

# THE AFTERMATH OF SLAVERY

Transitions and Transformations  
in Southeastern Nigeria

Edited by  
Chima J. Korleh and Femi J. Kolapo





## History/AFRICA

*In The Aftermath of Slavery: Transitions and Transformations in Southeastern Nigeria* the contributors present an in-depth survey of the impact of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade on the societies of the Lower Niger Basin of Nigeria. The book provides critical perspectives on the economic, social, and political changes that occurred in the region following the abolition of the external slave trade. By adopting various cultural, historical, political, and sociological perspectives, the contributors provide insightful analyses on the changing economic, political, and social landscape of African societies in the aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade. African producers adopted new production relations in response to increased demands for labor required for the production of agricultural goods. Advances were made in the production techniques and technology for the production of palm produce. Improved transportation and haulage systems increased quantities and bulk of supplies. Gender relations of production saw important transformations in response to labor and control of access to productive resources. The book provides new lines of argument that explains the early and close functioning of the coastal middlemen and the immediate hinterland societies with European traders, travelers, observers, and officials during the slave trade era and in the aftermath of slavery in the nineteenth century and offers a fresh look at the broader debate on the impact of the abolition of the slave trade on African societies.

"This is an important micro-study that we so much need in the classrooms. African Diaspora and African History students and their instructors would find it extremely useful."

—Dr. Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, Associate Professor of African Diaspora and African History, Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland

"*The Aftermath of Slavery* brings together the voices of many young scholars who daringly recast the narrative of the post-abolitionism period by showing the vitality of indigenous processes that contested the hardware of externally-induced political economy. They deploy the resources of the social sciences to re-interpret the so-called crisis of adaptation as actually a welter of internally-generated, creative, transformation in the structures of production, commerce, labor, gender, social underpinnings, and political structures. The editors have knitted the various perspectives into an artistic weave like the akwete cloth."

—Ogbu U. Kalu, Henry Winiers Luce Professor of World Christianity, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago.

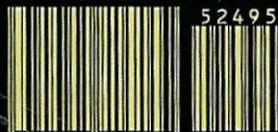
"Fantastic! This book is a splendid exploration of the internal dynamics of change in the Biafra Hinterland. It is a tour de force. . . . A paradigmatic shift from Eurocentric to Afrocentric discourse in the context of the slave trade. It is a must read for scholars and students of African social and economic history."

—Felix Ekechi, Emeritus Professor of History, Kent State University

Chima J. Korieh teaches African History at Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey. He has authored over forty articles and essays in journals, books, and encyclopedias and is an associate editor of *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism Since 1450* (The Gale Group/Macmillan Reference USA, 2006).

Femi J. Kolapo is currently a professor in African History at the University of Guelph, Canada. He had earlier on taught at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria. One of his major areas of research is the relationship between African peoples and the Christian missions.

ISBN 1-59221-515-7 \$24.95



9 781592 215157

**Africa World Press, Inc.**

P.O. Box 1892

Trenton, NJ 08607



P.O. Box 48

Asmara, ERI TRETA

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## **The Vocabulary of Niger Delta Historiography, 1800-1914**

**INNOCENT F. A. UZOECHI**

Scholars have examined the Niger Delta region from many angles, including from those of politics, history, ethnography, military science, and diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Experts have thus created a body of mixed knowledge that now guides academics as they struggle to further expand their understanding of the pre-colonial era and especially nineteenth-century events and peoples in the Niger Delta. In this vein, the present chapter will identify and interpret, in their historical contexts, some key words, terms and concepts that have dominated the history and historiography of Niger Delta politics and society before the turn of the twentieth-century. This study argues that the historical place of these words and terms is indicative of an evolving vocabulary of Niger Delta and West African historiography, which can be valuable in the study of regional history in this period. With what justification, one may ask.

First, understanding a word-list will promote learning and scholarship, which is a newly evolving frontier in teaching and learning of history.<sup>2</sup> Second, word-meanings change, hence seeing them in their settings will reveal their origins and local contexts. Third, a rigid emphasis on Queen's English as a language of communication, can imprison scholars in a bygone epoch. Fourth, words convey histories and they are best comprehended in their times. Fifth, the Niger Delta vocabulary, now being dug up, provides useful information about the actors in that age of vanishing frontiers. It may also be very important for what it does not tell. Sixth, though the old slave trade had disappeared by law, it lingers in the words that were trafficked alongside its victims.

Additionally, one must emphasize that a cultural revolution happened among African traders, Europeans, and city-state political elite during the period when they all interacted in international sale of slaves. In this understanding lies a connection between conceptualizing the past through words and story-telling that, in part, passes for tradition. Different terms suggest in their changing contexts, histories of peoples, of social contacts, and of migrations. Of course languages, like human beings, also die, hence the vocabulary from history writing and other related disciplines periodize the past. In view of the fact that some concepts get new meanings as they travel among peoples, new interpretations can create fresh and liberating views on that past. Finally, since this attempt is not a bibliographical essay, its focus is general, but concrete and practical. For this project, my focus centers on those words that historians and others used in analyzing events—hence the emphasis on vocabulary and historiography.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Niger Delta in Perspective**

The Niger Delta is a region with three major divisions. They are the western, involving the Urhobo, the central, with the Igbo, and the Eastern, joining the Efik-Ibibio-Ogoja ethnics.<sup>4</sup> This geopolitical zone extends as far as its nineteenth century spheres of influence and trade. These were often taken vaguely as its “trading empire.” In this opinion, the Lagos lagoon—a former Portuguese and later Beni trade colony and many nearby communities to the coast got swept into deltaic life.<sup>5</sup>

From their first arrival on the African coast, Europeans wrote down African terms. On their part, Africans were interested in the languages spoken by the new comers. The history of earlier contact as the trans-Saharan contact between Western African and the Arab world has shown the powerful effect of communication. Mastery of foreign languages facilitated trade but also bestowed new forms of identity to its speakers. One of the earliest attempts to record the vocabulary of West African languages was carried out by Jean Barbot in the seventeenth century. Barbot’s account was first recorded in his account of Guinea.

The period between 1800 and 1914 which witnessed a dramatic expansion of European commercial and imperial activities in the Af-

rica, makes a sharp break with the previous century that was based on joint stock company organization, mercantilism, and forced international migration called the slave trade. Indeed, it was a period of revolution as Webster and others have underscored in their book on Africa since 1800.<sup>6</sup> Many writers like Felix Ekechi and Elizabeth Isi-chei have also noted such radical changes imposed by the European presence on the various indigenous societies. The forces dynamizing society included expanding Euro-American industrial capitalisms; prideful and aggressive nationalisms; unequal technologies; dying slavocracies; and class-based fears about imminent social revolts. This was the age that shaped the angry proletariat, molded the bold and hungry urban poor, and groomed the patriotic empire builder. For racism, it was the high noon, when race-thinking and apartheid mattered much. The colonizer and the colonized stood apart. Other forces included the world-changing ideologies—better known as the famous isms—socialism, capitalism, and communism, which clashed in European imperial capitals, first of all, before spilling over into the colonies by 1914. World War I (1914–18) purged most illusions. It created an unstable peace among disordered European nations.

#### Historical Value to Selected Key Vocabularies

The various words selected for discussion came from the slaves and the society of their time. Others came from diplomatic practice, commercial life and social organization, some with the print of the culture of violence in the coastal and inland communities of the Niger Delta. Indeed, some of the terms have been centuries-old, having been derived from the Portuguese and other slave-traders or re-exporters. The words listed in the appendix match these groupings.

A look at terms and concepts deriving from Afro-European interactions in diplomacy and commerce quickly generates some observations. Racism touched Euro-African contact. Scholars have addressed the intersection of slavery and racism. At least it was fundamental in creating boundaries of racial and social difference. Africans were regarded as different. Cannibalism, an important descriptive term that differentiated how Europeans perceived themselves and the other was extended to the Niger Delta. *The New York Times* of October 21 1859 quoted one Mr. Hutchinson as saying: “human flesh was exposed as butcher’s meat in the markets at

Duketown, old Calabar. . . . In Brass (or the Mimbe country) cannibalism often occurs . . .”<sup>7</sup> Such descriptions were not only justification for the racial ideology of Europeans on their contact with African, but it became even of greater urgency in the post-abolition period as Europeans struggled to find justification for its civilizing mission towards the end of the nineteenth century. The polemics use of such terms as “cannibalism” were engrained in European thinking, whether they were founded on solid evidence or not.

The philosophy for discrimination in church and state propped up European arrogance and pseudo-science. Though apartheid re-echoes over South Africa, it was the colonial practice. In general, supremacy-thinking and segregation have colored white rule in Africa and other colonized societies.<sup>8</sup> But its earlier antecedents could be deciphered in the languages and words that European traders, travelers, and explorers began to use to mis-inform and denigrate Africa in their own eyes and in the eyes of their European fellow citizens as far back as in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nineteenth-century European diplomatic officials and their colonialist history-writers have often used the term “protection” literally to imply that they were indeed guaranteeing helpless Africans safety from their enemies. The evidence, however, reveals the other side of the truth to the word. At first, African political elite, and in some instances, the common people as well, were the ones who protected the Whiteman by guaranteeing his safety in transit as well as the safety of his property. Visitors, slave and other caravans relied on an armed guards or official guides during tours. By the later nineteenth-century, change overtook African control of its alien visitors. British consuls now arranged treaties of trade and “protection” with African leaders or the “principal men.”<sup>9</sup> Often these agreements were sweetened and prefaced with gifts that were worth little in foreign eyes, but came to be much valued among the Africans, hence the term *pacotille*.

The term “acephalous”<sup>10</sup> meaning *leaderless or headless* has been used wrongly in the historiography of the Niger Delta—misused because there is no such thing as statelessness. The term became popular among colonial anthropologists perhaps because of the illusion that kings were better than non-kings. However, it is clear that kingless states or communities survived in their environments as well or even better than their counterparts with kings. For the Europeans,

the absence of an identifiable leader meant that a particular African society was stateless and therefore backward. In reality the absence of a king in itself does not imply that leaders or a framework of political control was not in place. Thus, the historical vocabulary requires not only de-colonizing but also nationalizing to exclude the wrong foreign content.

During the era of slave and legitimate trade, and into the colonial period, there had always been a need among the people in the hinterland of the Niger Delta to understand Delta trade language. This accounts for the emergence of interpreters, guides, spokesmen (linguists) and diplomatists. In the colonial era, native courts agents, warrant chiefs, the interpreters and court clerks exploited mass illiteracy-in-English. The response to this need, however, was met with the creation of Creolized English or "pidgin English,"<sup>11</sup> which the Niger Delta people and their commercial neighbors forged together as a workable tongue. In pidgin-English, the expression "Massa no dey" interprets to "the master (white man) is away."

In the word list supplied, there is also a suggestion of violence. Official opinion was changing from slave to oil trading. Popular and endemic violence in form of raids, expeditions, hangings, tapping and blockades accompanied the change—well into the colonial period.<sup>12</sup> Panyarring, deportation, kidnapping, oil-chopping, revolt, and suicide were socially relevant words in the parlance of the era.<sup>13</sup> Frequent slave murders and suicides on land or in the high seas made no news again as conscience was dead or numb, and on their part, many enslaved youths showed fearless indifference to their fates. Corruption was also common, as reflected in that powerful sixteenth to nineteenth century trade term—"dash" (known by many names). For European traders, giving alcohol to African patrons, popularly known as *dassie* was an instrument for building alliances with indigenous people for work, sex, or simply to encourage and cement relationship.<sup>14</sup>

This evolved into subsidies and grants by Europeans to the influential personages to stop the slave trade, to provide alternative trade goods, and to protect trade and trade routes, and in the twentieth century became 10 percent tax rebate granted to colonial chiefs or agents. Whether competing African leaders were at each other's throats and or against the Europeans over trade, profit, dash, or in-



fluence is not often very clear. War and conflict indeed tended to have several roots.

Even if corruption stamped everything, the House System that emerged in the Niger Delta as the principal sociopolitical institution lived on. It acquired varieties in composition, content, purpose, power and legitimacy. The *duowari* (kinship inheritance by blood) differed from the *opuwari* (non-blood inheritance) or the offshoot, *kalawari*. Fortunes and prospects for the different Houses in Bonny or Kalabari changed in accordance with their accumulation of wealth and display of business acumen. Able men, including trade or urban slaves, rose to into leadership positions and status, some assisted by their trade alliance with European partners. For instance, British merchants, the Miller Brothers—Alexander and John, supercargoes in their own right, supported “king” Jaja in Opobo till his death and later built an epitaph in his honor near his palace.<sup>15</sup>

However, exploiting such Afro-European relations were just one side of the story. Niger Delta leaders also employed traditional methods in their inter-community dealings: marriage alliances, much like blood oath, linked communities together. Usually, the powerful chiefs married into rival or powerful/rich families to expand their authority; to increase their power, to heal old wounds, and to recruit allies for peace or for war.

With international politics of trade and its corollary of foreign imperialism, there grew a confusion of laws that overlapped or conflicted with each other. In general, local communities still relied on their customary usages, concluding oral treaties sealed by oath-taking and feasting. When they moved over to written treaties in English—often (mist) translated to the African signatories—they still depended on custom to seal them. The question to deal with, of course, was which regime or law to apply concerns of mutual interest to the two sides, traditional or foreign? Herein lay the root of conflict and hegemony. Since law is backed by force and the British had more force, they imposed theirs. Though their treaty-making was flawed by “bribery”<sup>16</sup> and the illiteracy-in-English of the signatories, the bad laws tended to prevail till the nationalist leaders began to oppose them. J. E. Flint’s question (respecting European treaty-making and the colonization of Nigeria) as to whether the whole concept of international law was a fraud could not be more apt.<sup>17</sup>



At the political power level soldiers, guns, canoes, and leaders feature as elements in the militarization of the nineteenth century Niger Delta.<sup>22</sup> Every nineteenth century House increased its potential for warfare. Doing so meant buying guns, recruiting soldiers, and getting rich, maintaining paddlers—often called “pulla boys or pull-away boys.” Not for nothing did coastal chiefs all the way to far away Badagry requested guns and powder. Theirs came to be known as the “gun powder” empires. “Empire” appeared in “trading empires” to suggest the desire to expand frontiers by trade, force and diplomacy.

Administered trade boomed in this environment. The king’s agents first *opened* trade in oil, gun, and ivory, etc., and thereafter their subjects and commoners could also trade in their own goods. Monopoly was in the very air that people breathed, but it was always fought against be it the black chiefs or the White chiefs monopoly. Sincerely, did people revolt in the Royal Niger Company territories? Nineteenth century trading involved the use of various currencies in the Delta and beyond. But these monies’ geography and use cannot yet be precisely delineated all round. Despite the studies by the Very Rev. G. T. Basden, Secretary to the Anglican Mission (an Igboophile made chief), and G. I. Jones, colonial officer-turned anthropologist, their spread is not known fully.<sup>18</sup> But the manila had been “pirated” at a profit by Okpogho blacksmiths in Udi region. They named their own version to themselves—*Okpogho*.<sup>19</sup> This name goes as *Ikpegbe* with the Abiriba people. In upper Igboland, *ayụ*, a hook-like iron currency stayed popular beside cowries till after 1914 when, for a change, cowrie-decorated beads became the fashion.

Another important institution and a fashionable one where it occurred was the secret society. Whether labeled *Ekepe*,<sup>20</sup> *Egbo*, or *Okonko*, it served members in different ways. Such cults operated as executive and diplomatic agents in politics and in commerce. In Nkwere and Ngwa regions of Igboland, these cults incorporated leaders defending the community, an ethos that has persisted down to the present. They had been trade promoters funding caravans, supporting slave markets, and were otherwise generally, leaders serving their community. Since the 1840s through the 1900s, they had had rivals in the new Christian Missions and their converts, as well as fervent opponents among British colonial agents. This forced them into different types of camouflaging. Some cults founded cells

and arranged field workers much like the oracle-mongers. It is unclear in the literature whether the kings or big chiefs were initiated or were just honorary members. What seems evident though from the vocabulary list in the appendix is the expansion inland of these cults to areas now named Abia and Imo States.

The secret associations had pro-European and anti-European groups. These institutions had a divided impact on the Niger Delta. The opposing and conservative groups were the returned ex-slaves, missionaries and their converts as against the slave owners, and the traditional worshippers of African gods respectively. Women, slaves and the poor, as always, appeared to have carried the privileged few—powerful, nonetheless—on their backs for so very long. Even the abolition of the slave trade cannot be considered over, given today's social carryovers from the era of slave and oil trade that are still evident. These have continued or are being maintained under the successor institutions and practices. Few educated Niger Delta women and men achieved prominence before 1914. The Christian-educated slaves, fired by suffering, felt liberated through the brotherhood message of the Bible. In Calabar, the slaves "Order of Bloodmen" revolted in 1848—thanks to their gospel influenced new-found beliefs about equality and freedom.<sup>21</sup> Poor and angry, converted and boiling, it is not surprising that in their rank were those who welcomed British colonial agents. Their liberation, it seems depended on their lighting up the "Dark Continent."

### Appendix

A. SALVEHOOD	B. DIPLOMACY
Barracoön	Spokesman, Agent
Coffle	Messenger, Linguist
Barter trade	Contracting parties
Silent trade	Protection
Pacotille	Dual government
Factory	Protected person
slave revolt	Protectorate
salve suicides	Protector, protectorship
Slave murders	Exclusion treaty
Aro Oracle	Subsidiary alliance
Abolition	Gunboat diplomacy

Maroons (runaways)	Duress 'Paper protectorate' Extraterritoriality Ratification "Governor" Guides Interpreters Mediatization Consulate
C. COMMERCIAL LIFE	D. SOCIAL ORGANISATION
Trust system	Canoe House
Double trust	War Canoe-House
Subsidies	House system
Supercargoes	"Razor house"
Coasters	"Kitchen house"
Coast fraternity	Senior House
'Making juju'	Subordinate House
Trading empire	<i>Duowari</i>
Oligopoly	<i>Opuwari</i>
Monopoly	<i>Kalawari</i>
Gentleman's bar	House group (cf. cartel)
Comey	"The principal men"
Oligopsony	Acephalous community
Monopsony	Stateless society
Work-bar	Progressives
Custom-Bar	Conservatives
Pirates	Heathens
Shake hand	"Jew jew"
Administrative trade	Blood brotherhood or bond
Passage	Long juju cult
Dashes	Invisible priests
Royal prerogative	"Accomplishments"
Secret society	'God' and 'Book'
<i>Igba ndu</i> [Blood oath]	Fraternity (Ekpe Society)
Palm-oil ruffians	
Iron	
Slaves	
Cowries	
Brass rods, rings	

Copper	
Goods	
E. VIOLENCE	F. RACISM
Slave revolt	Dual government
	(Cannibalism
Tapping	Dual mandate
Chopping oil	"Indirect Rule"
Punitive expedition	Autocracy
Attacks	Natives
Raids	Native foreigners
Ambushes	Native-foreigner
Piracies	Native council
Pirate's flag	Native court
Kidnapping	"Going native"
Deportation	Native Affairs Department
Hanging	Repugnancy
Panyarring	Colonial African service
Blockades	Colonial white service
Gunboats	Colony
Shelling down	
Slave murders	
Enslavement	
Crimes	
Forcible transportation	
Resource war	
Armaments	

### Notes

1. See for example, Kenneth O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria* (London: OVIP, 1963); J. C. Anene, "The Peoples of Benin, The Niger Delta, Congo and Angola in the Nineteenth Century" in J. C. Anene and M. Brown, *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: London, 1966); *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1985-1906: Theory and Practice of a Colonial Protectorate* (Cambridge: CVP, 1966; E. J. Alagoa, "Long Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," *Journal of African History* XI, 3. (1970): 319-39; W. H. Waverley, *Military Report on Southern Nigeria*, 2 vols (London: HMSO, 1908); Obaro, Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry Itsekiri-*

*Urbobo Relation and The European Presence, 1884–1936* (London: Longmans, 1969).

2. This method of leaning key concepts is the new frontier in teaching history effectively. See for instance Philip Lee Ralph, *Study Guide for Burns and Ralph World Civilization*. Fifth edition, vol 2 (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974), 25–ff. This author lists proper names, ideas, and place names for identification to facilitate understanding and conceptual thinking. This practice is old in the United States but as new as 1963 at the Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka when Dr. C. J. Munford, Jr. employed it.

3. Historiography as the “history of history” is very wide. See Elmer Barnes’ two-volume study.

4. See map XXXI in G.T Stride and Caroline Ifeka, *Peoples of West Africa. West Africa 1000–1800* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson Nig. 1978), 321. See also Ume E. Kahu, *The Rise of British Colonialism in Southern Nigeria, 1700–199: A Study of the Bigbts of Benin and Bonny* (Smithtown, NY.: Exposition Press, 1980), 89 on inter-coastal slave traffics and retail markets.

5. “Lagos” is a city in Portugal. “Lagos” in Niger territories began as a trade colony of the Portuguese, called Lago de Kuramo.

6. See J. A. Webster, A. A. Boahen, and M. Tidy, *The Revolutionary Years West Africa Since 1800* (London: Longman Group, 1980).

7. *New York Times*, October 26, 1884.

8. F. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1919).

9. C. C. Ifemesia, *Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (Lagos: Nok Publishers, 1988).

10. Akinjide Osuntokun, *Nigeria in the First World War* (London: Longman Group, 1979), 6.

11. “Pidgin–English” has spread to the urban areas and has become a radio talk-show language in Nigeria.

12. On expedition, see NNAI CSOI/21, Vol. 11. Military Expeditions–friendlies attacked by unfriendlies, 151–2.

13. On detention, see NNAI CSOI/21, 7 Overami (Ovaremwen) Detention Order 1911 & Overami Detention and Deportation Ordinance. On “chopping,” see K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta: An Introduction to Economic History* (London: Clarendon Press, 1957), 109–10. Consider “chopping nut,” too.

14. The concern over labor supply and productivity was important in alcohol policy in some parts of Africa. In late nineteenth century South African, mining companies made alcohol and sex readily available in mine compounds in order to control African labor. See for example, Didier Fas-



sin, "The Embodiment of Inequality; Aids as a Social Condition and the Historical Experience in South Africa," *Science and Society* 4 (2003), 87.

15. The Miller Brother erected an epitaph to "King" Jaja in Opobo. This author saw it during a Historical Tour, by the UNN undergraduates, to Arochukwu and Opobo, in 1962.

16. See Christopher Hibbert, *Africa Explored: Europeans in the Dark Continent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 319.

17. Flint the author of the very readable *Nigeria & Ghana* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1966). See page 133 for his view of Jaja.

18. G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Frank Cass, 1983, 1966) Passion. See also. See G. T. Jones, "Oluadah Equiano: Introduction," in P. D. Curtain, ed. *Africa Remembered (Narratives by W. Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade)* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 67.

19. Okpogho Community has three settlements—Okube, Ukwuagba, and Volovolo (Okpogho Mgbuta). This author interviewed some elders on their iron technology in 1962.

20. Kenneth O. Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of Southeastern Nigeria 1650–1980* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990), 14, 289–ff.

21. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 156.