

Bonny Nineteenth Century Slave Revolt Revisited

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Abstract

The study analyzes the nineteenth century Bonny crisis that terminated with the 1869 Opubo Annie Pepple group of War Canoe House revolt against the Fubara Manilla Pepple group supported by the King. The work uses data from the secondary sources of information and applies the qualitative approach in analyzing the data. The study opines that the 19th century Bonny crisis was not a class oriented struggle vis-à-vis slave revolt as suggested by some pioneer historians such as Kenneth Dike. The study reveals that the 19th century crisis was group struggle for political-cum-economic dominance of the City State, and created the opportunity for the 1869 episode which was a continuum of internal movements into preferred locations within the Niger Delta space for advantage in intergroup relations of learning to make peace after war. The study established that the quest to dominate the palm oil trade was the main reason why Opubo group eluded Bonny and established at the estuary of Imo River on the conviction that the area had the potentials for palm oil trade between them (as middlemen), the hinterland people and the European traders. The paper concludes that, this study and the ones by previous scholars are geared towards attempting an interpretation that truly reflects the 19th century Ibani history.

Keyword: *Bonny, slave, revolt, crisis and trade*

Introduction

Bonny Kingdom is one of the earliest City States in Eastern Niger Delta Region that established trade contact with the European merchants, in slave trade, and later, palm oil trade. However, before their contact with the European traders in their coast, they have first established trade relations with the interior hinterland communities through the Imo River estuary, a development that showcased the Eastern Delta communities to the interior hinterland people.

The trade relations which Bonny people established with the European supercargoes enhanced their trade contacts with the hinterland communities, as middlemen in a trade relations between the Europeans and the hinterland people. The European merchants demanded slaves from Bonny people which changed the dynamics of the trade relationship between Bonny people and the hinterland people which was predicated on mutual complementarity. Bonny exchanged their sea foods and salt with the hinterland produce such as yam, cocoyam, oil and vegetables.

Bonny's demand for slaves from their hinterland trading partners, began a new era in their trade relations. This explains the history of the presence of slaves in Bonny community, which started from the late fifteenth century (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972:81). However, Bonny traders expanded their business areas in the hinterland in order to satisfy their domestic demands, as well as, that of their European partners. This increased the presence of slaves in the kingdom.

Acquisition and acculturation of slaves among the Ijo communities of Eastern Niger Delta instilled shrewdness in and contributed to the high level success achieved in their socio-economic and political history. In Bonny, the presence of the domestic slaves contributed to the bilingual nature of the people (adulterated Ibo and Ibani). The acculturation of the slaves in the Bonny society created the integration of the slaves into all the facets of the society, a development that gave the domestic slaves equal rights with the freeborn in the society. However, what contributed to the perfect integration of domestic slaves was the discrimination and groupings of the ones to be absorbed and those to be sold to European slave traders. Wariboko (2014) observed that those for absorption were bought at a tender age, preferably between ten and twelve years, when they would have been amenable to character moulding.

Interestingly, the procedure for the absorption of the young slaves into different households also played a role in the perfect acculturation of the domestic slaves in the society. Wariboko (2014) adumbrated on this development:

When the newly bought slave arrived in the community, the break-off of his previous kinship ties and the assumption of a whole series of new ties were brought home to him by means of a dramatic rite de passage in which his new mother shaved his head clean and then gave him a ritual meal. From then on, the mother was supposed to live up to his title in the fullest sense.

According to Jones (1963:163) as a sign that they belonged to her she ritually shaved their heads in the same way she shaved the heads of her children and in the Opobo idiom, these permanent members were distinguished as her razor house.

Also, the house head (husband) became the father of the slave child, while the freeborn in that household became either the 'sisters' or 'brothers'. This ritual process was designed to make the slave child a bonafide member of the household and the community in general. According to Ibani (Bonny and Opobo) tradition, after a slave child passed through the ritual processes, a ceremony was organized to bring many members of the community to that household and the slave child was formally introduced as a new member in the household and the community in general.

As noted, the ritual processes the slave child went through, endowed him/her with equal rights and privileges in the household and the community in general. Hence, what determines the position anybody attained in the community was economic success; an acquired status which was the topmost consideration, and not inherited or ascribed status. However, it is not convincing how Dike (1956: 152) arrived at his suggestion that the domestic slaves in Bonny had limited rights and freedom when he observed that:

Politically, ex-slaves had no rights: that was the theory King Pepple of Bonny doggedly maintained. What freedom they enjoyed, what liberty they possessed were gifts from the King and from the freemen, to be withdrawn at the latter's discretion.

As will be elaborated later, the domestic slaves enjoyed unlimited political, economic and social powers as well as freedom in Bonny. In the area of politics, the domestic slaves rose to the ranks of main and minor War Canoe House Chiefs, and regents of the Kingdom. On the issue of becoming a king of Bonny, that position was hereditary and everybody in Bonny, the freeborn and ex-slaves, joined together to preserve the hereditary sanctity of the throne. Thus was not intentionally designed as Dike suggested, to deprive the ex-slaves such a right.

Concerning the crisis witnessed in Bonny in the 19th century, it was a political-cum-economic struggle for supremacy between the two royal War Canoe Houses. King Perekule (Pepple) who reigned from about 1700, established his dynasty, after his transmigration in 1757AD (Finapiri, 2001:20), his son, Fubara Manilla Pepple, ascended the throne and ruled Bonny for about three decades and transmigrated without a heir. Before his transmigration, his personal War Canoe House which he handed over to one of his sons by purchase, Chief Ibaniburufia (Ibani) Fubara Manilla Pepple, had been formidably positioned. His younger brother, Opubo Annie Pepple, ascended the throne in 1792 Pepple and Oko-Jaja, (2015:19) and Alagoa and Fombo (1972) and equally handed over the leadership of his personal War Canoe House to one of his sons by purchase, Chief Tubongonegim (Maduka) Opubo Annie Pepple. King Opubo Annie Pepple ruled Bonny for about four decades and during the period of his reign, his personal War Canoe House had equally been formidably positioned under Chief Maduka. After the transmigration of King Opubo Annie Pepple, the heir to the throne, Prince William Pepple, a biological son of King Opubo, but a jurial son of King Fubara, was then a minor, consequently, Chief Ibani, head Chief of Fubara Manilla Pepple group of War Canoe Houses, and Chief Maduka, head Chief of Opubo Annie Pepple group of War Canoe Houses took the responsibility of overseeing the activities of the Kingdom as co-regents, a development that contributed in making the two royal houses very influential, rich and powerful in the kingdom (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972).

However, these explanations underscore the dynamics and trajectory of the crisis witnessed in Bonny in the 19th century between these two royal houses and consequently underscores the conceptual framework of this study which anchored on the direction of economic prosperity and political development. The struggle for economic supremacy among these two influential royal houses, created the crisis and also constituted the remote reason for Opubo group of houses' exodus from Bonny in 1869, for a strategic-cum-peaceful area devoid of crisis for economic enhancement and harmonious inter-group relations. Alagoa, (2019) projected this assertion when he observed that:

By 1500 the major migrations into the Nigerian territory had been completed. The period of mainly centripetal movements had come to an end. A new period of the internal movement into preferred locations within the Nigerian space has begun. It was a period of adjustment of conquest and competition for advantage in inter-group relations of learning to make peace after war, and devising mutually beneficial norms

and ways of living together in a shared environment. The bulk of Nigerian traditions of genesis relate to this period between the 16th and 19th century AD.

Furthermore, the forgoing explanation underscores the fact that the struggles in Bonny that resulted in the crisis, was not to achieve a class primordial interest, but a group interest for economic enhancement and domination. So, it is not convincing why Dike (1956:272) attributed the crisis in Bonny to a result of class struggle to achieve primordial interest:

The upheaval at Bonny was the work of ex-slaves most of them powerful and wealthy merchant princes debarred from enjoying political positions commensurate with their economic strength. They were not fighting to be free but to gain more political power.

The study x-rays the crisis in Bonny in the 19th century, beginning from the emergence of William Dappa Pepple as the king and terminating at the period Jaja led the Opubo Houses out of Bonny to found Opobo in 1870.

Dynamics of the Crisis before and during King William Pepple

The crisis between the Fubara Manila Pepple group of War Canoe Houses and Opubo Annie Pepple group of War Canoe Houses was an age long one that pre dated the reign of King William Pepple. As Wariboko, (2007) observed, before the death of King Opubo in 1830, the two Royal War Canoe Houses of Fubara and Opubo had attained the status of group of War Canoe Houses following the unprecedented establishment of six War Canoe Houses respectively under their command, a fact that enhanced their affluence and as such, increased their influence in the kingdom. As Alagoa and Fombo (1972) and Cookey (1974) noted, the leaders of these two groups of War Canoe Houses, Chief Ibani and Chief Maduka, in one accord, frustrated King Bereibibo, successor to King Opubo and finally ousted him from the throne of Perekule. Several reasons have been adduced to explain this development (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972:15 and Cookey 1974:33). For more clarification this paper observed that the remote reason for the development was to preserve the patrilineal lineage of ascendancy to Perekule's dynasty. This underscores the fact that the duo, Ibani and Madu, were powerful in the kingdom in all spheres, and were not limited in any form by their slave origin. They were conscious of the fact that the throne of Bonny is a dynasty of Perekule, their patriarch father, and ascendancy to the throne is hereditary, a tradition they determined to protect as Chiefs of the two Royal War Canoe Houses.

Furthermore, their doggedness in preserving the patrilineal lineage of ascendancy to King Perekule's (Pepple) throne, witnessed the co-regency of the duo, in Bonny political history. The reason for this historic development was the need to prevent a vacuum in Perekule's dynasty and prevent interlopers in contesting for the throne while they take time in preparing the heir apparent, Prince William Dappa Pepple, who was then a minor, for the task ahead as a king. The co-regency arrangement, indeed, protected Perekule's dynasty in Bonny kingdom throughout the period of the interregnum and beyond.

Nevertheless, the nature of King William's birth (Jones, 1963:110) was probably a divine arrangement to further enhance the unity of the two Royal War Canoe Houses initiated and sustained by his predecessors. Under the Ibani tradition, King William had full equal rights in the two Royal War Canoe Houses. It is imperative to establish here that the transmigration of King Perekule in 1757 (Finapiri, 2001:20), witnessed the abysmal moribund status of the Perekule Royal War Canoe House in Bonny Kingdom, a development that paved the way for the emergence of the two Royal War Canoe Houses, whose founders, avoided the mistake of their father while ruling the kingdom at different times.

It is unknown who was older between Chief Ibani and Chief Maduka. According to the scholarships on the history of Bonny, Chief Ibani was the first (ex-slave) to be installed a chief in the two Royal War Canoe Houses. The transmigration of King Fubara Manilla Pepple saw the affluence disposition of Chief Ibani diminishing, as King Opubo Annie Pepple began more concentration on the development of his personal War Canoe House through Chief Maduka. This development saw the rise of another ex-slave in the two Royal War Canoe Houses, in affluence in the kingdom. At the transmigration of King Opubo Annie Pepple in 1830 (Wariboko, 2007:183 and Oko-Jaja, 2020), Chief Maduka had risen to an enviable influential position in the kingdom. Dike (1956) described him as, "a man of rare ability, religiously dedicated to the service of the monarchy". He equally noted that during his leadership of Opubo house, he had by his industry and efficient administration made the house the wealthiest in the land (Dike, 1956:69). Interestingly, these assertions underscore the fact that, at the time of the co-regency in Bonny, 1830-1835, Opubo group of War Canoe Houses was richer than Fubara Manilla group of War Canoe Houses, as well as, other War Canoe Houses in the kingdom. This means that the Head Chief of Opubo group of Houses, Chief Maduka, was the richest and the most influential.

Chief Maduka's affluence incubated Chief Ibani's personality in the co-regency era which enhanced his influence vis a vis Opubo group of houses in the kingdom, a development many chiefs in Bonny were not comfortable with, particularly, the chiefs of Fubara Manilla Pepple group of houses. This began the foundation of jealousy, hatred and division within the two royal groups of houses. However, the jealousy against Chief Maduka's position in the regency structure brought about disparaging remarks against him, meant to dent his reputation, achievements and contributions to the kingdom, as well as, put him on a collision course with the heir apparent. While diligently performing his duties and ensuring that the European traders at the shores of Bonny, respect the kingdom's laws, his principles on zero tolerance on indiscipline was mischievously portrayed as highhandedness and arrogance. Above all, he was accused of being intoxicated by the royal office, hence, very much reluctant to leave the office for the heir apparent (Wariboko, 2007:183).

However, the chiefs of Fubara Manilla Pepple group of houses in conjunction with few other chiefs of the kingdom and European agents, fuelled the seemingly conflict between Chief Maduka and Prince William Dappa Pepple, by arranging the abrupt coronation of the Prince without recourse to the regency, thus, ignominiously ending their administration in 1835. Wariboko (2007), supported this assertion when he opined

that; “as a teenager William did not have the resources to establish an independent house, so Manilla Pepple and European trades who were eager to end the despotic reign of Madu raised the necessary men, material and monies for him.” Unfortunately, this development worsened the schism between the two royal houses and brought it to a dangerous dimension. Cookey, (1974) observed that, “...fighting had broken out in the course of these upheavals between the Annie Pepple canoe house led by Madu and the Manilla Pepple canoe house which supported the new King...”. Regrettably, this was the atmosphere existing among the two royal houses when King William Dappa Pepple assumed office as the King of Bonny.

The above explanations underscore the fact that, schism within the Royal War Canoe Houses which began during the regency of Chief Maduka and Chief Ibani, marked the beginning of the crisis that rocked Bonny in the 19th century, with the terminal episode in 1869 when the Opubo Annie Pepple group of houses eluded from Bonny. On the contrary, it was not the coronation of King Williams Dappa Pepple in 1835 as the Amanyababo of Bonny Kingdom that began the crisis it rather enhanced it, as well as, midwives the involvement of the king in it (Wariboko, 2007:183).

Unfortunately, the partisan nature of the king in the crisis as against his predecessors’ unifying philosophy, led the crisis into a new twist in Bonny political history. The untimely death of Chief Maduka resulting from the King’s truculent attitude against him and his Opubo house, brought the crisis to the door step of the king during Chief Alali’s headship of Opubo War Canoe House, a development some scholars erroneously interpreted, and which did not correctly explain the true position of events in Bonny politics at that period. Wariboko (2007), observed that, “the tradition of transferring control of houses of new kings to members of their houses (often ex-slaves) provided a veritable platform for ambitious ex-slaves to challenge their kings and plunge the Bonny political system into turmoil.” However, it is pertinent to note here that, at the genesis of this crisis, the kingdom had started emerging from the slave trading era to the trade in palm produce which Alagoa (1980), identified as capital intensive.

The palm oil trading activities that dominated Bonny economy in about the second quarter of the 19th century also contributed in enhancing the crisis. This is because, the capital intensive nature of the trade did not allow many independent War Canoe Houses in the kingdom to effectively participate, and as such, they had to seek alliance with any of the two Royal War Canoe Houses, which due to their wealthy positions, effectively repositioned their economic activities in the palm oil trade, hence dominated the activities in the kingdom. The alliance of many independent War Canoe Houses to the royal houses, helped in their efficient participation in the palm oil trade, in addition to the financial and other necessary supports they received, which boosted the influential positions of the two royal houses, thereby explaining the bisectional areas of influence in Bonny at that period.

In essence, Bonny politics and economy rested under the shoulders of the two sections, Fubara Manilla Pepple and Opubo Annie Pepple. The existing rivalries heightened competition among them, on the dominance of the economy, which the kingship of the kingdom was an instrumental factor. However, this underscores the reason Chief Alali, successor of his late father, Chief Maduka, head Chief of Opubo

Annie Pepple Section, became threatened with the hobnobbing of King William with Fubara Manilla Pepple Section. Interestingly, it further explains the reason Chief Alali and his Opubo Section doggedly contributed to the dethronement and exile of King William Dappa Pepple in 1854, and engineered the coronation of King Dapu-Ye-Fubara, who was biased towards the Opubo Section.

The re-emergence of the Opubo Section in the political dominance of Bonny in 1854, through their beloved compassionate and complimentary King Dapu-Ye-Fubara Pepple, son of the late Prince Dapu Opubo Annie Pepple, first son of King Opubo Annie Pepple, and their dominance of the economy of the kingdom was abruptly halted following the untimely transmigration of the King. Consequently, the sudden demise of the king was blamed on the activities of witchcraft, masterminded by Chiefs Yanibo Pepple and Isiuku Pepple (also called Fred Pepple), two principal ex-slaves of King William Dappa Pepple and Chiefs of the king's puny War Canoe House (Cookey, 1974:41). This occurrence inflamed the crisis as the Opubo section led the group that unleashed terror on members of the King William Dappa Pepple War Canoe House (Cookey, 1974:44).

The absence of an immediate successor to the throne encouraged the establishment of Council of Regents to administer the kingdom, and those selected were, Chiefs of Opubo Annie Pepple Section, Fubara Manilla Pepple Section, Ada Allison War Canoe House and Captain Hart War Canoe House. The death of Chief Alali during this period, in late 1855, was a big blow to the Opubo Section, but his younger brother, Chief Ilioli who later succeeded him as head chief of Opubo Section, according to Cookey, (1974) "... was determined to uphold at all cost the interest of the group of houses which he led." Chief Ilioli shortly after taking his position in the Council of Regents, was determined to influence the activities of the headless quartumvirate, a situation the other chiefs resisted. This development affected their harmonious operation. However, the weakness and subsequent sidelining of the other two members of the Council of Regents, by the two sectional Chiefs, established a fierce rivalry over the dominance of the economy and the Council's activities, between Fubara Manilla Pepple group and Opubo Annie Pepple group. Consequently, there was an intensified cold war between them, a situation Consul Hutchinson T.J who newly arrived Bonny to replace Consul Lynslager summed up thus:

The four regents never lived in unity or unanimity; they had their little jealousies of trade as well as their domestic social bucklerings, they took the money (comey) but never joined in concert to expand it in obtaining peace in their immediate circle, or in the interior markets; consequently civil war was ever ripe around and about them as there existed in Bonny territory... (Cookey, 1974:45).

On account of this, the political situation in the City State did not improve for peaceful co-existence in the Council of Regents, inspite of all efforts by the newly arrived Consul Hutchinson to re-position the Council through the manumitting of Chief Ncheke, head chief of Fubara Manilla Pepple group, and recognizing him as head of the Council of Regents. This development was not welcomed by the Opubo Section, knowing it's

implication on their interest in the economic fortune of Bonny. With the ever-growing cold war and its attendant consequences on the kingdom, particularly European trade interest, the Supercargoes and some Bonny chiefs began advocating for the reinstatement of King William Pepple (Dike, 1956:162). However, the call for the reinstatement of the deposed King William was opposed by the Opubo group under Chief Iloli, because of the anticipated reprisal attack he might unleash on the Opubo group following their major role in his dethronement and the decimation of his War Canoe House. The Opubo group feared that the reinstatement of King William Pepple would erode and ruin the impressive feat they achieved in their economic dominance of the City State and possibly lead to their Waterloo.

Interestingly, when it was glaring to the Opubo group that their opposition to the reinstatement of the deposed King William was exercise in futility, their anxiety over the anticipated reprisal became tensed, and as such, according to Epelle (1970), Chief Iloli mooted to the chiefs of his Opubo group, the idea of eluding Bonny and setting at the site Opobo presently occupied. Unfortunately, the idea was rejected by the chiefs, according to Oko-Jaja (2020), the idea was jettisoned for so many reasons, particularly because there was no convincing plan on ground to establish trade with the Supercargoes at the (Nkoro toru)(Brown, 2022) (now Opobo River). Regrettably, the fear and the reinstatement of King William as the Amanyanabo of Bonny in 1861, became a nightmare to the Opubo group particularly, Chief Iloli, who became dejected and as such lost focus and control of his business empire. He became indebted and died in the process in 1862 (Cookey, 1974:47).

The Trajectory of the Crisis and the Emergence of Jaja

The tensed influence of the British officials in the political administration of the City State at that period, the financial hiccup of the reinstated king, following the devastation of his War Canoe House and the king's old age, plummeted the expectations of his performance in the political stability of the kingdom. This development prolonged the political cum economic upheaval in the City State between the two groups. With the reinstatement of King William Pepple, the signal was convincing to the Opubo group that further romance or control of the political administration of the kingdom would be far from their reach as well as sustaining their leading position in the palm oil trade and the economy. The assumption that these influences in the kingdom would elude them, informed their decision for an alternative solution of moving out of Bonny.

Fortunately for the Opubo group, the man destined to lead the way for the alternative solution was readily available in the person of Jaja. Dike, (1956) observed thus;

He saw Bonny with the critical eye of the foreigner. He loathed its crippling politics, its sordid intrigues, and kept aloof until he was ready to act. Jaja was new to Bonny politics, but Bonny politics were not new to him. This conclusion stands clear from detailed investigation. He knew the characters of the leading political figures, studied the Bonny scene, and made up his mind about his future line of action without disclosing his plans to anyone.

Jaja was unanimously elected by the chiefs of the Opubo group as Chief Iloli's successor, to the head chief of the group in 1863. Jaja became an elder, a position the European traders referred to as a *leser* chief, in the Opubo group during the period of Chief Iloli. As an elder, he stayed more in the kingdom, an opportunity he used to further study the Bonny scene and had more understanding of the political dynamics. Subsequently, he prepared himself early enough for the task of leading the Opubo group and executing the alternative solution of the eluding of Bonny. The Consul's remark about Jaja, highlights this assertion;

...One Jaja son of an unknown bushman, a common Negro had been elected to head the Anna Pepple House. He is young, healthy and powerful, and not less ambitious, energetic and decided. He is the most influential man and the greatest trader in the river, and 50,000 pounds, it is said, may annually pass through his hands. He lives much with Europeans and he rides rough shod over young hands coming into Bonny. In a short time he will either be shot or he will beat down all his rivals (Dike, 1956:184).

In the same vein, Dike (1956) asserted that;

"realizing that the source of Delta wealth was in the oil markets, he made himself persona grata with the chiefs of the interior and spent more time with them than with the artificial society of the coast. Similarly he sought popularity with the supercargoes who were at the receiving end of the interior products... it must not therefore, be imagined that Jaja was idle because his name did not appear on the Bonny political scene until his dramatic election in 1863.

It is not known why Jaja, one of the younger ex-slaves in Opubo group prepared himself very early for the job of heading the Section and achieving the dream of his predecessor, which eventually made him a king. According to Joseph (2015), Jaja was destined to be a king, he was a royalty, with a royal blood from Umuduruoha Community in Orlu Local Government Area of present Imo State, Nigeria. Perhaps, he was acting under the influence of his destiny which came to pass through hardwork, dedication and foresight in 1870.

On assumption of office as the fifth head chief of Opubo group, Jaja's disposition and style of governance depicted a man prepared for the task at that crucial period of Opubo group in the kingdom. Having understood the gloomy moments which his groups faced in the political theater of the kingdom, he focused more on sustaining his group dominant position on the economy of the City State. His doggedness in the palm oil trade and the unprecedented success which his group recorded at a short time, announced him and blossomed his personality as one of the figures of discourse in the kingdom. Consequently, guided by his rich knowledge about the intrigues in the kingdom, he was aware that his unprecedented fame and the success of his Opubo group would come under heavy and severe attack from the Manilla Pepple group. For this reason he quickly put to action the opportunity which his sudden fame provided by strategizing on how

possible he could actualize his predecessor's idea of eluding Bonny. However, Jones, (1963) noted that;

As soon as he became head of the Annie Pepple main house, Jaja set about implementing secret plans on which he had been working on for some time. It was clear to him that there was no immediate prospect of Annie Pepple house becoming dominant in Bonny as the Manilla group was too powerful.

In essence, his main objective of pushing to achieve the idea of Opubo group eluding Bonny was to sustain the tempo and achievements recorded by his group on palm oil trade in the City State, as well as entrench their dominance of the trade within the Eastern Niger Delta and beyond. Jaja (2012) explained further that;

Having access and increasing participation in the trade became part of the reasons why King Jaja was emboldened to take steps to leave Bonny. It would seem that at least he saw the possibility of being a major player in the trade once he could secure strategic control over a trade route that would supply the European traders who were his friends.

On securing the confidence and cooperation of Charles Decardi, a newly arrived French trader, who was facing challenges to start a trade on Bonny river, Jaja began practical steps on achieving the plan. Consequently, he explained to Decardi the challenges facing the plan, particularly, making possible the access of European trading ships into the area proposed for the relocation from the Atlantic Ocean for the commencement of trade with the Europeans. On this development, Decardi sought and achieved the cooperation of his colleague, Mc Eachean, a British trader of the firm of Alexandra Miller Brothers of Glasgow and the duo assured Jaja of commencing trade with his Opubo group at the site, which commenced the exploration of Nkoro toru (Opobo River) in 1867 (Ejituwu, 1991:136). The favourable result of the adventure, which showed that Imo River was navigable to ocean steamers at least, up to a site later known as Egwanga Opobo now in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, was a cheering news to Jaja, hence, he started his final preparation (Oko-Jaja, 2020).

Having completed the preparations with the aid of Decardi, Mc Eachean and others (Oko-Jaja, 2020), Jaja saw the need to get the sympathy of many of the stakeholders in the City State at that moment, particularly the European agents, as a necessary precondition for Opubo group legitimate relocation. Consequently, the unexplainable, inferno that wreaked havoc on the Opubo group and the premeditated attacks that ignited the Civil War, Alagoa and Fombo (1972) observed that;

Before Jaja fired shots he had already loaded his properties into full size puncheon canoes on the pretext of being goods for the upcountry markets and had also sent messages to the Europeans who were backing him up to dispatch building materials and ammunitions after him.

Also, Dike (1956) further highlighted that; when Jaja left Bonny town in 1869, he had completed his plan to found a new state. However, the seemingly pitiable condition of Opubo group at that period was advanced by Jaja as the reason for their relocation, and with the conviction of many of the European agents, particularly the British Consul, Opubo Section successfully relocated to the east fringe of the Eastern Niger Delta on 1st January 1870, and within a short period of time, dominated the palm oil trade against Bonny (Oko-Jaja, 2020).

Conclusion

From the analysis so far, there is no convincing explanation that what happened in Bonny in 1869 was a class struggle and a slave revolt. However, the slave revolt of 1851 in Calabar lacks no ambiguity, because the class struggle between the free born ruling class of the Egbo fraternity and the slaves, organized under 'Order of Blood Men' was convincing and the British Consul in Calabar recognized the existing Egbo ruling class and worked to sustain it through his policy for peace and enhancement of British interest (Dike, 1956:156), a situation that was not recorded in Bonny. Rather what the study observed in the case of Bonny was a group or sectional struggle for political-cum-economic power.

In Bonny, the paper revealed that unlike in Calabar, the ex-slaves enjoyed equal rights and privileges, and as such were not limited to membership of any cultural organization or attainment of any socio-political and economic positions. However, it is unknown the kind of political power the ex-slaves were debarred from attaining in Bonny for which they fought as Dike (1956) suggested. As the study observed, the only position the ex-slaves did not attain, was the position of the Amanyabo of Bonny, which is hereditary, and automatically every other Bonny free born males, no matter how wealthy he may be, and not from that patrilineal lineage of Perekule (Pepple) is debarred from attaining that position, a development Bonny people (ex-slaves and free borns) jealously protected and sustained, as the case of King Bereibibo is a good example.

The group crisis that took place in Bonny in the 19th century is clearly explained in this study, the two groups which Bonny metamorphosed into in the second quarter of the 19th century and beyond, fight for the sustainability of their economic interest which the kingship of the City State was a determinant factor, due to the advantage of trade negotiations with the Europeans and the hinterland people. For this reason the two groups fought to enthrone a King that would be amenable to them for enhancement of their economic interest. This further underscored the fact that the cause of the 19th century crisis was not for a class interest but a group interest.

It is pertinent to note here that within the two groups free born and ex-slaves coexisted harmoniously and doggedly protected their group interest in the City State. Consequently, Jaja evacuated free born and ex slaves of Opubo group from Bonny to the estuary of Imo River, a site they named Opubo-Ama (Opobo) in memory of the founding father of the group and the greatest king that ever ruled Bonny kingdom. The migration was a continuous process of a new era of internal movement into preferred locations within the Niger Delta space, and which also was later experienced in Kalabari

in the late 19th century. The movements were not caused by slave revolts as erroneously interpreted by some pioneer scholars.

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