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ABSTRACT

Seamanship was part of the culture of Nigerian nationalities. Waterborne activities such as war were practised by the nationalities before the coming of Europeans. It was the differential levels of seamanship between Nigerian nationalities and the United Kingdom that gave the United Kingdom the opportunity to colonise the Nigerian land space. The study relied on documentary and oral data. The documentary data were sourced from government annual departmental reports, newspapers and correspondence. The secondary sources used were subjected to internal and external criticism for authentication, and then to textual and contextual analyses. The oral data depended on interviews with some scholars resident in Nigeria. The study found that the differential level of seamanship and naval power amongst states had given an advantage to the British throughout the 19th and 20th century. The paper proved that seamanship was not inimical to Nigerians and that they have a culture of littoral warfare before the coming of their European counterparts. The study proves that over the ages seamanship has been centre to development of states.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country within the tropical region. It lies within latitudes 4°N and 14°S.¹ It is bounded

by the Lake Chad in the north and in the south by the Gulf of Guinea, an arm of the Atlantic Ocean. It has two main climatic seasons – the wet or rainy season and the dry season. Nigeria has a number of waterways, of which the most important of these is the River Niger, the third longest river in Africa. It empties itself into the Gulf via an amazing labyrinth of creeks. Other waterways include the River Benue, a tributary of the Niger, the River Sokoto, the River Kaduna, the River Katsina, the River Gongola, the River Anambra, the River Imo, the River Cross River, the River Ogun, the River Benin, the River Siluko, the River Sombreiro and many others. The waterways shape the pattern of every living thing along their course. The life of the people living along the beaches of the sea, along the banks of the rivers and their tributaries revolves around their maritime environment. It is the source of livelihood, the means of communication, the subject of folktales and fables, and the centre of their religious beliefs and practices.²

The peoples of the coast learnt from the constraints of nature to focus their resources on eking a living out of the sea and engaging in barter trade with the producers of food crops in the forest belt beyond them.³ The delta region of Nigeria is criss-crossed by a dense network of waterways as in the creeks, the chief of which are the Benin, Escravos, and Forcados.⁴ All the rivers, creeks, and lagoons are subject to tidal rise and fall indicating a low-lying topography. As a result of the tidal influence and proximity to the sea, the waters are saline with salinity dropping in the wet

season when the discharges from fresh water coastal rivers are significant.⁵

For so long in history, the waterways have defined the passion of the people of the coastal states, the formation of their territory and the kind and nature of war they engaged in amongst themselves. There is a correlation between the waterways and the development of towns and communities. Out of this relationship between the waterways and the peoples of the communities emerged such states as Foropa, Ogheye, Bonny, Burutu, Biresibe and Ebrohimi amongst others. These waterways became a link for trade which, sometimes because of the competition for power and economic benefits, led them to war. Trade was not only done among them (the coastal people), it was also done with the peoples of the hinterland. As a result of this economic relationship, wars were fought at the slightest provocation between neighbouring villages and towns, coastal states and their vassals, leaving the coast in a continuous state of skirmishes and war.

The skill and ability of the coastal peoples of Nigeria in the operation and handling of boats show that seamanship had existed long before colonization. It is important to state here that before the colonial era, the riverine areas of Nigeria had been skilled in boat making and in the ways of the sea; the kind of seamanship developed by the peoples of the coast and riverine interior was indigenous to them and was independent of any European influence. By the time Europeans first visited the Guinea Coast in the sixteenth century, trade had long been established with indigenous skills in boat-making, weapons manufacture, and fishing peculiar to the peoples. Pereira, visiting the Bonny area at the beginning of the sixteenth century, described great canoes coming from the hinterland with domestic products:

Some of them are large enough to hold eighty men and they come from a hundred leagues or more up this river bringing yams in large quantities. They also bring many slaves, cows, goats and sheep.⁶

What is remarkable in Pereira's statement is that seamanship was known to the peoples of the coast and that the seaman's skills were autochthonous, developed before the European ever set his boats on the coastal waters of Nigeria. Pereira reported such activities at a delta port on the Rio Real where large trading canoes made out of single trunks brought yams, slaves, cows, goats, and sheep from as far in the hinterland as a "hundred leagues or more."⁷ Barbot described the trading canoes used at Elem Kalabari in the seventeenth century in terms similar to Pereira's report.⁸ Apart from the waterways which linked the coastal communities with the hinterland; there were several rivers which linked up with over-land routes of the interior. In Northern Nigeria, these rivers included Kaduna, Sokoto, Yobe, and Gongola.

The terms 'coastal waters' and 'coastal states' are applied here only to the delta of Nigeria and the Lagos waterways. The geographical basis for the classification is that all the groups named lie within the axis of the delta and the Lagos waterways. This classification is apt not only as a geographical description, but also because of the environmental identity and the similarity in the institutions of the states.

II. WATER-BORNE WARFARE IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

The pages of history are replete with the incidence of wars. Wars are a very complex phenomena. It is a very significant aspect of the history of communities, kingdoms and empires. Indeed, war is older than recorded history, and this fact has led many to the fatalistic conclusion that it plays a gory role in the evolution of the peoples of the world. Hence, judging from the importance of the waterways to the coastal peoples of Nigeria, it is only natural for the people of the coast to protect and secure their interests on water. The waterways have also defined their coastal passions and interests over time. If waterways have played the role of facilitator of trade and other contacts,

they have been the channels through which naval vessels operated.

The waterways served the dual purpose of harvest and transfer. Harvest is the people's effort at reaping the resources of the waterways. Transfer, on the other hand, involves transportation of goods and services with the object of making profit. Unlike harvest, which perhaps is brought about by nature's endowment and human needs, transfer is a product of man's adventurous spirit and curiosity. All these interests must be supported with the protection and security of the people on water. The peculiar nature of the people and the significance attached to their maritime environment correlates in many ways with their choice of warfare with their enemies on the waterways for the pursuance of their individual or state interest.

Naval power has been one of the factors that has enabled the people of the coast to become important in the power play of groups in pre-colonial Nigeria. The lagoon warfare in coastal Nigeria had characteristics similar to the naval wars of medieval Europe, of which naval actions were undertaken with hybrid fleets made up of very large boats. The Ilajes, for instance, had used the *oko ogun* or the *oko uja*,¹¹ a wooden dug-out boat as its star war boat; they used it to prosecute their battles on water. The marine war boats used by the people in the past are estimated to be 80-90m long and about 10-12m wide.¹² The boat had a capacity of about 85-100 persons (persons here means warriors).¹³ The water wars were fought with spears, bullet-proof charms, and local guns (*shakabula*).¹⁴

These descriptions are fully consistent with the traditions of the people in the delta and other Ijaw groups relating to their trading boats and war boats. The war boats, according to Alagoa, "carried javelins and shields for defence, with twenty paddlers, and were capable of carrying 70 to 80 warriors."¹⁵ A warrior on water was expected to possess swimming skills, knowledge of local geography, and paddling. The wood used to make these boats must be the type that floats, hence, the

Ilaje proverb that *oko umale e ka rin* (it is abominable for the *oko umale* to sink).¹⁶

From the 1640s, some Ijaw rulers were reported to have possessed war fleets consisting of boats that were larger than those used for their fishing. Warlords and slave merchants were among those people who possessed war fleets. The *Totor* war of the 1780s¹⁷ between the Ijaws and the Ilajes was one of the wars with significant naval characteristics. The Ilajes won the war and collected the war boats of the Ijaws. According to Ehinmore, this kind of war was fought frequently. Here, warriors tried to make their boats come close to each other and used this proximity to attack in a kind of water ire as occurred in ancient battles of Medieval Europe. The Ilajes' victory over the Ijaw groups, gave Olowopiti the oba of Mahin, the nickname *Olowopiti aja gboko* (the king that fought and took boats).¹⁸ As dictated by the topography of the region, warfare was fought on water. However, once defeat came upon a people on water, it will ultimately ensure the victory on, and control of land. This belligerency on water determined also the course of state formation, political stability and growth. For the people of the coast, war on the waterways was a matter of life and death; it was an essential aspect of their security. Communities close to the coast were important trade routes and their towns grew because of the large trade that took place in the various communities.

In the Niger Delta, the boat was the very basis of government and society. In war periods, the boat provided rapid and efficient transport for troops. Naval warfare took place on water between opposing boats of city states, and blockade and ambush were practised by the forces.¹⁹ According to Duarte Pacheco, the boats of the delta carried up to fifty men and were used for war and other purposes.²⁰ But he was especially impressed by the boats on the Bonny and New Calabar rivers in the eastern delta of Nigeria. These boats of the Bonny and New Calabar rivers had their own hearths, and special arrangements for the storage of crews sleeping units.²¹ From the seventeenth century onwards, firearms were coming into use,

and boats were armed with small cannon as well as the muskets carried by individual warriors.²² The guns are usually described as small or as six pounders, though Adams writes of a gun of large calibre being mounted on the war boats of the King of Bonny in the Niger Delta.²³

The war boats with which Kosoko, the exiled oba of Lagos, attacked across the lagoon close to Lagos in 1853, were apparently of two types, some being 80ft in length and carrying “upwards of a hundred men”.²⁴ Guns mounted on swivels were sometimes used in the war boats of Lagos in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ A missionary observer of Kosoko’s attack on Badagry in July 1851 writes that “there were about 100 large boats, containing 10-25 men each, some mounted swivels”, which attempted to force a landing.²⁶ The effort however failed. The Yoruba on their lagoons, according to G.J.A. Ojo, used “woven fresh palm branches held upright and turned as the occasion demanded”,²⁷ but John Whitford noted that the trade boats plying between Badagry and Lagos in 1865 were fitted with square sails of strong cotton cloth, woven in an inferior way.²⁸ Whitford also writes that “sometimes they spread butterfly sails, after the manner of Queen Elizabeth’s invention of studding sails”.²⁹

Finally, migration because of trade increased the population of the states close to the coastal area. It is within the context of trading in the coastal areas that wars had been fought to protect their various interests. Those from the hinterland migrated to the coast in large numbers. All coastal societies were invariably multi-ethnic. The influx of people from different backgrounds was positive in the sense that different skills were brought to the coast by the people of the hinterland and a multi-ethnic society emerged because of the economic growth taking place at the coast in the eighteenth century in response to European presence. Seamanship was the skill of the coastal peoples and it placed them in a unique position vis-a-vis the migrating groups from the hinterland. The coastal states, because of the increase in population with people from different

environments, became an admixture of different cultures and traditions.

III. CONTEXTUALIZING SEAMANSHIP IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Seamanship is an essential ingredient of sea power. Seamanship has existed in Nigeria’s maritime environment long before the first European set his foot on Nigerian soil. Communities at the coasts have long drawn upon seamanship as a source of food, as means of travelling and sources of protection and trading. Every empire from ancient Egypt to Victorian England utilized their maritime environment to develop the economy and secure itself from the enemy. The Roman Empire employed the use of the sea to extend its territories; the British utilized the sea to defeat the Spanish Armada in 1588, the British also used the sea to defeat the French and Spanish in 1805 at the Battle of Trafalgar, and the Americans won their independence by check-mating Britain on the sea. It is only important to say here that water has been and is still a vital element of security in the world today.

During the Atlantic slave trade era, the relations between the Nigerian coastal peoples and the European traders became highly formalized. The Europeans recognized and traded under the political sovereignty of the coastal rulers. They paid their customs duties and other forms of homage to the rulers who, in turn, ensured their safety and peaceful business operations.³⁰ The European traders lived and conducted their business mostly in their hulks, and distanced themselves from the politics of their host communities.³¹ These contacts with Europeans made the coastal city-states important in the network of trade. They became the face of the trans-Atlantic trade between the peoples of the coast and the Europeans, and also were at the forefront of trade with the peoples of the hinterland. All this was due to their unique skill of seamanship. These specialized skills gave them an advantage over groups in the hinterland who were land-based, but at the same time it also brought

them into conflict with their European counterparts.

In the eighteenth century, the coastal states were the masters of their maritime environment. Their new status as intermediaries in the distribution of European goods began to overshadow their local trade in fish products and seafood. This could be pointed out as one of the reasons why slave trade activities could not be curbed easily. It is, however, important to say that European seamanship by the fifteenth century had surpassed the home-grown seamanship of the peoples of the coast. The middleman status of the coastal states and peoples brought them face to face in competition with their European counterparts. The aim of both the Europeans and the coastal peoples was the same: to make profit from trade.

However, as the relationship went further, the interest of both groups swerved, and tilted in favour of the Europeans. Europeans started imposing their own wishes upon the people thereby causing friction between the Europeans and the peoples of the coast.³² As the eighteenth century came to an end, the dominance of the peoples of the coast as intermediaries began to dwindle as mistrust between them and their European counterparts increased.³³ The greed of the European traders increased as the balance of naval power tilted in their favour, bringing to the fore European aggressive tendencies. Coastal traders, on the other hand, were beginning to distrust these white-pigmented humans. The distrust the coastal peoples had for their European counterparts sparked off a lot of bickering between both parties which sometimes caused ill-feelings that eventually affected the free flow of trade. The European intrusion into the lives of the coastal peoples backed by superior sea power characterized the future relationship of the two peoples.

Over the two centuries from 1400 to 1600, Europeans developed the art of navigation in a way that changed the whole geo-political order of

human societies.³⁴ Shortly after 1500, European ships were able to reach any sea coast in the world.³⁵ All the coasts of Africa were now open to European sea-borne trade, supported by the combination of sails and guns that was to give them naval dominance over other possible powers. In the sixteenth century, ships became more seaworthy; and at this time Portugal, Spain, Holland, France and England were developing commercial and naval fleets on their own lines, but Portugal and Spain retained specialized work force in several types of vessels.³⁶

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, sailing had reached a state of such perfection and reliability in Britain that an innovation such as steam could only be seen to be superfluous.³⁷ However, the steam made its debut in the Royal Navy in 1828, when the first steam vessel HMS *Lightning* appeared on the Royal Navy list. Within twenty one years, there were some 150 steamships officially listed which were either in commission, in reserve, or under construction.³⁸ The first man to give practical proof of the use of steam for converting heat into useful work was Thomas Savery who, in 1698, patented a machine for raising water from a mine pump.³⁹ The engine was used extensively in mines and eventually became known as the miner's friend. In 1705, Newcomen produced the Atmospheric Engine also for mine pumping.⁴⁰ The earliest successful attempt at propelling a boat by steam power was perhaps made by John Finch who in 1787 drove a skiff up the Delaware River by means of twelve vertical oars operated by a horizontal condensing engine, using a 12-inch bore cylinder with 36m stroke.⁴¹ Aaron Manby was the first steamship to be constructed of iron and it was also the first iron vessel to be put to sea, and the first vessel to go directly from London to Paris.⁴²

Putting the superiority of the Europeans into context, the contest between the coastal peoples and their European counterparts becomes critical to this research. The European penetration of the Nigerian hinterland in the late nineteenth century was because the peoples at the coast became progressively inferior in technology. The

overwhelming power of the Europeans on water won them this contest and their price was the dominance of the Nigerian waterways which became the decisive factor in the control of the sea, and later the major reason for the defeat of several states in the hinterland. The dominance by Europeans of the Nigerian maritime environment correlates with the defeat of some of the empires of the hinterland in pre-colonial Nigeria. In this case, the control of the sea ensured the control of some of the Nigerian hinterland territories. Colonization became possible because of the differential in levels of sea power.

IV. INFLUENCE OF SEAMANSHIP ON THE PEOPLES OF THE NIGERIAN COAST

The evolution of seamanship, it must be re-emphasized, began long before the coming of the Europeans. In any situation of historical change, there is always an element of continuity. Seamanship is not an exception to this rule. This is to say that positive developments in the realms of the economy and socio-political development of the coast came before the Europeans. It must be said that before the nineteenth century, the peoples of the coast dominated their environment. They were the face of the trans-Atlantic trade. All these were due to their seamanship skills. Seamanship was the consideration that made them so important to this trade.

Human enterprise thus transformed the sea from an agent of division to a bridge between two continents. The goods involved in the trade were mostly non-perishable and of high value in relation to their bulk. Two factors dictated this situation. First, the time to cross the sea was too long for perishable goods to remain fresh for use. Second, the cost of handling and transportation was very high, and durability was very essential for traders to make profit. Of utmost importance to this era is the trans-Atlantic slave trade that was taking place simultaneously with other forms of trade of the previous two centuries. The fact about the Atlantic slave trade is that it was the largest and the most brutal of forced migration in

human history. All these forms of trade characterized the economy of the peoples of the coast and their European counterparts.

Historically, the trans-Atlantic trade grew as centuries went by, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, it had become the number one trade in West Africa. Maritime trade had its roots in the seamanship of the peoples of the coast. The capital and labour requirements of the trade encouraged the migration of a large number of traders to the coast. Maritime trade involved hundreds of thousands of small-scale producers, petty traders, and middlemen. The relationship between the several grades of middlemen from Europe and the coastal states brought upon the coastal peoples mixed benefits. The abolition of the slave trade and the rise of 'legitimate commerce' scuttled the existing regime of European respect for indigenous political authority and society, and gave way to an attitude of political and cultural superiority and commercial dominance.⁴³ Political non-interference was replaced by meddlesomeness.⁴⁴ According to Hopkins, the trans-Atlantic trade democratized the West African economy and so symbolized the beginning of its modernization.⁴⁵ What is certain is that the powerful dominated the weak (the weak here is the majority of the peoples of the coast). The powerful, whether states or individuals, became predators of the weak, hence, the trade enriched a powerful minority of the two contesting civilizations.

We may need to say, first, that before the inception of the trade with Europeans, this model of maritime trade had been the norm between the coastal peoples and the peoples of the hinterland. Second, seamanship had been an existing skill with the peoples of the coast before the coming of the Europeans but it was inadequate to challenge the superiority of the European naval culture. Third, the nature of past wars fought by the peoples of the coast had always had the characteristics of naval warfare even before the nineteenth century. Fourth, trust was the sore issue between the trading Europeans and their

coastal counterparts, and this created conflict situations in their trade relations.

The eighteenth century is one which will always be important to the peoples of Western Europe. It was the beginning of colonisation, and one in which some of the nations, especially Great Britain, developed their sea sense making it more acute than it had ever been in the past. This was the beginning of imperialism. Imperialism is the projection into the wider world of national power, and nineteenth century imperialism was a consequence of the power struggle in Europe. For the peoples of the Nigerian coast, their influence as intermediaries between the Europeans and those from the hinterland dwindled; they lost almost all the gains they had made in the eighteenth century, which included their independence in the nineteenth century. How and why did they lose their dominance in the nineteenth century?

V. VICTORIAN IMPERIALISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SEAMANSHIP IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

From the nineteenth century, imperial powers began to monopolize the markets and supplies of their goods, and the English “mercantile system” was a mass of import and export restrictions done to favour the imperialist;⁴⁶ this became increasingly complicated as the century went by. While certain sections of the coastal peoples may have benefited, others saw it as a hindrance to what was then the status quo. Most of the communities at the coast clearly saw it as an undue interference in their maritime affairs. One important restriction of note was the 1807 unilateral decision of the English to abolish the trade in slaves. It was a controversial decision and the result characterized the impelling power play that favoured the English throughout the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, worldwide mechanization of industry stimulated the growth of the European empires, but in the case of those

communities at the coast, it became the beginning of their decline as an important group in the trading network of the Nigerian maritime environment. Imperial rivalry between the European states threatened the peace of the world.⁴⁷ Each power became a threat to the other, and each power became more anxious to have advantage over the others. The increase of production and of large fortunes intensified the search for markets and supplies, and for lands with raw materials for industries, where capital can profitably be invested.⁴⁸ Africa hence became a primary market in the network of trade with the rest of the world. From these facts arose the fact of imperialism. The motive for seeking resources was the benefit of people in the imperial state, particularly merchants and manufacturers, and the methods were frequently those of cruelty and treachery.⁴⁹

This defined the relationship between the peoples of the coast of Nigeria and their European counterparts in the nineteenth century. The role of the coastal peoples as an important intermediary in the trade with Europe continuously dwindled throughout the nineteenth century and they gradually transformed into subdued groups rather than important trading partners with the Europeans. Although they resisted their subjugation, they were defeated by the superior power of the English at sea and gradually this superiority became manifested in their coastal territories as well as those of their counterparts in the hinterland.

It is worthy to note here that the economy of coastal Nigeria had been expanding and becoming more complex long before the nineteenth century. Before the coming of the Europeans, many of the coastal communities were engaged in long-distance trade and in a variety of economic activities. In the coast, fishing and salt-making were the major sources of livelihood. Portuguese traders shortly after the fifteenth century reported that Bonny was manufacturing salt and exporting it to the Igbo in the hinterland in exchange for foodstuff.⁵⁰ Archaeological excavations carried out at *Igbo-Ukwu* since 1959 have revealed the skill

and beauty of workmanship of the people⁵¹ and the extent of the network of long-distance trade that the coastal communities were part of.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, attention was particularly focused on legitimate trade and the exploration of the Niger for the exploitation of its resources. These attempts to develop 'legitimate trade' in West Africa were not confined to the coastal regions alone. It also went further into the hinterland. The interest of the English in the exploration of the seas and rivers added a new dimension to the unfolding events of the nineteenth century.

In 1827, a naval presence was established at Fernando Po, and the mouth of the Niger was discovered by John and Richard Lander in 1830,⁵² thereafter a commercial highway was opened up for Britain into the hinterland of the Niger area. Soon after, as the Lander brothers returned to England with the news of their discovery, companies began to come into the coast with the aim of trading. The steam vessel constructed specially for the Landers expedition was able to explore over a thousand kilometres of the Niger in a period of eleven weeks. In the Niger expeditions of 1832 and 1841, navigation was improved by a properly constructed vessel.⁵³

In the event, the local populations on the coast were treated to increasingly frequent demonstrations of naval power in the form of seizures of slave ships, and the gunboat raids on local states. Further, the influence of the local authorities were reduced by using force and the offer of financial reward to sign treaties of amity, banning the slave trade and regulating 'legitimate trade'.⁵⁴ For the coastal peoples, these activities led to loss of sovereignty.⁵⁵ However, this loss was gradual for the coastal communities, and was brought about by the intervention of gunboats and use of the Court of Equity by British traders. Explorers were encouraged, and after the Lander brothers found the Niger route in 1830, subsidies were granted to steamship companies and traders, such as Macgregor Liard, to follow up the discovery.⁵⁶ The *Quorra* was the name of the

steamship used by Macgregor Liard, a name later adopted by the Nigerian Navy.

In 1836, an attempt by the chiefs of Bonny to protect a Spanish slave merchant resulted in the first confrontation between the British and a coastal state.⁵⁷ The Pepple royal house (founded in the early eighteenth century) and several house heads were of Igbo origin. Bonny was dominated from 1830 to 1861 by the ex-slave Alali, who was the head of the Anna Pepple House. Alali was appointed regent on the death of King Opobo in 1830 because the new king, William Dappa Pepple, was a minor.⁵⁸ In 1836, Alali bravely imprisoned some British traders after the British navy seized a Spanish slave ship in the Bonny harbour.⁵⁹ The superiority of British naval power was massively demonstrated, and the officers interfered in the politics of Bonny by placing William Dappa Pepple firmly on his throne over the opposition of senior chiefs.⁶⁰ Although the anti-slave trade campaign continued to be pursued in remote estuaries such as the Brass River, which were not very accessible to the British naval patrol at Fernando Po,⁶¹ this act of smuggling slaves can be considered as the genesis of sea piracy and smuggling in Nigeria's maritime waters. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, John Beecroft had signed abolition treaties with all the important slave trading communities and succeeded in making the trade unattractive.⁶²

It is important to mention here that another significant factor that aided the trading activities of the British at this point in time was the discovery of quinine which led to fewer deaths among the crew-members of the British gunboats or trading boats. Quinine was used not only as a curative but also as a preventive medication.⁶³ In 1854, Dr Baikie discovered that quinine could cure malaria and British firms were now able to act quickly to undermine the intermediary position of the coastal city-states by obtaining palm oil more cheaply and directly from hinterland producers.⁶⁴ Consequently, the change over from the slave trade to 'legitimate trade' in the nineteenth century brought new opportunities

for the coastal states, but it also became a major reason for their decline as intermediaries.

The emergence of the Nigerian military could be traced to the last four decades of the nineteenth century. As the British were having an upper hand in seamanship, a semblance of a military formation was beginning to emerge in the geographical land mass that became known as Nigeria. The resistance encountered by Europeans in Nigeria as early as 1836 was clearly indicative of the fact that resistance to European activities was high. The formation that began what could be aptly described as the modern day military in Nigeria started from the establishment in 1862 by Captain John Glover of a small Hausa militia (dubbed the Glover Hausa) to defend the British colony of Lagos.

The British Consul, Johnson Hewitt, signed protection treaties between 1883 and 1885, which bound the delta rulers not to enter into agreements with other European powers.⁶⁵ While leaders as Jaja of Opobo and Nana of Ebrohimi in Itsekiriland took the treaties as implying alliance with the British, however, the British instead saw it as the surrender of their sovereignty.⁶⁶ The 1884 treaty between Hewitt and Jaja allowed the Opobo king a monopoly of trade and the exclusion of non-British traders from his own territory.⁶⁷ Jaja was however overthrown in 1887.⁶⁸ The British consul, Harry Johnston, invited him to a meeting on a British warship, HMS Goshawk, promising the king he would be free to go afterwards.⁶⁹ At the meeting, however, Johnston told Jaja that he would be treated as an outlaw and the British Navy would attack Opobo. Jaja surrendered partly to save his people, but also because he believed he would get a fair trial and be acquitted of charges such as trading in slaves.⁷⁰

Nana Olomu, like Jaja, had insisted in his 1884 treaty with Hewitt that clauses providing for free trade and entry of missionaries be excluded from the agreement.⁷¹ In 1893, Itsekiriland became part of the Oil Rivers Protectorate. Prior to 1893, Sir Ralph Moor established the Oil Rivers Irregular between 1891 and 1892; it was later re-designated

the Niger Coast Constabulary and formed the basis of the Third Battalion of the Southern Nigeria Regiment of the West Africa Frontier Force (WAFF).⁷²

In 1894, the acting British Consul, Ralph Moor, made repeated requests to Nana for a meeting, all of which were ignored by Nana.⁷³ In August, Moor summoned all the Itsekiri traders to a meeting and demanded that they sign a treaty that would allow missionaries to enter their country and establish free trade.⁷⁴ All except Nana signed the new treaty. Nana failed to attend because he feared that he would be seized and deported as Jaja had been. Nana's refusal to attend marked him out as the chief opponent of the British.⁷⁵ Moor took action against Nana by destroying villages that supported him. The British eventually defeated Nana's small army and captured his capital, Ebrohimi, but only after they had been compelled by a strong Itsekiri resistance to withdraw three times. Nana had one considerable advantage: the site of Ebrohimi was a reclaimed land at the middle of a dense mangrove and difficult terrain.⁷⁶

In the end, several factors led to his defeat. The British forces (three gunboats of soldiers, 350 men in all) had more modern weapons than Nana's men. Nana's men used *kurufu* (local machine guns) to fight, and were able to hold on for a short period only.⁷⁷ Nana surrendered and his warriors were defeated.⁷⁸ Throughout the century, naval superiority over the coastal communities was the major factor that made the people lose their sovereignty, and their economic prosperity. However, seamanship and diplomacy plus naval power gave the British victory over their coastal counterparts with serious implications for hinterland peoples and states.

The coastal states had acted as a barrier to British penetration of the hinterland. The conquest of Lagos created the original breach in that barrier; further conquests completely removed the barrier exposing the entire hinterland to virtually unhindered penetration. The fall of Benin in 1897 can be attributed to this situation. The British

asked Frederick Lugard to raise the West African Frontier Force to conquer the remaining part of Southern Nigeria not already subjugated and Northern Nigeria between 1897 and 1906.⁷⁹ The Southern and Northern Nigeria Marine, which acted more or less like a marine police, were used in the quest for domination in the riverine areas.⁸⁰ Ade Ajayi has asserted that a stage was reached when it became necessary for Britain to redefine the boundaries of the various areas under its control. This was because it became inevitable that effective control should be established in compliance with the guidelines laid down at 1884/85 Berlin Conference on the partition of Africa. The redefinition of boundaries determined the areas that became designated as the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria.⁸¹

VI. CONCLUSION

The level of development of seamanship at the beginning of the nineteenth century was adequate for the coastal states to compete with their European counterparts. However, with the abolition of the slave trade and the introduction of 'legitimate trade', Britain had to penetrate into the hinterland to acquire land and locate 'legitimate crops'. The peoples of the coast were therefore persuaded to produce so called legitimate crops such as palm oil, tobacco, cocoa, and sylvan crops in general, thereby changing their orientation from what they had been used to for centuries. The manufacture of steel and steam engine improved Britain's seamanship and naval power. This was not the case for the coastal states that had a stagnated development of seamanship, even though, the coastal states had learnt to use firearms on their boats in the nineteenth century. Kosoko's attack on Badagry is an example of such naval warfare that did use firearms.⁸²

The southern flank of Nigeria is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean. The littoral area of Nigeria, comprising the coastal states, had acted as a barrier to shield the empires and states of the hinterland from penetration of the hinterland. The southern empires in the hinterland were bounded in the south by the coastal states. It was

only when the British dominated and conquered these coastal states that the hinterland politics began to collapse. The conquest of the coastal states of Nigeria opened up the hinterlands to confrontation with Britain.

Early contact with European traders was done at the sea coast. The geographical cover provided by the coastal states delayed the penetration of the British into the hinterland. For so long, the coastal states were the face of trade between southern politics and their European counterparts. In the nineteenth century, the existing relationship was redefined and a new course was followed by the two opposing groups in which the British dominated the peoples of the coast. The peoples found out that they could do little or nothing to reverse this new trend of domination. An otherwise profitable trade between both parties had become one that was unfavourable to the peoples of the coast. Confrontation had not favoured them, and the superior power of the British military invariably had become the main decider of the contest. The peoples of the coast fell most times gruesomely to British superior weapons. The forcible removal of some coastal rulers was the result of their obstruction to the economic and political interests of the British.

Indeed the greatest source of conflict between the coastal peoples and British traders was the latter's attempt to penetrate the hinterland in order to eliminate the services of the coastal dwellers.⁸³ The coastal middlemen responded through trade boycotts, closure of trade routes and open warfare.⁸⁴ Encouraged by the dream of legendary wealth which was believed to lie idle in the interior, British traders were bent on making their way inland. These factors encouraged the perspective in Britain that she needed to establish colonies of formal control not only in Nigeria but in West Africa generally. To achieve the primary goals of colonialism, the British developed the structures and the infrastructure for the conquest of the hinterland empires. The chief instruments of conquest were WAFF and a Southern Marine Department which was used in the subjugation of the peoples of the coast and the hinterland.

The control of the coastal rivers and seas bordering littoral Nigeria was significant to the conquest of hinterland states. This also gave Britain the edge over other competing European states interested in trading with the littoral peoples of Southern Nigeria. The rivers are important for communication with the hinterland. Hitherto, it opened up the interior to British penetration. War boats allowed Britain to make lightning raids against the people of the coast over which they had little defence.⁸⁵ Britain's sea power was a major factor in the colonisation of Nigeria. For a state to defeat any of the coastal states it must be a naval power, and Britain was one. The naval power of the coastal states was unequal to that of Britain. If only the coastal states were of equal strength with the British naval force, events in the coastal states might have turned out otherwise. It is the importance of the littoral areas that had made the British to finally take the coastal states.

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