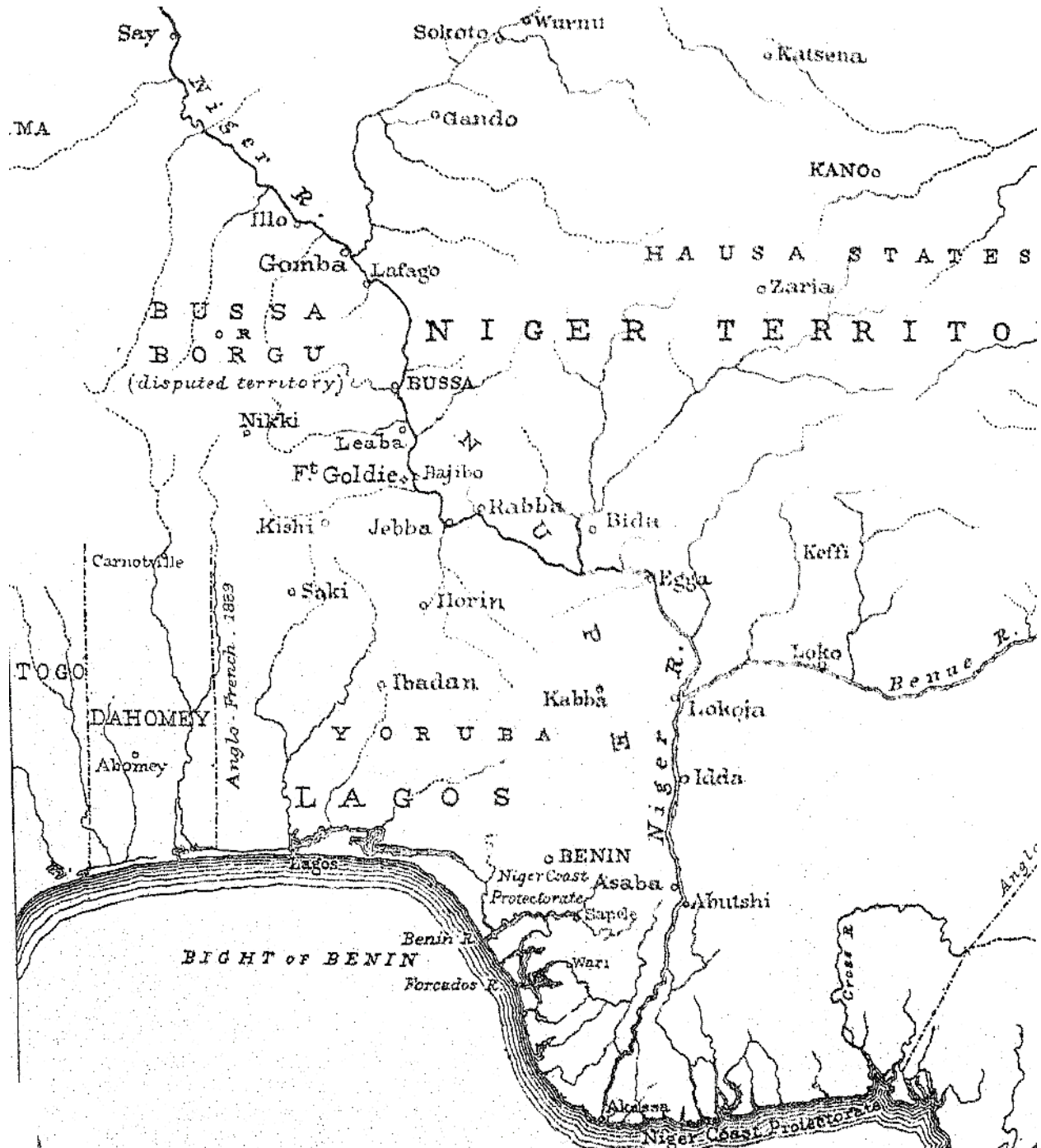


Figure 16: Map of the Territories of the Royal Niger Company showing the positions of Bida, Illorin, and the disputed Bussa region. Note that the region of Bussa, occupied by the French is almost directly north of Lagos (map from *Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger* by Seymour Vandeleur).

Goldie believed he had some time before the French tried to annex any of RNC's northern territories. In fact, the expedition against the Emirs of Bida and Illorin was partly undertaken to strengthen the company's treaty claims in the northern regions of the Niger and Benue and thereby prevent such a move by France. However, after being pressured by the British government not to operate north of Jebba so as not to risk a diplomatic incident, Goldie agreed not to bring company troops up to Bussa. But the British government now committed a fatal blunder. It informed the French foreign ministry that the British expedition would not go as far as Bussa in its operations against Sokoto. Armed with this knowledge, the French government was quick to mount an expedition to Bussa to claim it on the basis of effective occupation, ignoring the company's claim to the region on the basis of treaty rights.<sup>649</sup>

The subject of treaty rights and effective occupation was important in the geopolitics of European powers in Africa in the late nineteenth century. The protocol of the Berlin Conference stated that a European power had to have an established and official presence to claim territory on the West African coast. The idea of extending the principle of effective occupation to the rest of Africa was discussed but not adopted into the protocol.<sup>650</sup> The vast size of the interior of Africa and the difficulties involved in establishing an effective administration there meant that treaties with the indigenous people were considered enough to claim interior territories in Africa as protectorates. This principle of establishing treaties with various domestic polities whereby they acknowledged the authority of the European power in their territory was known as treaty rights. Treaty rights were the main instrument used to establish European protectorates in

---

<sup>649</sup> Correspondence from the George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 27-29.

<sup>650</sup> Imanuel Geiss, "Free Trade, Internationalization of the Congo Basin, and the Principle of Effective Occupation," in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, ed. Stig Förste, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 278–79.

African territory in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>651</sup> When French troops occupied Bussa and built Fort d’Arenberg there, the France government was claiming that effective occupation trumped pre-existing treaty rights.<sup>652</sup>

Such a claim was problematic as there was no legal foundation for it in the protocols of the Berlin conference. After all, article 35 clearly stated that effective occupation could only be claimed in coastal areas. There was no protocol that gave one power the right to establish a colony by invading another power’s protectorate with military force.<sup>653</sup> When the British government and the RNC protested that French forces were invading British territory, the French government ignored their protests. It quickly became clear that the only principle on which the French annexation was based was “might makes right.” In 1897 it seemed that the only way to recover the Bussa region for Britain was to force the French to leave. But since they would not listen to legal arguments, the only way to expel them was through force. However, such an action risked triggering a full-blown war between Britain and France.<sup>654</sup>

## The RNC’s War with the Bida and Illorin Emirates

Such concerns were far from Goldie’s mind as the company launched its military expedition against the emirates of Bida and Illorin. The RNC’s constabulary was re-organized for the expedition with the addition of several British officers explicitly hired for the campaign. These were primarily men who had experience fighting in Africa or were familiar with the use of

---

<sup>651</sup> Jörg Fisch, “Africa as Terra Nullius: The Berlin Conference and International Law,” in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, ed. Stig Förste, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 364.

<sup>652</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaigning Up. Nile Niger*, 246–47, 263.

<sup>653</sup> “Protocols and General Act of W. African Conference at Berlin, February 1885,” *19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, n.d., <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1884-061622>.

<sup>654</sup> Correspondence from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 21 and Correspondence from the Colonial Office to the Royal Niger Company, 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 28.

heavy weapons such as artillery and machine guns. One of these men was Lieutenant Seymour Vandeleur (1869-1901), who published a first-hand account of the campaign. His account of day-to-day operations allows us to draw some conclusions about the military options available to both sides. Unfortunately, Vandeleur's account includes limited information about the inside working of the armies of Bida and Illorin, leaving us with a somewhat one-sided view of the conflict. But there is enough information for us to draw conclusions about the strength and weaknesses of both armies and missed opportunities during the campaign. Vandeleur was an officer of the Scots Guards who had fought in the Nandi Expedition of 1895 in modern-day Kenya.<sup>655</sup> Arriving in Lokoja at the end of December, he took command of a Maxim machine gun section which consisted of him and four African gunners. At Lokoja, the constabulary ran through repeated firing and marching drills under the instruction of Commandant Alfred J. Arnold, a major of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hussars regiment, in preparation for the upcoming campaign. Arnold would have overall command of military matters, but Goldie was in overall command of the expedition focusing his energy on the diplomatic and logistical aspects of the operation.<sup>656</sup>

The new British officers, such as Vandeleur, were short-term hires on leave from the regular army. They were hired for their experience to bolster the RNC's army training and fighting capability. In this, they can be compared to modern private military contractors or PMCs. Private military contractors are still a feature in African warfare. They operate both to secure private interests and to bolster national forces. This was evidenced in 1961 at Jadotville in the Congo. There United Nations peacekeepers clashed with the private military forces of Union Minière du Haut Katanga.<sup>657</sup> In the Sierra Leone Civil War of 1991-2002, the PMC group

---

<sup>655</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 107–8.

<sup>656</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 167–69.

<sup>657</sup> Michael Whelan, *The Battle of Jadotville: Irish Soldiers in Combat in the Congo 1961* (Dublin: South Dublin Libraries, 2006), 28.

Executive Outcomes assisted the national government with training and operations.<sup>658</sup> Russian firm Gazprom used private military contractors to secure its oil production facilities during the Libyan Civil War.<sup>659</sup> In 2022 the government of Mali was accused of using the services of Wagner Group, a company of Russian PMC, to bolster its national armed forces in the Mali War.<sup>660</sup> The distinction between Vandeleur and the rest of the British officers and modern PMCs is that they were still officially part of the British army while “attached” to the Royal Niger Company, while most current PMCs are discharged veterans of national armies.<sup>661</sup>

Vandeleur was impressed with the quality of the RNC’s constabulary, saying, “these soldiers are the real Hausas from Hausaland itself and form the best fighting material in Africa.”<sup>662</sup> He was, of course, wrong; the RNC constabulary was at this point composed of Hausa and Yoruba soldiers in equal proportion. This was done if part of the force refused to fight their countrymen or co-religionists. In case of an ethnic uprising in the force, the company would also retain at least half its army to suppress the rebellion. Recruiting exclusively from one ethnic group was courting trouble and was something the company never did after the early failures of the constabulary.<sup>663</sup> Halfway through the campaign, Vandeleur seems to have realized that half of his soldiers were Yoruba and performed as well as the Hausa. He admitted, “Though many of them were Yorubas, who were supposed to be the least warlike of our soldiers, and were looked

---

<sup>658</sup> Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (London: Hurst & Company, 2005), 93.

<sup>659</sup> “Russian Mercenaries Enter Libyan Oil Field, as More Mercenaries Arrive from Syria,” *Daily Sabah*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/russian-mercenaries-enter-libyan-oil-field-as-more-mercenaries-arrive-from-syria/news>.

<sup>660</sup> “French FM Accuses Russian Mercenaries of ‘Despoiling’ Mali,” *Al Jazeera*, January 30, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/30/french-fm-accuses-russian-mercenaries-of-despoiling-mali>.

<sup>661</sup> “The Niger Expedition,” *The Manchester Guardian*, February 11, 1897, 5.

<sup>662</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaing Up Nile Niger*, 170.

<sup>663</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 76.

down upon by the Hausas, they behaved very well.”<sup>664</sup> Vandeleur’s statement concedes that any “inherent ethnic fighting quality” was no substitute for training, discipline, good equipment, and esprit de corps when it came to building an effective fighting force. The fact that most observers could not distinguish between Hausa and Yoruba soldiers suggests that reports sent home of purely Hausa forces such as Glover’s Hausas and the later Hausa Militia of Lagos may not have been as ethnically Hausa as many both on the frontier and metropole believed.<sup>665</sup> In fact, Haywood and Clarke state that most of the recruits of Glover’s Hausas were, in fact, ethnic Yorubas and Igbos.<sup>666</sup> The bilingual structure of the Constabulary also suggests that the necessity of “becoming Hausa” to take part in British colonial enterprise does not fit within the specific context of the Constabulary. These conclusions indicate that the Hausa dominance in colonial service in Northern Nigeria described by Moses Ochonu in his book *Colonialism by Proxy* does not fit the context of RNC expansion into Northern Nigeria. It further suggests that in the context of the Constabulary and British colonial forces in what would become Southern Nigeria, Hausas did not make up the majority of colonial military and police.<sup>667</sup>

Goldie, who until now had been managing the preparations for the campaign from his London office, arrived at Lokoja on the first of January 1897 to take charge of the expedition. Until Goldie’s arrival, the mission of the expedition had been nebulous. The soldiers were now informed that the RNC meant to break Fulani power in the old kingdom of Nupe by defeating the Emir of Bida and his allies. The portion of the emirate south of the Niger would become an

---

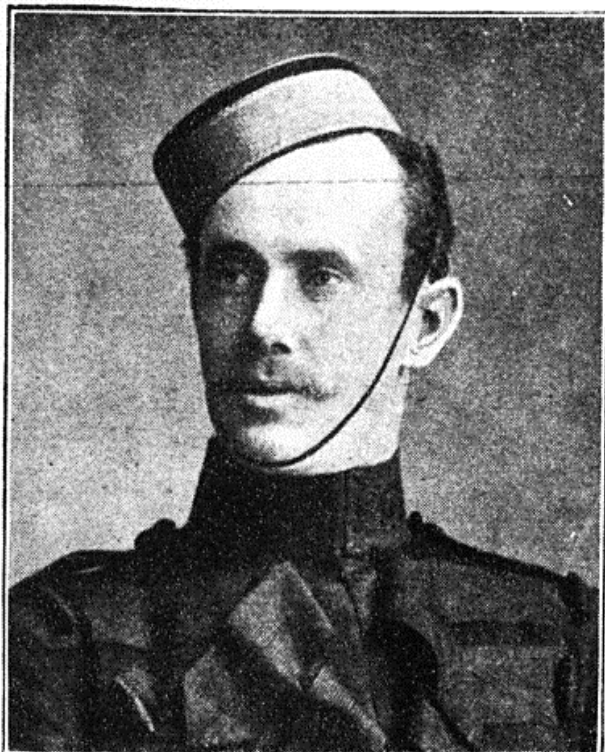
<sup>664</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 208.

<sup>665</sup> S C Ukpabi, “The Origins of the West African Frontier Force,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 3 (July 10, 1966): 491.

<sup>666</sup> Austin H. W. Haywood and Frederick A. S. Clarke, *The History of the West African Frontier Force* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1964), 17.

<sup>667</sup> Moses E. Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 15.

*Figure 17: Sir George Dashwood Taubman Goldie the Political Administrator of the Royal Niger Company and the Commander-in-Chief of the expedition against Bida and Illorin (photo from Britain Across the Seas: Africa).*



*Figure 18: Major Alfred J. Arnold, Commandant of the Constabulary, and the military commander of the RNC's expedition against Bida and Illorin (photo from The Graphic).*



autonomous province under RNC protection, and the emir would be forced to sign new treaties with the company.<sup>668</sup>

Company spies had learned that the emir's main cavalry army of 6000 men was permanently stationed south of the Niger at Kabba. From there, Markum Muhammed, Abu Bakr's highest-ranking general, was in an excellent position to raid into RNC and Niger Coast Protectorate territories. As the RNC's force was so much smaller than the Markum's cavalry army, Goldie wanted to cause as much disruption as he could before engaging the enemy in battle. The expedition was therefore divided into two sections. The ground section under the command of Goldie and Arnold would march inland south of the Niger to engage the cavalry army. At the same time, William Wallace would take the naval section of 12 steam vessels upriver and blockade the river between Jebba and Egga. This would prevent the cavalry army from retreating to Bida and prevent the troops at Bida from reinforcing the cavalry army.<sup>669</sup>

The expedition left Lokoja on the sixth of January 1897. The force was split into seven companies, each consisting of 60-70 men. Each company had a machine gun detachment of five men with one Maxim gun chambered for .45 calibre ammunition. Lieutenant Vandeleur was in charge of one such detail because of his familiarity with the Maxim. The force numbered 543 soldiers, 30 of which were Europeans, the rest mainly ethnic Hausa and Yoruba. There was also a small artillery contingent of one 12-pounder Whitworth gun, one 9-pounder Whitworth gun, and five Ordnance RML 7-pounder mountain guns. The Whitworth guns had 50 rounds each, while the 7-pounders had 29. To move the equipment and supplies necessary for the campaign,

---

<sup>668</sup> "Niger Expedition: Its Real Objects," *Liverpool Mercury*, January 13, 1897, 5.

<sup>669</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 171, 179.

900 carriers were hired. They were a mix of ethnic Yoruba and Hausa, along with ethnic Fante men who had been hired from the Gold Coast.<sup>670</sup>

Since only about 2% of the men of this 1443-strong expedition were Europeans and 98% were Africans, it is clear that the company could not conduct any military operations in its territories without its African employees. Therefore, we should try to understand what motivated these Hausa and Yoruba volunteers to fight for the company against local African states. The most powerful motivator was probably financial. African soldiers in the Constabulary were paid £1 10s a month or roughly 1s a day. Wages were not paid in currency but rather in trade goods worth a shilling a day as British currency was not widely used in company territory at this time.<sup>671</sup> This was probably considered a high wage as it was comparable to the 1s 2d paid to British regulars in Europe.<sup>672</sup> There was plenty of room for advancement in the Constabulary ranks as Africans filled all Non-Commissioned Officer roles. A corporal earned £1 15s a month, a Sergeant £2 a month, a Sergeant-Major 2<sup>nd</sup> class earned £2 10s a month, a Sergeant-Major 1<sup>st</sup> class earned £2 15s a month, a Native Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class earned £3 7s 6d a month, roughly the same as an African station agent, and a Native Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class made £3 17s 6d a month. All ranks higher than that were reserved for the few European officers serving in the Constabulary.<sup>673</sup>

The high wages of African Officers meant that a man who proved himself through military service could earn the same wealth and possibly social status as the Anglicized Africans working as Station Agents and company clerks. The food in the army was also quite serviceable,

---

<sup>670</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 176, 202.

<sup>671</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, FO 403/131, National Archives, London, 75.

<sup>672</sup> Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902*, 133–35.

<sup>673</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, 75.

consisting mainly of beef, rice, and yams.<sup>674</sup> Enlisting in the constabulary also meant that a soldier's wife and children could live in Soldier Town next to the Constabulary Headquarters at Asaba. This was a well-ordered town where each family had its own house on either the Yoruba or Hausa side of the town. This meant that a soldier could be sure his family was safe when he was out on deployment and that he could spend time with his family when not on deployment.<sup>675</sup>

Moses E. Ochonu has suggested that British service allowed some groups to establish themselves as a distinct class. His primary example is the Hausa military class in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Ochonu suggests that this part of modern Nigeria was partly colonized by Hausa in British service on behalf of the British Empire. His findings would indicate that the African soldiers of the constabulary were able to find social as well as economic advancement in company service.<sup>676</sup> There is one more motive whose existence we should not ignore, personal opposition among the troops to the existing African states.

The nineteenth century was a period of civil war and unrest in Yorubaland and Hausaland. The disintegration of the Oyo Empire in the latter half of the eighteenth century sparked off the Yoruba Revolutionary Wars, which devastated Yorubaland until the 1880s. When describing this civil unrest, Samuel Johnson of Lagos, who wrote his account in 1897, said, "violence, robbery, man-stealing were the order of the day."<sup>677</sup> Johnson, who served as the CMS's "native" minister at Lagos, was convinced that the civil war allowed the British Empire to gain ground in Yorubaland and was responsible for many Yorubas siding with the British in their conflicts against local states such as Ibadan.<sup>678</sup> After years of civil war and unrest, many

---

<sup>674</sup> Notes on the Royal Niger Constabulary by Commandant Seymour Saulez, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1887, 76.

<sup>675</sup> Report by Major MacDonald: Niger Company's Stations, 54-55.

<sup>676</sup> Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*, 6-8.

<sup>677</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. O. Johnson (Lagos: C.M.S. Nigeria, 1921).

<sup>678</sup> Johnson, 402-3.

Yorubas felt no loyalty to the states which had failed to protect them and their families. It may have seemed that the only thing that could guarantee stability and order in their country was a foreign power strong enough to bring the local warring factions to heel.

In Hausaland, the nineteenth century had also been a time of unrest and war. The Sokoto Caliphate had failed to bring peace and stability to its lands. The dominance of the Fulani in the new state was resented by many Hausa whose kingdoms had been conquered by the Caliphate. Baba of Karo, in her memoirs, says that many Hausa welcomed British authority and preferred it over the rule of the new Fulani nobility.<sup>679</sup> Although Baba's account was published in the context of colonialism, it seems reasonable to infer from it that some Hausa in company service might have opposed the rule of the emirs the company was making war on and might have preferred British rule. Goldie was certainly confident that the Hausa troops would feel more loyalty to the RNC than the Sokoto Caliphate. In the event, the troops would distinguish themselves by their high morale and outstanding discipline in the campaign.<sup>680</sup> The inference that African soldiers joined the Constabulary because military service promised economic and social advancement and because they did not feel much loyalty to African polities that had failed to establish law and order is in line with Vivian Bickford-Smith's analysis in *Black Experience and the Empire*. There Bickford-Smith concluded that African loyalty to the empire in West- and South Africa was due both to the empire's image as a deliverer from slavery and oppression, as well as a mixture of "practical partnerships and acceptable imperial practices."<sup>681</sup>

---

<sup>679</sup> Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa*, 81.

<sup>680</sup> George Goldie, "Introduction," in *Campaing on the Upper Nile and Niger* (London: Methuen & Co, 1898), IX–XXVII.

<sup>681</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, "The Betrayal of Creole Elites, 1880–1920," in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201.

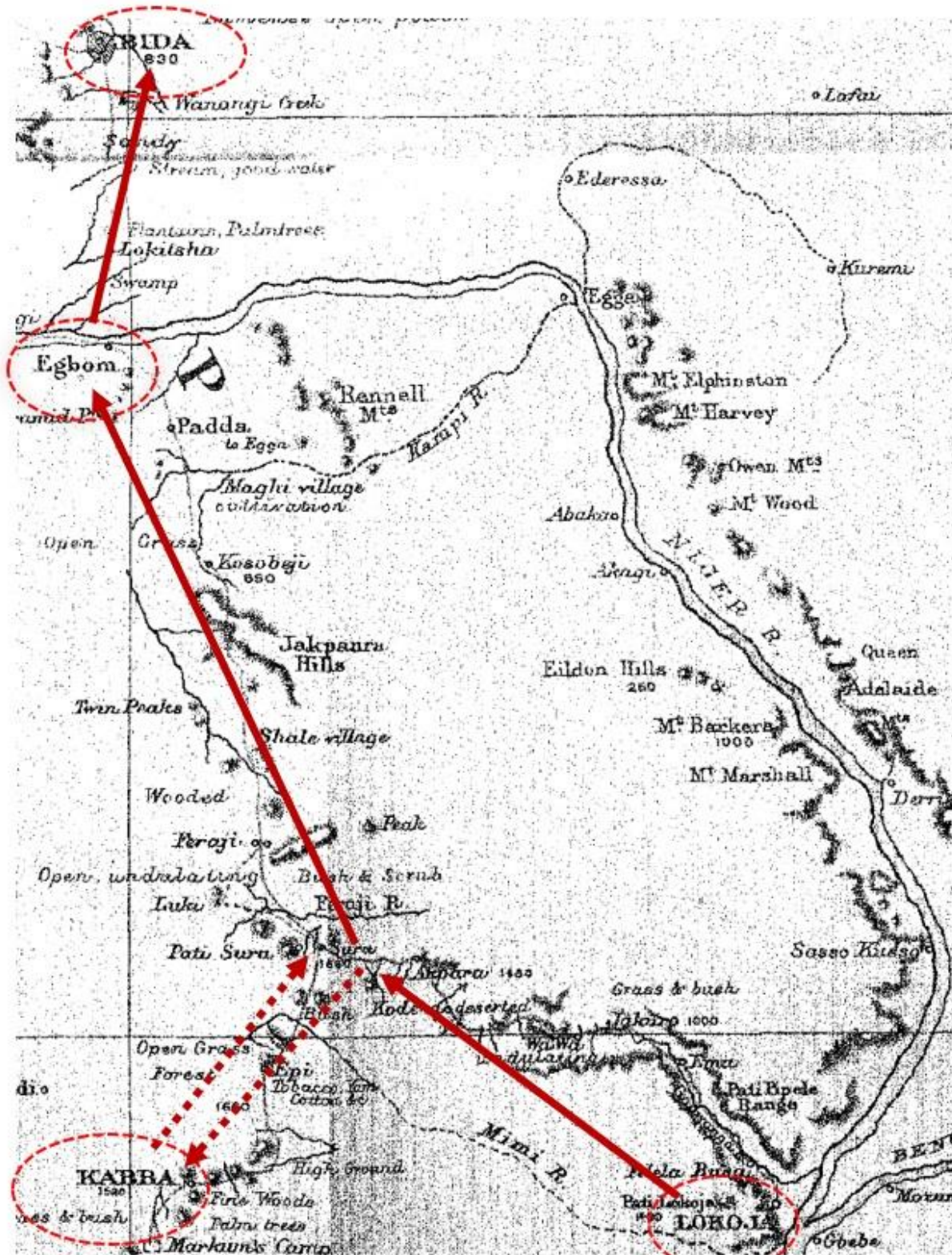


Figure 149: A map showing the theater of the first part of the Bida-Illorin campaign. Note Bida in the north-west, Kappa in the south-west, and Lokoja in the South-East. The Bida-Egbom-Kappa supply line was vital to maintaining the emirate's cavalry army in the south and the first target of the RNC campaign. The maroon line shows roughly the advance of the RNC's expedition (solid line) and the flying column's advance on Kappa (dotted line). (Graphics by author, map from *Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger* by Seymour Vandeleur).

The expedition's first target was Kabba, where Goldie and Arnold hoped the cavalry army of Bida might be isolated and destroyed. The stern-wheelers *Liberty* and *Empire* were used to ferry the expedition to the riverbank west of Lokoja. Although Kabba was almost directly west of Lokoja, the expedition marched northwest to cut off the supply line between Kabba and Bida, which crossed the Niger River at Egbom. Goldie must have hoped that Markum Muhammed would have only two choices once the company force cut off the cavalry army. Attack the force blocking his way or retreat without supplies north, hoping to be able to cross the river west of the company's blockade. Defeat or retreat would then remove the cavalry army as a fighting force leaving the capital of Bida to be defended by whatever forces could be mustered north of the river.<sup>682</sup>

Goldie's strategy made the most of his advantages. The RNC's complete control of the river meant that as long as the expedition did not stray too far away from the river, it could be constantly resupplied by Wallace's flotilla. The idea of outmaneuvering the opponent and forcing him to attack you on favourable ground was also a fundamental principle of military strategy. When selecting a battleground, both the RNC's expedition and the Emirate's cavalry preferred to fight on open ground. The RNC's officers wanted to fight in the open to make the most of their superior firepower. The Emirate's officers wanted to fight in the open to make the most of their excellent maneuverability. As confrontation loomed, officers on both sides must have pondered whether the RNC's firepower would be enough to check the momentum of a massed cavalry charge. Before the fighting broke out, Lieutenant Vandeleur believed the answer to this question would decide the war's outcome, writing, "It must be remembered that they [the Royal Niger Constabulary] had never had to face cavalry before, the moral effect of which, even

---

<sup>682</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 181–83.

on white troops, is very great... everything depended on the fire-discipline of the black troops.”<sup>683</sup>

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1897, the expedition reached Sura on the road between Kabba and Egbom. There a fortified camp was established. The carriers and a hundred soldiers were left to guard the base, and the rest of the Constabulary formed a “flying column,” meaning a light force capable of moving quickly. This column advanced on Kabba but soon realized that the cavalry army had abandoned its base and retreated north to avoid becoming cut off from Bida. They had been forced to leave much of their heavier supplies, including their grain depots which the company captured. Once at the river, Markum Muhammed realized Wallace's flotilla had already arrived at Egbom. The Nupe people living on the riverbanks had allied with Wallace, and there was now no way for the cavalry army to cross the river.<sup>684</sup>

The revolt of the people living on the southern banks of the Niger was in line with the predictions of *Lagos Weekly Record* editor John Payne Jackson. He believed that most of the people living under emirate rule south of the Niger River would side with the company in the war as they had suffered greatly from the slave raids of their northern neighbour and were “the mortal enemies of the Moslem.”<sup>685</sup> Low on supplies, Bida’s cavalry army began a westward retreat along the river, hoping to find a spot to cross the river. Its westward retreat quickly took a toll on the army’s organization. It became incapable of launching independent operations due to a lack of supplies and the fragmentation of its forces.<sup>686</sup>

---

<sup>683</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 207.

<sup>684</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1897, FO 403/248, National Archives, London, 44.

<sup>685</sup> “The Campaign in West Africa,” *Lagos Weekly Record*, February 13, 1897, 4–5.

<sup>686</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 185–88.

With the cavalry army effectively out of the fight, all that remained was to capture the Emirate's capital city of Bida and force the Emir to sign a surrender agreement. Before the army marched on, Goldie invited all the notables of the region around Sura and Kabba to a summit. Among these notables was an individual the British called "the king of Ayeri." Ayeri was a prosperous town near Kabba whose cotton, tobacco, and millet fields greatly impressed Lieutenant Vandeleur. The individual referred to as a king was an older man dressed in a red and golden gown with a red fez with a golden tassel. The old man said he was glad to see the British as Fulani taxation had been steadily increasing over the years. Their demands for slave tributes had deprived the farmers of Ayeri of their domestic enslaved people. However, he was unwilling to render any aid to the RNC expedition, saying he feared Fulani reprisals once the company force left. Undeterred by the tepid support for his cause, Goldie declared that Southern Nupe, meaning all territory of the Emirate of Bida south of the Niger, was now independent and under the protection of the RNC. Goldie's main interpreter, Esa, translated his speech into Nupe, and a Sergeant-Major of the Constabulary translated it into Yoruba. Goldie then declared that slavery was now illegal in Southern Nupe and that all Fulanis must move north of the Niger.<sup>687</sup>

Of course, Goldie had no capacity to enforce any of these decrees, nor was he willing to spend company resources on establishing a permanent administration in the newly conquered Southern Nupe. The council at Kabba was theatre meant as much for audiences in the metropole as it was for the attending notables. Goldie probably hoped that publicly declaring the RNC's expedition was ending slavery and liberating people from oppression might counter some of the attacks of the Liverpool lobby. Of course, after the campaign, the company would limit its presence to the riverbank, and as long as local authorities honoured their trade agreements with

---

<sup>687</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 189–92.



the company, the RNC would not interfere in their day-to-day lives. Henry Fox Bourne (1837-1909), the secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, pointed this out to the government after the campaign concluded when he urged the government to establish a proper administration in Southern Nupe as the RNC would never spend resources to enforce any of the edicts Goldie had laid down at Kabba.<sup>688</sup>

With the Emir's cavalry army in full retreat, Goldie and Arnold decided to rendezvous with Wallace at Egbom. There the expedition could be ferried across the Niger; once across, the troops could advance by road to Bida. Goldie also sent African messengers after the retreating Markum Muhammed offering to make him emir of Bida if he and his troops would switch sides. Muhammed, however, remained loyal to Emir Abu Bakr dan Masaba although he had by this time lost all communication with the capital. This was because patrols of local Nupe now bolstered Wallace's blockade and successfully prevented messengers from Bida and the cavalry army from crossing the river. Goldie also sent a telegram to the company to notify his associates and deputy-governor Lord Scarbrough how the campaign was going. The terse message read, "Kabba, 14<sup>th</sup>. Markum fled. We going Bida. All well."<sup>689</sup>

The company troops crossed the Niger at Egbom on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1897. The African soldiers got out their charms which they kept in their haversacks for the march but wore for protection in battle. Vandeleur describes the Hausa charms as "little leather cases containing a piece of paper with a verse from the Koran".<sup>690</sup> Others, probably the Yorubas, wore "pieces of wood or shells fastened together by a bit of boot lace...round the neck or on the

---

<sup>688</sup> Correspondence from Henry Fox Bourne to Lord Salisbury, 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1897, FO 403/248, National Archives, London, 105.

<sup>689</sup> Cablegrams received from Sir George Goldie, 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1897, FO 403/248, National Archives, London, 42.

<sup>690</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 198.

sword-belt.”<sup>691</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the expedition was ready to move, and the advance on Bida began. Two companies advanced ahead of the main force to clear the way, and these skirmished with Emirate forces throughout the day.<sup>692</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the expedition reached the open plains south of Bida. This was the ground on which Vandeleur believed emirate officers wanted to fight the decisive battle saying, “our adversaries... preferred the open ground round [sic] Bida, where they could attack with their cavalry, which they believed to be invincible.”<sup>693</sup> Markum Muhammed was still trapped on the southern bank of the river, and the emirate force was thus deprived of its best cavalry regiments. Nevertheless, Emir Abu Bakr had assembled an army to defend the capital. He had requested aid from the emirates of Agaie and Lapai, smaller emirates neighboring Bida. The Emir of Agaie Etsu Nuhu (d. 1900) had sent a military force to aid his longtime ally, as had emir Abd al-Qadiri (d. 1907) of Lapai. Both forces managed to reach Bida before the RNC’s expedition. The rest of Bida’s army was composed of local forces, a mixed force of infantry and cavalry. Its size is uncertain; Joseph Smaldone has estimated the size of Bida’s army as 10,000 cavalrymen and 20,000 infantrymen. But he did not clarify whether this included the approximately 4000-6000 men of the absent cavalry army trapped south of the river.<sup>694</sup>

The infantry and cavalry of the Bida army did not operate in the western fashion, with the cavalry kept on the flanks and rear in a battle to support the infantry and exploit any breakthroughs the infantry made in the enemy line.<sup>695</sup> Instead, according to Vandeleur, at the

---

<sup>691</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 198.

<sup>692</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 200–202.

<sup>693</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 200.

<sup>694</sup> Joseph P. Smaldone, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 119.

<sup>695</sup> For western organization and deployment of cavalry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century see for example Michael Blake, *American Civil War Cavalry* (London: Almark, 1973), 5. and Henry Montague Hozier, *The Franco-Prussian War: Its Causes, Incidents, and Consequences* (London: William McKenzie, 1872), 227–30.

battle of Bida, the emirate infantry moved to the rear of the cavalry and supported its advance against the enemy line and then covered its retreat if the cavalry was forced to retire. This tactic made the main line more maneuverable than the infantry line of European armies, but it left the cavalry exposed to the heavy firepower of the infantry firing line.<sup>696</sup>

The company's force set out at 6:00 on the 26<sup>th</sup> intending to reach Bida that day. At first, the leading two companies advanced in a skirmish formation through light forests forcing the Bida vanguard to fall back towards the city. When the force reached the Rafi Shaun Nullah, a ravine cut by Rafi Shaun stream which allowed access to the plains below, they could see Bida's army arranged in front of the red brick walls of the city, on the plains in front of them. Arnold decided to establish a camp at the ridge of the ravine, and the carriers and supplies were camped there and guarded by a company of soldiers. The artillery was still far in the rear and so would not play a part in the upcoming battle. The expedition now marched down the ravine and formed a firing line with two companies in the center and a company guarding each flank. As the Constabulary advanced, its steady rifle volleys and machine-gun fire wreaked havoc on the lines of the emirate army. The range between the forces was between 300-400 yards, and the rifle fire from the emirate infantry and cavalry made little impression on the company's ranks. But when the city walls were about only 2000 yards away, Major Arnold called a halt. The force was getting low on ammunition, the Maxims having fired almost 1000 rounds each, and the Bida cavalry was moving to flank the firing line. Major Arnold, therefore, ordered the force to form a defensive square until the mountain guns could be brought up. But he soon realized that he was cut off from the camp at the top of the ravine and that it would be impossible for the light artillery to get through unsupported.<sup>697</sup>

---

<sup>696</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaing Up. Nile Niger*, 203–5.

<sup>697</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 176, 204–6.

Abu Bakr now had a golden opportunity. His forces had discovered the camp by the ravine and moved to cut off communications between the square and the camp. That camp might have looked formidable, defended by hundreds of men, but most of those were carriers without rifles. The main fighting force was in a defensive square, a slow-moving formation, and engaged with his infantry. If he had ordered his cavalry to break contact with the square and used its superior mobility to move to the enemy's rear, they might have attacked the camp by the ravine. Given their performance in this campaign, the company defending the camp would probably have fought to the last man inflicting hundreds of casualties on Abu Bakr's army. But if his cavalry had been able to capture the camp, they would have captured the expedition's entire ammunition supply. The small fighting force, already low on ammunition, would then have been doomed. Out of ammunition, it could be easily destroyed by the superior numbers of the Bida forces, and a crippling blow dealt to the RNC's Constabulary. Another tactic might have been for the cavalry to bypass the camp and attack the heavy artillery pieces that had still not reached the camp. Still limbered and lightly defended, those guns might have easily been captured and destroyed by the cavalry depriving the expedition of much of its heavy firepower. But neither of these options were taken. Instead, Abu Bakr's cavalry remained engaged with the square charging again and again but being repulsed by the Constabulary's firepower, never coming closer than 100 yards to the firing lines.<sup>698</sup>

Knowing his position was untenable, Major Arnold ordered the square formation to retreat toward the camp. Step by step, the soldiers slowly retreated, firing as they went. The cavalry cordon between camp and square was quickly shattered, and with covering fire from the camp, the troops began to climb back up the ravine. As the force redeployed in a defensive

---

<sup>698</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 207–11.

formation around the camp, ammunition was distributed, and the seven-pounder mountain guns finally made it into camp.<sup>699</sup> These were now set up and began to shell the emirate cavalry, which had finally made it as far as the camp and was trying to encircle it. At 16:00, the first heavy artillery piece finally arrived. The nine-pounder had the range to effectively engage the main emirate force still close to the city walls. One round from the nine-pounder hit the command staff of the Agaie detachment and killed most of its officers, leaving the formation almost leaderless.<sup>700</sup>

The day's action cost the company force one dead and six wounded. When the battle was reported back in England, the company's troops were mislabeled as Hausa, no mention being made of the fact that half the force was Yoruba. The dead man was Lieutenant Thomson of the Leicestershire Regiment, who, like Vandeleur, had been hired for the campaign duration. *The Times* special correspondent embedded with the expeditionary force for publicity purposes was most impressed with the Constabulary, saying, "their fire discipline was equal to that of the best white troops."<sup>701</sup>

It would appear that some Europeans embedded in the force did not realize that half the force was composed of Yorubas. Vandeleur did not know it until he had been with the Constabulary for a week, first assuming every soldier was Hausa. *The Times* special correspondent never seems to have realized the ethnicity of the men around, constantly referring to the whole force as Hausa. However, the soldiers themselves were very aware of the ethnic composition of the force, as can be seen in the layout of soldier town. The families of the Hausa and Yoruba soldiers lived in separate quarters. Unfortunately, we have almost no account of how

---

<sup>699</sup> "The Niger Expedition," 5.

<sup>700</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaigning Up. Nile Niger*, 212–13.

<sup>701</sup> "The Niger Campaign," *The Times*, February 11, 1897, 5.

the Hausa and Yoruba soldiers interacted on a campaign. We know that there were both Hausa and Yoruba “native officers.” Still, the records do not mention whether these exclusively commanded their ethnic brethren or whether the companies were ethnically mixed. Haywood and Clarke noted that in 1903 most “native officers” of the Nigerian regiments of the WAFF were bilingual, and as that force was to a great extent modelled on the Constabulary, this suggests that companies of the Constabulary were ethnically mixed with officers communicating their orders in both Yoruba and Hausa.<sup>702</sup> Vandeleur mentions a rivalry between the Yoruba and Hausa soldiers and that some of the Hausa looked down on the Yorubas. But given the force’s outstanding performance in the campaign, we can surmise that ethnic divides did not affect discipline or conduct in battle.<sup>703</sup>

The expeditionary force spent that night in camp firing illumination rockets every few hours as Major Arnold was worried about a night attack. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, the force was reorganized. Major Arnold dared not tempt fate a second time, and that day all ammunition and supplies were carried inside the square. As there was no enemy force in close contact, the RNC force could take its time to lower the heavy guns down the ravine to the plains below unmolested. Once on the plain, the fighting companies formed a square with the Maxim guns placed at the corners of the square. The artillery was inside the square, along with the carriers with the supplies and ammunition. The square moved agonizingly slowly, but as Bida was only about 5 kilometres away, cohesion mattered more than speed in the upcoming battle.<sup>704</sup>

While the company was reorganizing its forces, Abu Bakr’s army was disintegrating. The Agaie Detachment, deprived of its officers, departed from Bida in the early morning and headed

---

<sup>702</sup> Haywood and Clarke, *The History of the West African Frontier Force*, 17.

<sup>703</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaing Up. Nile Niger*, 208.

<sup>704</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 214–15.

home. This indicates that the soldiers' loyalty lay not with the Caliphate or the Emirate but rather with their general. With the general fallen, the Agaie soldiers dispersed and took no more part in the fighting. Abu Bakr had already lost his best opportunity to win the battle when he failed to attack the RNC's supply camp or artillery train on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Not having his forces posted closer to the ravine on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> was another mistake. His infantry could have made life very unpleasant for the RNC's soldiers by forcing them to form their new square under enemy fire. Instead, most of the emirate's forces were posted close to the city. By now, the best tactic would probably have been to fight inside the town, where the tight battlespace would have nullified some of the company's long-range firepower. But city fighting was not something Abu Bakr had trained his troops to do. And so, they formed on the open plains south of the city, on the sort of battlefield they had trained for and on which they so far had been superior to most enemies.<sup>705</sup>

The series of tactical mistakes made by Bida's armed forces have not been previously discussed in the company's history. But they are important to note because they allowed the Constabulary to achieve victory despite limited numbers and unfamiliarity with the terrain. There was no foregone conclusion to this campaign. The RNC won the war because it conducted the campaign in a way that allowed it to maximize its strengths, namely superior firepower and control of the river. At the same time, the emirate's generals failed to use their strengths of superior numbers and maneuverability to their advantage.<sup>706</sup> With hindsight, it would appear that Abu Bakr could have won a deceive victory over the company on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January by outflanking the Constabulary's square formation and attacking their supply base and exposed supply line to the river.

---

<sup>705</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 212–15.

<sup>706</sup> "The Colonies In 1897," *The Times*, May 29, 1898, 10.

Had Abu Bakr conducted the campaign in a manner that maximized his strengths, he might have been able to follow in the footsteps of Menelik II (1844-1913) of Ethiopia, who a year earlier had defeated an invading Italian Army near Adwa. Menelik had managed to use his superiority in numbers and familiarity with the terrain to outmaneuver the Italian forces of Lieutenant-General Oreste Baratieri (1841-1903) in the mountainous terrain of Northern Ethiopia. The Italians, stuck in a bad defensive position, decided to go on the offensive. They split their forces into four columns for the advance, thereby making it impossible for them to take advantage of their superior firepower and artillery. As the advancing columns got lost in the mountains, the Ethiopians manoeuvred to attack them from the front and the flank. The result was an Italian defeat at the Battle of Adwa, after which the Italian government was forced to acknowledge defeat and sign the Treaty of Addis Ababa, which guaranteed the sovereignty of Ethiopia.<sup>707</sup> When studying these colonial campaigns, we must keep in mind that technological superiority does not guarantee victory in armed conflict. Strategy and tactics can be adapted to compensate for an opponent's advantage in firepower, a lesson that is as true in today's asymmetrical wars as it was in Africa in the late nineteenth century.

The emirate infantry offered the first resistance as the square advanced towards the city. Spread out in skirmish order in the buildings and trees along the way; their fire was ineffective as they opened fire before the company troops came into effective range and then withdrew when company troops opened volley fire at 400 yards. As the RNC forces neared the city, the emirate cavalry tried to flank the square but now found no troops in the rear, and each of their charges was repulsed by steady firing from the company troops. The square halted 2500 yards from the city wall, and the artillery was unlimbered. Emir Abu Bakr, who had ridden out with his cavalry,

---

<sup>707</sup> Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 334--335.



was wounded in the first salvo of the cannons and had to retire from the field. Most of the emirate army retired into the city as artillery forced them from the open ground south of Bida. The square then advanced again, securing a position 500 yards from the walls from which the entire settlement could be shelled. Hale rockets were fired into the city from this position, quickly setting fire to the thatched roofs of the town. As the city burned, the injured Abu Bakr and the rest of his army retreated from Bida and left the company forces in control of the town. The day's action had cost the expedition seven men killed and nine wounded. In total, only eight men had been lost in two days of heavy fighting, showing how ineffective the small arms fire of the emirate army had been. The losses of the emirate army had been severe, especially from the artillery fire, but neither the company nor the British press recorded an accurate estimate of their losses.<sup>708</sup>

In many ways, Goldie's victory at Bida was comparable to Garnet Wolseley's victory at Ashanti in 1873. Both were the result of a military expedition launched in response to an African state's opposition to British presence. Both took place in a territory which was not really in Britain's sphere of influence and whose location made permanent occupation difficult. Both campaigns, therefore, prioritized destroying the enemy's army and capturing his capital. Having secured their military objectives, both expeditions failed to achieve their political goals. All the victors could do was demolish the African capital and seize all military assets they could capture.<sup>709</sup>

But neither Wolseley nor Goldie had the capability to set up a permanent administration in the territory they had captured. The geographical remoteness and the disease climate of the

---

<sup>708</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 218–20.

<sup>709</sup> Thomas, *A Full and Authentic Diary of the Ashanti Expedition By Joseph Hammond Thomas, 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade*, 17–19.

regions in question meant that permanent occupation would have been costly and hazardous.<sup>710</sup> Thus both were forced to retire and leave the state they had attacked relatively intact. Both men, of course, tried to achieve a political settlement. Wolseley managed to get King Kofi of Ashanti to sign a surrender which entailed the Ashanti state paying war damages to the British Empire. But after he left, there was no way to enforce this treaty, and no payments were ever made, apart from the first one, which Wolseley had received in person from the king's emissaries.<sup>711</sup> Goldie likewise tried to create a political settlement to end the war. His idea was to depose Abu Bakr and place Markum Muhammed on the throne. As Abu Bakr had fled into exile, the Markum, his heir, was convinced to take the throne. As Emir Muhammed, he signed a peace treaty with the company. The treaty ceded all Bida Emirate territory south of the Niger and the entire northern bank of the river to the company. It acknowledged RNC sovereignty over the emirate, effectively cutting it away from the Sokoto Caliphate.<sup>712</sup> This political settlement was short-lived, and by August 1897, Abu Bakr was back in Bida, where Markum Muhammed returned control of the government to him.<sup>713</sup>

If this comparison makes the RNC's campaign against Bida and Illorin seem typical of British late nineteenth-century colonial operations in West Africa, we should be mindful of some of its unique characteristics. It was organized and executed by a private company, not the British government. The British army officers present were there as contractors. The supply line was entirely river-based and did not require the extensive and expensive roadbuilding that was necessary for campaigns conducted in jungle terrain.<sup>714</sup> The campaign's war aims were not

---

<sup>710</sup> Brackenbury, *The Ashanti War: A Narrative*, 267–70.

<sup>711</sup> Robert B. Edgerton, *The Fall of the Asante Empire: The Hundred-Year War For Africa's Gold Coast* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 170–71.

<sup>712</sup> "The Treaty of Bida," *Lagos Weekly Record*, May 1, 1897, 6.

<sup>713</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 298.

<sup>714</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 23–24.

THE WHITWORTH 9-POUNDER BREECHLOADING RIFLED FIELD GUN.

(For Description, see opposite Page.)

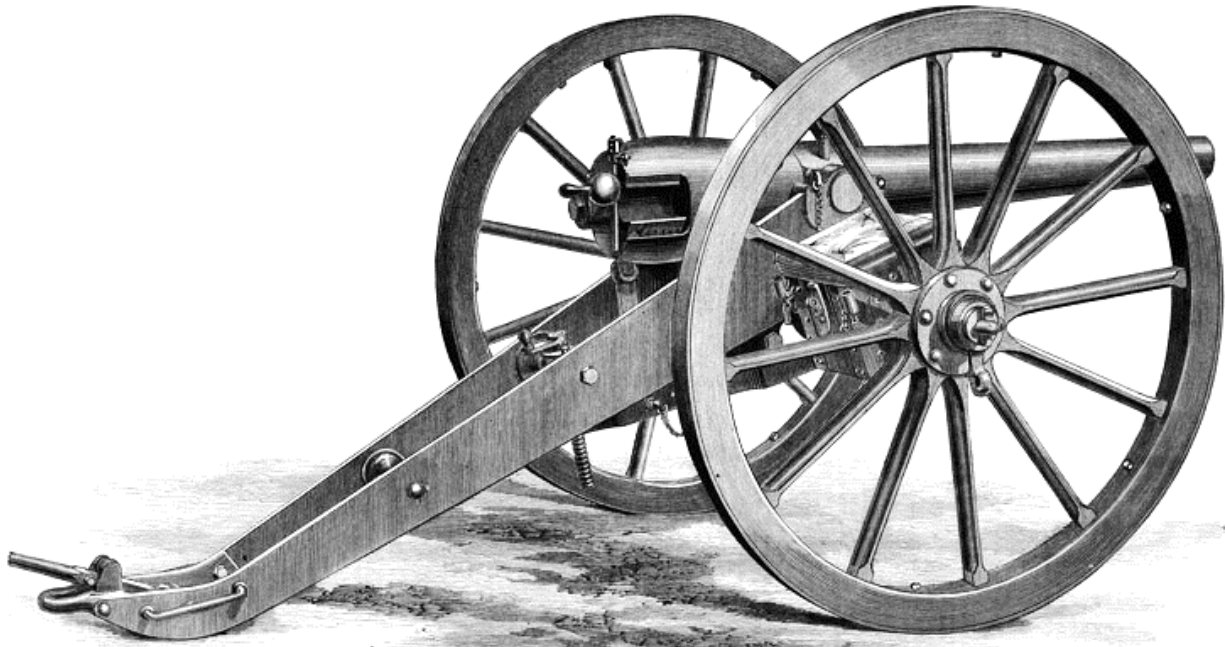


Figure 20: Engraving of Whitworth 9-pounder rifled breechloading field gun like the one, which with a single shot, deprived the Agaie Detachment of its command staff (photo from Wikimedia Commons).

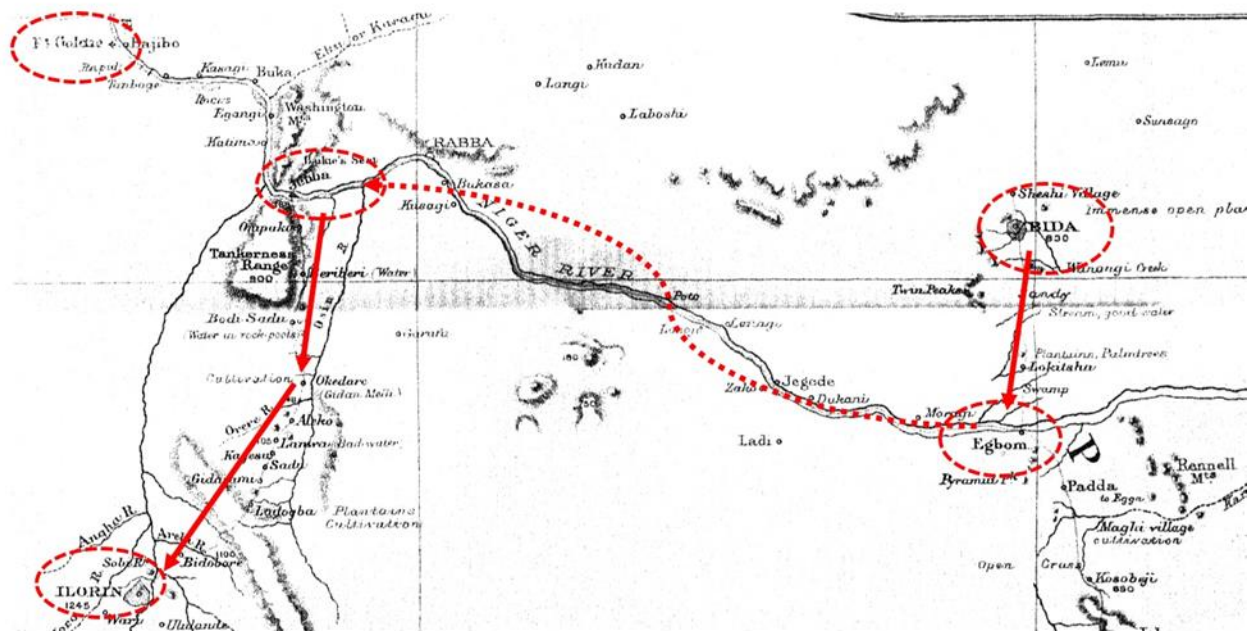


Figure 21: A map showing the theater of the second part of the Bida-Illorin campaign. Note Bida in the north-east, Egbom in the west, Jebba in the west, and Illorin in the south-west. The straight lines show the direction of overland marches by the expedition and the dotted line displays the transportation of the expedition by Wallace's flotilla from Egbom to Jebba. The position of Fort Goldie is visible north-west of Jebba (Graphics by author, map from Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger by Seymour Vandeleur).

political but economic. French incursion and the open hostility of the emirs of Bida and Illorin threatened the RNC's control of the river. The peace treaty with Bida shows the company's priority, control of the riverbank and, therefore, the river trade. The company's failure to affect a permanent settlement was primarily due to its unwillingness to spend resources on an occupation that would have contributed little to its commercial success. This also highlights the differences between the business models of the RNC and the British South Africa Company. In Mashonaland and Matabeleland, the BSAC was willing to spend resources on permanently occupying conquered territory as its primary revenue was meant to come from the introduction of European settlers and the development of mineral resources in its lands. The RNC, however derived its income from its monopoly of the river trade and therefore had no interest in control of any territory except the riverbank. The unwillingness to occupy any territory not necessary to maintain a monopoly on the river trade further demonstrates that the company's purpose was never to expand the British Empire. It was founded and operated for one purpose, monopolizing the Niger trade.<sup>715</sup>

Once Bida had been burnt to the ground and the emir's palace destroyed with explosives, the expedition headed back to the river to rendezvous with Wallace's flotilla on 3 February. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the flotilla transported the infantry force upriver to Jebba. On the way, Vandeleur noted that many villages on the river had hoisted white flags at prominent places. Because of their similarity to the RNC's flag, the white flags had become a symbol of the revolt against Bida and Illorin's authority. They symbolized that the towns took the RNC's side in the conflict. This was a wise precaution as armed company steamers continually patrolled the river between Egga and

---

<sup>715</sup> Imperialist (pseud. J.R. Maguire), *The Pioneers of Empire: Being a Vindication of the Principle and a Short Sketch of the History of Chartered Companies, with Especial Reference to the British South Africa Company*, 116–17.

Jebba. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, the force disembarked at Jebba at the company trading post. The station was built on an island in the river due to the opposition of the local government to the RNC.<sup>716</sup> At Jebba, the force also learned the worrying news that a French force of 500 soldiers and four European officers had entered the Borgu Kingdom and was claiming it for the French Republic. Of course, the RNC force could do nothing about this news as Goldie had promised the British government that the expedition would not travel further upriver than Jebba. This information had then been transmitted to the French government, which responded by invading territory claimed by the company, knowing that the RNC would not be able to react.<sup>717</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, the march towards Illorin began. However, many European officers were now sick, possibly with dysentery, and had to be supported by the African carriers to keep moving. By the 14<sup>th</sup>, the force was at Ladogaba when an embassy from Emir Sulaymanu dan Aliyu reached them. Goldie had dispatched several messages to the Emir urging him to surrender and negotiate a diplomatic solution with the company.<sup>718</sup> However, power at the Emir's courts rested mainly in the hands of the four Baloguns. According to the *Lagos Weekly Record* editor, Jackson, the most powerful of these was Balogun Adamu, who controlled Ilorin's foreign policy. His close relationship with the Emir of Bida and his slave raids south into Yorubaland made him an unpopular figure in Lagos. Jackson seems to have supported the RNC's expedition and seems to have been writing on behalf of the Anglicized African community in Lagos when he wrote, "the community will be glad if the moral effect of the Niger Company's expedition suffices to bring to an end the present somewhat strained relations between Illorin and this Colony."<sup>719</sup> This comment suggests that the RNC's expedition against

---

<sup>716</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 241–42.

<sup>717</sup> Correspondence from the George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1897, 28-29.

<sup>718</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 270.

<sup>719</sup> "The Expedition of the Royal Niger Company," *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 23, 1897, 4.

Bida and Illorin had some support among the Anglicized African community in Lagos. Many members of this community, being ethnic Yorubas, must have lost relatives or suffered themselves from slave raids launched from the emirates into Yorubaland, which might explain their support for the RNC's expedition.

In any event, the four Baloguns of Emir Sulaymanu's court refused to negotiate with the company and assembled a small army to defend their capital. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, the expedition started its final march towards Illorin. The four Baloguns had about 6000 troops in total and devised a battle plan. Most of their infantry was posted near the Oyon River. Meanwhile, the cavalry was split into squadrons of 200-300 men each. One squadron managed to outflank the expedition and block its retreat route. At the same time, other cavalry squadrons flanked the expedition from both sides. The plan was to force the Constabulary to retreat into the direction of the Oyon River, where the infantry would fall upon it and complete its destruction. However, these plans were upset when at 8:30 am, Major Arnold spotted the movements of the cavalry and ordered the force to form a square like it had on the second day of the Battle of Bida. He then ordered the square to maintain its position. This upset the plans of the Ilorin forces as they thought the small force would try to withdraw toward Oyon.<sup>720</sup>

Faced with the stationary infantry forming a square, the cavalry squadrons launched a concerted attack from all sides to dislodge their foe. But they were a breath too late. By the time they reached the square, the last Maxim was set up, and firing lines were established. At ranges of 50-100 yards, the volleys of the company riflemen and the fire from the machine guns tore the cavalry squadrons to shreds killing many cavalymen in the first minutes of the battle. Further attacks were launched and repelled, and the square then began to move towards the city. The

---

<sup>720</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaiging Up. Nile Niger*, 271–72.

force remained in formation during the night and placed wire emplacements at all fronts to hinder enemy cavalry charges. At 6:30 am the next day, the square moved again. The Ilorin forces now tried a new tactic forming a firing line with their infantry to block the route to the city. The expedition opened fire with its machine guns breaking the Ilorin firing line as it came into range. A second firing line closer to the town suffered the same fate, and by 8:15, the walls of Ilorin were in sight. A white flag was hoisted over the settlement bringing an end to the fighting. Hale rockets and artillery were then used to bombard the town, and these quickly set fire to the roofs of the houses. In the dry weather, the whole settlement was soon in flames. As the city burned, the soldiers and carriers of the RNC supplemented their wages by looting the town and nearby villages of food and valuables. At least 200 cavalymen and hundreds of foot soldiers had been killed in the two days of fighting, while Vandeleur reported no Constabulary losses.<sup>721</sup>

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, the four Baloguns, including Adamu and Alanamu, and Emir Sulaymanu, returned to the city of Ilorin and concluded a peace treaty with Goldie. The terms were the same as those offered at Bida. Ilorin was split from the Sokoto Caliphate and was now under the protection of the RNC. The company would decide on a borderline between Ilorin and Lagos, and the emir would abide by its decision. Among the witnesses to the treaty was Vandeleur.<sup>722</sup>

## The Tide Turns Against the Company

This moment marked both the high point of company power and the beginning of its demise. While the RNC had triumphed on the periphery of empire, the tide had turned against it

---

<sup>721</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 280–85.

<sup>722</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, 291–92.

in the metropole. In 1897 the British government appeared to have decided that the time had come to get rid of the company. The reasons were manifold. The French invasion into the company's northwestern frontier exposed its inability to defend imperial territory from hostile European powers. At the same time, domestic opposition against the company, led by the Liverpool lobby, began to receive a more favorable hearing in the halls of power. But the most important reason for the government's decision to get rid of the chartered company was probably a change in the government's attitude towards its colonial empire. In 1873 when Wolseley had conquered Ashanti, the British government had no interest in permanent occupation of African territory far from the coast. Wolseley had therefore withdrawn his forces, and the Ashanti state remained outside the British sphere of influence. By 1897 this kind of colonial territory was considered worth occupying, and in 1900 the third Ashanti expedition would annex Ashanti into the British Empire.<sup>723</sup>

The appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as Secretary of State for the Colonies signalled a sea change in British colonial policy. Chamberlain was the son of a London merchant who moved to Birmingham, where he ran a screw-making business. He originally became involved with politics as a proponent of social reform in Birmingham. In November 1873, he was elected mayor of Birmingham and entered national politics as a member of parliament for the Liberal party in 1876. By 1895 the Liberal party had split due to disagreement over the question of Irish Home Rule. Chamberlain joined the Liberal Unionists as he feared that Irish home rule would "logically lead to the disintegration of the union and the Empire."<sup>724</sup> After the election of 1895, he was offered a post in the administration as part of a majority government formed by the Conservative Party the Liberal Unionist Party. When offered his choice of position in the

---

<sup>723</sup> The Ashanti Expedition, 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1901, Volume 91, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 439-441.

<sup>724</sup> Denis Judd, *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 111.



government in July 1895, Chamberlain surprised many of his colleagues by picking the office of Secretary of State for the Colonies.<sup>725</sup> By 1896 Chamberlain had already begun to affect a much more aggressive colonial policy in Western Africa. His Assistant Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, John Bramston (1832-1921), laid out his supervisor's new policy in a series of missives to the Foreign Office. On the Gold Coast, where Britain had heretofore limited its presence mainly to the coastal regions, Chamberlain now wanted to spare no effort to "strengthen our position in the countries to the north of Ashanti and the Gold Coast."<sup>726</sup>

To secure the West-African interior, Chamberlain was willing to use the Gold Coast Constabulary to occupy strategic positions permanently. This was a marked departure from earlier policy. Chamberlain was not a man who was going to leave the hinterland to the French, and unlike his predecessors, he was willing to spend public funds on securing imperial territory. In West Africa, evidence of this new policy was the willingness of the government to increase its military commitment in the region in 1897 by beginning the process of consolidating the Lagos Constabulary, The Niger Coast Protectorate Force, The Gold Coast Constabulary, and the Sierra Leone Frontier Police into the larger and better organized West African Frontier Force.<sup>727</sup> Since the unwillingness to spend £3.750 annually on administering the Lower Niger Region had been the main reason the RNC was given a charter in 1886, this new government policy made the RNC redundant.<sup>728</sup> The company had been given a charter so the government would not have to spend money on the colonial periphery. If the government was willing to spend money, it no longer needed the company.

---

<sup>725</sup> Ian Cawood, "Joseph Chamberlain, the Conservative Party and the Leamington Spa Candidature Dispute of 1895," *Historical Research* 79, no. 206 (2006): 575–77.

<sup>726</sup> Correspondence from the John Bramston to the Foreign Office, 13th of July 1896, FO 403/234, National Archives, London, 26.

<sup>727</sup> Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force," 486–88.

<sup>728</sup> Correspondence from Consul Hewett to the Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1883, 299.

This was the new reality in 1897 when the company, at the height of its power, lost its usefulness to the government. A public indication of this change in government attitude came in July 1897 when Lord Salisbury welcomed a delegation from the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce to the Foreign Office. This deputation was composed of the main competitors of the company, such as John Holt (1841-1915) and James Pinnock (d. 1897), whose company was one of the oldest British companies operating in West Africa, having been a competitor of Holland Jacques and Company before Goldie became involved in the Niger trade. Their arguments were not new. The RNC was operating an illegal monopoly, and chartered companies should not govern foreign nations, etc. But their reception was different. Government officials had earlier ignored their arguments, but now Lord Salisbury publicly said he “was much obliged to the deputation for coming to place these matters before him.”<sup>729</sup>

The RNC would not be the first of the four British companies chartered in the late nineteenth century to be bought out by the government. Effectively bankrupt after fighting a guerilla conflict in Uganda, the Imperial British East Africa Company opened negotiations with the British government in 1892 about selling their territories and property to the government and winding up their charter. The IBEAC wanted the government to cover all expenses the company had incurred occupying and improving the infrastructure of their territories in modern Uganda and Kenya. In total, the company's directors wanted £450,000 from the government.<sup>730</sup> Such terms were not acceptable to the government; the whole point of the charter was to ensure that the government would not have to spend money on occupying new territory in Africa. The government was, however, willing to pay some compensation to the company. After all, had it

---

<sup>729</sup> “British Trade with West Africa,” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 7, 1897, 5.

<sup>730</sup> Report of the Court of Directors to the Shareholders, on the Negotiations with Her Majesty’s Government for the Absorption of the Company, 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1895, FO 403/208, National Archives, London, 60-61.

refused to pay for the territory and property of the company, it would have been seizing individual assets without compensation, a violation of British law. Therefore, the government offered a sum of £250,000 for the surrender of the “company’s rights, interests, and property in Africa,” a proposal the IBEAC directors agreed to in February 1895.<sup>731</sup>

This means that by the time the British government decided the RNC had outlived its purpose, there was already a precedent for how one of the new chartered companies should be bought out and how much such rights and territories were worth to the government. But the RNC would not be bought out on the same terms as the IBEAC. Unlike the IBEAC, Goldie and the directors had succeeded in creating a commercially viable company in West Africa with a monopoly on trade on large parts of the Niger River. The RNC had been able to sustain a major military expedition into the interior without going into unsustainable debt and was therefore negotiating from a position of strength when the government wanted to revoke the charter. Unlike other charter companies, it would then conclude the negotiations with the government on terms that allowed it to maintain its trading monopoly. The idea to unite the Lagos Colony, the Niger Coast Protectorate, and RNC territory into one colony was submitted to the Foreign Office by Ralph Moor (1860-1909) in June 1897. As Consul-General of the Niger Coast Protectorate, he believed that a larger colony under a single colonial administration would be much stronger than the three separate political entities now administering the region. Such a colony could be developed more quickly, become more self-sufficient, and need less financial and military support from Britain.<sup>732</sup>

---

<sup>731</sup> Correspondence from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 109.

<sup>732</sup> Correspondence from Consul-General Sir R. Moor to the Foreign Office, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1897, FO 403/248, National Archives, London, 36.

In August 1897, the Colonial Office, Foreign Office, and the Intelligence Division formed an Executive Committee for British West Africa. This body was charged with creating a policy that would secure British interests in West Africa from French aggression without provoking war with France. The government made the decision to exclude Goldie from the committee. This despite the fact that he had a private military force stationed on the frontier with France and that his company's treaties were the foundation for British land claims in the Middle Niger. This suggests that Chamberlain did not fully trust Goldie and might have been worried he would use the Executive Committee to lobby for a policy that favoured the RNC more than it did the government. The committee would meet with Goldie and inform him of its decisions, but he would not be part of the decision-making process.<sup>733</sup>

There was clear momentum in government decisions in this period that was not noticeable in the 1880s. When Chamberlain took control of the Colonial Office, the government finally seemed to have a clear goal for what it wanted for its colonies in West Africa. It wanted to consolidate its control of the hinterlands of its coastal colonies, create boundaries between British, French, and German territory, and develop the colonies to the extent that they could contribute more to the empire. This is evidenced by the Gold Coast Constabulary's march north to secure the hinterland, the formation of an Executive Committee for West Africa, and the government taking control of frontier policy in RNC territory. This step by the government put the RNC into a new position in late 1897. Whereas before, it had primarily made its own policy on the colonial frontier, a policy was now being dictated to it from the metropole. This signified a significant loss in autonomy and the company's end as an independent political power in what was becoming known as Nigeria.

---

<sup>733</sup> Correspondence from Sir Arnold B Kemball to the Foreign Office, 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1895, FO 403/208, National Archives, London, 163.

Although the RNC was excluded from the government's decision-making, it was now expected to act as an instrument of the government in the dispute with France. In July 1897, the Foreign Office sent a confidential message to the RNC asking the company to send a constabulary force north of Jebba to occupy Say. The plan was to establish a series of fortified posts on the river's west bank to challenge the French positions on the east side of the river. This would demonstrate how farcical the principle of effective occupation was in the region. If the French insisted on the principle of effective occupation, Britain occupied the territory to the same extent as France.<sup>734</sup> This Goldie refused to do. He argued that such an action would overstretch the resources of the Constabulary. But as the ruler of Boussa had requested company assistance to evict the uninvited French garrison, he was willing to send a strong expedition to Boussa to oust the French. This would be done under the guise of the company fulfilling its treaty obligations to an African partner to reduce the risk of open conflict with France.<sup>735</sup>

Chamberlain and Bramston believed that the French incursions into RNC territory at Boussa and Gold Coast territory near Mossi were part of a French effort to reduce the British sphere of influence in West Africa. They, therefore, wanted to respond with an advance on both fronts. The Gold Coast Constabulary would advance to occupy the Volta River north of the Gold Coast Colony. At the same time, the RNC Constabulary would march to secure the Niger River as far as it was navigable. As the RNC Constabulary occupied the river, Protectorate troops would advance from Lagos to secure northern Yorubaland. With a solid frontier established, the French government might agree to a negotiated settlement of the colonial frontier in West Africa. Goldie had explained to Chamberlain that the company's main concern was that if France

---

<sup>734</sup> Correspondence from the Foreign Office to the Royal Niger Company, 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 22.

<sup>735</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Foreign Office, 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 24-26.

obtained a port on the Niger, the French could demand free access to the river. This would financially ruin the company as its monopoly on the river trade would be lost.<sup>736</sup>

Even in this international crisis, the RNC's priority was still on maintaining their monopoly on the Niger trade, a technically illegal monopoly, in violation of their charter but tacitly approved by the Foreign and Colonial Offices. This has been overlooked by scholars such as Wellesly, Muffett, Flint, and Baker, who seemingly accepted the idea cultivated by Goldie that the RNC was founded to expand the British Empire in Africa. Although the formation of the RNC did eventually result in the expansion of the British Empire, we must differentiate between intention and causation. The RNC caused the empire to expand when the government bought its treaty rights, but its intention as a company was to establish a monopoly to make the trade on the Niger River profitable. The company made treaties with indigenous polities to secure control of the riverbank for trade, the RNC's service to the government in exchange for its charter was that these treaties could also be used to proclaim British political hegemony in the region.

We must not read history backward and assume that since the formation of the RNC caused imperial expansion, that was the primary objective of the company and its directors. The primary sources clearly show that when dealing with the British government, even in a time of crisis, the focus of the company was always on the establishment and maintenance of its monopoly. This conclusion is in line with Hirschfield's conclusion that by 1898 Chamberlain had decided to throw Goldie overboard as he no longer believed that the RNC could protect British interests within its sphere of influence. Goldie and the company were therefore removed from

---

<sup>736</sup> Correspondence from the Colonial Office to the Royal Niger Company, 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 29-30.

the government's decision-making process for the region as is evident in the decision to exclude Goldie from the Executive Committee for British West Africa.<sup>737</sup>

In response to the Colonial Office's plan of joint effort along the entire frontier, Goldie proposed a more aggressive policy. He would attack Boussa with the full force of the RNC Constabulary, eradicate the French garrisons and advance as far as French Soudan. There he would establish a defensive line. At the same time, the Niger Coast Protectorate Force should advance north to secure his eastern flank while the British Navy blockaded Dahomey to prevent French reinforcements from arriving by sea. This policy would most likely have led to open war between Britain and France. We must also remember that such an extensive campaign, even if successful in securing the company's monopoly, would have placed an enormous burden on its finances. Therefore, it is quite possible that Goldie was not sincere but wanted his warlike talk to spur the Colonial and Foreign Offices into stepping up their diplomatic efforts rather than risk war in Africa. Given the change in colonial policy in the metropole, it is also possible he wanted to assure Chamberlain that the RNC was still a valuable tool for the government and should not be done away with.<sup>738</sup>

In any case, the RNC took no offensive action apart from fortifying Fort Goldie north of Jebba. From this position, the constabulary could prevent the French from advancing further south from Boussa. Fort Goldie's position was so strong that the French even formally requested to be allowed to establish an outpost in its vicinity as a more defensible and accessible position than Boussa. This request British negotiators politely declined in Paris.<sup>739</sup> Now that he had a

---

<sup>737</sup> Hirschfield, *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France and the Creation of Nigeria 1890-1898*, 202–3.

<sup>738</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Colonial Office, 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 31-32.

<sup>739</sup> Correspondence from the Martin Gosselin and William Everett to Edmund Monson, 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1897, FO 403/250, National Archives, London, 220.

series of fortified strategic posts to block further French advance in West Africa, Chamberlain was ready to take control of the Paris negotiations. Goldie was sent to Paris as a special advisor, and the British committee now went on the diplomatic offensive.<sup>740</sup>

The French, who had so far refused to budge from their claim to the Boussa region, were deeply concerned that Chamberlain's aggressive policy in West Africa might lead to armed confrontation between Britain and France. There was also the fact that Gabriel Hanotaux (1853-1944), the French minister of foreign affairs, was concerned his term in office would end after the legislative elections of May 1898. Worried that the territorial dispute between Britain and France was about to come to a head, Hanotaux was eager to settle the territorial dispute in West Africa. By mid-1898, the French had withdrawn most of their territorial demands, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1898, the Anglo-French Convention of 1898 was signed. This agreement secured all the navigable Niger for Britain, as well as the Sokoto Caliphate, leaving the RNC in possession of all the territory it claimed in the region around Boussa. The agreement momentarily eased tensions between Britain and France, although the Fashoda Incident in September 1898 would spark fears about a military conflict between the two countries in Africa.<sup>741</sup>

It is interesting that in the negotiations with France about the future of the Niger, Chamberlain's demands ended up being the same as Goldie's. Both insisted that all the navigable Niger belonged to Britain. In 1886, Goldie secured the Niger for Britain by buying out all French competition. In 1898, Chamberlain secured the Niger for Britain by negotiating a French withdrawal from the region. The policy decision made to buy out the RNC was most likely made before the Paris Negotiations.<sup>742</sup> The British government was already signaling a change in

---

<sup>740</sup> *Documents Diplomatiques: Correspondance et Documents Relatifs À La Convention Franco-Anglaise, Du 14 Juin 1898* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1899), 33–36.

<sup>741</sup> Hirschfield, *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France and the Creation of Nigeria 1890-1898*, 177–79, 201.

<sup>742</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 295.



public attitudes towards the Niger as early as July 1897 when Lord Salisbury welcomed the Liverpool deputation to the Foreign Office. Chamberlain's new policy of using government resources to expand British presence in the hinterland was evident as early as 1896 when he ordered the Gold Coast Constabulary to fortify a new line of posts north of Ashanti. The foundation of the British position at the Paris Negotiation was that the RNC was a legitimate representative of the British Government and that all RNC territory was part of the British Empire.<sup>743</sup> There is no hint of any pressure from France for the British Government to buy out the company in the records of the negotiations, merely insinuations that the RNC was a purely commercial entity and its territorial treaties were therefore invalid.<sup>744</sup>

By November 1897, the government was already debating how much should be paid for the political rights of the RNC on the Niger. It must have seemed clear to the company's directors that the government meant to divest the political aspect of the RNC from its commercial component. The seemingly obvious response from the company would have been to focus on getting as much compensation as possible for the company's treaty rights and occupied territory as they were transferred to the government. These funds could then be used to maintain

---

<sup>743</sup> Correspondence from Henry Howard and William Everett to the Marquess of Dufferin, 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1896, FO 403/235, National Archives, London, 85-86.

<sup>744</sup> Reply to a Memorandum presented by the British Commissioners respecting the Frontiers of Gandu and Gourma, 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1896, FO 403/235, National Archives, London, 119.

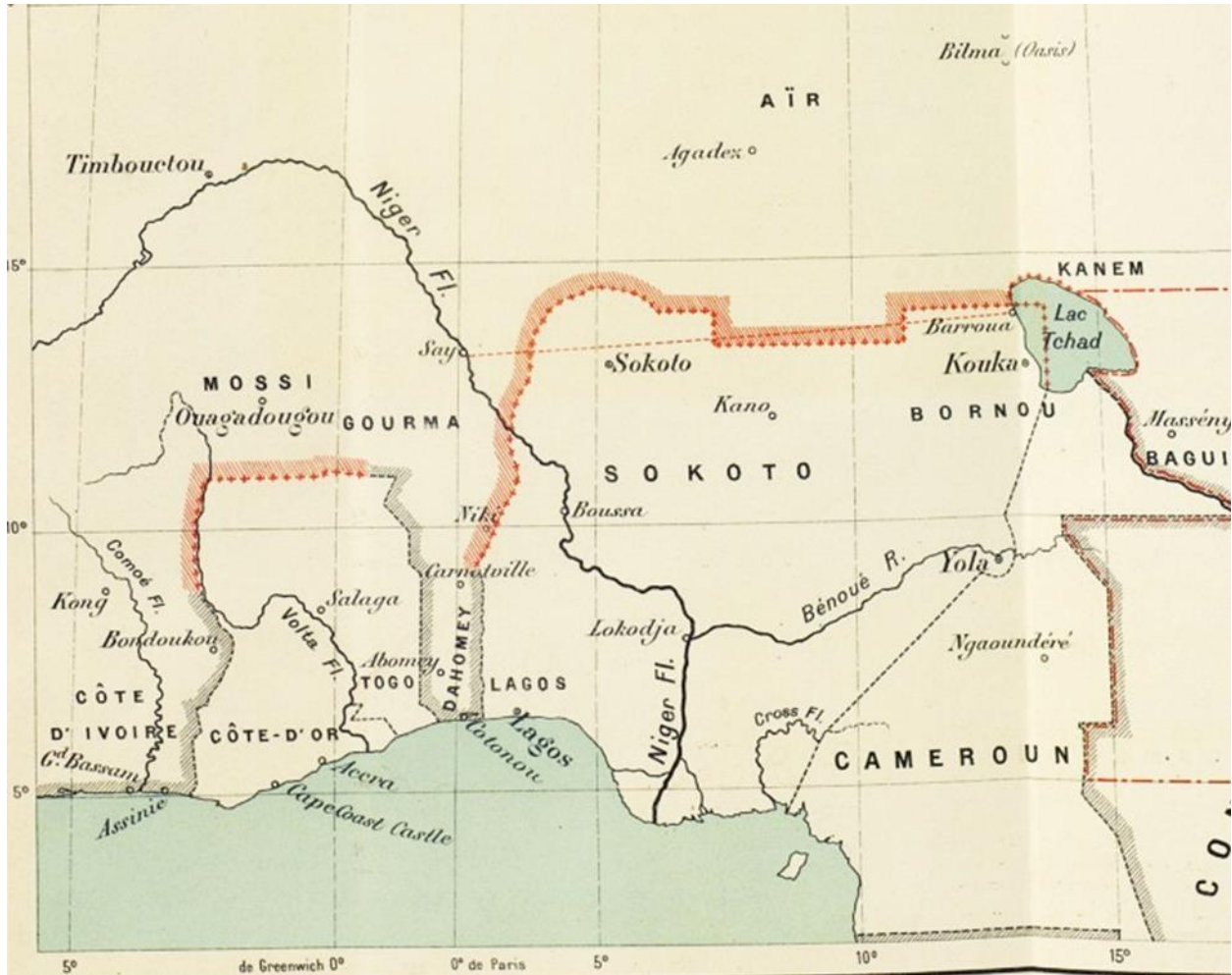


Figure 22: The official map showing the new boundary (red line) between the British and French Empires in the Niger and Gold Coast territories established by the Anglo-French Convention of 1898 (map from *Déclaration additionnelle du 21 mars 1899 à la convention franco-anglaise du 14 juin 1898*).

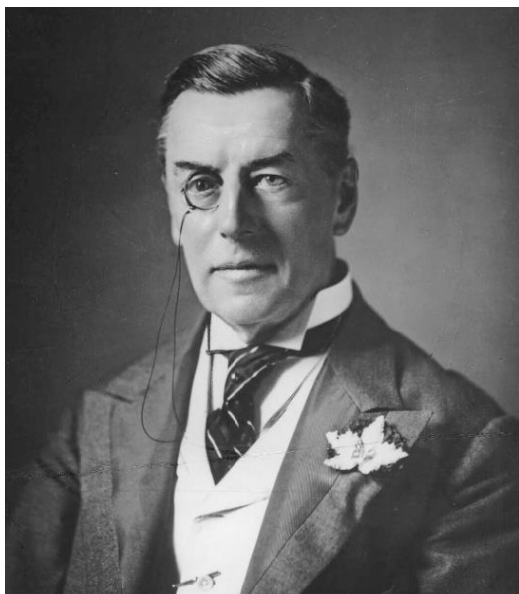


Figure 23: Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies who's willingness to spend public resources on the British colonial empire in West-Africa made the RNC redundant (photo from Wikimedia Commons)

the company's dominant trading position on the Lower Niger. Its 40 stations and control of the best landing spots on the river would give the company the upper hand against any competitor attempting to enter the region. Such a position made perfect sense. After all, the company only used its political power and legislative framework to maintain its monopoly on the Niger trade. The commercial aspect of the company had always been the director's focus, and the political powers were acquired and used to further commercial success.<sup>745</sup>

Yet strangely, Goldie's first response to the government's new policy of buying out the company was to try to revive the old scheme he and Kirk had devised after the war with the Nembe kingdom. Opening with the bald-faced lie that "the Niger Company, which was founded... for the express purpose of obtaining a charter, would not consent to employ its capital for trading operations alone, if its proper function, that of administration were taken from it."<sup>746</sup> This was a distortion of the facts; administration had never been the proper function of the company, and the company was well prepared to transition to a fully commercial entity. But Goldie wanted to retain his political control in West Africa and now suggested that the RNC become a governing body as the East India Company had eventually become. He proposed merging the Colony of Lagos, the Niger Coast Protectorate, and RNC territory into one "West African Territory." The RNC would then transition into a West African Council that would govern the territory from London.<sup>747</sup>

We must question Goldie's motives for such a move. Political power had never been the end goal of the RNC. Therefore, that Goldie was willing to cease all trading operations in return

---

<sup>745</sup> Memorandum on the Estimates of Amount to be Paid to the Royal Niger Company by Sir T. Sanderson, 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1897, FO 88/6857X, National Archives, London, 1.

<sup>746</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Colonial Office, 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1897, FO 403/249, National Archives, London, 44.

<sup>747</sup> Correspondence from the Royal Niger Company to the Colonial Office, 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1897, 44.

for political power is unlikely. His motives were hardly those of a man willing to sacrifice all for the “national object,” as Flint suggested.<sup>748</sup> Rather his motives might be gleaned from his past behaviour. There was nothing in his scheme to promote a monopoly on the river by the newly independent commercial arm of the RNC. But neither had there been any suggestion of monopoly in the founding documents of the RNC. The extralegal monopoly on trade was maintained by special concessions made by the government and by the government turning a blind eye to the complaints of the Liverpool lobby.<sup>749</sup> We can hypothesize that if the government had agreed to the Goldie-Kirk scheme of a private governing body for West Africa, they would have quickly found that the “West Africa Council” existed mainly to create monopoly conditions in the new territory, either for the newly independent commercial arm of the RNC or for some sort of conglomeration of British merchants forming a successor to the RNC. Goldie’s proposal might therefore be viewed as an evolution of his original goal of forming the RNC.

But Goldie’s scheme was doomed to fail. Now that Chamberlain had convinced the government to invest public funds in the West-African colonies, there was no longer any need for a chartered company. In his biography of Chamberlain, Denis Judd stated that Chamberlain took the job of Secretary of State for the Colonies hoping to promote the material well-being of Britain through a restructuring of the colonial system. Improved trade within the empire would improve living conditions in Britain. This aim was in keeping with Chamberlain’s early political experiences as an advocate for social reform and improved living standards. Allowing the monopolistic RNC to retain control of vast, underdeveloped imperial territory was hardly in

---

<sup>748</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 213.

<sup>749</sup> “The Royal Niger Company: Protest from Liverpool African Merchants,” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 20, 1897, 10.

keeping with Chamberlain's goal of making the empire materially beneficial to the people of Britain.<sup>750</sup>

The events of 1897-1898 had shown how vulnerable the RNC was to incursions by other European powers. The company had been unable to dislodge the French from the Boussa region without government assistance. Any new private governing body would be equally vulnerable to foreign incursion unless backed by the Imperial government. It must have seemed evident to Chamberlain that the government would have to take an active role in the new Nigeria region. Propping up a private governing body bent on financial gain was hardly an enticing alternative to just administering the area directly and cutting out the RNC middlemen. Chamberlain, therefore, ignored the various proposals for private government and worked towards bringing the region under government control. It would take 18 more months to finish negotiations and buy out the company, but by November 1897, the fate of the company had already been decided.<sup>751</sup>

## Transitioning from Chartered to Commercial Power

In his landmark study of the RNC, John Flint framed the 1898-1900 period as the decline and fall of the company. This may be true of the company's political power and function, but we must remember that the RNC had not been created for political power. It had been established to allow a group of British merchants to create a monopoly on the Niger trade. In 1886 the only way to do that was by using political power for economic purposes. In 1897 this was no longer true. The RNC now controlled the best landing sites on the Niger and Benue Rivers. It was the only company with trading stations in the region, and it dominated all shipping on the rivers.

---

<sup>750</sup> Judd, *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 186–89.

<sup>751</sup> Memorandum on the Estimates of Amount to be Paid to the Royal Niger Company by Mr. Ryder and Sir C. Hill, 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1897, 3.

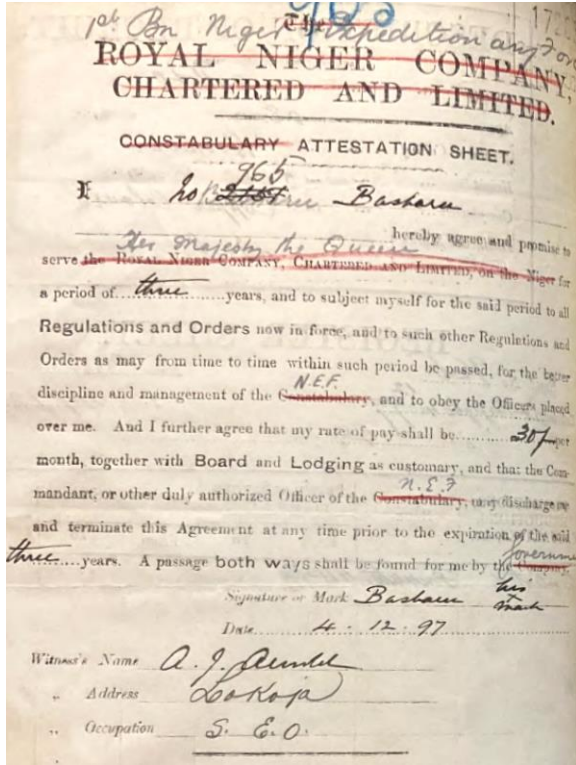


Figure 24: Constabulary Attestation Sheet signed by all recruits of the RNC. This one has been modified by the RNC's recruiting party to be used for Lugard's Niger Expeditionary Force, a precursor of the West African Frontier Force (photo from CO446/1)

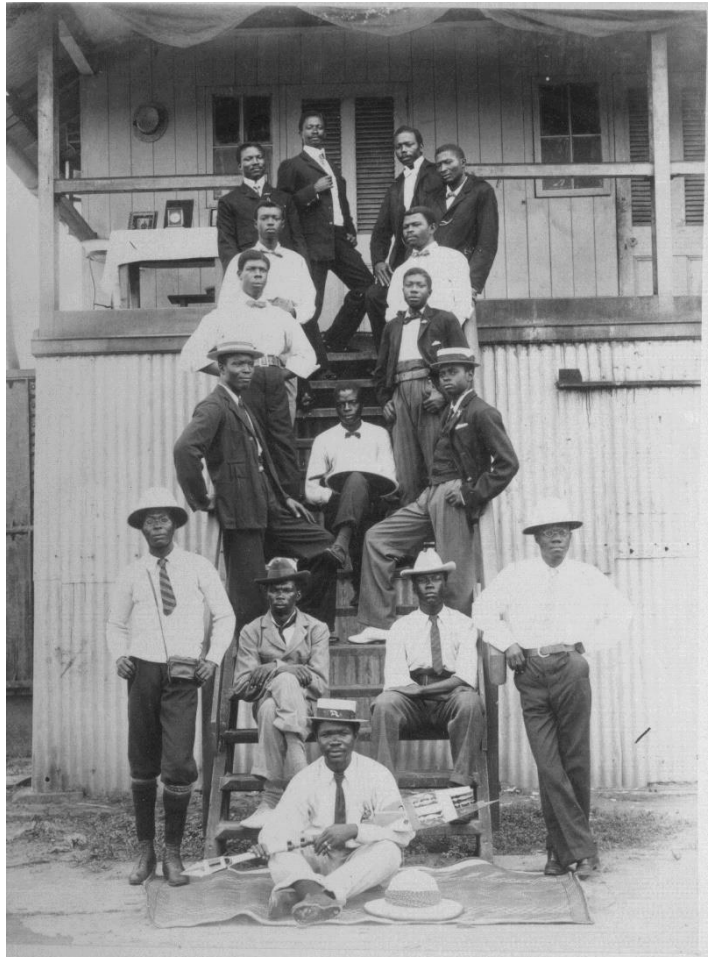


Figure 25: The Anglicized Africans. A group of clerks of the UAC, the NC's successor posing in front of their office sometime in the 1930s (photo from Unilever Archive)

Therefore the 1898-1900 period should not be framed as the decline and fall of the company but rather as a successful transition from a chartered to commercial power in Nigeria.<sup>752</sup>

There is one branch of the company that has been ignored in previous studies on the RNC's transition to a purely commercial entity. Flint, in his landmark study of the company, spent no time discussing the subject, while Baker only spent a single paragraph explaining its fate.<sup>753</sup> This is the Royal Niger Constabulary, the armed force of the RNC. The soldiers of this force were not disbanded, nor did they disperse once the company ceased military operations. Instead, the organization and tactics of the Constabulary heavily influenced its successor, the Northern and Southern Nigeria Regiments of the West African Frontier Force. In 1898 and 1899, company troops served side by side with the new WAFF in joint operations in RNC territory, sometimes commanded by a WAFF officer and sometimes by a Constabulary officer.<sup>754</sup> Such operations were necessary to counter the French occupation of the Boussa region. The Constabulary was still the largest British fighting force in the region as the WAFF had not reached full strength. As Hirschfield has demonstrated, Chamberlain's plan was to occupy all important places between Nikki and Boussa with greater military strength than the French expedition. To gain the numerical advantage quickly, he needed the troops of the RNC.<sup>755</sup>

As S.C. Ukpabi has pointed out, the formation of the WAFF was an admission of British military weakness in West Africa.<sup>756</sup> It was also a testament to the poor relations between the regular army troops stationed in the region and the colonial governors they were supposed to be assisting. The War Office had no department of colonial warfare, and the Colonial Office had no

---

<sup>752</sup> Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, 295–97.

<sup>753</sup> Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971*, 205.

<sup>754</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain, 9th of May 1898, CO 446/1, National Archives, London, 144.

<sup>755</sup> Hirschfield, *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France and the Creation of Nigeria 1890-1898*, 103.

<sup>756</sup> Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force," 500.

military department. Edho Ekoko has shown that relations between the two offices were strained and that the War Office was hesitant to deploy any of its troops to the interior of West Africa.<sup>757</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Chamberlain wanted the WAFF to be under the control of the Colonial Office, not the War Office, giving the Colonial Secretary the option of using military force in West Africa without having to petition the War Office for help.<sup>758</sup>

When Lugard began to recruit the 2000 men Chamberlain wanted for the two new battalions of the WAFF, he had originally envisioned a pure Hausa force, believing like many of his contemporaries that they were the superior martial race in West Africa. But this was not a view shared by people familiar with military operations in the region. Goldie wrote to Lugard to explain that his dislike of Yoruba soldiers was unreasonable as they had always performed very well in company service.<sup>759</sup> Lugard was soon forced to adapt to the realities on the ground and decided that the WAFF regiments on the Niger should be a bilingual Yoruba and Hausa military force on the model of the RNC Constabulary. In 1905 when Captain Esmé Gordon-Lennox served with the Southern Nigeria regiment of the WAFF, the Nigeria regiments were still bilingual and recruited from both Yorubaland and Hausaland. The Sargent-Major of each company had to be bilingual so he could give orders to both Yoruba and Hausa soldiers. Since the bilingual structure was adopted from the Constabulary, this would suggest that Constabulary companies contained a mixture of Yorubas and Hausas commanded by bilingual African non-commissioned officers. Gordon-Lennox also noted that all soldiers were trained to understand basic commands in English.<sup>760</sup>

---

<sup>757</sup> Edho Ekoko, “The West African Frontier Force Revisited,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10, no. 1 (July 10, 1979): 47–48.

<sup>758</sup> Ukpabi, “The Origins of the West African Frontier Force,” 490–91.

<sup>759</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to Frederick Lugard, 20th of December 1897, CO 445/4, National Archives, London, 2.

<sup>760</sup> Esmé Gordon-Lennox, *With the West African Frontier Force in Southern Nigeria* (London: H. J. Ryman Printer, 1905), 51–52.



As Lugard did not yet have recruiting parties of his own most of his soldiers were recruited by RNC recruiting parties, and the linguistic composition of the recruits, therefore, followed the model of the constabulary. The recruiters of the RNC did not impose age restrictions in their recruiting but rather focused on the physical shape of their recruits. All recruits had to pass a physical examination before acceptance. This was the case for Oseni, a 44-year-old Yoruban farmer who enlisted in October 1897, and Nado Ghana, a 15-year-old Hausa youth who enlisted in February 1898. As the WAFF had not printed any enlistment forms, the recruits had to sign the RNC enlistment form with the words “Royal Niger Company” crossed out and the words “Her Majesty the Queen” written in pencil above it. Just how closely Lugard modelled the first battalions of the WAFF on the Constabulary has been missing from the historiography of the company. But it deserves to be included because it is one of the permanent marks the RNC left on the region and demonstrates how the Constabulary was an integral part of the continuous evolution of British military forces in Nigeria.<sup>761</sup>

By 1898 the officers and soldiers of the RNC Constabulary seemed to have believed that the RNC’s military arm would eventually be incorporated into the new WAFF. Many of those whose enlistment contracts expired in 1898 chose to enlist into the WAFF rather than renew their Constabulary contracts. One of these men was Lieutenant Arthur H. Festing, nominally of the Royal Irish Rifles Regiment, who had served with distinction in the expedition against Bida and Illorin. When his enlistment with the Constabulary expired in November 1898, he returned to England and secured a commission as a Major in the WAFF. In January 1899, he returned to the Niger as a company commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the force.<sup>762</sup>

---

<sup>761</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain, 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1898, CO 446/1, National Archives, London, 280-286.

<sup>762</sup> West African Frontier Force Record of Festing, A. H., 1900, CO 701/25, National Archives, London, 46.

Although the records are silent, some African veterans whose service contracts ended in 1898 and 1899 may have reenlisted with the WAFF. Lugard's correspondence mentions that when the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the WAFF arrived in Jebba to undergo basic training, its training was handled by veteran African NCOs and European officers with experience in Africa. As these European officers were men like Festing, the African NCOs may have been veterans of the RNC Constabulary who, like Festing, reenlisted in the WAFF.<sup>763</sup>

Many African soldiers were unhappy with losing the commanders with whom they had served for several years. The African soldiers of the company were also dissatisfied with being stationed in the new forts on the northern frontier, such as Fort Goldie. Their families had been left at Asaba, and the company also seems to have been cutting corners in supplying the force as new uniforms were not available. Many of the men were almost naked; their uniforms wore out by constant patrolling in the Boussa region. Matters came to a head in August 1898 at Fort Goldie when 20 soldiers refused to carry out any orders until conditions improved. This resulted in a violent altercation with African officers who killed one of the insubordinate soldiers. The rest of the men were arrested and charged with mutiny but were only found guilty of the less severe offence of refusing to obey orders and released into the custody of Major Arnold, the commandant of the Constabulary.<sup>764</sup>

Arnold took the complaints of the men seriously, and the forts on the frontier were garrisoned by WAFF troops fresh from basic training. At the same time, the Constabulary went back to concentrating their forces at Asaba, from where they could respond in strength to any disturbance. The fact that Major Arnold addressed the trouble at Fort Goldie by conceding to the

---

<sup>763</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain, 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1898, CO 446/1, National Archives, London, 195.

<sup>764</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1898, CO 446/1, National Archives, London, 446-447.

demands of the African soldiers speaks volumes. Both he and Lugard regarded the complaints as valid, and instead of resorting to harsh punishments, Arnold worked to repair the relationship between officers and soldiers. This suggests that the Constabulary was a well-run force that relied on good training, high morale, and discipline rather than draconian punishments to maintain order. Major Arnold and acting Agent-General William Wallace seem to have formed a good working relationship with Lugard.<sup>765</sup>

In November 1899, the armed force of the RNC was officially disbanded, two months before the administrative branch of the RNC ceased to be. However, no soldier or officer was released from service. Originally the Constabulary had been meant to become the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the WAFF. Lugard had even offered Major Arnold the post of the commanding officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. But instead of forming a new 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, some Constabulary soldiers were used to bring the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the Northern Nigeria Regiment up to full strength. Four hundred fifty men of the Constabulary, 300 of which had been stationed south of Lokoja when the Constabulary was disbanded, joined the Southern Nigeria Regiment.<sup>766</sup> Since the battalions of the Northern Nigeria Regiment and the Southern Nigeria Regiment were still understrength in 1899, the decision was made to bolster them with soldiers from the Constabulary instead of using them to form a separate battalion as had originally been planned.<sup>767</sup>

There are different versions in the historiography of how the Constabulary was integrated into the WAFF. W.D. Downes, who served with the WAFF in the Great War, says in his book *With the Nigerians in German East Africa* that the Constabulary became the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Nigeria Regiments. This is not quite right since the Nigeria Regiment was formed in 1914. It was formed

---

<sup>765</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain, 447-448.

<sup>766</sup> “The Organization Of Northern Nigeria,” *The Times*, July 30, 1900, 6.

<sup>767</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to the Colonial Office, 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1898, CO 445/4, National Archives, London, 1-2.

by combining two regiments that existed between 1900-1914. The Northern Nigeria Regiment had three battalions, and the Southern Nigeria Regiment had two battalions. Downes probably meant that the Constabulary personnel was integrated into both regiments, which is true.<sup>768</sup> In their regimental history of the WAFF, *The History of the West African Frontier Force*, Austin H. W. Haywood and Frederick A. S. Clarke say that the Constabulary became the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Service Corps Battalions, later renamed the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalions of the Northern Nigeria Regiment in 1900.<sup>769</sup> This is not quite right as, according to archival sources, the Special Service Battalions were raised in 1897, two years before the Constabulary was disbanded. The Special Service Battalions served alongside the Constabulary and did not become the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions until the Northern Nigeria Regiment was formed in 1900. It was only then that Constabulary soldiers were used to bring those battalions up to full strength.<sup>770</sup>

The problem with Haywood and Clarke's analysis is that they dated the dissolution of the Constabulary two years too early.<sup>771</sup> Reports from the period suggest that the transfer of personnel took place at the end of 1899.<sup>772</sup> The erroneous belief that the Constabulary disbanded in 1897 appears to have led Haywood and Clarke to the belief that the new Special Service Battalions of the WAFF raised that year were made up of Constabulary soldiers. The truth is that those battalions were formed primarily from new recruits provided by RNC recruiting parties. The recruits were trained by a cadre of veteran officers such as Major Festing and probably some African NCOs that reenlisted with the WAFF and oversaw the training of the new battalions.<sup>773</sup>

As we have seen, the military branch of the company was vital to maintaining its monopoly,

---

<sup>768</sup> W. D. Downes, *With the Nigerians in German East Africa* (London: Methuen & Co, 1919), 7–8.

<sup>769</sup> Haywood and Clarke, *The History of the West African Frontier Force*, 8.

<sup>770</sup> Correspondence from Captain T. D. Pilcher to the Colonial Office, 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1897, CO 445/4, National Archives, London, 1-2.

<sup>771</sup> Haywood and Clarke, *The History of the West African Frontier Force*, 31.

<sup>772</sup> "The Organization Of Northern Nigeria," 6.

<sup>773</sup> Correspondence from Frederick Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1898, 446-447.

suppressing African and European competition in its territory, and quashing African resistance to company rule. Its dissolution and merger into the WAFF is an integral part of the RNC's transition to a purely commercial entity and deserves its place in the history of the last days of the chartered company.

The commercial transition of the company has been covered thoroughly in the works of John E. Flint and Geoffrey Baker. As the end of its duties and custom collection on the Niger came close, the RNC began stockpiling trade goods, mainly gunpowder and gin, in its warehouses in Africa. This was done so it would be able to underbid any competition that tried to enter the Niger trade. Any new venture would have to pay customs and duties to the British colonial administration, while the company would have goods on which it had paid duties and customs charges to itself.<sup>774</sup>

The company also made sure that the transfer of charter power would not include their ownership of the best landing sites on the Niger for the loading and unloading of cargo. British law prohibited trading companies from buying "native" land. This would make it hard for competitors to establish their own trading stations on the river as the company would be in possession of the best sites for such stations. This aroused the ire of the Anglicized African community in Lagos. Jackson, the editor of the *Lagos Weekly Record*, wrote that "If the company were allowed to carry out their purpose, it would be impossible to acquire land at any of the principal trading centers between Akassa and Lokoja on the river side, and under such circumstances the right of trading would be exclusively in the hands of the company."<sup>775</sup>

Jackson was correct, this was the company's plan as Goldie and the directors were not about to surrender the monopoly without a fight. With a large stock of duty-free goods and

---

<sup>774</sup> "The Future of the Niger," *Lagos Weekly Record*, April 2, 1898, 2.

<sup>775</sup> "Weekly Notes," *Lagos Weekly Record*, June 11, 1898, 3.

control of all the best landing sites between Akassa and Lokoja, no other trading company would be able to challenge them on the Niger. The fact that the company was taking steps to secure its control of the Niger trade after the removal of the charter suggests that this was not a period of decline and fall for the company. In fact, trading profits rose from £68.000 in 1897 to £94.000 in 1898. However, it is fair to say that the company was no longer spending money on the parts of the company that the government was about to take over, hence, for example, the lack of uniforms for the Constabulary. While Jackson's arguments were valid, the government could do little to stop the company from building up stocks of gunpowder and alcohol or securing its control of the best landing sites between Akassa and Lokoja. The government was buying the RNC's treaty rights, arsenal, and administrative buildings, not its commercial trade goods and trading stations.<sup>776</sup>

One thing that would not transfer from the chartered to the commercial company was Goldie himself. His last task for the RNC was negotiating the sale price for the company's treaty rights and administrative and military assets. The government was willing to give ground. For example, it agreed to pay £115.000 for parts of the company's assets, mainly the military barracks, administrative buildings, and customs hulks. This was unusual as the company valued its entire holdings in Africa at £113.282. The final agreed price was £865.000, much more generous than the £250.000 received by the Imperial British East Africa Company.<sup>777</sup> According to MP John Dillon (1851-1927), this was an outrageous waste of taxpayer money, and he requested that the price be reduced to £400.000, which would be nearer to the value of the assets and rights the government was purchasing. But his objections fell on deaf ears. Joseph

---

<sup>776</sup> Commons Sitting— Royal Niger Company Bill, 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1899, Volume 75, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 371, 423.

<sup>777</sup> Commons Sitting— Royal Niger Company Bill, 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1899, Volume 75, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 371, 401.

Chamberlain was anxious to pass the bill, and the Dillon amendment was voted down. The Royal Niger Company Bill passed both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1900.<sup>778</sup> It was understandable Chamberlain wanted the bill to pass quickly. He had already picked a governor, officially High Commissioner, for the new territory of Northern Nigeria, the commander of the WAFF, Frederick Lugard. Lugard was already in place. Any delay would keep the region's administration in limbo and might even threaten its stability by weakening the limited administrative authority the company had established. Plans had also been made to amalgamate the southern part of company territory with the Niger Coast Protectorate to create the territory of Southern Nigeria. After the bill was passed, Lugard wasted no time in taking over the administration of the region, and the flag of the RNC was ceremoniously lowered in Lokoja on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1900 and replaced with the Union Jack as the new soldiers of the WAFF, many still in Constabulary uniform cheered.<sup>779</sup>

By then, Goldie was no longer the governor of the company. He had announced his resignation to the shareholders in July 1899. He was the only board member to leave when the charter was revoked, and he gave no explanation for doing so. For some reason, the idea of running the new purely commercial Niger Company did not appeal to him, and he left the company. This would suggest that, unlike the other board members, Goldie had come to crave the political power and standing the RNC had brought him. If, as I argued in chapter two, Goldie had antisocial/dissocial/psychopathic tendencies, that would explain his need for power and prestige and explain why running a commercial enterprise without holding political power did not interest him. That does not make him an imperialist or a patriot just a man who could not

---

<sup>778</sup> Commons Sitting— Royal Niger Company Bill, 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1899, Volume 75, UK Parliament Hansard Archive, London, 399.

<sup>779</sup> Report by Sir F. D. Lugard on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, and Administration, 1912-1919, October 1919, CO 879/119/8, National Archives, London, 6.

stomach the thought of losing the power he had become accustomed to wielding. If Goldie had antisocial/dissocial/psychopathic tendencies, his feelings of entitlement would have made it impossible for him to accept any reduction in power and status. The other board members could accept the RNC becoming the highly profitable Niger Company, but for Goldie, that was not enough.<sup>780</sup> He would return briefly in an advisory role during the Great War when his successor's military duties prevented him from running the company. But other than that, he would take no further part in the affairs of West Africa. His successor was the deputy governor Aldred Lumley, Lord Scarborough.<sup>781</sup> Acting Agent-General William Wallace left the RNC at the same time. He accepted a political post in the new administration as deputy high commissioner to Lugard. Wallace had come a long way since shooting the unarmed Mr. Sanacoh in 1888, a crime for which he was never punished.<sup>782</sup>

Under Scarborough's leadership, the Niger Company emerged as the leading palm oil trading company on the Niger and would dominate the Niger trade into the 1920s. By then, the company's annual profits had risen to £250.000 per annum. During this time, the company retained its middleman role of buying palm oil in Africa and selling it to British manufacturers. In 1920 the British middlemen network was acquired by the Lever Brothers company. It wished to secure its control of the raw materials it depended on for its soap manufacturing. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1920, Lever Brothers purchased the Niger Company for £8.000.000. The Niger Company had grown leaps and bounds since 1881 when the United African Company emerged with a

---

<sup>780</sup> Manfred Kets de Vries, "The Psychopath in the C Suite: Redefining the SOB," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 23, 2012, 10 and Kevin Dutton, *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us About Success* (New York: Scientific American / Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012), 113.

<sup>781</sup> The Royal Niger Company, Chartered and Limited: Special Notice, July 1899, FO 2/244, National Archives, London, 130-131.

<sup>782</sup> Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971*, 205.



nominal value of £250,000.<sup>783</sup> One of the company's most important assets was controlling all the best landing stations between Akassa and Lokoja, just as John Payne Jackson predicted. Control of these was not lost until 1960 when the new government of independent Nigeria nationalized them. In 1929 the assets of the Niger Company were combined with the African & Eastern Trade Corporation to form the United Africa Company, which was run as a subsidiary of Unilever until 1987. The legacy of the RNC now lives on in two corporations, Unilever Nigeria Plc and UAC of Nigeria Plc, whose origins can be traced back to the Royal Niger Company. Nigeria itself is no longer an exporter of palm oil, and production has shifted to Malaysia and Indonesia, which now supply the world with 80% of its palm oil. Nigeria only produces about 2% of world production and must import palm oil to meet domestic demand.<sup>784</sup>

As we have seen, several factors led to the end of chartered administration on the Niger. The political instability of the Sokoto Caliphate and French incursion into company territory created a crisis that would last from 1896 until the signing of the Anglo-French Convention of 1898. The series of military campaigns known as the Sokoto or Fulani Jihad that were waged from 1800-1840 led to a creation of a vast Caliphate in the interior of West Africa. The new Caliphate was very decentralized, and political instability, civil war, and incessant slave raiding made many of the inhabitants hostile to the state. Ethnic tensions between Fulani and Hausa were also a cause of conflict as the Hausa were excluded from the upper reaches of government.

Many Hausa appear to have viewed the British Empire as a better alternative to the Caliphate, and by the 1890s, there was a long tradition of Hausas serving in the British colonial

---

<sup>783</sup> Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change* (London: Cassell, 1970), 250–53.

<sup>784</sup> Oladele Oladipo Edafe Erhie, Mary Iwelumo, Esiri Agbeyim, “X-Raying the Nigerian Palm Oil Sector” (Lagos, 2019), 1–3.

forces in West Africa. The motivation of the soldiers enlisting in the Constabulary has not been explored in previous works on the history of the RNC, and I have attempted to explore the possible social, financial, and political benefits recruits believed they could reap in company service. Archival documents show that many soldiers in the company renewed their contracts and served for years with the company suggesting that military service with the Constabulary was a sought-after profession.

In January 1897, the RNC launched a successful campaign against the emirates of Bida and Illorin. The rulers of these emirates opposed company incursion into their territory and refused to acknowledge a treaty between the Caliphate and the RNC, which granted the RNC exclusive trading rights in the emirates. After a series of battles in which emirate forces failed to take full advantage of their superior numbers and mobility, the Constabulary captured and destroyed the capitals of both states. Accounts of the campaign indicate that *The Times* reporter and the officers hired for the duration of the campaign could not distinguish between Hausa and Yoruba soldiers and reported back home that the whole force was composed of Hausas. This was despite the fact that the force was bilingual and Soldier Town split into Hausa and Yoruba districts. The fact that imperial agents on the ground could often not distinguish between Hausa and Yoruba troops and reported back to the metropole that all troops were Hausa calls into question just how “Hausa” the British Hausa forces were in West Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It also suggests that “becoming Hausa” was not necessary to become part of the colonial enterprise at this point, suggesting that the theories of Moses Ochonu of Hausa dominance in the colonial service in Nigeria are not applicable in the context of the RNC and its employees.<sup>785</sup>

---

<sup>785</sup> Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*, 15.

The result of the campaign against Bida and Illorin was not a foregone conclusion. The emirate forces had superior numbers and greater maneuverability in the field, thanks to their cavalry. The RNC forces had the advantage in firepower, and their control of the river allowed them to rapidly redeploy their forces on the strategic level. The first victory was won without firing a shot when Wallace's flotilla cut the supply line between Bida and Markum Mohammed's cavalry army deployed on the south of the river. This, combined with an uprising of the Nupe towns on the south bank of the Niger, forced the cavalry army to retreat northwest, destroying it as a fighting force. The moment of danger for the company force was its march north from the river towards the capital. The long supply line offered Bida's cavalry an opportunity for a flanking maneuver or even a double envelopment to surround the RNC force inland. The shortage of ammunition this would have imposed on the Constabulary would have reduced its advantage in firepower and allowed the emirate troops to destroy it in detail. But the emirate troops never embarked on such a maneuver and instead gathered to fight the Constabulary on the plains south of Bida, where greater firepower and discipline gave all the advantage to the RNC. These operational details have never been included in the history of the company. Not including the opportunities and strengths of both sides gives the impression that RNC's victory in the campaign was a foregone conclusion, a misleading interpretation of events.

Comparing the RNC campaign to the earlier Ashanti Expedition shows that there were many similarities in the strategic planning for both campaigns. Both sought to strike at the enemy's capital in order to force him to deploy his troops for a decisive battle. When, in both cases, the African armies managed to successfully retreat from the battle, saving themselves from destruction, the burning of the capital city served to mark an end to the campaign. Such comparisons also highlight the distinctive aspects of the company's campaign. It was organized

and executed by a private entity, not the British government. The British army officers present were there as contractors. Unlike Wolseley's Ashanti campaign, the campaign goals of the RNC were economic, not political. The RNC launched the campaign to secure its control of the river, not just from the Sokoto Caliphate but from the French advancing into the Boussa region where they could establish permanent ports.

French incursion into the Boussa region exposed the limitations of RNC military power and its tenuous hold on the territories the company claimed on the Middle Niger. Joseph Chamberlain, determined to reform the colonial system in order to make it materially beneficial to the British people, was willing to invest government resources in West Africa. He, therefore, ordered all colonial forces in the region amalgamated into the WAFF and ordered the formation of two new battalions to bolster the force. To achieve his goal of occupying positions in proximity to French positions in Boussa, he needed RNC troops. 1897-1900 was a period of close cooperation between the Constabulary and the WAFF, which ended with the integration of the Constabulary force into the WAFF.

When the directors of the RNC realized in 1897 that Chamberlain meant to revoke the charter, they took effective steps to secure their monopoly. The company stockpiled goods before British customs were introduced to the region and secured the best landing sites on the Niger. These measures allowed the company to maintain its control of the river trade until the company's assets were acquired by Lever Brothers in 1920. The Anglicized African community in Lagos was happy to see the company go, and the Lagos newspapers urged the government to take steps to secure free trade on the river after the revocation of the charter. Their efforts were unsuccessful, and the company secured most of its demands in its negotiations with the government. The RNC sold its treaty rights and administrative assets to the government in 1900

for £865.000. This was considerably higher than the £250.000 paid to the British East Africa Company and may have been a vast over-evaluation of the worth of company assets, which MP John Dillon believed to be worth around £400.000. The generous terms secured by the company in these negotiations suggest that the RNC's military assets and its profitable trade allowed it to negotiate from a position of strength. The successful transition of the RNC from a chartered to a commercial company was successful, as indicated by rising profits from £68.000 per annum in 1897 to £250.000 per annum in 1920.

This chapter has demonstrated that the RNC's military victories against Bida and Illorin were not a foregone conclusion. They were the result of company officers executing the campaign against the emirates in a way that allowed them to take advantage of their superior firepower and control of the river. At the same time the armed forces of the emirates failed to take advantage of their superior numbers and mobility, and this led to RNC victory in all major battles of the campaign. The chapter has also shown that the company's loss of its charter was due to changing imperial policy in the metropole. The confrontation with France in the Boussa region and Chamberlain's willingness to expand resources on the British Empire in West Africa made the company redundant. Once company directors realized they were about to lose the charter they executed a successful transition from a chartered to commercial enterprise. Scarborough emerged as the leader of the new NC as Goldie lost interest in the company when it could no longer give him access to the political influence, he had become accustomed to wielding. The NC then continued to dominate trade on the Niger River until it was acquired by the Lever Brothers in 1920.

# Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have tried to write a new history of the Royal Niger Company, incorporating aspects heretofore missing. The most significant missing piece from company history has been its interaction with the new social class of Anglicized Africans in Western Africa. I have chosen to use the term Anglicized African for this group because it illustrates their dual identity as ethnic Yorubas, Igbos, Ijaws, Hausas, etc., who had received British education. This class emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as CMS schools were established in Sierra Leone and slavery was abolished. The Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron ships would release people taken from illegal slave ships in Freetown. Due to the importance of Sierra Leone to their origin story, Anglicized Africans were often referred to as "Sierra Leonians" or "Saros."

Many of these formerly enslaved people were Yorubas and Igbos from the Lower Niger. After being educated in the CMS's schools in Sierra Leone, many converted to Christianity. As adults, many returned to their homelands in the Lower Niger. Samuel Crowther, later Bishop of the Anglican church, was among these young people. Returning home, the Anglicized Africans formed new communities and sometimes clashed with indigenous rulers. In fact, Lagos only became a British colony after an Anglicized African militia overthrew the Oba of Lagos in 1851.

This new social class was multilingual and predominantly Christian, often founding new social networks centred on the community church or mission station. This created scenes such as that at Ekow station of carpenters, coopers, clerks, and the station agent singing English hymns translated to Yoruba in a living room decorated with pictures of the British royal family. The RNC both clashed with and depended on the Anglicized Africans to run the company. While advances in medical science had made the disease climate of the Niger safer for Europeans, it still posed a considerable hazard. To operate its ships and trading stations, the company needed a

large number of educated people and skilled artisans accustomed to the climate. Without the Anglicized Africans, it would have been impossible to establish or run the RNC.

The stories of the Anglicized Africans have been missing from previous studies of the company as these studies have been based on the official accounts preserved by the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, and these are largely silent on the part played by Anglicized Africans in the development and running of the company. The records of the Church Missionary Society, the newspapers of Lagos, and a few official accounts give us a glimpse into their lives and their part in running the company, and I have attempted to include these vignettes of their lives in this dissertation.

When the Anglicized African vision of what the British Empire should be, differed from Goldie's and the directors' vision of a corporate, chartered empire, clashes were inevitable. Goldie reserved particular contempt for Bishop Crowther and his African missionaries, believing them to be a direct threat to his plans for the company. This antagonism caused him to purge Africans from the top managerial positions of the CMS-owned West Africa Company when it was amalgamated with the United Africa Company in 1879.<sup>786</sup> Africans were also prohibited from advancing above the rank of a station agent. At the same time, most of the middle managerial staff and skilled craftsmen of the company were Anglicized Africans, as were many of the NCOs of the Constabulary.

The RNC only kept a few European employees in Africa. Most were based at Akassa or in the military headquarters of the Constabulary at Asaba. This means that most Africans trading with the company probably never met any of its European employees. The local station agent and the clerk/interpreter were Anglicized African, as was the cooper kept at every station to

---

<sup>786</sup> Correspondence from George Goldie to the Foreign Office, 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1886, 205.



make palm oil casks. The manual labourers were a mixture of local people and “Krumen” migrant labourers from the West coast of Africa. The technicians and clerks of the river fleet were Anglicized Africans, while the crew and pilots were often recruited from the riverside communities of the Niger. When laws were violated, Anglicized Africans complained to British authorities, such as in the case of Frederick H. Trinity, the ship's clerk of the *SS Nupe* who exposed the crimes of George S. Burgess—committed when Burgess was acting captain of the *SS Nupe*. This episode indicates that some Anglicized Africans believed that they were entitled to the protection of British law, suggesting they thought themselves in some sense to be British, while at the same time African.

Anglicized Africans only made up a minority of the population of the Lower Niger in the late nineteenth century. The largest concentrations of them were close to the shore, such as in Lagos, where they made up most of the merchant community in town. In Lagos, they established newspapers such as *the Lagos Weekly Record* under the editorship of John Payne Jackson and funded by the African merchant Richard Beale Blaize. Further from the coast, the largest concentrations of Anglicized Africans were often at the RNC stations. This caused small communities of Anglicized Africans to be established along the river as the company expanded north. The loss of the charter changed little. The commercial branch of the company remained largely intact, still managed locally by the Anglicized Africans. However, a new ideology soon began to spread among the Anglicized African community. This was Nigerian Nationalism, one of whose early proponents was Herbert Macaulay, the son of Thomas Babington Macaulay, the founder of the CMS Grammar School, Lagos, and grandson of Samuel Crowther.<sup>787</sup> The connection between the new social class and the new ideology could hardly be more explicit.

---

<sup>787</sup> “Herbert S. H. Macaulay,” *The Journal of Negro History* 31, no. 3 (May 31, 1946): 383–84.

When independence was gained, the descendants of the people who had run the RNC in Nigeria and staffed its semi-autonomous army became the leading class of the new country's social, cultural, and political life.

The four previous works dedicated solely to the company's history written by Dorothy Wellesley, John Flint, D. J. M. Muffett, and Geoffrey Baker all share a peculiar trait. Their authors all accepted the public image cultivated by Goldie and the directors that the RNC was founded to expand the British Empire in Africa. Although preeminent in Goldie's writings and public statements by the company, this view is not supported by actual events. Goldie first became associated with the Niger trade in 1875 when his brother John Goldie Taubman bought out his father in laws near-bankrupt trading firm, Holland Jacques and Company. Until the late nineteenth century, the Niger trade between palm oil producers in the African interior and soap manufacturers in Britain had been carried out by a two-tier middlemen system.

On the Niger and Forcados were the African trading firms, the largest of which were the Nembe Canoe Houses, the trading firm of Nana Olomu, and the firm of Jubo Jubogba, also known as King Jaja. These specialized in shipping goods on the rivers, selling palm oil to British firms, and British goods in the interior. On the coast were the small, undercapitalized British firms buying palm oil from the African firms and selling it to Britain. Two events made this system untenable in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first was advancements in medical science that made navigating the interior of Africa much safer for Europeans. The second was the declining sale price of palm oil in Europe. After visiting the Niger Delta, Goldie concluded that the only way to make the Niger trade profitable again was to monopolize the trade by uniting the British firms and bypassing the African firms to trade directly in the interior.

This would allow the new firm to acquire palm oil at reduced prices, making the trade profitable again.

It was this vision that drove Goldie's entire career. He first tried to create a monopsony by uniting the firms of Holland Jacques and Company, the Company of James Pinnock, Alexander Miller, Brothers and Company, and the West Africa Company into the United African Company Ltd. in 1879. But as soon as the new company managed to force the buying price of palm oil down, new competitors entered the market. This made it clear to Goldie that political power would be needed to create a monopoly. Goldie got the idea of applying for a charter from the British North Borneo Company, which received a royal charter in 1877. In 1882 the United African Company Ltd was reorganized as the National African Company with the aim of applying for a royal charter giving it the right to administer the Lower Niger on behalf of the British Empire.

This sequence of events demonstrates that Goldie's idea of a trade monopoly on the Niger River preceded his idea of applying for a royal charter. The RNC was not formed to add Nigeria to the British Empire. It was assembled to create the trade monopoly necessary for making the company a profitable enterprise. Although the formation of the RNC eventually led to the incorporation of Nigeria into the British Empire, we should not read history backward and assume that this was the company's purpose. We must differentiate between the intentions of the company and the causation of its actions. Intentions matter, both in history and in life. The formation of the RNC did coincide with the British government's wish to expand its protectorates in West Africa, but that desire existed before the granting of the charter and persisted after the charter was revoked. Giving the NAC a charter and turning it into the RNC allowed the government to expand its control on the Lower Niger without greatly increasing its

expenditure in the region. Meanwhile, the charter allowed the company to achieve its goal of monopolizing trade on the Niger, making the palm oil trade profitable again. Once the charter was lost, the RNC as the NC was able to sustain its monopoly by economic means for 20 years.

Once the charter was gained, the RNC's administration was threadbare and concentrated on controlling the Niger and enforcing its commercial regulations, which hindered all attempts at competition by European and African firms. Indigenous polities were left to their own devices if they did not threaten the RNC's monopoly. This style of administration might be called a proto-indirect rule since it left local power in the hands of indigenous governments but lacked the structured network of chiefs and notables that the colonial government would later commission. The events of the Berlin Conference challenge the narrative that British imperial policy was dictated by an "official mind" isolated from voters and lobbyists. The actions of George Goldie in the metropole and NAC's general agent McIntosh on the periphery significantly influenced the negotiating position of the British delegation. Thanks to them Britain had secured treaty rights with numerous indigenous polities on the riverbank before the conference started and France commercial interests on the river had been incorporated into the NAC. Due to Goldie's and McIntosh's actions Britain secured its hegemony over the Niger at the conference. This suggests that while officials and ministers might have acted independently of parliament in imperial matters they did not act independently of lobbyists and actors on the periphery.

The Goldie that emerges from contemporary descriptions is a problematic figure. While Wellesley, Flint, Muffett, and Geoffrey Baker were content with accepting him as a unique and adventurous individual whose actions were motivated by a desire to expand the British Empire, this description does not stand up to scrutiny. We have already seen that the RNC was not formed to expand the British Empire but rather to monopolize the trade on the Niger River for

the financial benefit of the RNC's directors. The narcissistic, exploitative, entitled, and domineering personality traits described by Goldie's contemporaries seem to resonate with the personality traits now associated with antisocial/dissocial/psychopathic tendencies. This makes Goldie something very different from a "product of his time," and he should be compared and examined alongside other leaders past and present with such tendencies. This should give us a more realistic profile of the man than just touting his own misinformation about his motivations or caricaturing him as an imperialistic chauvinist.

## Contemporary Lessons

There is a lesson to be learned from the history of the RNC concerning giving private corporations control over public administration. The RNC was given total administrative control over a vast region of Africa. This was done to incorporate the area into the British Empire without burdening the British taxpayer with the cost of establishing, conquering, and administering the Lower Niger. This control came with the responsibility of administering the region on behalf of the British Empire. But the company did not establish any administration apart from on the Niger River itself, where it imposed strict trading regulations enforced by its private military. All the RNC's administrative work was done to create and maintain its monopoly on the river trade. Apart from this, the company made no effort to expand its administration or control over the inhabitants. This was due both to a lack of interest and means as the company's resources were limited, and thus their use had to be prioritized in the advancement of commercial operations.

This shows us that when given responsibility for public administration, a private corporation will only establish the absolute minimum administration necessary for it to achieve its commercial goal. Of course, the company's public image made it appear like the company

was furthering the cause of the “civilizing mission,” suppressing the slave trade and the liquor traffic. But this was rhetoric, and no actual administrative efforts were made to enforce these policies apart from a vague ban on alcohol sales north of the 7<sup>th</sup> northern parallel and a public declaration that slavery was illegal in company territory. The alcohol ban was meaningless since the predominantly Islamic population north of the 7<sup>th</sup> parallel was hardly conducive to alcohol sales. Furthermore, it was north of the palm oil belt, and the primary use for alcohol on the Lower Niger was the purchasing of palm oil and palm kernels. The ban on slavery was hollow since it was not followed by any genuine efforts to suppress the domestic slavery still common in the late nineteenth century. This shows that when evaluating the policies and actions of large corporations, one needs to look beyond their public image and examine their actual operations on the ground.

## Legacy in West-Africa

The emergence of the RNC as a political powerhouse on the Lower Niger caused permanent changes in the political fabric of the region. The Canoe Houses of the Nembe Kingdom had dominated the palm oil trade before the company's formation. They specialized in transporting palm oil from the palm oil belt to the coast to be sold to the British merchants. When the RNC moved to monopolize the river trade, their main rivals were the Canoe Houses. From 1875 the Nembe state, which was a confederation of towns and Canoe Houses, was split between the traditionalist and Christian religious factions. Three of the Canoe houses had converted thanks to the missionary work of Samuel Crowther and the “Anglicized Africans” of the CMS’s Niger Mission. The rest of the Great Canoe Houses remained loyal to the traditional Nembe religion. The election of William Frederick Koko, a Christian schoolteacher, as amanyanabo of Ogbolomabiri in 1889 brought hope that the two factions could be reconciled.

But this hope was short-lived. After his election, Koko renounced Christianity and embraced the traditionalist faction, which became his most loyal support. The Christian faction was marginalized in the kingdom's politics, and civil war between the factions almost broke out in 1891 due to the increasingly anti-British sentiments of the traditionalist houses. As it became clear that a diplomatic solution could not be reached, Koko decided to strike a decisive blow against the company by destroying its main shipping depot, Akassa station. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, a Nembe fleet attacked Akassa and burned it to the ground, capturing and killing many RNC employees. The attack met with no defence thanks to the criminal negligence of Agent-General Flint, who, despite repeated warnings, did nothing to fortify Akassa station.

In the aftermath of the attack, Koko made a critical blunder. Having captured 70 prisoners, he proceeded to execute them in honour of the national god Ogidiga ritually. This decision shattered the fragile alliance between some of the Christian Canoe Houses and the traditionalist Canoe House. Eight Canoe Houses refused to follow Koko and left his side. This left the Nembe armed forces split when the combined forces of the RNC and the British Empire launched a counteroffensive which resulted in the burning of Ogbolomabiri and Okpoma. With Koko forced into exile, the Christian faction took power in the Nembe state. Christopher Warri, who had split with the king following the execution of the prisoners, helmed the peace negotiations. The translator for these negotiations was James Allen Spiff, leader of the only Canoe House ruler who did not take part in the attack on Akassa. As a result, Warri became the head of the ruling council, which replaced the monarchy of the Nembe state following the war. This permanently changed the political landscape in the Niger Delta, and its consequences are still evident today. The “Anglicized Africans” of the Christian faction had kept close ties to Britain. Many of their descendants were sent to Britain for higher education, and the Warri and

Spiff families are still political powerhouses in Twon-Brass and Nembe. It can also be argued that this demonstrates how following the national independence of Nigeria, the “Anglicized Africans” maintained their social position, emerging as the leaders of the new nation's political, cultural, and military life.

John Flint has thoroughly examined the effects of the RNC’s war with Sokoto because of Goldie’s personal involvement in the war. The main limitations of Flint’s account of the war was that he did not fully consider how the tactical and strategic failures of African generals Markum Muhammed and Emir Abu Bakr facilitated company victory. They did not use the maneuver advantage of their cavalry, failing to attack the exposed supply line between the expeditionary force and the Niger River. This allowed the Constabulary to use its superior firepower to overwhelm the emirate troops in the pitched battles of Bida and Illorin.

The possible motives of the African troops fighting indigenous polities for the RNC have previously not been explored. I suggest that the failure of the Sokoto Caliphate to bring peace and order to its territories made it unpopular among its Hausa subjects. With no loyalty to the indigenous states that had failed them, the company's troops were willing to fight for British control over northern Nigeria, hoping that foreign rule might bring stability and order to their homeland. The military expedition launched by the company in 1897 weakened the already fracturing Caliphate by severing its control of the emirates of Bida and Illorin. In the long term, this exposed the southern borders of Sokoto to further British advances, which the WAFF would carry out under the command of Lugard.

The transition from a chartered to a purely commercial company took place over a relatively long period from 1897, when it became clear that the government had decided to revoke the RNC’s charter, to 1900, when the company handed over its administrative assets and



its political rights to the British government. There has been an inclination in the scholarship of the company to regard this interval as a period of decline for the RNC. But I argue that the company successfully transitioned from chartered to a commercial powerhouse. The company's selling price was much higher than the Imperial British East Africa Company, which was bought out for £250.000. The government ended up paying the RNC £865.000 and allowed it to retain its claim to mineral royalties in the territories it handed over. Moreover, the company was only selling its treaty rights and some of its military assets to the government. It retained control of most of its river fleet and its trading stations. It had stockpiled alcohol and gunpowder before it lost control over customs and duties, meaning it could underbid any competitor that tried to enter the Niger trade.

In 1900 the company was flush with cash and in a prime position to maintain its monopoly on the Niger by commercial means rather than political. Goldie left the company when the charter was lost, and Lord Scarbrough became governor of the company. The company remained the most powerful supplier of raw materials on the Niger until 1920 when Lever Brothers purchased the Niger Company for £8.000.000. This they did to secure their control of the supply of raw material necessary for their soap production. In 1929 the assets of the Niger Company were merged with the African & Eastern Trade Corporation to form the United Africa Company. The RNC and its assets are building blocks of two contemporary corporations, Unilever Nigeria Plc and UAC of Nigeria Plc. Through them, the company's legacy as a commercial powerhouse lives on. Its military legacy lives on in the evolution of British military forces in Nigeria. The WAFF would eventually become the Nigerian Military Forces, Royal West African Frontier Force, a founding block of the independent Nigerian Army.

# Bibliography

## Primary Sources: Archival Sources

*The National Archives, Kew.*

CO 445/4: Colonial Office. Individuals.

CO 446/1: Colonial Office. Despatches.

CO 701/25: Colonial Office. West Africa Frontier Force: European establishment, officers and civilians; notes...

CO 879/119/8: Colonial Office. The amalgamation and administration of Northern and Southern Nigeria, 1912-1919; report by Sir Frederick D Lugard.FO 84/1611: Foreign Office. Domestic Various. Despatches.

FO 403/114: Foreign Office. Expedition to Ilorin. Report by Major Macdonald.

FO 403/131: Foreign Office. Visit of H.M. Commissioner to the Niger and Oil Rivers. Report by Major Macdonald.

FO 403/149: Foreign Office. Royal Niger Company. Further Correspondence. Part IV.

FO 403/208: Foreign Office. East Africa Further Correspondence Part XL.

FO 403/215: Foreign Office. Niger Territories Further Correspondence.

FO 403/216: Foreign Office. Niger Territories Further Correspondence.

FO 403/233: Foreign Office. Niger Territories, Further Correspondence Part V.

FO 403/234: Foreign Office. Niger Territories, Further Correspondence Part VI.

FO 403/235: Foreign Office. Niger Negotiations at Paris. Correspondence.

FO 403/248: Foreign Office. Niger Territories Further Correspondence Part VII.

FO 403/249: Foreign Office. Niger Territories Further Correspondence Part VIII.

FO 403/250: Foreign Office. Niger Territories Further Correspondence Part IX

FO 403/537: Foreign Office. Africa: correspondence; Royal Niger Company, parts 1-2, 1885-1888.

FO 403/5913: Foreign Office. Visit of H.M. Commissioner to the Niger and Oil Rivers. Report by Major Macdonald.

FO 403/76: Foreign Office. Royal Niger Company. Correspondence. II.

FO 84/1634: Foreign Office. Africa West Coast. Consuls Rowe & Hewett. Central Africa. Consul at Nyassa.

FO 84/1655: Foreign Office. Domestic Various. Drafts & Despatches.

FO 84/1660: Foreign Office. Africa West Coast. Consul at Old Calabar. Hewett.

FO 84/1681: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 84/1682: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 84/1687: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 84/1785: Foreign Office. Domestic. Various.

FO 84/1789: Foreign Office. Domestic. Various.

FO 84/1792: Foreign Office. Domestic. Various.

FO 84/1793: Foreign Office. Domestic. Various.

FO 84/1796: Foreign Office. Domestic. Various.

FO 84/1813: Foreign Office. Papers relating to the Congo, (West African Conference). Vol. 13.

FO 84/1814: Foreign Office. Papers relating to the Congo, (West African Conference). Vol. 14

FO 84/1876: Foreign Office. Domestic. Various.

FO 84/1879: Foreign Office. Charter for National African Col. (Royal Niger Co.) Vol. 1

FO 84/1880: Foreign Office. Charter for National African Col. (Royal Niger Co.) Vol. 2

FO 84/1892: Foreign Office. Germany. Sir E. Malet, Mr. Scott. Despatches. 1-78.

FO 84/1916: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 84/1917: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 84/1925: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 84/2089: Foreign Office. Domestic Various.

FO 88/6857X: Foreign Office. Miscellaneous letters and papers.

*Church Missionary Society Archive, Birmingham.*

CA3: Catalogues to the Overseas Archive: Africa (Group 3): Volume 2, Nigeria, 1844-1934.

GAZ1: Circular book, 1881-1883.

A3/1/1J: Papers relating to Africa: Miscellaneous papers, letters and reports, 1880-1892.

*House of Commons Historic Hansard Online Archive*. Available from

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html>

Hansard HC Deb. vol.313 cols.676, 7 April 1887. [Online]

Hansard HC Deb. vol.313 cols.1788, 25 April 1887. [Online]

Hansard HC Deb. vol.323 cols.24-25, 2 March 1888. [Online]

Hansard HC Deb. vol.323 cols.372, 6 March 1888. [Online]

Hansard HC Deb. vol.332 cols.90, 13 December 1888. [Online]

Hansard HC Deb. vol.75 cols.371-423, 26 December 1899. [Online]

Hansard HC Deb. vol.91 cols.439-441, 19 March 1901. [Online]

## Primary Sources: Printed Works

“A Patent Cause of Miscarriage in the Administration of Laws on the Niger.” *The Lagos Observer*, May 21, 1887.

“A Patent Cause of Miscarriage in the Administration.” *The Lagos Observer*, June 4, 1887.

“Account of the Butter, or Shea Tree.” *The Scots Magazine*, March 1, 1800.

General Act of the Conference at Berlin. “Act of Navigation for the Niger,” 1885.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/general-act-of-the-berlin-conference-4070667>.

“Affairs on the Niger.” *The Morning Post*, September 1, 1886.

“Agencies at Liverpool and Hamburg.” *The Lagos Observer*. January 7, 1882.

Baikie, William Balfour. *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue*

*(Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854.* London: John Murray, 1856.

Berkeley, G. F-H. *The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik.* London: Archibald Constable & Company, 1902.

Brackenbury, Henry. *The Ashanti War: A Narrative.* Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874.

“British Rule in Africa.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 23, 1898.

“British Trade with West Africa.” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 7, 1897.

“Death of Mrs. Josiah Crowther.” *Sierra Leone Weekly News*. April 5, 1910.

“Deposition of King Jaja.” *The Lagos Observer*, February 11, 1888.

“Disturbances on the Niger.” *The Times*, January 1, 1887.

*Documents Diplomatiques: Correspondance et Documents Relatifs À La Convention Franco-Anglaise, Du 14 Juin 1898.* Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1899.

Fenn, Christian C., and Frederic E. Wigram. “Letter to the West African Christians Connected With the Church Missionary Society.” *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* XLIII, no. XVII (1892): 59–61.

Forbes, P. W., John C. Willoughby, H. Rider Haggard, F. C. Selous, and P. B. S. Wrey. *The Downfall of Lobengula: The Cause, History, and Effect of the Matabeli War.* Edited by W. A. Wills and L. T. Collingridge. London: The African Review, 1894.

“Fortunately for the Cause of Truth and Justice.” *The Lagos Observer*, February 25, 1888.

“From Our London Correspondent.” *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*,

November 17, 1886.

Goldie, George. "Introduction." In *Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger*, IX–XXVII.

London: Methuen & Co, 1898.

Gordon-Lennox, Esmé. *With the West African Frontier Force in Southern Nigeria*. London: H. J.

Ryman Printer, 1905.

*Handbook for Gardner and Nordenfelt Rifle Calibre Machine Guns*. London: Harrison and Sons,

1889.

*Handbook of British North Borneo*. London: William Clowes & Sons, 1890.

Imperialist (pseud. J.R. Maguire). *The Pioneers of Empire: Being a Vindication of the Principle*

*and a Short Sketch of the History of Chartered Companies, with Especial Reference to the*

*British South Africa Company*. London: Methuen & Co, 1896.

Jinks, W. E. "Alleged Massacre by the Royal Niger Co's Employees." *Lagos Weekly Record*.

April 25, 1893.

Johnson, Henry. "The Missions on the Upper Niger: Report of Stations in the Archdeaconry of

the Upper Niger." *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* September (1882): 540–58.

"Keep Your Own Side of the Way: From Our Lagos Correspondent." *The Lagos Observer*, May

21, 1887.

Kirk, John. "Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass." London: Harrison and Sons,

1896.

"Lagosian on Dits." *The Lagos Standard*, February 20, 1895.



Laird, MacGregor, and R. A. K. Oldfield. *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger, in the Steam-Vessels Quorra and Alburkah, in 1832, 1833, and 1834.*

Vol. 1. London: Richard Bentley, 1837.

———. *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger, in the Steam-Vessels Quorra and Alburkah, in 1832, 1833, and 1834.* Vol. 2. London: Richard Bentley, 1837.

Lovell, Josh G. “The Trade War in the Niger.” *Daily News*, March 11, 1887.

“Manchester Chamber of Commerce.” *The Manchester Guardian*. May 1, 1884.

“Marriage in High Life.” *The Lagos Observer*, January 28, 1888.

Mattei, Antoine. *Bas-Niger, Bénoué et Dahomey*. Paris: Grenoble, 1890.

Mockler-Ferryman, Augustus. *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald’s Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa*. London: George Phillip & Son, 1892.

Moore, Arthur W. *Manx Worthies*. Douglas: S. K. Broadbent and Company, 1901.

Morel, Edmund Dene. *Affairs of West Africa*. London: William Heinemann, 1902.

“News, Notes and Comments.” *The Lagos Standard*, October 16, 1895.

“News from the Niger.” *The Sunday Times*, May 22, 1887.

“News Items.” *The Lagos Observer*, May 18, 1882.

“Niger Expedition: Its Real Objects.” *Liverpool Mercury*, January 13, 1897.

“Obituary: Dr. Gustav Nachtigal.” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 7, no. 7 (1885): 466.

“Obituary: Honorable T. C. Bishop.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, December 10, 1898.

Oto. “The Drink Traffic.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 7, 1894.

“Our Islamic Prospects.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, August 26, 1893.

Page, Jesse. *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger*. London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1890.

Proctor, Henry. “From H. Proctor, Brass (Tuwon), Niger.” In *Extracts from the Annual Letters of the Missionaries for the Year 1895*, 268–71. London: Church Missionary Society, 1896.

“Protocols and General Act of W. African Conference at Berlin, February 1885.” *19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, n.d.

<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1884-061622>.

*Register of Missionaries, (Clerical, Lay, and Female), and Native Clergy, From 1804 to 1894*. London: Church Missionary Society, 1904.

Schön, James Frederick, and Samuel Crowther. *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, Who With the Sanction of Her Majesty’s Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society*. London: Hatchard and Son, 1842.

Seymour Vandeleur. *Campaing on the Upper Nile and Niger*. London: Methuen & Co, 1898.

Snape, Thomas. *The Ashantee War: Its Causes and Results*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co, 1875.

“The Campaign in West Africa.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, February 13, 1897.

“The Colonies In 1897.” *The Times*, May 29, 1898.

“The Drink Traffic.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 7, 1894.

“The Editor’s Monthly Chat.” *The Church Missionary Juvenile Instructor* XI (1890): 94–95.

“The Expedition of the Royal Niger Company.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 23, 1897.

“The Future of the Niger.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, April 2, 1898.

*The Missionary Register for the Year 1814: Containing an Abstract of the Proceedings of the Principal Missionary and Bible Societies Throughout the World.* London: L. B. Seeley, 1814.

“The Niger Campaign.” *The Times*, February 11, 1897.

“The Niger Expedition.” *The Manchester Guardian*. February 11, 1897.

“The Niger Trade.” *The Northern Whig*. August 28, 1884.

“The Obituary List.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 7, 1911.

“The Organization Of Northern Nigeria.” *The Times*, July 30, 1900.

“The Recent Fighting on the Niger.” *The Times*, March 12, 1895.

“The Royal Niger Company: Protest from Liverpool African Merchants.” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 20, 1897.

“The Treaty of Bida.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, May 1, 1897.

“The West African Conference And The Niger.” *The Times*, October 15, 1884.

“The West African Mission.” *The Manchester Guardian*, July 23, 1864.

Thomas, Joseph Hammond. *A Full and Authentic Diary of the Ashanti Expedition By Joseph Hammond Thomas, 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade*. Pembroke: William Emblow, 1875.

Thomson, J. B. *Joseph Thomson: African Explorer*. 2nd ed. London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1897.

“We Have Much Pleasure.” *The Lagos Observer*, May 7, 1887.

“Weekly Notes.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, June 11, 1898.

## Secondary Sources

“A Patent Cause of Miscarriage in the Administration of Laws on the Niger.” *The Lagos Observer*, May 21, 1887.

“A Patent Cause of Miscarriage in the Administration.” *The Lagos Observer*, June 4, 1887.

“Account of the Butter, or Shea Tree.” *The Scots Magazine*, March 1, 1800.

General Act of the Conference at Berlin. “Act of Navigation for the Niger,” 1885.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/general-act-of-the-berlin-conference-4070667>.

“Affairs on the Niger.” *The Morning Post*, September 1, 1886.

“Agencies at Liverpool and Hamburg.” *The Lagos Observer*. January 7, 1882.

Aghalino, S.O. “British Colonial Policies and the Oil Palm Industry in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, 1900-1960.” *African Study Monographs* 21, no. 1 (2000): 19–33.

Ajayi, J. F. Ade. *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*. London: Longmans, 1965.

Alagoa, Ebiegberi J. “The Niger Delta States and Their Neighbours, 1600-1800.” In *History of West Africa, Vol I*, edited by Jacob F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, 269–303. New York:

Columbia University Press, 1972.

———. *The Small Brave City State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964.

Alexander, May. “The Round Table, 1910-66.” Oxford University, 1995.

Alfred, Charles. *A Comprehensive History of Twon-Brass: From the Pre-Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Era To 2010*. Wukari: The Federal University, 2015.

Allen, William, and T. R. H. Thomson. *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty’s Government to the River Niger in 1841 under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter*. London: Frank Cass & Co, 1968.

Allina-Pisano, Eric. “Resistance and the Social History of Africa.” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 187–98.

Apata, Z O. “Ilorin-Lagos Relations in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of British Imperial Struggle in Yorubaland.” *Transafrican Journal of History* 20 (September 19, 1991): 145–60.

Ayandele, E A. “Background to the ‘Duel’ Between Crowther and Goldie on the Lower Niger, 1857-1885.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 1 (April 22, 1967): 45–63.

Ayandele, Emmanuel A. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914*. London: Longmans, 1966.

Baikie, William Balfour. *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue (Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854*. London: John Murray, 1856.

Baker, G L. “Research Notes on the Royal Niger Company: Its Predecessors and Successors.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (1960): 151–61.

Baker, Geoffrey L. *Trade Winds on the Niger: The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-*

1971. London: The Radcliffe Press, 1996.

Bartholomew, J. G. “Joseph Thomson.” *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 11, no. 10 (1895): 524–28.

Barua, Pradeep. “Inventing Race: The British and India’s Martial Races.” *The Historian* 58, no. 1 (February 17, 1995): 107–16.

Beintker, Michael. “Was Ist Das Reformatorische? Einige Systematisch-Theologische Erwägungen.” *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 100, no. 1 (August 7, 2003): 44–63.

Berkeley, G. F-H. *The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik*. London: Archibald Constable & Company, 1902.

Berry, Sara S. “The Concept of Innovation and the History of Cocoa Farming in Western Nigeria.” *The Journal of African History* 15, no. 1 (1974): 83–95.

Bickford-Smith, Vivian. “The Betrayal of Creole Elites, 1880–1920.” In *Black Experience and the Empire*, edited by Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Blake, Michael. *American Civil War Cavalry*. London: Almark, 1973.

Boahen, Adu. *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Brackenbury, Henry. *The Ashanti War: A Narrative*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874.

Brenner, Robert. *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550-1653*. London: Verso, 2003.

“British Rule in Africa.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 23, 1898.

“British Trade with West Africa.” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 7, 1897.

Sarpur. “Brúsi,” 2017. <https://www.sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=1856953>.

Burroughs, Peter. “Imperial Institutions and the Government of Empire.” In *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by William Rogers Louis, Andrew Porter, and Alaine Low, 170–97. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Cain, P. J., and A. G. Hopkins. *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*. 2nd ed. Harlow: Longman, 2002.

Cain, P.J., and A.G Hopkins. “Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945.” *The Economic History Review* 40 (1987): 1–26.

Carlos, Ann M., and Jamie B. Kruse. “The Decline of the Royal African Company: Fringe Firms and the Role of the Charter.” *Economic History Review* 49, no. 2 (1996): 291–313.

Carney, Judith, and Marlène Elias. “Revealing Gendered Landscapes: Indigenous Female Knowledge and Agroforestry of African Shea.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 40, no. 2 (2006): 235–67.

Carus-Wilson, E. M. “The Origins and Early Development of the Merchant Adventurers’ Organization in London as Shown in Their Own Mediaeval Records.” *The Economic History Review* 4, no. 2 (1933): 147–76.

Cawood, Ian. “Joseph Chamberlain, the Conservative Party and the Leamington Spa Candidature Dispute of 1895.” *Historical Research* 79, no. 206 (2006): 554–77.

Chuku, Gloria. “Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800s-2005.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2009): 81–103.

Clough, G. D. “The Constitutional Changes in Northern Rhodesia and Matters Incidental to the Transition.” *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 6, no. 4 (1924): 278–82.

Collingwood, Robin George. *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946.

Cookey, Sylvanus J. S. *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times, 1821-1891*. Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1974.

Craven, Matthew. “Between Law and History: The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the Logic of Free Trade.” *London Review of International Law* 3, no. 1 (2015): 31–59.

Crowder, Michael. *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Curtis, Lionel. *The Round Table Movement: Its Past and Future*. Toronto: Rous & Mann, 1913.

Dambo, Livingston Borobuebi. *Nembe: The Divided Kingdom*. Port Harcourt: Paragraphics, 2006.

Darwin, John. *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012.

Davidson, Basil. *The Black Man’s Burden : Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*. New York: Times Books, 1992.

Davis, Lance E., and Robert Huttenback. *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism, 1860–1912*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. “Death of Mrs. Josiah Crowther.” *Sierra Leone Weekly News*. April 5, 1910.

Dennis, Rutledge M. “Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 3 (April 22, 1995): 243–52.

“Deposition of King Jaja.” *The Lagos Observer*, February 11, 1888.

“Disturbances on the Niger.” *The Times*, January 1, 1887.

Dobinson, Henry Huges. “Notes of a Second Journey Into Ibo Land.” *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* April (1892): 276–81.



*Documents Diplomatiques: Correspondance et Documents Relatifs À La Convention Franco-Anglaise, Du 14 Juin 1898.* Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1899.

Downes, W. D. *With the Nigerians in German East Africa.* London: Methuen & Co, 1919.

Dutton, Kevin. *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us About Success.* New York: Scientific American / Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012.

Edafe Erhie, Mary Iwelumo, Esiri Agbeyim, Oladele Oladipo. “X-Raying the Nigerian Palm Oil Sector.” Lagos, 2019.

Edgerton, Robert B. *The Fall of the Asante Empire: The Hundred-Year War For Africa’s Gold Coast.* New York: The Free Press, 1995.

Egboh, E. O. “The Nigerian Gum Arabic Industry : A Study in Rural Economic Development Under The Colonial Régime (1897-1940).” *Présence Africaine*, no. 108 (1978): 92–105.

Ekeh, Peter. “Benin, the Western Niger Delta, and the Development of the Atlantic World.” *Umẹwaṣen: Journal of Benin and Edo Studies* 1 (January 1, 2016): 4–41.

Ekoko, Edho. “The West African Frontier Force Revisited.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10, no. 1 (July 10, 1979): 47–63.

Eltis, David. “The Relative Importance of Slaves and Commodities in the Atlantic Trade of Seventeenth-Century Africa.” *The Journal of African History* 35, no. 2 (1994): 237–49.

Fenn, Christian C., and Frederic E. Wigram. “Letter to the West African Christians Connected With the Church Missionary Society.” *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* XLIII, no. XVII (1892): 59–61.

Fergusson, Niall. *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power.* New York: Basic Books, 2003.

Fieldhouse, David K. “Keith Hancock and Imperial Economic History: A Retrospect Forty Years

On.” In *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth*, edited by Frederick Madden and David K. Fieldhouse, 144–63. London, 1982.

Fisch, Jörg. “Africa as Terra Nullius: The Berlin Conference and International Law.” In *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa : The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, edited by Stig Förste, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson, 347–75. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Flint, John. E. “Economic Change in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century.” In *History of West Africa, Vol II*, edited by Jacob F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, 380–401. London: Longman, 1974.

Flint, John. “Chartered Companies and the Transition from Informal Sway to Colonial Rule in Africa.” In *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa : The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, edited by Stig Förste, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson, 69–83. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Flint, John E. *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Forbes, P. W., John C. Willoughby, H. Rider Haggard, F. C. Selous, and P. B. S. Wrey. *The Downfall of Lobengula: The Cause, History, and Effect of the Matabeli War*. Edited by W. A. Wills and L. T. Collingridge. London: The African Review, 1894.

“Fortunately for the Cause of Truth and Justice.” *The Lagos Observer*, February 25, 1888.

Franklin, C E, and W Johnson. “William Hale’s ‘Improvements in Rockets.’” *International Journal of Impact Engineering* 18, no. 2 (1996): 231–41.

“French FM Accuses Russian Mercenaries of ‘Despoiling’ Mali.” *Al Jazeera*, January 30, 2022.  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/30/french-fm-accuses-russian-mercenaries-of->

despoiling-mali.

“From Our London Correspondent.” *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*,  
November 17, 1886.

Galbraith, John S. *Crown and Charter: The Early Years of the British South Africa Company*.  
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

———. *Mackinnon and East Africa 1878–1895: A Study in the “New Imperialism.”* Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 1972.

Gallagher, John, and Ronald Robinson. *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of  
Imperialism*. 2 edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978.

———. “The Imperialism of Free Trade.” *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953): 1–15.

Gberie, Lansana. *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone*.  
London: Hurst & Company, 2005.

Geary, William N. M. *Nigeria Under British Rule*. 2nd ed. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965.

Geiss, Imanuel. “Free Trade, Internationalization of the Congo Basin, and the Principle of  
Effective Occupation.” In *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa : The Berlin Africa Conference  
1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, edited by Stig Förste, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and  
Ronald Robinson, 263–80. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London: W. Strahan  
and T. Cadell, 1781.

Royal Museum Greenwich. “Gin Bottle,” 2021.

<https://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/2816.html>.

Gissis, Snait B. “Visualizing ‘Race’ in the Eighteenth Century.” *Historical Studies in the Natural  
Sciences* 41, no. 1 (April 22, 2011): 41–103.

Gleick, Peter H. *The World's Water 2000-2001: The Biennial Report On Freshwater Resources*.

Washington: Island Press, 2000.

Goldie, George. "Introduction." In *Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger*, IX–XXVII.

London: Methuen & Co, 1898.

Gordon-Lennox, Esmé. *With the West African Frontier Force in Southern Nigeria*. London: H. J.

Ryman Printer, 1905.

Graham, Gerald S. *Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America*.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950.

Gwynn, Stephen. "The Making of Nigeria: A Historical Introduction." In *Sir George Goldie:*

*Founder of Nigeria*, 1–87. London: Macmillan and Co., 1934.

*Handbook for Gardner and Nordenfelt Rifle Calibre Machine Guns*. London: Harrison and Sons,

1889.

*Handbook of British North Borneo*. London: William Clowes & Sons, 1890.

Haywood, Austin H. W., and Frederick A. S. Clarke. *The History of the West African Frontier*

*Force*. Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1964.

Heap, Simon. "'A Bottle of Gin Is Dangled before the Nose of the Natives': The Economic Uses

of Imported Liquor in Southern Nigeria, 1860-1920." *African Economic History*, no. 33

(2005): 69–85.

"Herbert S. H. Macaulay." *The Journal of Negro History* 31, no. 3 (May 31, 1946): 383–84.

Herskovits, Jean. *A Preface to Modern Nigeria*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

Hertslet, Edward. *The Map of Africa By Treaty*. 3rd ed. London: Harrison and Sons, 1909.

Hirschfield, Claire. *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France and the Creation of Nigeria*

*1890-1898*. Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979.

Hobson, John A. *Imperialism: A Study*. New York: James Pott & Company, 1902.

Holland, J H. “The West African Oil Palm. (*Elaeis Guineensis*, Jacq.)” *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)* 1920, no. 6 (1920): 199–205.

Hopkins, Antony G. *An Economic History of West Africa*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973.

Hozier, Henry Montague. *The Franco-Prussian War: Its Causes, Incidents, and Consequences*. London: William McKenzie, 1872.

Ikime, Obaro. *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest*. London: Heinemann, 1977.

Imperialist. *The Pioneers of Empire: Being a Vindication of the Principle and a Short Sketch of the History of Chartered Companies, with Especial Reference to the British South Africa Company*. London: Methuen & Co, 1896.

Imperialist (pseud. J.R. Maguire). *The Pioneers of Empire: Being a Vindication of the Principle and a Short Sketch of the History of Chartered Companies, with Especial Reference to the British South Africa Company*. London: Methuen & Co, 1896.

Isaacman, Allen, and Barbara Isaacman. “Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, c. 1850-1920.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (1977): 31–62.

Isichei, Elizabeth. “Historical Change in an Ibo Polity: Asaba to 1885.” *The Journal of African History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 421–38.

Jann, Rosemary. “From Amateur to Professional: The Case of the Oxbridge Historians.” *Journal of British Studies* 22, no. 2 (1983): 122–47.

Jenkinson, Hilary. “The Records of the English African Companies.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1912): 185–220.

Jinks, W. E. “Alleged Massacre by the Royal Niger Co’s Employees.” *Lagos Weekly Record*.  
April 25, 1893.

Johnson, Henry. “The Missions on the Upper Niger: Report of Stations in the Archdeaconry of  
the Upper Niger.” *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* September (1882): 540–58.

Johnson, Marion. “The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa. Part I.” *The Journal of African  
History* 11, no. 1 (1970): 17–49.

Johnson, Samuel. *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the  
British Protectorate*. Edited by O. Johnson. Lagos: C.M.S. Nigeria, 1921.

Jonas, Raymond. *The Battle of Adwa*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Judd, Denis. *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain*. 2nd ed. Cardiff: University of Wales  
Press, 1993.

Katz, David Brock. *General Jan Smuts and His First World War in Africa, 1914-1917*.  
Philadelphia: Casemate, 2022.

Keay, John. *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company*. London:  
Harper Collins, 1993.

“Keep Your Own Side of the Way: From Our Lagos Correspondent.” *The Lagos Observer*, May  
21, 1887.

Keith, Arthur Berriedale. *The Sovereignty of the British Dominions*. London: Macmillan and Co.,  
1929.

Kets de Vries, Manfred. “The Psychopath in the C Suite: Redefining the SOB.” *SSRN Electronic  
Journal*, November 23, 2012.

Kingsley, Mary H. *West African Studies*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan and Co., 1901.

Kirk, John. “Report by Sir John Kirk on the Disturbances at Brass.” London: Harrison and Sons,

1896.

“Lagosian on Dits.” *The Lagos Standard*, February 20, 1895.

Laird, MacGregor, and R. A. K. Oldfield. *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger, in the Steam-Vessels Quorra and Alburkah, in 1832, 1833, and 1834*. Vol. 1. London: Richard Bentley, 1837.

———. *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger, in the Steam-Vessels Quorra and Alburkah, in 1832, 1833, and 1834*. Vol. 2. London: Richard Bentley, 1837.

Law, Robin. “The First Scottish Guinea Company, 1634-9.” *The Scottish Historical Review* 76, no. 202 (February 19, 1997): 185–202.

Lenin, Vladimir. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1917.

Lenman, Bruce P. “Colonial Wars and Imperial Instability, 1688–1793.” In *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, edited by P. J. Marshall and Alaine Low. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lovejoy, Paul E, and John Edward Philips. “Five Letters from the Sokoto Archives Bearing on the Kano Civil War.” *Sudanic Africa* 4 (June 29, 1993): 77–94.

Lovejoy, Paul E, and David Richardson. “The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810.” *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 67–89.

Lovell, Josh G. “The Trade War in the Niger.” *Daily News*, March 11, 1887.

Lugard, Frederick. *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922.

Lynn, Martin. “The Profitability of the Early Nineteenth-Century Palm Oil Trade.” *African*

*Economic History*, no. 20 (April 22, 1992): 77–97.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*.

London: Macmillan and Co., 1915.

MacKenzie, John M. *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts*. Manchester: Manchester

University Press, 1995.

Maishanu, Hamza Muhammad, and Isa Muhammad Maishanu. “The Jihad and the Formation of

the Sokoto Caliphate.” *Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 119–31.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late*

*Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

“Manchester Chamber of Commerce.” *The Manchester Guardian*. May 1, 1884.

“Marriage in High Life.” *The Lagos Observer*, January 28, 1888.

Martin, Jane. “Krumen ‘Down the Coast’: Liberian Migrants on the West African Coast in the

19th and Early 20th Centuries.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18,

no. 3 (1985): 401–23.

Masson, Paul. *Marseille et La Colonisation Française: Essai d’Histoire Coloniale*. Marseille:

Barlatier, 1906.

Mattei, Antoine. *Bas-Niger, Bénoué et Dahomey*. Paris: Grenoble, 1890.

Melsteð, Bogi. *Íslendinga Saga*. Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1903.

Merem, E. C., Y. A. Twumasi, J. Wesley, D. Olagbegi, M. Crisler, C. Romorno, M. Alsarari, et

al. “Appraising the Changing Trends in Oil Palm Farming in Nigeria’s Lower South

Region.” *International Journal of Ecosystem* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–22.

*Military Report on Nigeria*. London: Harrison and Sons, 1929.

Mockler-Ferryman, Augustus. *Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald’s Mission*



- to the Niger and Benue Rivers, West Africa*. London: George Phillip & Son, 1892.
- Moore, Arthur W. *Manx Worthies*. Douglas: S. K. Broadbent and Company, 1901.
- Morel, Edmund Dene. *Affairs of West Africa*. London: William Heinemann, 1902.
- Muchmore, Lynn. “A Note on Thomas Mun’s ‘England’s Treasure by Forraign Trade.’” *The Economic History Review* 23, no. 3 (1970): 498–503.
- Muffett, D. J. M. *Empire Builder Extraordinary, Sir George Goldie: His Philosophy of Government and Empire*. Douglas: Shearwater Press, 1978.
- Mukherjee, Mithi. “Justice, War, and the Imperium: India and Britain in Edmund Burke’s Prosecutorial Speeches in the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings.” *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (2005): 589–630.
- Mwalimu, Charles. *The Nigerian Legal System: Public Law*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- “News, Notes and Comments.” *The Lagos Standard*, October 16, 1895.
- “News from the Niger.” *The Sunday Times*, May 22, 1887.
- “News Items.” *The Lagos Observer*, May 18, 1882.
- Nfam, Odeigah Theresa. “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade from the 15th -19th Centuries: A Major Setback to the Development of the Indigenous Economy of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.” In *The African Conundrum: Rethinking the Trajectories of Historical, Cultural, Philosophical and Developmental Experiences of Africa*, edited by Munyaradzi Mawere, Tapuwa R. Mubaya, and Jowere Mukusha, 287–302. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2017.
- “Niger Expedition: Its Real Objects.” *Liverpool Mercury*, January 13, 1897.
- Northrup, David. “The Compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil Trades in the Bight of Biafra.” *The Journal of African History* 17, no. 3 (1976): 353–64.
- O’Hear, Ann. “British Intervention and the Slaves and Peasant Farmers of Ilorin, c. 1890-c.

1906.” *Paideuma* 40 (1994): 129–48.

“Obituary: Dr. Gustav Nachtigal.” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 7, no. 7 (1885): 466.

“Obituary: Honorable T. C. Bishop.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, December 10, 1898.

Ochonu, Moses E. *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Odekunle, Theophilus. “Rainfall and the Length of the Growing Season in Nigeria.” *International Journal of Climatology* 24 (March 30, 2004): 467–79.

Ofonagoro, Walter Ibekwe. “Notes on the Ancestry of Mbanaso Okwaraozurumba Otherwise Known as King Jaja of Opobo, 1821-1891.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 3 (1978): 145–56.

———. *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*. Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1979.

———. *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria: 1881-1929*. Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1979.

Oliver, Roland. “Some Factors in the British Occupation of East Africa, 1884-1894.” *The Uganda Journal* 15, no. 1 (1951): 49–64.

Omu, Fred I. A. “Journalism and the Rise of Nigerian Nationalism: John Payne Jackson, 1848-1915.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7, no. 3 (1974): 521–39.

Onselen, Charles van. “The Role of Collaborators in the Rhodesian Mining Industry 1900-1935.” *African Affairs* 72, no. 289 (1973): 401–18.

Oto. “The Drink Traffic.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 7, 1894.

“Our Islamic Prospects.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, August 26, 1893.

Page, Jesse. *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy Who Became Bishop of the Niger*. London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1890.

Pakenham, Thomas. *The Scramble for Africa*. London: Abacus, 1992.

Parsons, Timothy H. "African Participation in the British Empire." In *Black Experience and the Empire*, edited by Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, 257–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Parsons, Timothy H. "'Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen': The Evolution of the Kamba as a Martial Race, 1890-1970." *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 4 (1999): 671–701.

Platt, D. C. M. "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations." *The Economic History Review* 21, no. 2 (1968): 296–306.

Platt, Desmond C. M. *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Proctor, Henry. "From H. Proctor, Brass (Tuwon), Niger." In *Extracts from the Annual Letters of the Missionaries for the Year 1895*, 268–71. London: Church Missionary Society, 1896.

"Protocols and General Act of W. African Conference at Berlin, February 1885." *19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, n.d.

<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1884-061622>.

Ranger, Terence O. *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1897*. London: Heinemann, 1967.

Reese, Ty M. "'Eating' Luxury: Fante Middlemen, British Goods, and Changing Dependencies on the Gold Coast, 1750-1821." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 851–72.

*Register of Missionaries, (Clerical, Lay, and Female), and Native Clergy, From 1804 to 1894*. London: Church Missionary Society, 1904.

Robinson, David. *Muslim Societies in African History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

2004.

Robinson, Ronald. “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration.” In *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, 117–42. London: Longman, 1972.

———. “Oxford in Imperial Historiography.” In *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth*, edited by Frederick Madden and David K. Fieldhouse, 30–48. London: Croom Helm, 1982.

Rodgers, Nini. “The Irish in the Caribbean 1641-1837.” *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5, no. 3 (2007): 145–55.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1982.

Rotimi, Kemi, and Olukoya Ogen. “Jaja and Nana in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Proto-Nationalists or Emergent Capitalists.” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 7 (2008): 48–58.

“Russian Mercenaries Enter Libyan Oil Field, as More Mercenaries Arrive from Syria.” *Daily Sabah*, July 6, 2020. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/russian-mercenaries-enter-libyan-oil-field-as-more-mercenaries-arrive-from-syria/news>.

Saïd, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Salau, Mohammed Bashir, ed. “The Roots of Sokoto Caliphate Plantations.” In *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study*, 80:47–57. Boydell & Brewer, 2018.

Schön, James Frederick, and Samuel Crowther. *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, Who With the Sanction of Her Majesty’s Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society*. London:

Hatchard and Son, 1842.

Seeley, John R. *The Expansion of England*. Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1890.

Seymour Vandeleur. *Campaiging on the Upper Nile and Niger*. London: Methuen & Co, 1898.

Singer, Barnett, and John Langdon. *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Smaldone, Joseph P. *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by Edwin Cannan. New York: The Modern Library, 1937.

Smith, Mary F. *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa*. London: Faber & Faber, 1954.

Smith, Robert. “The Canoe in West African History.” *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 4 (1970): 515–33.

Snape, Thomas. *The Ashantee War: Its Causes and Results*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co, 1875.

Spiers, Edward M. *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

———. *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

Methil Heritage. “Stephen Williamson,” 2021.

<http://www.methilheritage.org.uk/content/pages/santiago.php>.

Strandmann, Hartmut Pogge von. “Domestic Origins of Germany’s Colonial Expansion under Bismarck.” *Past & Present*, no. 42 (1969): 140–59.

Streets, Heather. *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

Suberu, Rotimi T. “Nigeria.” In *Diversity and Unity in Federal Countries*, edited by Luis Moreno, César Colino, and John Kincaid, 228–57. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010.

Tamuno, Tekena N. “Some Aspects of Nigerian Reaction to the Imposition of British Rule.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (1965): 271–94.

Tasie, G. O. M. *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta, 1864-1918*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978.

“The Campaign in West Africa.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, February 13, 1897.

“The Colonies In 1897.” *The Times*, May 29, 1898.

“The Drink Traffic.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 7, 1894.

“The Editor’s Monthly Chat.” *The Church Missionary Juvenile Instructor* XI (1890): 94–95.

“The Expedition of the Royal Niger Company.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 23, 1897.

“The Future of the Niger.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, April 2, 1898.

*The Missionary Register for the Year 1814: Containing an Abstract of the Proceedings of the Principal Missionary and Bible Societies Throughout the World*. London: L. B. Seeley, 1814.

“The Niger Campaign.” *The Times*, February 11, 1897.

“The Niger Expedition.” *The Manchester Guardian*. February 11, 1897.

“The Niger Trade.” *The Northern Whig*. August 28, 1884.

“The Obituary List.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 7, 1911.

“The Organization Of Northern Nigeria.” *The Times*, July 30, 1900.

“The Recent Fighting on the Niger.” *The Times*, March 12, 1895.

“The Royal Niger Company: Protest from Liverpool African Merchants.” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 20, 1897.

“The Treaty of Bida.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, May 1, 1897.

“The West African Conference And The Niger.” *The Times*, October 15, 1884.

“The West African Mission.” *The Manchester Guardian*, July 23, 1864.

Thomas, Joseph Hammond. *A Full and Authentic Diary of the Ashanti Expedition By Joseph Hammond Thomas, 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade*. Pembroke: William Emblow, 1875.

Thomson, J. B. *Joseph Thomson: African Explorer*. 2nd ed. London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1897.

Trivedi, Raj Kumar. “The Role of Imperial British East Africa Company in the Acquisition of East African Colony in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 33 (1971): 616–23.

Trivellato, Francesca. *The Promise and Peril of Credit: What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance Tells Us about the Making of European Commercial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Udoka, Ini Akpan. “The Shipping Industry in the Lower Cross River Region, Nigeria: 1865-1955.” *Transafrican Journal of History* 24 (1995): 205–15.

Ukpabi, S C. “The Origins of the West African Frontier Force.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 3 (July 10, 1966): 485–501.

Wagland, P J. “Kainji and the Niger Dams Project.” *Geography* 54, no. 4 (1969): 459–63.

Walker, Eric. *The British Empire: Its Structure and Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943.

Wariboko, Nimi. “A Theory of the Canoe House Corporation.” *African Economic History*, no.

26 (1998): 141–72.

Washbrook, D. A. “India 1818-1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism.” In *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by William Rogers Louis, Andrew Porter, and Alaine Low, 395–421. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Watt, Douglas. “The Management of Capital by the Company of Scotland 1696–1707.” *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (November 1, 2005): 97–118.

“We Have Much Pleasure.” *The Lagos Observer*, May 7, 1887.

Webster, Anthony. “The Political Economy of Trade Liberalization: The East India Company Charter Act of 1813.” *The Economic History Review* 43, no. 3 (1990): 404–19.

“Weekly Notes.” *Lagos Weekly Record*, June 11, 1898.

Wellesley, Dorothy. *Sir George Goldie: Founder of Nigeria*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1934.

Wetherell, Phyllis Jane. “The Foundation and Early Work of The Church Missionary Society.” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 18, no. 4 (1949): 350–71.

Wheare, Kenneth Clinton. *The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.

Whelan, Michael. *The Battle of Jadotville: Irish Soldiers in Combat in the Congo 1961*. Dublin: South Dublin Libraries, 2006.

Wiener, Martin J. “The Idea of ‘Colonial Legacy’ and the Historiography of Empire.” *Journal of The Historical Society* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–32.

Wilcox, Rosalinde G. “Commercial Transactions and Cultural Interactions from the Delta to Douala and Beyond.” *African Arts* 35, no. 1 (2002): 42–55.

Willan, Thomas S. *The Muscovy Merchants of 1555*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953.



- William Rogers Louis. "Introduction." In *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume V*, edited by William Rogers Louis, Andrew Porter, and Alaine Low, 1–42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Wilmot, Alexander. *History of the Zulu War*. London: Richardson and Best, 1880.
- Wilson, Charles. *The History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*. London: Cassell, 1970.
- Withers, Charles W. J. "Mapping the Niger, 1798-1832: Trust, Testimony and 'Ocular Demonstration' in the Late Enlightenment." *Imago Mundi* 56, no. 2 (2004): 170–93.
- Woolfe, Leonard. *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism*. London: The Labour Research Department, 1922.
- Wright, I. A. "The Early History of Jamaica (1511-1536)." *The English Historical Review* 36, no. 141 (1921): 70–95.
- Yarak, Larry W. "West African Coastal Slavery in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of the Afro-European Slaveowners of Elmina." *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 1 (November 26, 1989): 44–60.
- Yu, Wangteh. *The English Cabinet System*. London: P. S. King & Son, Ltd, 1939.
- Zachernuk, Philip S. *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000.
- Zook, George F. "The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading Into Africa." *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 2 (1919): 134–231.