

A Historical Exploration of the Peoples of the Southern Margins of the Nigeria–Bénin Border until European Partition

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Abstract

Until the partitioning of the Nigeria–Bénin border by the British and French colonial masters during the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884/85, the peoples that dwelled in the borderlands had maintained a shared history spanning centuries. Unfortunately, however, the demarcation of the Nigeria–Bénin border, like other parts of Africa, left an indelible imprint on the people since the colonial era. The paper engages in a historical exploration of the peoples of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border up to the boundary demarcation. The paper historicises the origin and migration story of the sociocultural, economic, and political activities during the period. The article reveals that, like every society all over the world, the peoples of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border had their share of wars and peaceful relations before they lost their sovereignty to the European colonialist. The paper concludes that, despite the vicissitude that accompanies the scramble and the partitioning of the peoples of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border into separate colonial territories, they continued to maintain cordial relations. The paper utilises transnational community theory to analyse the subject; it equally employs primary and secondary sources, and also, proffers some recommendations.

Keywords: Bénin, border, European, Nigeria, partition

Introduction

Studies in African boundaries since the second half of the twentieth century have revealed several perspectives, and trajectories that had influenced, if not determined, the continent's borders and borderlands since the

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precolonial period. These studies are not limited to the artificiality and porosity of the continent's borders, developments in precolonial African borderlands, neglect of border regions, crossborder ethnic conflicts, and the impact of the colonial borders on the continent, as well as disagreement over boundary lines between neighbouring countries, (Asiwaju, 1984, Asiwaju and Adeniyi, 1989, Aluede, 2018a, Vorrath, 2010). Development in precolonial African borderlands has received scholarly attention among scholars, even though some had argued that the concept of border and its features only became prominent in the continent until the late nineteenth century, following the partitioning of the continent. However, it is interesting to note that precolonial African societies were not ignorant of the role of borders in determining the boundaries of territories during the period. O. Adejuyigbe, shed light on the features used for boundary demarcation in precolonial Yorubaland. He affirms that:

Topographical features such as sea, lagoons, lakes, rivers, boulders, hills, mountains and valleys as well as man-made constructions (such as mounds) were evidently in use as markers in areas considered to be the border region between one Yoruba Kingdom and others.

The literature on African borders has examined several themes such as the European partition of Africa's borders and its impact, among others. In Nigeria's borderlands with her immediate neighbours, the following works are being reviewed: J.C. Anene (1970) interrogates the intrigues and aftermaths among rival European colonial powers (British, French, and Germans) that characterised the creation of Nigeria's international boundaries with her immediate neighbours. Anene sheds light on the various treaties and conventions reached between the European imperial powers and the traditional rulers in colonial Nigeria and her proximate neighbours, as well as the impact of the partition on the border communities in the postcolonial period. A.I. Asiwaju (2017) historicizes the early history of the Imeko border town since the sixteenth century. He unravels the migration history of Imeko and its people, their sociocultural,

economic, and political institutions, and especially, the trading activities of people and their impacts on Imeko town. Kunle Lawal (1994) examines the historiography of three major ethnic groups in Badagry, namely the Ogu (Gun), Awori, and Agonyin, from the earliest time to the 1950s. Lawal probes into their origin and settlement in Badagry, as well as interdependence, and the extent to which geographical complementarity and common historical experiences had shaped their interactions.

K. Afolayan (1980) examines the impact of the trade routes across Egbado land on the people and the extent it contributed to promoting commercial activities among them in the past and now that is divided between Nigeria and the Republic of Bénin. The author reveals the respective trade routes connecting major trade towns in Egbado land, the items of trade, and the nature of the movement from one town to another. L.C. Dioka (1992) examines trade and cultural relations across the Nigeria–Bénin border between the Gun of Badagry and Porto Novo since the precolonial period. Dioka traced the origin of the Gun to the Togo/Ghana borderlands, from where they migrated to Porto Novo. He equally sheds light on the factors that led some Guns to migrate from Porto Novo to Badagry. He affirms that the Gun in Badagry is culturally conservative owing to their contiguous location with their original culture area in Porto Novo. Likewise, he highlights some of the trading activities of the Gun in Badagry and Porto Novo to include the slave trade, and agricultural produce. The following reviewed works examine some aspects or themes that provide insight into the impact of the European partitioning of the Nigeria–Bénin border on the border communities, the migration, and settlement of the ethnic groups that settled in the borderlands and their economic and trading activities since the precolonial period. However, none of these works addresses the nature and patterns of the sociocultural, economic, and political activities of the peoples that straddle the Southern margin of the Nigeria–Bénin before the partitioning of the Nigeria–Bénin border. This lacuna brings, to the fore, the relevance of this article, as it seeks to fill the gap in the literature concerning the nature and pattern of the sociocultural, economic, and political activities of the peoples that

dwell in the territory that was subsequently partitioned into different colonial territories, as it was the case in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border.

Theoretical Framework: Transnational Community

Over the year, theories have enabled scholars to probe and provide insight into human, societal, and abstract phenomena, and how they impact society. One such theory is the theory of transnational community, an offshoot of the theory of transnationalism, traced to Randolph Bourne. The theory of transnational community explains the dynamics of culture and international migration of individuals and a group of people across international boundaries (Faist, 2009: 9). Likewise, it has served as a prominent research lens through which the aftermath of international migration, the shifting of state borders across populations, and the various activities of immigrants in host countries and communities in different parts of the world is viewed. Transnational community refers to ‘communities made up of individuals or groups that are established in different national societies, and who act based on shared interests and references (which may be territorial, religious or linguistic), and use networks to strengthen their solidarity beyond national borders’ (Hypergeo, 2014). The notion of a transnational community focuses on human agency and involves trans-border activities that link individuals, families, and local groups. The theory therefore will provide insight into the nature, and patterns of interactions of the peoples of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border, their shared interest, and history before the partitioning of the borderlands.

Southern Margins of the Nigeria–Bénin Border

The boundary lines that defined the Nigeria–Bénin border were concluded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by British and French colonial officials. The colonialist achieved this feat by signing treaties with their traditional rulers, which were ratified at the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 and served as evidence for the partitioning of territories by the

British and French colonial masters (Touval, 1966: 288). However, there were instances of disputes over claims and counter-claims over territories secured by British and French colonial agents from African rulers (Anene, 1970:182). To avert conflict over colonial territories, the British and French resorted to a convention to address their differences. The Nigeria–Bénin border was amicably partitioned through the Anglo-French Conventions of 1889, 1906, and 1914 (McEwen, 1991: 67). The conventions defined the boundary lines demarcating both colonial territories, subsequently, bequeathed to independent Nigeria and the Bénin Republic. The Nigeria–Bénin border spanned a land boundary of approximately 770 kilometres. The boundary was peopled by three major ethnic groups, namely the Yoruba, Ogu, and Bariba. The Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border are densely populated with human settlements residing in towns and villages located within and around the borderlands. The area was actively involved in the slave trade and kola trade during the precolonial era, owing to its strategic location to the coast and interior of Yorubaland (Folayan, 1980: 85).

Peoples of the Southern Margins of the Nigeria–Bénin Border

The Yoruba are one of the ethnic groups that settled at the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border before the coming of the Europeans. There is a variance of the language among the people nevertheless; the Oyo Yoruba appears to be the most popularly spoken by the various Yoruba groups (Akinjogbin and Ayandele, 1980: 121). Before, the fall of the Old Oyo Empire, in the nineteenth century, it was the leading Yoruba state during the sixteenth century. The geographical location of Yorubaland under the Old Oyo Empire until the eve of the European partitioning stretched to the West from around Badagry to Warri and inland until they almost reached the Niger around latitude 90– Old Oyo Empire extended to parts of the Niger boundary between it and the Nupe around latitude 50. The empire spread westwards, cutting across some parts of Dahomey and reaching into the east of Togo (1980).

The literature on the origin and migration of the Yoruba peoples

alluded to Ile-Ife as their ancestral home and Oduduwa as their progenitor (Atanda, 1980: 1). It is believed that Oduduwa fathered seven sons, and his sons and their children established their kingdoms across Yorubaland (Akinjobin, 1967: 9). Old Oyo was established by Oduduwa's youngest son, Oranmiyan, and it later became the most powerful and leading Yoruba state, until its collapse in the late 1830s. Furthermore, among these early Yoruba kingdoms, some were established in what is today known as the Nigeria–Bénin border. Some of these kingdoms (Ketu and Sabe) were located between Dahomey and Old Oyo Empire and they paid homage to the Alaafin of Oyo, the paramount ruler of Yorubaland.

According to G. Parrinder, the kingdoms of Ketu and Sabe (Ketu and Save) are two of the earliest original Yoruba kingdoms that have been fused with non-Yoruba-speaking people (Parrinder, 1947: 125). He goes further to conclude that “Since the splitting up of the Yoruba country by an artificial frontier, these two ancient towns have been cut off from their fellows” (1947). Ketu and Sabe Yoruba kingdoms were located in the westernmost areas of Yorubaland. The Kingdoms of Ketu and Sabe are believed to evolve at the same time as Old Oyo and, like other Yoruba-speaking groups, migrated from Ile-Ife. Ade Obayemi affirms that the kings of Ketu and Sabe are relatives of the Alaafin of Oyo and the Alake of Egba (Obayemi, 1971: 238- 239). Concerning Ketu, Sopasan (Soipasan) is regarded as their ancestor that led the group from Ile-Ife. Before the establishment of the town of Ketu by the seventh king known as Ede, the migrating group had settled initially at Oke Oyan and Aro Ketu (1980). Ede and his group of migrants subdued the people whom they met around their town. Following the fortification of their capital, the rulers of Ketu not only withstood the aggression of hostile neighbours but expanded their kingdom as far as Meko (Imeko) in the East, River Weme in the West, River Okpara in the North and to the marshland of the Ohori in the South (1980). Ketu came under the hegemony of the Old Oyo Empire from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, following the westward expansion of the Old Oyo Empire. This made the rulers of Ketu (the Alaketu) pay tribute to the Alaafin of Oyo during these periods. Similarly, during the

period, Ketu was troubled by Dahomey. This development forced it to rely on the protective hands of Old Oyo. Unfortunately, the decline of Old Oyo from the nineteenth century opened Ketu to regular attacks from Dahomey, until Ketu was destroyed between 1882 and 1886 by the Dahomean forces (Anene, 1963: 481). The territory of Ketu and Dahomey were later incorporated into French colony territories of West Africa in the late nineteenth century.

The kingdom of Sabe shares a common heritage with Ketu and Old Oyo. Nevertheless, the paucity of publications on Sabe's history was linked to its heterogeneity in terms of the local population, in which the Yoruba-speaking Egba and Oyo groups were distinguishable. According to Obayemi, the traditions of Sabe are often confused with that of the North. This is because, at some time, possibly during the eighteenth century, a dynasty from Boko in the Bariba area identified around the personality of one Baba Gidai who came to install himself as the ruler of Sabe (1980). It is believed that the Sabe migrating groups had settled at Killibo. However, the early important centres were the villages of Kabuwa and Jabata, where a shrine to Oduduwa was erected. Thus, notwithstanding, Sabe was annexed by the French as part of their colony in West Africa; Sabe was less successful in establishing its influence within their regions like Ketu and Oyo.

Other Yoruba-speaking people that settled in the Southwestern Yorubaland that, today, form the border communities between Nigeria and the Republic of Bénin include Egbado and Badagry. The Egbado kingdom is one of the last to emerge in Yorubaland. Egbado is a cluster of many towns founded between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Atanda, 1980). The people of Egbado, though are dominated by the Yoruba-speaking groups, some claim to have migrated from Porto Novo, and others from Oyo. Despite this claim, they came under the control of the Old Oyo Empire from the seventeenth century onwards. The Egbado area consists of six distinct local dialect groups, namely: the Egbado, Awori, Anago, Ketu, Olori-Ketu, and the Ogu (Obayemi, 1980, 240). The Kingdom of Egbado is ruled by the Olu. Each Olu ruled over their different towns.

For instance, the Olu of Ilobi ruled over his people. The same applies to other Egbado towns, namely: Ilaro, Itaro, Ijanna, Idogo, Ibese, Ibara, Ilewo, Ishaga, and Ilogun among others (1980). After a while, Ijanna became the most important of the Egbado towns.

Before the fall of Old Oyo in the second half of the nineteenth century, the lordship of Ijanna over other Egbado towns was upturned by Ilaro, whose ruler, the Olu, became the most important of the Egbado kings. The decline of Old Oyo and the power vacuum created in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century brought Egbado under the mercy of the Egba and Dahomey. The people of Egbado were harassed by both Dahomey and the Egba until they came under the protection of the British who declared a protectorate over the area towards the end of the nineteenth century (Ajayi, and Smith, 1971). Badagry, in the words of Robin Law, is an extremely heterogeneous community, comprising elements of disparate origins, displaced from their early original homelands by the expansion of Dahomey in the early eighteenth century— Badagry, though was initially heterogeneous, was influenced by the subsequent immigration of alien group (Law, 1994: 33). There are different accounts concerning who are the first sets of settlers to settle in Badagry. Some historians traced the earliest settlers of Badagry to the Ogu people who migrated from Ajala (Porto Novo) owing to attacks from the Dahomey forces led by King Agaja in the eighteenth century (Akinjogbin, 1962: 550). The name Ogu is a generic term used to identify the Tado groups that include the Ewe, Aja, Fon, and Egun (Asiwaju, 1979). They migrated from their original homeland in the region between the Weme and the Volta Rivers in the present-day Togo-Bénin border to the Southern margins of the present-day Nigeria-Bénin border. The other settlers in Badagry are the Yoruba-speaking people of Awori descent. The Awori-Yoruba like other Yoruba-speaking groups traced their origin to Ile-Ife (Aderibigbe, 1975: 4).

According to the tradition of origin, Ogunfunmire, a hunter from Ile-Ife, led a group of Aworis to settle in Lagos. Their first port of call was Iro, near present-day Mokoloki, having sailed through the Ogun River guided by a floating calabash (Adefuye, 1987: 4) They continued their

journey from Mokoloki until they reached Isheri (Iseri), where their journey ended in the sixteenth century. Isheri subsequently became the second centre of dispersal of the group, as various Awori groups moved in different directions, led by different leaders with the title Olofin, first bestowed on Ogunfunmire (Faluyi and Lawal, 1987: 231). In the course of their migration, some of the leaders moved from Isheri to Ido, Agege, Ado-Odo, and Ado-Igbesa. The group that entered Badagry migrated from Ado. This group, it is believed, left Ado at the height of Old Oyo pressure to seek refuge in the drier parts of Badagry, between the lagoon and the swamp. The migrating Awori group settled briefly at Pota before going further to more habitable parts close to the swamps. Though a branch settled at Ibereko near the Ogu village of Mowo, others moved towards Imeko Northeast of Badagry (Dioka, 2001). Parts of the Badagry area occupied by the Awori-speaking group and Ogu were divided between British and French colonial territories, which later became post-colonial Nigeria and the Bénin Republic.

Political Institutions of the Peoples in the Southern Margins of the Nigeria–Bénin Border

The settlers in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border before the advent of the Europeans evolved their political institutions. The political institutions of the Yoruba-speaking people in the Nigeria–Bénin border share similarities with that of other Yoruba-speaking peoples in different parts of Yorubaland, before their contact with the Europeans. The system of government evolved by the Sabe, Ketu, and Egbado as well as the Yoruba settlers in Badagry and their environs was monarchical. An Oba or king headed each of these Yoruba kingdoms, and each of these kings was entitled to wear a crown, and his authority spread across the various towns within his kingdom. Each of the paramount rulers of these kingdoms had a title peculiar to them, namely: the Aleketu of Ketu, the Onisabe of Sabe, the Olu of Egbado, and the Akran of Badagry (Akinjogbin, and Ayandele, 1980: 17). The Oba's of these kingdoms ruled as divine kings. They exercised executive, legislative, and judicial powers in the

administration of their kingship over their people. In theory, these rulers exercise absolute powers. This means that their subjects cannot question their decisions. However, in reality, this was not the case as was the case in the Old Oyo Empire, where some members of the state council led by the Oyo Mesi, the Bashorun, and the Ogboni cult checked the Alaafin's power to ensure he does not abuse the power vested in him. The same applied to the Yoruba kingdoms in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border. The Oba ruled in consonance with the Igbimo.

The Igbimo shared similar characteristics with the Oyo Mesi. The Igbimo was the most senior chief in the town. He was a representative of certain lineages, descendants in some towns bound together by strong ties (1980). The Igbimo chiefs performed official duties for their towns and Oba. They equally, like their paramount rulers, exercised executive, legislative and judicial responsibility for the palace and the people. The Igbimo chiefs equally functioned as advisers to their Oba on key issues that affected the kingdom. The Ogboni and the Bashorun titleholders in these kingdoms equally carried out functions as prescribed by their customs and traditions. Furthermore, on the political, administrative, and judicial structure of these kingdoms, lesser chiefs that headed the Adugbo (town) or ward chiefs governed each town at the local or community level. These chiefs were known as Ijoye and Baale (1980). The lesser chiefs performed very useful functions at the lower level, particularly at the village and community administrative structure. The Baale, whose position in most cases was hereditary, in some instances, were appointed by the Oba to administer parts of their town and community. The Baale oversaw the welfare of members of his compound. He settled disputes among members and other issues that might cause chaos across his jurisdiction.

On the other hand, the Wards chiefs ensured that law and order reigned in their wards. They served as the mouthpiece for their wards in the central government of their town and kingdom (Law, 1994: 44.) In some cases, the chiefs of the wards, due to the vast areas they governed and the complex nature of governance, were compelled to seek the assistance of the Igbimo chiefs to assist them to effectively carry out their functions to

their people. The ward chiefs in Badagry were potential candidates who contested for the crown of Badagry. This Robin Law asserts that:

The open and competitive character of political leadership in Badagry probably applied not only to the struggle for primacy among the different ward chiefs but to some degree to succession to the ward chiefs themselves (Law, 1994: 45).

The political institutions evolved by the Yoruba and Ogu-speaking peoples in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border promoted stability as well as law and order, before their contact with the Europeans.

Social Institutions of the Peoples in the Southern Margins of the Nigeria–Bénin Border

The social institutions of the Yoruba and Ogu-speaking people in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border, before losing their sovereignty to the Europeans, promoted social cohesion and solidarity among the people. Religious and cultural festivals, coronations ceremonies, and festivities in the region played major roles in uniting the people and giving them a sense of identity. Religion and cultural festivities have played a very important role in promoting unity, oneness, peaceful coexistence, and solidarity among the Ogu and Yoruba-speaking people in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border since the precolonial period. Before the introduction of Islam and Christianity in the borderlands, the majority of the people adhered to their traditional religion. The traditional worshippers worshiped Bahia, Ifa, Zengbeto, Yoho, Orisha, and the god of Iron (Hunsu, 2022). There are several cultural festivities celebrated by the people, including the Thevi festival celebrated by the Ogu and Yoruba.

Economic Activities of the Peoples in the Southern Margins of the Nigeria–Bénin Border

The geographical location, physical environment, and climatic condition influenced largely the economic activities engaged by the people in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border during the precolonial period. Except for Badagry, whose strategic location along the Atlantic coast afforded the people the opportunity to trade with European traders at the coast in agricultural produce and slaves from the interior (Ogunremi, 1994: 44), the other parts of the region are in the tropics and guinea zone, where rainfall and soil fertility are adequate for agricultural produce. As in other parts of Africa, agriculture constitutes the major economic activity of the people in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border. Despite the existence of other economic engagements of the people, agriculture remained the mainstay of the precolonial economy of the people (Faluyi, 2003: 36).

The Yoruba and Ogu-speaking people engaged in farming and the cultivation of various crops both local and foreign. The indigenous crops cultivated by the people are yam, oil palm, palm tree, and kola nut. The contact with the Europeans from the fifteenth century following their contact with the indigenous introduced foreign crops such as cassava, maize, potatoes, guava, and pineapple among others (Atanda, 1980: 36). The climatic condition and the physical environment of the region favored the cultivation of these crops. The land was communally owned by the various communities; hence it was released to whoever is interested in farming. In the same vein, the people practiced rotational farming. The majority of the people were involved in subsistence farming during the period and the people used crude farming implements to farm.

Apart from farming, the Yoruba and Ogu-speaking people were equally involved in the domestication of animals, hunting, and fishing. In Badagry and its environs, fishing was the predominant occupation of the people, though the people were still very much in farming. The proliferation of the lagoon gave Badagry a distinctive economy in which fishing and salt making (evaporated from seawater) were prominent. This, to a considerable

extent, differentiated them from others– the purely agricultural societies in the interior (Manning, 1989: 57). Trade was another economic activity of the people. The strategic location of the region as well as its proximity to non-Yoruba and Ogu-speaking peoples and the different agricultural produce facilitated trade between the people of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border and their neighbours.

Nonetheless, despite the peoples' occupation in agricultural and non-agricultural activities, their contact with the Europeans from the fifteenth century also opened up trade in slaves between traders from the region and the Europeans. The demands for slaves in the New World (North America) to work in the tobacco and cotton plantation attracted European slave dealers to the coast of West Africa. In the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border, Badagry was an active early trading port of slaves in Yorubaland until the Lagos port emerged in the eighteenth century (Ryder, 1980: 245). Slaves traded at the Badagry port were derived from the interior of Yorubaland, Dahomey, Hausaland as well as Borguland en route Europe and North America through the Atlantic Ocean (Adekunle, 1994: 10).

By the sixteenth century, Badagry was one of the leading slave trading ports in West Africa. The slaves were victims of wars between rival states, kidnapping, and domestic slavery. The trade of slaves affected the demography, economic, social, and political growth of the Yoruba and Ogu-speaking peoples in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border. The quest for slaves resulted in inter-state wars, looting, and destruction of the agricultural produce of the belligerent. The era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border was one of the dark episodes of the history of the people.

Impact of the Partition of the Nigeria–Bénin Border on the Peoples of the Southern Margins

Indeed, the partitioning of the Nigeria–Bénin border by the British and the French had a profound effect on the people of the Southern margins of the borderlands. It affected the people's social-economic activities and

created new challenges for the leaders of post-colonial Nigeria and the Republic of Bénin. Unfortunately, the partitioning ended the traffic of traders from Yorubaland and Dahomey, as well as Borgu, in kola nut trade (Mabogunje, 1993: 5). The boundary demarcation eroded the lively social and economic activities among the ethnic groups that are now divided by borderlines before the advent of the Europeans. Unfortunately, for the people, the colonial masters introduced border restrictions through the payment of tolls backed by colonial laws, which many post-independence African leaders maintained, including the governments of Nigeria and the Republic of Bénin. Furthermore, the partitioning of the border resulted in the neglect of the borderlands and its people by both the colonial and post-colonial governments of Nigeria and the Bénin of Republic. Instead, their focus has been on major towns and cities, to the detriment of the border towns, in terms of development and social infrastructures (Aluede, 2018b:149).

The partitioning of the people in the Nigeria–Bénin border, like other parts of the African continent, sowed the seeds of border-related challenges that have continued to confront post-independence African states. Ieuan Griffiths, commenting on the effect of the Berlin conference of 1884/1885, concludes that:

The inherited political geography of Africa is as great an impediment to independent development as her colonially based economies and political structures (Griffiths, 1986: 204).

Aside from the above fact, other challenges that have continued to confront the leaders of Nigeria and the Bénin Republic, owing to the partitioning of the Nigeria–Bénin border, and by extension the peoples of the Southern margins, include irredentist agitation, boundary dispute, boundary encroachment, cross-border crime and in recent times terrorist attacks, owing to the porosity of the Nigeria–Bénin border (Botoku, 2015). Furthermore, owing to the activities of smugglers in Nigeria's borderlands with her immediate neighbours, the Nigerian government was forced

to close its borders (1984, 2003, and 2019) with them (Campbell, 2019: 1; Golub, 2020) The border closure affected the socioeconomic activities of the people in the borderlands during the period of the closure. The leaders of both countries have made several efforts in the post-colonial period to address some of the border challenges such as the establishment of the Nigeria–Bénin Joint Border Commission in 1981, organising joint border workshops, and the signing of cross-border treaties, some of the border issues persist (Aluede, 2017: 16).

Conclusion

This paper historicizes the sociopolitical development of the peoples of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border from the precolonial period until the partitioning of the borderland, in the late nineteenth century. It examined their origin, socioeconomic and political institutions, as well as relations with each other during the period. The paper reveals that, before the partitioning of the borderlands which led to their separation into British and French colonial territories, the peoples maintained cordial relations influenced by trade relations and other sociocultural interactions. The paper equally reveals that war also featured in their interaction during the period. However, from the second half of the twentieth century, some European countries, notably the British and French quest for colonies, altered the sovereignty enjoyed by the people. They succeeded in securing treaties signed by the traditional rulers of the Southern margins of the Nigeria–Bénin border, which they used to lay claim over the territories they finally secured at the Berlin Conference. The impact of the partitioning of Nigeria–Bénin on the Southern margins of the borderlands is revealed in the article. Likewise, the paper reveals the strict border policy of the Nigerian government on the people of the Southern margins of the borderlands. Furthermore, the efforts of the Nigerian and Béninoise governments to address some of the border issues confronting them are explored. The paper concludes that the governments of Nigeria and the Bénin Republic should strengthen the sociocultural relations of the peoples of the Southern margins of the borderlands

owing to their shared history dating back to the precolonial period. It, therefore, recommends that the Nigerian government discontinue the implementation of the close border policy in her borderlands with her immediate neighbours owing to the effect it has had on the sociocultural and economic activities of the people in the borderlands.

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