Nineteenth Century Socio-Economic Vertical Mobility of People in Bonny and Calabar: An Awake of Uprise

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Abstract
This paper has vividly given a historical analysis of some dramatic events in the economic and social developments of the Delta City States, particularly in Bonny and Calabar from the change of the slave trade to the palm-oil trade in the 19th century. It was contended that the abolition of the overseas slave trade was probably the most dramatic factor for a switch of the economic and social systems of the Delta States in especially the aforementioned cities in this period. Adopting the qualitative research methodology of content analysis, the work revealed that the decline of the slave trade carried the nobility down with it, while the prosperity of the palm oil trade carried the new men to wealth and power owing to social upheaval of revolutionary proportions as the lower classes of men such as Alali, Oko Jombo and Jaja in Bonny, and the Blood Men in Calabar struggled upwards against the prejudices and oppression of the nobility prevalent during the period under review. The work however, asserted that in spite of these internal developments, it was the British usurpation and takeover of the middlemen role from the coastal rulers-both new men and the kings that caused the natives economic want and political prostrate and sank them into economic misery and poverty during and even after the period under review. One simple solution to the economic and social advancement of the city-states as whole is to leave the past behind and work to develop the present and the future.

Keywords: *revolutionary, economic, social development, Bonny, Calabar*

Introduction

The abolition of the overseas slave trade was probably the most dramatic factor for a change of the economic system of the Delta and coast communities often referred to as the Niger Delta states since the nineteenth century. The abolition of the slave trade by British in 1808 transformed the economic life of the delta and coast communities. Where before they had traded profitably in slaves, they had now to turn their attention to exploiting hinterland products such as palm produce, timber and ivory.[1] This change was however difficult, involving as it did new methods of trade. It took some time before the coast chiefs became reconciled to the less dramatic and less profitable trade in legitimate goods such as the palm oil.[2] This work would look at the dynamics of the switch from the slave trade in the Niger Delta to the palm oil trade such as "the House system and the rise of the new men in particularly Bonny, the Trust system

which became a source of frictions, and the significant events in the collapse of the city-states from 1880-1895 owing to the British involvement in the peoples economic and political affairs.

Methodology

The paper heavily relied on the qualitative historical analytical research design. According to Shinija (2023), qualitative historical analytical research is qualitative research method that studies past events in an attempt to analyse facts and describe the cause of events, and how they affect the present. Historical research is used to provide critical contextual link of events between the past and the present. As a research design, this historical method is particularly relevant to this study because it accounts for a systematic analysis of the events in the economic and social developments of the Delta City States, particularly in Bonny and Calabar from the change of the slave trade to the palm-oil trade in the 19th century. Although the design involves gathering of data from primary and secondary sources, analyzing source material such as eye witness accounts, oral or written testimonies, letters, diaries, and textbooks, journal articles and newspapers, respectively, for the purpose of this paper, the researcher solely relies mostly on secondary materials such as textbooks, journal articles and online materials.

Results and Discussion

1. *The Niger Delta and its Physical Features*

Going by Isaac Adaka Boro's account, "the Niger Delta is strictly the area occupied by the Ijaws, the aboriginal tribe of the delta. It spans the coast of the Bight of Biafra, from the Forcados River to the Opobo River and upstream to the Niger tributaries of the Nun and Forcados Rivers. Compared to other parts of the country, this is a geographical complex, with a crisscross of creeks and a dense forest nourished by heavy rains almost throughout the year".[3] He further stressed that "the Niger Delta has sufficient land to accommodate four of the largest cities in the world-London, New York, Buenos Aires, Moscow-more than enough humidity to battle the extreme aridity of the entire Sahara; and a physiognomy gloomy enough to repel the most adventurous of explorers".[4] But in a slightly different account, E.N. Ota, asserted that what is geographically referred to as the Niger Delta in Nigeria is the stretch of wetland that covers an estimated area of about 70,000 square kilometers.[5] It consists of district ecological zones which are characteristics of larger river deltas in a tropical region, coast ridge barriers, mangroves and fresh water swamps and forests. The Niger Delta mangrove forests cover some 6,000 square kilometers, while the fresh water swamps cover about 11, 700 square kilometers.[6] Altogether, the Niger Delta region accounts for about 7.5% of the total land mass in Nigeria, which extends from Apoi to the Bight of Benin. It also covers a coastline of 650 kilometers and about two-third of the meter coastline of Nigeria. Because of its peculiar location, the Niger Delta is characterized by creeks, rivers, streams and canals which are also home to seasonal swamp forests and low land rain forests. The area is strategically located in the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean and is largely populated by fishermen, with a sprinkling of farmers. More importantly, the Niger Delta is even currently the source of Nigeria's huge earning from oil. It is therefore, vital to the economy of the Nigerian state, given the fact that exports from crude oil account for about 80% of total Federal Government revenue.[7] Even before the discovery of crude oil, the Niger delta had been the economic hub and treasure base of the country. Agricultural produce of palm oil and kernel which are by far the oldest economic endeavor served this purpose. They are obtained from wild palm trees which occupy a considerable part of the fresh water jungles.[8] Another forest resource is timber comprising mainly mahogany, abura, black and white afara, iroko.

Agricultural potentialities are vast. Owing to the astonishingly fertile soil, majority of the tropical crops can grow without using fertilizers for years. This is made possible by the rich alluvial soil deposited yearly by the floods.[9] Pioneer experimental farms set up by the Niger Delta Development Board show that rice in the swamps could thrive all the year round. Rubber cocoa, tobacco, sugar-canes and other moisture-nourished cash crops are especially favoured.[10] Fisheries in fresh and brackish water are also predominantly prosperous investments. Although, Boro strictly tied the Niger Delta to the area only occupied by the Ijaw, Ota said "politically the Niger delta region comprises, originally, six 'core' states and three 'peripheral' states in Nigeria". The "core" Niger Delta states, according to him are Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, (recently de-listed) Delta, Edo and Rivers, while the "peripheral" states are Abia, Imo, and Ondo. The region has an estimated population of 20 million, comprising some fifty ethnic groups and over 3,500 communities who speak approximately 260 dialects. The major ethnic groups are Ijaw, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ibibio, Isoko, Annang, Calabar, Ishan, Edo and Igbo, among others. Almost all of these groups are located in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. The states that make up the Niger Delta are also contiguous.[11]

2. *From Slave Trade to Palm oil Trade*

For a hundred years the Niger Delta city states had been the leading West African participants in the slave trade. In the nineteenth century, due to British naval insistence and their situation in relation to the palm oil belt, the city-states quickly converted to the palm-oil trade and by the middle of the century had become the leading African exporters. This conversion of the economy was not accomplished without social disruption of revolutionary proportions which occasionally went so far as to replace the freeborn aristocracy of the states by the ex-slaves. Thus, the change brought about by the suppression of the slave trade was the major factor in the history of the Niger Delta in the first half of the nineteenth century.[12] The history of the city-states also illustrates how the suppression of the slave trade led to a greater European involvement in and encroachment upon African politics, and thus to the partition. The late nineteenth century trade war between the city-states and European firms throws considerable light on the economic background to the partition and the unfortunate consequences of European commercial dominance for the city-states.[13] As stated in the introductory page, because the slave trade had provided in a lucrative source of wealth with the result that the coast settlements underwent remarkable political and social developments, it took some time before the coast chiefs became reconciled to the less dramatic and less profitable trade in legitimate goods, but the British naval vessels which operated from Fernando Po kept close vigilance on the activities of the coast communities.[14] In time the chiefs were induced to negotiate treaties with the British naval commanders in which the chiefs promised to throw the weight of their authority on the side of humanitananism.[15] But in order to have full control of the newly converted legitimate palm oil trade, the British officials tarnished the images of the local rulers. One of the British commanders, Edward Nicolls, thus declared: "it was his intention to make the coast area a glory and advantage to British commerce and the cause of Humanity".[16] During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the peoples of the coast were gradually adjusting themselves to the new state of affairs created by the abolition of the slave trade and the presence of the British naval officials who began to interfere in the internal affairs of the city-states. British merchants who were developing the new trade in palm produce indulged in the belief that the British navy behind them they could defy the authority of the coast chiefs. Their complaints which flooded the British foreign office usually emphasized what they called 'the wickedness and the slaving

propensities of the local rulers'.[17] The presumed humanitarian anxiety to terminate the suffering of the victims of the slave trade was strong among some British abolitionists. But is now realized that the movement gained official support mainly because of the practical needs of the British economy. That is, that by the beginning of the 19th century, Britain had already created capital out of the slave trade and its American plantations, and this capital launched the industrial revolution.[18] The slave trade was, accordingly, no longer vital to the British economy; whereas the palm oil and palm kernels of the Niger Delta and its hinterland products were required by the British industry.[19] Although there were social statuses in the Niger Delta before the legitimate palm oil trade, these statuses under the palm oil trade boosted the statuses of the ex-slaves, and undermined the influences of the local rulers. But the new statuses of these ex-slaves also led to their clashes with the British officials which led to either the ex-slaves' deportations or exiles. Thus, the change brought about by the suppression of the slave trade was a factor in the history of the Niger Delta in the first half of the nineteenth century.[20]

3. *The Niger Delta Palm Oil Trade and the Rise of the New Men: A Chaotic Period in Bonny and Calabar*

Originally the city-states, like the Ibo and Ibibio clans, possessed a segmentary political system based on lineages, but important changes had taken place in order to organise their export trade and their trading empires effectively. In the past, only royal princes could find or head Houses, but in the commercial competition of the eighteenth century a House either chose its ablest man as leader or collapsed before its rivals. As a result, except in Itsekiri, capable and energetic businessmen among the slaves rose to prominence in the Houses.[21] Such was the case in Bonny and Calabar. In Bonny, for instance, the history during the middle years of the century throws abundant light on the fortunes of the delta and coast peoples during the period. Although the 'house' system which was the characteristic structure of the social, economic and political life of the people served a number of useful purposes, it was also a source of weakness to the already established Monarchical systems. The strength and influence of a house depended on the wealth derived from trade. It thus happened that the king of a city-state who owned his own house had to compete in trade with subjects who also had their own houses.[22] A poor king could not hope to command in a society apparently preoccupied with trade. So, at the death of Opubu the Great in Bonny, the heir to the throne, prince Dappa Pepple, was still a minor. The headship of Opubu's House, Anna Pepple, was passed to Alali, who was one of the first and most capable of the new men, men not of royal or even freeborn aristocracy who were beginning to feature in delta society. And because house head appointment or election was based on economic and political prowess as well as courage and bravery, Alali who was not even a freeborn commoner, but an assimilated slave was appointed regent in 1833. Had Bonny overcome its remaining prejudices against men of his (Alali's) origin and elected him king, the state might have avoided some of its later troubles.[23] In 1836 the British navy, without warning, violated Bonny's policy of allowing all nations to trade with her, and entered her territorial waters to seize a Spanish slave ship in her harbour. In retaliation for this outrage against international law, Alali imprisoned the British merchants. The British navy in turn threatened to destroy Bonny unless the merchants were released. Prince Dappa, anxious to rid himself of Alali and take over the throne, offered co-operation. In return for a promise never to touch British subjects again. Prince Dappa persuaded the British to force Alali sign his own deposition. As a result, British subjects became an arrogant and often criminal element, a privileged caste above the law of Bonny. Alali, thus gained the support of those who resented British privilege and felt that prince Dappa had sold

Bonny's sovereignty to further his own personal ambition.[24] Since king Dappa was not wealthy, his power was challenged, both from without by the British who expected his subservience since he owed them his throne, and from within by Alali who was prospering and increasing his political power by absorbing Houses into the Anna Pepple group but in the end he was crushed between them.[25] He signed an anti-slave trade treaty with the British whereby the promised to pay him a subsidy for five years to enable him to switch from slaves to oil; but Dappa's real need for the subsidy was to build up his Houses to compete with Anna Pepple. To check Alali, he passed a law forbidding further absorption of Houses and ruled that Europeans only give trust to, and Africans hold trust from the king. These policies were universally unpopular. In 1854 Pepple seized a British merchant ship, in place of the payment they owed him under the treaty, which they had four times signed and four times refused to ratify; thereupon Alali and his supporters signed a proclamation for the kings deposition and the British consul, backed by the navy and the British merchants, deported the king. A civil war followed in which Alali, leading a combination of the new men, who were mainly ex-slaves, destroyed the royalist and freeborn supporters of the ex-king.[26] Alali was now the new power in grand Bonny. He might even overcome the prejudice against his servile origins, but the British were too much aware of his hostility to their privileged position to favor him as a replacement on the throne. They supported instead a Regency Council of four; and although three of these were new men, the British were careful to see that only one was from the Anna Pepple House group. Since this government ignored the realities of political power, chaos and confusion followed, until the British merchants called for the return of king Dappa.[27] Though, Dappa returned in 1861, he was only a shadow of his father Opubu the Great. Worse still, at British instance he was forbidden to engage in trade and forced to rely upon comey (the custom dues paid by foreign traders). His deportation head undermined his divinity, the civil war had destroyed his fortune and the trade ban prevented the rebuilding of his wealth. The British wanted a king who held absolute power over his subjects and who would do their bidding and be able to command his people to do likewise. This was impractical, for although control of trade was the key to wealth and wealth was the source of a monarch's power, the British were determined to control trade. Following the civil war it became true that whether there was a king or not real power lay with Anna Pepple House under Alali and Manilla Pepple under Oko Jombo, both new men of servile origin. King Deppa Pepple died in 1866 and was succeeded by George Pepple, who in external affairs did what the British wanted, and in internal affairs did what Oko Jombo wanted.[28] But no trade history in Bonny during this period without the mention of the diplomatic prowess of Jaja would be an affront to history. When Alali died, Anna Pepple House elected Jaja, a purchased Ibo slave, to succeed him. Jaja had risen to prominence in the House, was popular in the interior markets had a quick eye for the promotion and advancement of capable men like Alali continued to build up the Anna Pepple group and absorb other Houses. In 1868 the Manilla Pepple House under Oko Jombo attacked the Anna Pepple House with the support of the king. Rather them engage in a civil war Jaja withdraw his House group and established it at Opobo, carefully placed so as to cut off Bonny from its trading empire on the Imo River.[29] In 1870 however, Jaja founded the town of Opobo on the estuary of the Imo River. This effectively siphoned off most of the Bonny oil supplies from the Ndoki and Western Ibibio countries. In the last three decades of the 19th century therefore, Opobo superseded Bonny as the principal oil exporting city state of the Niger Delta.[30] This situation also forced Bonny into more intense contests with the Elem Kalabari for markets, as Jaja even invited British firms to establish themselves in Opobo but it insisted that they must operate under African law without special privileges.[31]

The economic rise and diplomatic Prowers of Jaja became a source of concern to both within and outside. Hence, Bonny and the British firms called upon the British consul to force Jaja to return. The consul even advised a boycott of Opobo until Jaja's ammunition was exhausted when it was believed he would collapse. But Jaja had what everyone wanted, palm oil. A couple of firms moved to Opobo, the boycott failed and in 1872 the British consul recognized Opobo as an independent city-state. While Grand Bonny and the British firms who remained loyal to her decline, Opobo and her commercial allies prospered as never before.[32] Suffice it to say that history has credited Jaja as the greatest king of the delta. According to J.B. Webster, A.A. Boahen and H.O. Idowu,[33] "Jaja represented the triumph of the new men of servile and common origin: these men had risen with the palm oil trade at the expense of the nobility who had declined at the trade in slaves came to an end. In all the city-states, the pattern was the same, with the lower classes challenges the upper; but none was the social revolution so complete or dramatic as that led by King Jaja of Opobo. Unlike Bonny, trade in palm oil did not lead to capitalistic production in Cross River which embraces Calabar. Like other delta trade, Cross River developed a general-purpose currency in the copper rod and copper wire before the Nineteenth century. This facilitated the storage of wealth and the accumulation of capital. Nevertheless, palm oil was collected from wild trees by individual peasant collectors. When cocoa was introduced to Calabar in 1870, there arouse the prospect of capitalist production in slave plantation[34.] But Calabar cocoa proved to be poor quality and prone to disease. Its production came to an end with the price slaving during the first world war. Therefore, profit in the palm oil trade was invested in slaves. Thus, one of the Obong or kings of Calabar, Duke Ephraim, people a whole village, Akpabuyo, with his slaves "to strengthen the power of his House or ward".[35.] It was such slave villages that the 19th century European visitors called 'plantations. The slaves in these villages, however, were not necessarily employed in agricultural production. Rather, they were mainly considered a store of wealth and potential labour force, status symbol, and sometimes were used for ritual sacrifice. [36.] This prelude was responsible for the later formation of the 'Order of the Blood men. The rise of the lower classes in Calabar however, took a different form because of the unique political and economic organization of their state. Calabar was organized in Houses but was divided politically under two kings. Real political power, however, lay neither with the kings nor with the House heads, but with the Ekpe secret society, which was divided into grades, the highest being the Nyampa or governing grade. The Nyampa were the real rulers of Calabar and its supreme Judicial authority, through which the British merchants collected their debts. Ex-slaves became House heads, but since they were normally forbidden entrance to the top Ekpe grades they were politically powerless[37]. There were serious weaknesses in the local affairs of the Calabar which did much to undermine the independence of the Calabar 'Republics'.[38a] The Calabar rulers had, in addition to the slave members of the trading corporations or 'house', plantations in the neighborhood which were occupies and cultivated by Calabar-owned slaves.[38b.] But since there were prejudices against them owing to the Ekpe Secret Society, in the 1850s the plantations slaves organised them slaves under their own leaders to protect their members against the arbitrary exactions of their masters. The slave society was aimed primary at the Ekpe Society which was the instrument at the disposal of the Calabar rulers for keeping their slave population in complete subjugation. [39] Now as soon as the slaves had organised their own secrete society known as the 'Order of Blood', they not only defied the authority of the Ekpe Society but threatened to invade Duke Town. Civil war was averted only by the intervention of the British Consul, merchants and missionaries[40].

Again, the Slave society was formed because, unlike the other city-states, Calabar's economy

was later based on palm plantations which, like the plantations in America, bred a new and more oppressions type of slavery. The freeborn and slaves were more segregated than in the eighteenth century, the former living in Calabar town, and the letter on the plantation along the cross and Calabar rivers. There was less opportunity for assimilation, promotion or inter-marriage. Except for those privileged to be employed in the House trading activities in Calabar, the slaves were looked upon as nothing more than a source of cheap labour by their absentee freeborn masters[41]. As if that was not cruelsome enough, Efik custom had it that upon the death of a king or prominent person the House concerned displayed its wealth by the number of slaves it sacrificed to accompany and render service to the dead in the next world. House Competition in sacrificing greater and greater numbers became a terrifying abuse of the slave class. It was against these inhuman deeds and actions that runaway slaves established their own community on the Qua River, where they founded the order of blood men, which was organised in grades like the Ekpe, and was formed as a protection against the oppression of that society[42]. Slaves from the plantations as well as from Calabar town joined the order for protection. It undertook its first defensive action in 1851. When the Ekpe arrested some slaves, thousands of Blood men poured into Calabar threaten to destroy the town utterly if their brethren were harmed. Although the British Council and merchants tended to favour their trading partners in the Ekpe, without an army they were helpless against the slaves. In 1852 when King Archibong 1 died the Blood men again poured into Calabar, standing around the town, watchful but non-violent. No funeral sacrifices took place either then or later as the order repeated these tactics upon the death of every prominent freeborn man in Calabar. In 1857 when a freeborn man killed his slave the Blood men demanded and got the offender delivered up to justice. Many of the poorer freeborn began to join the order as a protection against Ekpe oppression[43]. The Order of Blood Men, through non-violent methods, secured a measure of equality for the new (both freeborn and slaves) so that by 1863 they were able to win court cases against the nobility and Nyampa. The Order sought justice and equity but not domination. It neither attempted to setup its own king nor destroy the Ekpe. The social revolution it created did not replace one class by another. Rather it compelled the nobility to govern in the general interest rather than for the advantage of one class. This revolution in Calabar was perhaps the most remarkable non-violent revolution in nineteenth century West Africa[44].

4. *The Place of the British in the Collapse of Bonny and Calabar as City States in the 1880s*

The Nineteenth Century Delta history as a whole was a century-long battle of middleman, and the new men challenging the traditional nobility. The role of the middleman by local potentates was viewed as a barrier to British interest in both the slave and palm oil traders. In Bonny and later Opobo when king Jaja diplomatically moved out with his subjects that dwindled the political and economic history of Bonny, and the political authority of the Ekpe society in Calabar, the British became so uncomfortable. The local British representative was not at all happy about the independent. posture which Jaja of Opobo continued to assume after the formal declaration of the British protectorate of the oil River[45]. In 1884 when the partition of Africa was under way Jaja signs a treaty of protection with the British but specifically refused to include a free tread clause. In the same year the British firms at Opobo combined to fix the price of oil but Jaja persuaded the firm of Miller Bros. to break the combine and buy on his terms. If British merchants were to secure a trade monopoly here it would have to be imposed by force. In early 1887 the consul asked Jaja to insert a clause which would allow British traders access to any part of his kingdom and Jaja refused[46], the consul deliberately precipitated a quarrel with Jaja which

culminated in the separation of the latter to the West Indies in 1887[47]. The consul lured Jaja to a meeting, promising that after the meeting Jaja would be free to go. At the meeting, however, Jaja was informed that, if he left, British naval guns would destroy Opobo. To save his capital and people, who had no hint of the disaster which hung over their heads, Jaja left peacefully with the consul and was tried at Accra and deported to the West Indies. He died in 1891; his corps being brought back to Opobo for a royal funeral for burial within the palace walls. Much has been made of British duplicity, and certainly "consul" was for long time synonymous with treachery in the eastern delta; but even had the British been honorable and met Jaja in open war, the end result would have been the same because the British were determined to monopolise the middlemen position of the palm oil trade[48]. The fall of Jaja, however, meant the final overthrow of the independence of not only Opobo and Bonny, but other delta states which had for many centuries played a spectacular part not only in the slave trade but in the development of the trade in palm produce. Before the end of the nineteenth century British authority was firmly established on the coast[49]. In Calabar, the political authority of Ekpe and the kings was taken over in the last decade of the 19th century by the British, following the declaration of a protectorate in 1885. (Calabar became a colonial headquarters for the protectorate government over most of southern Nigeria. The traditional authorities were in no position to oppose these developments by armed resistance. like Bonny, Elem Kalabari and Opobo, the rulers of Calabar rather tried to maintain a subtle resistance of British penetration into the hinterland markets[50]. Even this opposition was of no avail, and in the closing decades of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the British moved up the Cross River conquered the peoples of the hinterland[51], thus closing that chapter of the people's history.

5. *An Enactment of a Vertical Dynamism of Status and Social Mobility in Bonny and Calabar.*

As repeatedly stated above, the abolition of the slave trade was probably the most dramatic factor for a change of the economic and social system of the delta states in the 19th century. The new situation of British take-over created changes that have passed into the 20th century[52]. The British, particularly in Bonny and Calalar, not only tried to abolish the trade in slaves but also employed the navy against the city-states to gain for British oil merchants a privilege position above African law. The result was to weaken the power and authority of the kings and traditional ruling classes of the states, and to make them less able to maintain law and order and to deal with the social upheaval in their states[53]. So, this marked some effects on social and status mobility between the natives. That is, individuals shifted from one social status or class to another. The dominant social mobility in this period was the vertical mobility which stood for change of social position either upwards or downwards. As the city-states such as Bonny tried to change from exporting slaves to exporting palm oil, the new men, either freeborn commoners or ex-slaves, found opportunity for advancement in these city-states in the oil trade. As the slave trade declined it carried the nobility down with it, and as palm oil became important it carries the new men to wealth and power. But this did not sail through unchallenged. As the city-states, particularly Bonny tried to change from exporting slaves to exporting palm oil, the nobility and the freeborn traders were so determined to hung on to slaving trading, while Calabar retained the slaves for luxuries, hash plantation services and ritual purposes. This caused a social upheaval revolutionary proportion as the lower classes, led by men like Alali, Oko Jombo and Jaja in Bonny, and the Blood Men in Calabar struggled upwards against the prejudices and oppression of the nobility[54].

In spite of these internal wranglings between the freeborn nobility and slave commoners, it is expedient to note that it was the British diplomatic and forceful take-over of the middlemen role firm the native potentates which sector of the economy provided the largest profits and where capital could be accumulated and from where the economic development of the city states could be stimulated was made prostrate. Hence, the once economically flourished people sank into dismal subsistence level poverty[55], where they remained throughout the colonial period and even after.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated in clear terms some dramatic events of the economic and social dynamics in Bonny and Calabar in the nineteenth century. It was articulated that the abolition of the overseas slave trade by Britain in 1808 transformed the economic life of Bonny and Calabar in particular, and the delta and coast communities in general. Where before they have traded profitably in slaves, they had now to turn their attention to other agricultural products such as palm produce. The essay however, stated that the change was difficult because the switch from slave trade to the palm oil trade was less profitable to the local potentates. Hence it took some time before the coast chiefs became reconciled to the new imposed trade. It was also discussed that the change of trade by the British was not an act of altruism, as the suppression of the slave trade opened the gateway for a greater European involvement in the encroachment upon African polities, and thus to the partition. The work also exposed how this conversion from slave economy to the palm oil production ushered in social disruption of revolutionary proportions which in some cases went so far as to replace the freeborn aristocracy of these states by the ex-slaves. But of all these developments, it was asserted that it was the British takeover of the middlemen role from the local chiefs that gave a dead-nuts on the people's economy. Finally, it is a wish to say that one simple solution to economic and social advancement of the city-states as whole is to leave the past behind and work to develop the present and the future. The British has left after technically destroying the caste system and bequeathed their model of governance, the current generation leaders without any form of prejudice to the erstwhile slaves, should therefore, collectively work to develop the arrested development occasioned by the British and the internal prejudicial practices.

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