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## **The dynamics of the abolition of slave trade and the changing nature of Yoruba economy in the nineteenth century**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the Yoruba society within the context of the nineteenth century's global historical transitions. Within the broad and avalanche historical milestones of the Yoruba people in the course of the century, the study concentrates on the process of the abolition of the Slave Trade and its impacts on the Yoruba economy. In line with this, the paper interrogates the dynamics of the slave trade abolition processes vis-a-vis the socio-political landscapes of Yoruba land. It further examines how the phenomenon of slave trade abolition contributed to the changing nature of Yoruba peoples' economic activities, particularly within the confine of the nineteenth century. The paper submits that the nature of the Yoruba economy was actually affected by the slave trade abolition phenomenon, particularly leading to the colonisation of the economy of Yoruba nation. The paper further opines that the economy of Yoruba became massively integrated into the international capitalist economic enclave from this period onward. In order to unravel its objectives and investigations, the paper adopts historical and analytical approaches, and relies heavily on extant literatures to justify its submissions.

**Keywords:** Slavery, slave trade, abolition, Yoruba economy, nineteenth century

### **Introduction**

The nineteenth century marked a watershed in the annals of the global historical transitions. The events of the nineteenth century were massive in the continuity and changes that have continued to determine global socio-economic and political transformations. Though the beginning of the slave trade predates the nineteenth century, the advocacy for its abrogation was sterner within the space of the century. In actual fact the declarations engendering the official termination of the protracted inhuman trade were made in the nineteenth century. It is, however, suffices to mention that the driven force for the abolition movement was not restricted to the philanthropist and religionist perceptions alone as projected by some scholars. The clamour for the abolition had socio-political and economic undertones but the economic consideration seems to have galvanised the most effective impetus. It was the economic necessities for the abolition that paved the way for the amplification of the so called "legitimate trade" which contributed enormously to the socio-economic dynamics of many nations, particularly African nations. The political dimension to the abolition efforts at the long run berthed the phenomenon of colonialism, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, while the philanthropist/religion intonation leaned credence to evangelisation and Christianisation of many parts of the African region <sup>[1]</sup>.

The south western part of what is now Nigeria, which is predominantly occupied by the Yoruba ethnic group, was broadly affected by the nineteenth century historical concurrent, particularly the slave trade and its abolition processes. From the twilight of the eighteenth century to virtually the entire period of the nineteenth century, the Yoruba nation could adequately be defined as a nation in turmoil. There were series of persistent and devastating internecine wars that engulfed the entire nation. These crises lasted for almost a century and impacted the political and socio-economic landscapes of the Yoruba nation. It must be pointed out, however, that as destructive and devastating the Yoruba civil wars were, it provided incentive for the continuation of slave trade because it opened the opportunity for the slavers to have more captives. On the other hand, the slave trade supplied the weapons which made the upheavals more destructive.

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Arising from the steady supply of captives, the slave trade became more lucrative thereby transforming the fortunes of many traditional rulers and elites within the Yoruba enclave. A good example is Oba of Lagos who was referred to as "Olowo Eko" to recount his newly acquired status and wealth which were majorly derived from proceeds from the slave trade [2]. In addition, the reign of Alafin Abiodun of the Oyo empire was said to be prosperous due to engagement in slave trading activities particularly through the Port of Ajase (Port Novo). Therefore, some of these traditional rulers fiercely kicked against the abolition of slave trade when the clamour for it was in the offing. The excuse of these resistances has often been taken by the European powers to establish colonial hegemony over various parts of the Yoruba nation.

In the lights of the above paragraphs, this article examines the socio-economic and political dynamics of the abolition process over the Yoruba nation. It takes cognisance of how the process of abolition has affected the nature and practices of the Yoruba economy particularly in the nineteenth century. The paper is divided into seven sections, the next section engages in a conceptual clarification while the third section looks at the nature of the Yoruba economy in the pre-nineteenth century era. The focus of the fourth section is on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its impacts on the Yoruba society. The fifth section concentrates on the processes of slave trade abolition paying attention to major factors and philosophical leanings that necessitated the abolition processes. The sixth part of the paper examines the so called "Legitimate Trade" within the context of the changing nature of Yoruba economic practices in the nineteenth century. This section places emphasis on the effects of the abolition on Yoruba economy and how it engendered the colonisation of Yoruba economy. The last section is the conclusion aspect of the paper which summaries the major investigations and submissions of the article.

### **Slavery and Slave Trade: A Conceptual Clarification**

The institution of slavery is a global and historical phenomenon that is recognised by various customs, traditions, and religions across the world. Slavery can be interpreted as a master-servant relationship in which the servant is subjected to servitude and compelled to perform certain activities. The institution of slavery has continually transformed in characteristic and mode throughout history. Though a global issue, the practice of slavery differs from one region of the world to the other. In many traditional African societies, for example, slaves enjoyed some privileges which ranged from the opportunity to be fully integrated into the new society, holding importance offices in the bureaucratic governance, rising to the topmost position within the host community, opportunity to inherit properties of their masters, opportunity to secure freedom through good conduct and diligence, and other mild concessions [3]. However, the consensus among scholars seems to be that African societies melted better treatment on their slaves than their European and American counterparts [4]. Slaves are secured through various means such as prisoners of war which were often enslaved, conversion of criminals to slaves, debtors could be brought under servitude upon inability to pay debt, some religion dissident were sent into slavery in some other communities, and many other ways.

Slave Trade was the most potent way of acquiring slaves, particularly in multitude and for labour intensive works. It is a commercial activity that involves the selling and purchasing of able bodied persons for various needs. Walter Rodney views slave trade as "the shipment of captives from Africa to various parts of the world where they were to live and work as the property of the Europeans [5]". A variant of such servitude is pawning which is called *Iwofa* among the Yoruba and *Awowa* among the Asante. Pawning is a situation whereby a debtor (or one of his relatives) is put under the servitude of his creditor until either his debt is settled in cash or a commensurate period of hard-work is completed. However, Samuel Johnson emphasised that the *Iwofa* syndrome was not an implication for slavery in the Yoruba society and posited that slavery was alien to the culture of the Yoruba people. According to him, unlike the slaves, the *Iwofas* were freemen and had none of their social status suspended during their services to their creditors or masters [6]. J. D. Fage corroborated this assertion in his effort to categorise a number of social and economic conditions which were generally referred to as slavery in West Africa. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Yoruba society got entangled in slave trading activities. For example the ancient Oyo Empire built its cavalry on the thrust of the talents of the Hausa slaves in taming horses which were used in the military. In fact the nucleus of the Lagos colony's constabulary, which later morphed into the Nigerian Police Force, was based on the Hausa slaves who were initially purchased into the Yoruba society.

At a point in history, slaves became the most viable commodity for international trade and Africa became the most vibrant area where these slaves were produced. The exportation of slaves of African origin to different parts of the world started as early as the first century and did not stop until the early twentieth century reaching its climax during the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade [7]. Most ancient African Empires and Kingdoms rose to prominence partly because of their active participation in slave trade; the ancient Ghana, Mali, and Kanem-Bornu Empires were no exception to this practice. On the other hand, the slave trade was a crucial factor in the expansion of European capitalism and imperialism. The Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch, the French, and the British became leading slave traders. In fact for the occasion and strong footing of the industrial revolution, slave trading was very essential to the economy of Europe and America. Most of the captive slaves were obtained from West Africa and were doomed to facing horrible situations aboard the slave ships to their destinations.

### **The Nature of Yoruba Economy in the Pre-Nineteenth Century**

The pre-nineteenth century Yoruba economy, like many other African communities, was predominantly agriculture. Geographical and demographical factors were very instrumental to the growth of agricultural practices in Yorubaland during the period before 1800s. Geographically, Yorubaland is located in the tropical area where rainfall is usually in abundant thereby enhancing soil fertility which promotes agricultural activities particularly with reference to crop production [8]. In fact, the favourable climatic conditions of the pre-nineteenth century Yorubaland guaranteed bi-annual harvests of farm produce. In the absence of machineries which could be used for mechanised

agricultural activities, the adoption of labour intensive agricultural practice was imminent. To this end, the Yoruba nation was blessed with a sizeable demography which was used in agricultural activities. Polygamy which was an integral part of the societal social structure aided population growth which was converted to agricultural labour. Apart from the favourable population size, the traditional Yoruba centralised system of government which paved the way for peace and stability also engendered development in various economic activities, chief of which was agriculture.

Various crops were grown both for subsistence and commercial purposes; some of the crops such as yam, oil palm, and kola *nitida* were indigenous to Yorubaland while others such as maize, rice, cotton, beans etc were introduced as a result of the trade with the outside world. In the production of these crops, simple implements such as hoe and cutlass were applied. Hopkins has argued that heavy implement and technology such as the plough were not really necessary for pre-nineteenth century Africa and Yorubaland agricultural activities because the soil was not suitable enough for this implement <sup>[9]</sup>. The soil was soft enough for the use of simple implements thereby making agriculture to be drastically less capital intensive. Such system as shifting cultivation, bush fallow, and plant rotation were practiced particularly because of the presence of surplus landmass. Agricultural products such as yams, different kind of beans, vegetables of various types, fruits, cotton were consumed and surpluses were sold. In some cases, some of these produce were turned into manufactured articles such as palm oil, palm oil butter, palm kernel oil, locust beans seasoning, yam flour, plantain flour, maize beer and others before being sold. Large plantations were carried out in the bush while small scale cultivation was done inside the town where vegetables, maize, pepper, and others were planted especially by old people who could no longer engage in long distance bush farming. Apart from crop production, the pre-nineteenth century Yorubaland also engaged in some form of animal husbandry. Though large scale animal husbandry did not exist, domestication of such animals as goats and sheep was practised. Fishing and some other maritime economic activities such as salt making and canoe building were carried out by the people of the coastal communities such as the Ilaje and the Awori. Supplementary to the foregoing economic activities was the institution of hunting which had its economic and socio-cultural importance.

It remains incontrovertible that agriculture was the dominant occupation of Yorubaland during the period before the nineteenth century, but some of the people also took to other occupations or economic activities. However, it must be established that for each person that engaged in other occupation apart from agriculture he also engaged in mini-farming at his backyard or family land as part-time occupation <sup>[10]</sup>. One of these economic activities was iron mining and smelting which made it possible for the blacksmiths to produce agricultural implements. Iron smelting was widespread and very important to the growth of the other industries. Agriculture could not have been conducted on such a large scale without the regular supply of iron implements especially hoes, cutlass and scythes knives, hammers, chains, and various other implements were made in the blacksmith shops.

Apart from iron mining and smelting, there was also the Yoruba indigenous textile industry where both men and

women produced various patterns and designs of cloth which were of high quality and formed part of the articles for inter-state trade <sup>[11]</sup>. Related to this was the tie and dye industry which was predominantly handled by the womenfolk. On the other hand, men engaged in tailoring activities. Other industries such as leather work, rope making, basket making, pottery, and canoe and salt making in the coastal regions were also noticeable in the pre-nineteenth Yorubaland. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, cloth weaving had reached a very high degree of craftsmanship among the Yoruba. In addition, indigo making cotton, cotton, spinning, and sewing of strips to make garments were noticeable activities. Furthermore, objects such as plates, cooking utensils, water storage pots, and various others were also produced by the ceramic industry. Wood Carving was another industry which was popular among the pre-nineteenth century Yoruba people. They made various forms of drums, mortars and pestles, carving of images, household utensils, and others both for domestic use and for commerce.

Another aspect of the pre-nineteenth century Yoruba economy is trade and commerce. Prior to the nineteenth century, the Yoruba people massively engaged in local and inter-states trade which could sometime be middle or long distance trade. As far as internal trade was concerned, two major factors aided its growth and development. One of these factors was the advantage of a common currency which was the cowry shells. Cowries as international currency was acceptable throughout the Yoruba country and this aided the ease of doing business. The second factor could be placed in the advantage of common language. Because virtually every part of Yorubaland speaks a particular language that is comprehensible by all, the problem of language barrier which is an impediment to smooth commercial interaction was pruned to the barest minimum. To promote their socio-economic interests, Yoruba traders organised themselves into various commodity and professional guilds. Generally, these guilds could be categorised into two including the *Egbe Alajapa* whose members dealt in inanimate commodities and *Egbe Alarobo* whose members dealt in animate articles of trade <sup>[12]</sup>. To galvanise their financial muscle and promote trade, members of these guilds used to engage in *Esusu* contribution whereby members contributed a fixed sum periodically and each member would collect the total sum of the contribution on a rotational basis.

In line with the trade and commercial activities, various markets and market systems were established. Some markets were big while some were very small; some were open to everybody while some were restricted, some were run on a daily basis while others were attended periodically, and some were morning markets while others began towards the sunset. Majorly, agricultural and manufactured products constituted the articles of trade. However, as inter-states trade improves more articles were sold in the various markets. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, some parts of Yorubaland had begun the importation of European luxuries including cloths, consumables, mirror, liquor and others <sup>[13]</sup>. In fact, the continuous importation of European cloths which were cheaper tended to gradually affect local production in the Oyo Empire. The existence of intra-Yorubaland and external trading activities negates the position of the substantive school of economic history that posits that economic activities in pre-colonial Africa were

only at subsistence level. Another feature of the Yoruba economy before the 1800s was collection of custom duties on goods that passed through the borders of various kingdoms and empires. A close examination of the features of the pre-nineteenth century Yorubaland economy would suggest that the indices were determined by many internal factors.

### **The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the Yoruba Society**

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was a protracted commercial transaction majorly in human labour which lasted between fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the 400 years of the trans-Atlantic or triangular slave trade, millions of Africans were kidnapped and shipped to North America and the Caribbean for laborious works on sugar, tobacco, cotton, rice, and indigo plantations which were owned by European merchants <sup>[14]</sup>. There is controversy about the actual number of African slaves that were carted into slavery, particularly during the Atlantic trade. Phillip Curtin, however, put the number at an approximate of 15 Million including those who eventually got to the destination and those who lost their lives during the course of raiding and transportation <sup>[15]</sup>. During the voyages, millions of the captured slaves never reached their destinations. Some of them became seriously sick as a result of hunger and severe conditions and were then thrown overboard by their captors. In fact some of the captives intentionally threw themselves overboard rather than continue the journey into slavery.

In addition, many lives were lost during the process of slaves hunting in the various African communities adding to the total number of lives that were lost during the epoch of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Lord Anthony Gifford described the trans-Atlantic slave trade as the highest wicked criminal enterprise in recorded human history <sup>[16]</sup>. Able bodied men and women including adolescents who constituted the cream and owned the future prosperity of African societies were the target of the captors and the desire of the slavers. Before proceeding, however, it must be pinpointed that the slave trade was not the pioneering commercial and economic relationship between Africa and the outside world, particularly the Europeans. Hopkins is of the opinion that what actually set the pace for the commercial interactions was the trade in legitimate produce such as agricultural produce and some mineral resources <sup>[17]</sup>. Some historians opine that one of the major implications of this commercial relationship was that African technological, industrial, and economic progress was stagnated while Europe, America, and the Caribbean grew economically buoyant on the proceeds of the so called “triangular” slave trade <sup>[18]</sup>. In particular, the wealth by the British merchants which were procured through the slave trading activities became important source of capital for the industrial revolution. This scenario, according to this school of thought, rendered African communities economically shrivelled and prepared the ground for eventual colonisation. On the other hand, some scholars in the like of J. D. Fage, Robert July, A. F. C. Ryder, and Hopkins are of the opinion that the Atlantic slave trade brought about some form of economic benefits to numerous African communities. J. D. Fage, for instance, was of the opinion that the slave trade stimulated commercial revolution whereby many African merchants and markets emerged; also that it made it possible for the establishment of stronger

expansive governments with the supply of European arms and ammunition in various parts of Africa <sup>[19]</sup>.

Robert July illustrated the perspective of the slave trade apologists who emphasised that the commercial interaction assisted to strengthen African societies because many of its criminal and unscrupulous elements were carted into slavery <sup>[20]</sup>. This argument tends not to be substantive and basically Eurocentric judging by the fact that the preponderance number of the slaves were captured during raids and internecine wars and this suggests that majority of the slaves were either patriots or law abiding citizens of their various communities. Aside, many of the said criminals were not real criminals; many of them were reported to have committed minor or no offense before being doomed to slavery. Also, the argument about supply of ammunition is insufficient to demonstrate that the slave trade promoted the emergence of large empires and kingdoms. Rather, the availability of arms and ammunition assisted in the destruction and sometimes complete annihilation of many African societies during wars and raids.

Like many African kingdoms and empires, the pre and nineteenth century Yoruba society was affected by the trans-Atlantic slave trade phenomenon. First of all, a sufficient number of peoples of Yoruba origin were sold into slavery. Apart from other evidences, the fact that some elements of Yoruba cultural practices conspicuously exist in South America and the Caribbean is strong enough to lay claim that a good number of the people were taken into slavery. Such socio-cultural practices like polygamy, long period of breast feeding, eight-day naming ceremony, diluted Yoruba words and statements are found in these areas <sup>[21]</sup>. Ryder asserts that a substantial number of Yoruba were sold into slavery in the seventeenth century but the number increased drastically during the late eighteenth century as a result of political upheavals and establishment of western slave ports <sup>[22]</sup>. Initially, Yoruba slaves were taken through the ports at Allada, Whydah, and later on Badagry. The destruction of Badagry in 1784, however, created the way for the emergence of Lagos under the reign of Oba Akinsemoyin as the principal slave outlet and port for the Yoruba states. Oba Abiodun on whose reign as the Alafin of Oyo the protracted Yoruba civil wars broke out was said to have prioritise slave trade than any other economic activities ostensibly because of the huge revenue generated from the business. Some scholars are of the opinion that the slave trade was a significant factor in the political upheavals that led to the breaking up of the Oyo Empire. But it could be concluded that the breaking up was as a result of combination of internal factors of which provide much impetus to the slave trade.

The fact that the trans-Atlantic trade stagnated Yoruba economic, technological, and industrial growth and development had been substantiated by many scholars, particularly by African historians <sup>[23]</sup>. One of the indigenous Yoruba industries that were destroyed by the trans-Atlantic trade was the textile industry. European cloths were massively imported into Yorubaland to the detriment of the indigenous textiles which were of superior quality. It has been asserted that this disruption was made possible because the indigenous handloom weavers were competing with machines which had more speed and efficiency of production. Also mass production and variety of designs from Europe made their cloths to be cheaper and affordable to the masses. Apart from the textile industry, the

indigenous salt making industry was also affected by trans-Atlantic trade. Initially, the coastal people such as the Ilaje and Awori were the supplier of salts for the hinterland which they use in exchange for other goods. With the growth of the trans-Atlantic trade, the importation of salt from Europe rendered the local salt industries completely not vibrant.

On a general note, the effects of the Atlantic trade on the politics and economics of the Yorubaland could be viewed from two perspectives based on the coastland and hinterland dichotomy. As for the hinterland which majorly served as the slave procuring regions, the trade relations led to huge amount of depopulation of which the cream of the population was the most affected. As a result of the drainage of the manpower resources, the growth of the traditional economy of these regions such as mining and agriculture were constrained. In addition, the atmosphere of insecurity created by the process of raiding prevented a peaceful atmosphere for economic interactions, growth, and development. Above all, the situation put the economy of these regions in the hands of the ruling and aristocratic class because the Obas, their relatives, their chiefs, and trusted servants dominated the economic space creating an unequal distribution of wealth and regressive social mobility within the regions. On the other hand, the trans-Atlantic slave trade promoted the local and international economic importance of the coastland such as Lagos. From 1810s onward, Lagos served as one of the major ports through which Yoruba slaves were gathered and purchased for departure into the New World. Apart from slaves, provisions which were needed for the up-keep of the slavers and the slaves during the voyage and the European products which were imported in order to gain capital for the purchase of the slaves were procured from the Lagos port. This laid the foundation of the economic vibrancy of the Island. However, the trade relations had some negative impacts on the traditional economy of the Island. For instance, fishing activities was reduced drastically while the importation of salt also crippled the local salt production. Another feature of the Lagos economy during this period was that economic prosperity was left in the hands of the oligarchy adopting the *Baba-Isale* (Godfatherism) system where necessary. Most importantly, the trans-Atlantic slave trade gradually provided opportunity for the intervention of the European in the economics and politics of the coastland and later the hinterlands of Yorubaland leading to the eventual birth of colonialism.

### **The Dynamics of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade**

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, the economic reality of Europe particularly Britain which was the leading slave trading country tended to be incongruent with the trade in human cargoes. This necessitated the agitation for the abolition of the slave trade which started slowly but gradually gained momentum through the nineteenth century. Though there had been little concerted efforts from the locals to engender the stoppage of trade, the real agitations for the abolition were externally initiated<sup>[24]</sup>. Nevertheless, there were controversies as regards the real factors that influenced the agitation for the abolition. There were those who believed that the humanitarian and philanthropist pressures were the precipitators of the abolition process. According to this school of thought, the humanitarian and

philanthropists anchored their argument for the abolition on moral philosophy. They argued that the slave trade gave room for massive loss of lives; that it deprived the African communities of the usefulness of its able-bodied men and women; and that it prevented the diversification of African economy. This set of agitators then put forward a programme for the rejuvenation of Africa through Christianity, civilisation, and legal trade and commerce. This set of slave trade antagonists constituted themselves into various groups such as Society of Friends of Blacks, the British Quakers, the American Quakers, and etc. Prominent among their leaders were William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson etc.

On the other hand, there were those who believed that the slave trade was abolished mainly because of economic considerations. The school of thought was led by people like Eric William and J. F. Ade Ajayi who demonstrated that it was the economic imperatives that made the abolition process inevitable<sup>[25]</sup>. This school argued that the commencement of the industrial revolution gave impetus to the decline in slave trading activities. Industrialists and even merchants began to divert their investment into the promotion of industrial activities which had become more lucrative than slaving. Owing to the industrial revolution, this school emphasised, the major articles of trade between Africa and Europe and the Americas gradually changed from human labour to raw materials which were needed to fuel the newly established industries. Agricultural products such as palm oil which were demanded in smaller quantity became major articles demanded by the European merchants to serve the expanding industries in Europe. To guarantee the continuous supply of these raw materials however, the shipment of African labours to slavery had to be discouraged hence the need for abolition. In fact, this school of thought asserted that the backbones of the moralists/humanitarian agitators were the capitalists who wanted to see the end of the slave trade in order to enhance their own economic interests.

Apart from the humanitarian and economic interpretations for the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the libertarian and revolution factor has also been fashioned into the debate. The increasing awareness of individual rights and liberty in Europe from the 1760s influenced the agitation for the abolition of slave trade. The struggle and achievement of independence in America during the second half of the eighteenth century assisted a lot to ginger the interests of people towards liberation and human rights aiding the agitation to foreclose the slave trade. The French Revolution of the late eighteenth century was also instrumental to the abolition of the slave trade because it added to the advocacy for liberty and personal freedom which were not in consonance with slavery. In 1772, Judge Mansfield pronounced the freedom of any slave that sets his feet in Britain and this declaration gave necessary back-up to the abolitionists<sup>[26]</sup>.

However, the agitation for the abolition of slave trade was rebuffed by the slave-owners and traders in Britain and other European countries and the America. The abolitionists kept the pressure down to the passage of the anti-slavery legislations. There emerged a group of industrial barons who used their wealth and power to challenge the status quo in the British parliament. The industrialists, however, were unable to muster enough pressure to break the hold of the slavers on the political parties and government decisions.

But with the growing advocacies from the humanitarian groups, legislations began to roll out for the abolition. Denmark led the way in 1802 while Britain followed in March 1807, the United States made slave trade illegal in 1808 and France made her pronouncement in 1815, gradually the outlawing of the slave trade garnered momentum during the nineteenth century. In collaboration with the white abolitionists, free blacks played effective role in the abolition and anti-slavery movement, particularly in the Americas. They served as lecturers, pamphleteers, and newspaper editors and organised vigilance committee in the principal cities to assist fugitive slaves. Apart from collaborating with the whites, the black abolitionists organized their own conventions which met periodically to draft plans and actions to gain freedom for the slaves.

### **The Legitimate Trade and the Changing Nature of Yoruba Economy**

Apart from few other minor factors, the slave trade and its abolition majorly served the economic benefits of Europe and the Americas. In the same vein, the promotion of the so called "legitimate" trade was to serve the economic interests of the West pioneered by Britain and then joined by others. The "legitimate" trade could be defined as exchange in agricultural produce and European products between Africa and the outside world serving as alternative to slave trade. The trade placed emphasis on the production of food crops, cultivation of export crops, and exploitation of local natural resources which were exported to propel the growth of the industrial revolution in Europe. In actual fact, "legitimate" trade predated the slave trade but was deemphasised during the slave trade epoch for obvious economic reason of profitability. Until the final collapse of the slave trade for the growth of the legitimate trade, both trades went *pari pasu*, though at different level of acceleration. The "legitimate" trade, which replaced the illegal trade in human being, began to gather serious momentum from the early nineteenth century, majorly as a result of the slave trade abolition [27].

In the course of the growth in the "legitimate" trade, the economy of Yorubaland witnessed some form of reformations. For instance, emphasis on the trade in agricultural produce assisted to open the economic space and restricted its domination by the ruling class. Legitimate trade permitted the participation of many small scale farmers and traders thereby downplaying the hold of the oligarchy on the economy [28]. In the quest to source for agricultural produce, the Europeans decided to bypass the oligarchy and began to deal directly with the small scale farmers in the hinterland and the coastland. In Lagos, for example, this kind of scenario drastically reduced the role of the Oba and his chiefs in international trade in agricultural produce [29]. Also, the influx of liberated slaves such as the Saros and the Sierra Leonean returnees into Lagos and other parts of Yorubaland really assisted to dwindle the dominance of the oligarchy on the economy which was at its peak during the slave trade epoch. This set of migrants began to serve as middlemen between the Europeans and the Yoruba people trading in all sort of merchandise. To this end, new crops of merchants such as Shitta Bey, Taiwo Olowu, Seidu Olowu, Madam Tinubu, Da Rocha, J. H. Doherty, Sedu Williams, the Crowther family, and others began to emerge.

Another way by which the legitimate trade affected the existing feature of the Yoruba economy particularly during the nineteenth century could be viewed from the angle of increase in the production of agricultural produce, mainly the palm oil produce including palm oil and palm kernels. The production of palm produce was in the hands of small scale farmers which allowed for increased production. Hopkins pointed out that there were fifteen million palm trees in Yorubaland in 1892 for the production of palm oil [30]. Palm oil dominated the export of Yorubaland where the hinterland provided a steady supply to Lagos. In addition new export crops were introduced into Yorubaland in the course of the legitimate trade. Cocoa, for example, which was introduced into Yorubaland in 1890 became one of the major sources of Yoruba economy throughout the colonial period and even beyond. Cocoa served as the mainstay of Yoruba economy and source of socio-economic development until Nigeria as a whole drifted to mono-economy and shifted attention to petroleum. The fact that cocoa was initially not consumed by the people guaranteed the massive production and exportation of the product. Also, the ecological nature of the Yorubaland was suitable enough for the growth of cocoa after it failed to yield expected result in the eastern part. It was actually introduced to Yorubaland by private farmers such as J. P. L. Davies, a saro who established a cocoa farm at around Agege area of Lagos. The colonial government leaned credence to the spread of cocoa by establishing a Botanical station, which distributed cocoa seeds to the peasant farmers; in 1887 [31]. The success recorded in the production of this produce in the entire Yorubaland was tremendous.

Apart from cocoa, the cultivation and exportation of rubber also witnessed some form of development in the nineteenth century Yorubaland. During the 1890s the international price of rubber rose and this fired the interest of the local farmers in its production even though the necessary skills to handle its tapping were lacking. As a result of the poor tapping methods by the local farmers, the Agricultural and Forestry Department introduced new types of the rubber plants in order to increase the yields. Later-on, the department embarked on the programme of demonstrating to the local farmers the techniques of efficient planting and production of the newly introduced species. Towards supplying the demands of Europe for these agricultural produce some Yoruba farmers began to engage in some sort of plantation economy starting from the close of the nineteenth century. The British introduced a deliberate policy of not alienating the Nigerian farmland to allow for continuous supply of the needed agricultural produce [32].

Another area by which the legitimate trade affected the economics of Yorubaland during the nineteenth century was in the area of currency. Initially, series of commodities such as cloth, gold, and cowries were used as media of exchange in the local and international trades. But with the increasing volume of trade with the Europe and other parts of the world, there were steps towards a more acceptable currency by business parties. In 1880, an ordinance was passed which provided for the domestication of certain coins which plus the silver British sterling were to serve as the legal tenders. Gradually, the British currencies which were brought by the British officials and traders were circulated not only in Yorubaland but across the country. The introduction of these foreign currencies initially faced the problem of acceptability among the indigenous people who regarded

them as “mere papers”. Owing to this introduction, however, the old institution of trade by barter drastically declined in Yorubaland <sup>[33]</sup>.

With the growth of the usage of foreign currencies came the necessity for a banking system. A British Company, the African Banking Corporation (ABC) was the first to be established towards this end. The bank served as the sole distributor of the British silver coins in Lagos since 1872 and by 1891 it started a banking business. The bank which was operated as a private concern was constrained by lack of patronage and was therefore taken over by the company of Sir Alfred Jones. Later, it became a joint venture of Elder Demoster & Company (Sir Jones’ Company) and the British government in 1894 under the name Bank of British West Africa (BBWA) in 1894 <sup>[34]</sup>. The monopoly of BBWA was challenged in early twentieth century when the National Bank of Nigeria was established by the indigenous/returnees. These commercial banks drew their customers mainly from traders, to whom they extended credit facilities to finance imports and exports businesses and this restructure the Yoruba banking along that of the western capitalist system.

Noticeable among the economic transitions that occurred in Yorubaland as a result of the growth in the legitimate trade was introduction of the Credit System or Trust System. This was a situation whereby the Europeans advanced goods to merchants for a later date payment. The most beneficiaries of this package were the Sierra Leonean emigrants who used their connection with the hinterland to obtain goods on credit from the Europeans in exchange for palm produce <sup>[35]</sup>. The emigrants were perceived as people who have better understanding of the local socio-economic situations and who could provide the needed information about prices and political situation in the hinterland. The credit system was later extended to the indigenous people and survived the abolition of slave trade, became a prominent feature of the colonial economy, and survived till the modern era with a modified system. Gradually, the *Iwofa* traditional credit system began to peter away for the western model.

Increase in the volume of trade interaction also impacted the means of transportation. Ab initio, porters and canoe used to be the major sources of transporting goods from one place to the other. But by 1885, road construction began in Lagos with the passage of the road construction ordinance. With this legislation, a few roads were constructed and maintained by the chiefs. The government also supervised the construction of some roads amounting to about 250 miles in 1889. However, the construction of these roads were constrained by paucity of manual labours majority of whom had been drifted to farming as new cash crops such as cocoa and rubber were introduced. Gradually, there was the introduction of the railway system which assisted a lot to galvanise the Yoruba economy during the colonial and post-colonial epochs. A number of feeder roads were also constructed to serve the railways.

The abolition and the introduction of the legitimate trade also affected the economy of the Yorubaland in the area of changing the nature of the labour force. New forms of professionals such bankers, artisans, bricklayers, carpenters, traders, horticulturists, etc began to emerge in Yorubaland. The bulk of these people were returnees who had gained skills and abilities during their sojourn in the America and Sierra Leone <sup>[36]</sup>. They also absolved many local inhabitants as apprentices. Also, there was increase in the number of

labours needed by the new class of business magnate to cultivate the newly introduced cash crops. Paid labourers, therefore, began to replace the old institutions of *aaro* and *owe* within the Yoruba economic traditions.

## Conclusion

This article has endeavoured to demonstrate that the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its abolition contributed enormously to the economic transitions of the Yoruba nation during the nineteenth. These changes laid the foundation of future socio-economic situations of the nation in the subsequent centuries. Having established the fact that the Yorubaland was engrossed in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the paper articulated some of the ways by which the trade affected the economic trajectories of the Yoruba nation in terms of stagnation and opportunities. For the economic retrogression of the Yoruba nation during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the elites in the society who downplayed the societal growth for their selfish interests are the major culprits. The abolition of the trade in human cargoes, however, came as a result of various conspicuous economic imperatives which were external to the Yorubaland in actual sense but must be adopted by any means possible, particularly since its integration into the European capitalist economic system. One of the major outcomes of the abolition of slave trade was the acceleration of the legitimate trade which assisted to revitalise the indigenous economy of the Yoruba nation though at the whims, caprices, and dictates of the European powers. Though the legitimate trade re-laid the economic foundation of Yorubaland in terms of increase agricultural produce, introduction of modern currency, construction of roads, among others, it placed the determination of the economic space of the Yorubaland in the hands of the colonial masters and drastically integrated the economy into the global capitalist economic system.

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