Economic Impact of Palm oil Trade on Opobo Kingdom 1870-1960

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Abstract

The main thrust of this study was to analyse the economic impact of palm oil economy on Opobo Kingdom, 1870-1960. There are many scholarly works on Opobo history, but none of the studies gave adequate attention to this subject matter. To achieve the objective of this study, the work adopts the use of multi source approach to generate the needed data. Since knowledge cuts across disciplines, the study also employed the interdisciplinary approach, using knowledge from other related discipline to compliment the available historical data. The qualitative approach to data analysis was used in the methodology. The study reveals that, the lucrative market of palm oil was a since quon non to the founding of Opobo in 1870. The work establishes that, though the palm oil trade created huge wealth and different employment opportunities for Opobo people, it arrested her fragile local economy of fishing, which consequently left many of her people stranded when the British economy replaced the palm oil trade. The study recommends that the Nigerian Government should undertake a comprehensive study of the palm oil trade, particularly how Opobo was able to control and direct the activities and the pace of the trade in Opobo River that earned them huge resources with the aim to replicate same in her crude oil and gas in the international community.
Introduction
The Economic impact of palm oil trade on Opobo kingdom is worthy of study. Its contributions in re-shaping the economy of Ibani nation, especially Opobo kingdom, cannot be overlooked.

Palm oil was one of the staple commodities of legitimate trade. Legitimate trade started in the 19th century between Africa and Europe. It was an international commerce that replaced the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The trans-Atlantic slave trade which started in about the 14th century between Europe and Africa, was unilaterally stopped by the European capitalist/business moguls, who realized that in the light of new developments in European economy, at that period, demands a paradigm shift in article of trade, as such, slave trade was no longer relevant. However, the new development at that time was the industrial revolution witnessed in many parts of Europe. Consequently, what the industries needed urgently for smooth operation was raw materials and not slaves. One of such raw materials was palm oil. It was needed for the manufacturing of highly demanding commodities, such as, soap, lubricants and candles (Hopkins, 1973:128). Lubricants were urgently needed for greasing parts of the machines for effective operation. Palm trees are grown predominantly in West Africa. In Nigeria, it was predominantly grown in the rain forest region and some parts of the swamp/mangrove region. Before the trade, palm oil was being produced and consumed as food stuffs by the people and traded within Africa. This helped to explain why, when the commodity was demanded to replace the Atlantic slave trade by the European traders at the coasts of Africa, especially West Africa, there was no much disruption on the overseas commercial transactions among Africans.

The course of transacting this trade between the European traders and African people, were the same pattern with the Atlantic slave trade. The European traders stationed at the coasts and the African coastal people,
went into the interior hinterlands through the waterways to buy the commodities from the hinterland middlemen and back to the coast, where they sell to the European traders. The trade encouraged chains of middle men, as the coastal middle men were the end link to the European traders (Cowan, 1927).

Opobo kingdom was one of the coastal city states in the Niger Delta Region that participated strongly in the palm oil trade. The founders of Opobo kingdom in 1870 had hitherto been strong participants of the trade in Bonny. As we shall see later, one of the reasons why they left Bonny, was their desire to control the trade, which at that time, was sine qua non to economic survival of Niger Delta city states.

Opobo is located at the estuary of Imo River. It is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the South, the Ogoni in the North, Andoni & Nkoro in the West and the Ibibio in Akwa Ibom State in the East. The activities of the trade had a lot of impacts on the socio-economic and political evolvement of Opobo. However, this study x-rays the economic impacts of the trade on Opobo.

Nevertheless, this study is imperative because many scholarships on Opobo history have not given a proper attention on this topic. Although, we cannot claim here that it is deliberate. The general studies on Opobo by many scholars, torched aspects of this study but not with proper attention.

Interestingly, the Economic developments in Opobo kingdom, within and after the palm oil trade, motivated this study, which aims at identifying reasons why Opobo failed in developing their local economy on fishing, which they had a comparative advantage like their Andoni neighbours, who had over the years, built a strong local economy on fishing and had established one of the biggest fishing ports in West Africa at Oyorokoto.
Economic Reasons for the Founding of Opobo

There are many reasons suggested by scholars in their works on Opobo kingdom, Dike, 1956; Epelle, 1970; Jaja, 1991; Finapiri, 2001; Ejituwu, 1991; Cookey, 1974; Crowder, 1962 and Alagoa and Fombo, 1972, why the Opubo group of War Canoe Houses under the leadership of Chief Jaja, left Bonny and found Opobo in 1870. This study focused on the economic reasons as suggested by Epelle, Ejituwu and Dike in their separate works, as it will help us in explaining why it was so easy for Chief Jaja and his Opubo houses to evacuate from Bonny, found Opobo and assumed control of palm oil trade in the Delta Region within a short period.

Dike and Ejituwu, pointed in their separate works, that Jaja planned Opubo houses exodus from Bonny, without the knowledge of his subjects, until after the September 13th 1869 crisis when he disclosed the plan to the 14 Chiefs of Opubo Houses (Dike, 1956 and Ejituwu, 1991). However, Dike and Jaja further provided an insight why Jaja planned Opubo houses movement from Bonny and the founding of Opobo (Dike, 1956 and Jaja, 2012). Shortly after the election of Chief Jaja as head Chief of Opubo Houses in 1863, Dike quoted consul Burton’s remark on Jaja, saying:

One Jaja son of an unknown bushman, a common Negro, had been elected to head the Annia 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).

Also, Dike observed that;

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..., 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..., realizing that the source of Delta wealth was in the oil markets, he made himself personal grate with the chiefs of the interior and spent more time with them than the artificial society of the coast. Similarly, he sought popularity with the supercargoes that were at the receiving end of the interior product... (Dike, 1956:185).

Jaja before his election as head Chief of Opobo houses from the foregoing, was a very wealthy man, had an understanding about the intrigues in Bonny politics, and was fully aware of the sources of the wealth of Delta city states. Opobo houses since under the reign of Chief Alali in about 1845, had been dominating the palm oil trade in Bonny (Pepple and Oko Jaja, 2015), and as such, had been in control of Bonny’s economy. Consequently, many of the independent houses in Bonny such as, Fine Bone, John Africa, Jack Tolofari, Wariso, Oko-Epelle, Tom Brown, among others, have consistently joined membership with Opobo group of War Canoe Houses, even after the 7th January, 1865 agreement that reaffirmed them as independent Houses in Bonny (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972:110).

The economic position occupied by Opobo Houses had been a source of concern to the Fubara Manila Pepple Houses a position that have been given Opobo Houses an edge in the political affairs of Bonny since after the exile of King William Pepple in about 1853. The emergence of Chief Alali as a regent in 1855 after the death of King Dappa ye Fubara, was strongly opposed by Fubara Manilla Pepple Houses, Ada Allison and Captain Young Houses (Cookey, 1974), and consequently, contributed to 1855 civil war in Bonny (Dike, 1956:182.

The war inflicted damages to economic achievements of Opobo Houses and above all contributed to the death of Chief Alali. Alali’s successor, Chief
Iloli, having evaluated the damages done to Opobo Houses which was targeted to her economic success, decided to summon the chiefs and elders of the Houses and suggested to them the idea of eluding Bonny and to settle in the Island where Opobo is presently located, the Island was discovered during Bonny Andoni war of 1836 (Epelle, 1970:3). The idea was not unanimously accepted at the period and so remains in abeyance. The reasons for this are unknown, but may relate to the fact that:

1. The idea was untimely and no proper plan to achieve such risky venture,
2. No arrangement so far on how to get the European traders to open trade with them at the proposed new site,
3. There is no knowledge of proper direct link of the Ikomtoro River and the Atlantic Ocean for easy access of European trading ships and
4. No formal discussion with the Andoni people who had issues with Bonny and whose water ways they will access to the area.

Rebuilding Opobo Houses and reinstating her position in palm oil trade became a task for Chief Iloli. While accomplishing the task, he took huge ‘Trust’ from the European traders, with hope of balancing his account soon with the supercargoes, since the trade at that period was highly lucrative and the product was at its highest price level in the Niger Delta Region since the beginning of the trade (Hopkins, 1973 and Ikime, 1980:495). However, Chief Iloli’s affluence, generosity, sagacity and judicial powers earned him the most influential member of the Quadrumvirate regency established to man the kingdom (Cookey, 1974), a position that further increased the jealousy of Manila Pepple Houses, Ada Allison and Captain Hart. The cold war that resulted from the jealousy against Iloli and his Opobo Houses impacted negatively on their commercial transaction between the hinterland and the supercargoes. Consequently, Iloli, had problem in balancing his account with the supercargoes before his death in 1862 (Cookey, 1974:47).
Interestingly, the debate among the Chiefs of Opobo group of War Canoe Houses on how to settle late Iloli’s debt to the supercargoes contributed to the choice of Jaja as successor to Iloli. Base on this circumstance, King Dandison Jaja, in his address to Jaja group of Houses during the 2017 Jaki Alali celebration in Opobo claimed that, the throne of Opobo main House, was a collateral presented to Jaja, to offset the debt of late Chief Iloli, and so, any person, section or War Canoe House, other than Jaja descendants eyeing the throne, should first pay Jaja descendants the said amount Jaja paid to the supercargoes for Chief Iloli’s debt. Jaja having diligently served Chief Madu (his father by adoption), Alali and Iioli, made so much wealth for himself and was a close observer of Bonny political and economic intrigues. The lessons he learned helped to shape his further actions, as Dike succinctly remarked, earlier quoted.

On assumption of office, Jaja continued his predecessors commercial foundation and maintained Opubo Houses dominance in palm oil trade in Bonny. In achieving this, he commenced the empowerment and elevation of many young men in Opubo Houses as Decardi rightly noted;

> During the first twelve months he had selected from among the late Elolly’s slaves no less than eighteen or twenty young men, who had already amassed a little wealth, and whom he thought capable of being trusted to trade on their own account, bought canoe for them, took them to the European traders, got them to advance each of these young men from five to ten puncheons worth of goods, he himself standing guarantee for them [Cookey, 1974:52].

On this development, Professor S.J.S Cookey in his interaction with Opubo watch team, noted that Jaja’s ability to identify and encourage talents in Opobo Houses in Bonny and Opobo, contributed to the economic success of Opobo Houses in Bonny and rapid development Opobo witnessed within 17 years of Jaja’s administration (Cookey, 2018).
Jaja also undertook a familiarization tour to Bonny neighboring communities such as Ogoni, Andoni, Ibibio (Cookey, 1974:52)), and possibly Nkoro. The tour perhaps, was to establish a more robust friendly relationship, especially with the Chiefs and people of Andoni and Nkoro whom Bonny, had not been in friendly cooperation with for so long and whom also, he believed, he may need their assistance, should he work on his predecessor idea of eluding Bonny.

Soon after settling his predecessor’s debt with the supercargoes, the supercargoes developed more trust and confidence in doing business with him. Therefore his commercial transactions alongside his Opubo Houses increased with the supercargoes. Consequently, he became wealthier and Opubo Houses doubled their control over the trade in Bonny. Having achieved this feat, Jaja was conscious of the envy and jealousy that would come from the Fubara Manilla Pepple Houses and the actions that may follow it, considering what they did in 1855 and beyond that raked economic achievements of Opubo Houses and contributed to the death of Chiefs Alali and Iloli. In view of this, Jaja started considering the idea of eluding Bonny. King Dandison Jaja explained further on this when he observed 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 (Jaja, 2012:92-93).*

By 1867, Jaja was clearly convinced that the idea of eluding Bonny was the only option left for him, considering the two days crisis between his Opubo Houses and Fubara Manilla Pepple Houses, and the role of King George
Pepple on the skirmish which caused damages to their trading facilities (Dike, 1956: 186).

During this period at the coastal regions of Africa, especially in Niger Delta, the European officials and supercargoes have become highly involved in the internal political crises of the city states, so as to achieve their primordial economic interest of exploitation of Africa’s economy (Ikime, (ed) 1980:382). One of such city states was Bonny. It was at this period that Jaja met this newly arrived French trader, Charles Decardi, who was facing challenges to start a trade. Jaja disclosed to him his plan of eluding Bonny and the site of relocation. Decardi, having accepted Jaja’s plan, with the promise of starting trade with him and his Chiefs at the new site, disclosed this plan to one of his friends, facing similar challenges at Brass River, a British trader of the firm of Alexandra Miller Brothers of Glasgow, Mc Eachean (Ejituwu, 1991:135; Ikime, 1980:381). In their regular interactions with Jaja over the plan, Jaja told them more challenges confronting the plan such as, access of trading ships into the area from the Atlantic Ocean, and how to get the cooperation of the Andoni people, whose water ways they will access in getting to their new site. Against this backdrop, according to Ejituwu, Decardi, visited Andoni, in what he regarded as “exploration visit”, in 1867, during which he broached the idea of Jaja transferring to the east of Eastern Niger Delta fringe and there starting a new base for the palm oil trade, and the encouraging discussions he had with the Andoni leaders, made him to invite Arthur Mc Eachean and two of them commenced the exploration of Ikomtoro now Opobo river. The result showed that Imo river was navigable to ocean steamer at least up to Egwanga now Ikot Abasi (Ejituwu, 1991:136). Alagoa and Fombo on their part claimed that it was these two European traders - Decardi and Mc Eachean that suggested to Jaja the idea of eluding Bonny (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972:30). Jaja on getting cheering reports from Decardi became elated and started his final preparations. On this note, again, according to Ejituwu, Jaja contracted the services of Esuku Ufuile, his influential Andoni friend, resident in
Bonny at that time, to begin talk with Andoni leaders on his plan to elude Bonny (Ejituwu 1991:136). The success reports of Jaja’s talk with the Andoni leaders contributed to his decision to flee Bonny town to Minima (One of Bonny’s satellite towns located close to the River leading to Andoni and trading hinterland communities) after the inferno that wreaked havoc on Bonny, especially the Opubo Houses in 1869. Dike highlighted on this assertion, when he observed that:

When Jaja left Bonny town in 1869 he had completed his plan to found a new state (Dike, 1956:189).

Interestingly, one of the reasons why Jaja did not move straight to his newly founded state from Bonny town and chose to stay briefly at Minima was because he has not disclosed the plan to his Chiefs and winning their support which was crucial for his successful exit. At Minima, Jaja summoned a meeting of all the Chiefs of Opubo Houses (Epelle, 1970:5), in the meeting he told them of the plan and all arrangements he had made, they were overwhelmed with joy and supported the plan. Their support to the plan signaled the final preparation of their exit from Bonny. However, the conclusion of internal arrangements with the Chiefs and the arrival of imported ammunitions, food and other material, ordered by Jaja through Decardi at Ikotoro River, prompted Jaja and his Opubo Houses to start the all important war with the Fubara Manila Pepple Houses which they used as their immediate cause for eluding Bonny (Jaja, 1991 and Cookey, 1974:64-65), Alagoa and Fombo, illuminated on this assertion when they 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 up-country markets and had also sent messages to the Europeans who were backing him up to dispatch building materials and ammunitions after him (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972:30).
However, the course of their exodus and settlement, have been taking care by Cookey (1974), Dike (1956) and others. And so, the successful exodus of Opubo Houses from Bonny opened a new chapter in palm oil trade in Niger Delta Region, as the group successfully occupied the strategic points on the main creeks leading to the oil markets and thereby cut off Bonny from the source of its supplies, as they immediately opened trade with the supercargoes in the River and in about four months time, precisely 15\textsuperscript{th} February 1870, they have firmly positioned on the trade in the region (Dike,1956:190, Hopkins 1973:141). So, it is worth suggesting from the foregoing, that economic factor was part of the remote reason why Jaja and his Opubo Houses fled Bonny and founded Opobo in January 1870 (Pepple and Oko Jaja, 2015:18). Having founded Opobo, the economic ambition, propelled them to put extra effort in achieving their aim of dominating the trade in the Delta Region and which impacted on the general activities of the kingdom.

**Expansion of Opobo**

Palm oil trade was a labour intensive business that requires enough manpower to man the trading canoes and the war canoes (Ikime, 1980:251). Opubo Houses having suffered great casualties in the inferno and the crises in Bonny (Cookey, 1974:63-67), on settlement at their new site, commenced mass acquisition of domestic slaves for affective transaction of the trade and by extension, for creation of a new War Canoe Houses. In Opobo, before an elder (Wari Senibo) launches a War Canoe House, he must be successful in commerce, with great ownership of properties, such as huge number of loyal slaves (Jaja, 2005), enough to man his war canoe and ceremonial canoe regatta. This is the case, as Opobo oral tradition states that, free born children were not permitted to pull their father in a canoe regatta during ceremonial activities of War Canoe House establishment. This was perhaps, why since after the repeal of the “House Rule Ordinance” that encouraged domestic slavery in 1915 no new War Canoe House has been created in...
Opobo, but only the recognition of already created ones by the Amanyanabo-in-Council (Pepple and Oko Jaja, 2015: 8-9).

The labour intensive nature of the trade also contributed to the encouragement of polygamy in Opobo. It was aimed at having many children to assist in the trade following the capital intensive nature of acquiring a domestic slave and other challenges associated with it at that period. The slaves were acquired from Ibo and Ibibio hinterland and passed through a ritual ceremony before becoming a member of a household (Cookey, 1974:13). Adhesion of foreigners into households or War Canoe Houses was encouraged to boost the man power requirement of the scale of trade Opobo embarked on.

Nevertheless, the slaves, the adhesion of foreigner and the birth of children, speeded up demographic increase, which led to expansion of Opobo kingdom. The expansion of Opobo occurred in two ways, expansion in geography and in the number of War Canoe Houses. The lucrative nature of the trade created many successful traders, who created their own War Canoe Houses. The increase number of houses among the 14 sections (Polos) of the kingdom, generated problem of insufficient land space, which made some of the polos and War Canoe Houses, to relocate from the main town (Opuama) to Opobo’s satellite islands, known as Kala-ama (small town). Those that relocated were, Adibie Polo, Fubarakworo Polo, Opusunju Dappa, Kala Sunju Dappa and Tilibo Dappa War Canoe Houses. Among them, the first to settle at that area is Fubarakworo polo (Pepple and Oko Jaja, 2015:47).

In the same vein, other War Canoe Houses, who also faced similar problem of limited land spaces, decided not to relocate, either because there was no comfortable area to relocate to, or they feel there was no need. However, some of them acquired plots of land within Andoni, Ogoni and Ibibio areas for reasons such as, resettlement of some House members, storing of some
House properties, for agriculture purpose and burial of their dead ones. Those plots of land are generally called ‘Ozu’ (plantation), and some of them are, Ozu Efere, Ozu Ugbor, Opukalama, Amandiari, Kampa etc. Also some War Canoe Houses established their own plantation within Opobo’s territories, they are Ekereborikiri, Oloma, Fubiri, Olom Doukiri, Ozu Cornelius etc.

The plantations also served Opobo in various other capacities. Many of the areas where the plantations are located have fertile soil that was good for agriculture. A good number of those that occupied the plantations were former slaves, who, hither to, have experience on farming and so, they engaged in full time farming activities to serve the needs of those in full time palm oil activities. Also, some families who maintained fishing occupation, left Opobo to the plantations where they were free to practice their fishing activities, since Jaja’s government restricted some of their practices in Opobo town, such as, ban on hanging of fishing nets in the town (Alagoa, Tamuno and Clark (eds) 2009:540). Furthermore, the movement of persons and goods from the plantations to Opobo Town and back, created a new set of employment opportunities for energetic young men, who then specialized in hand pulling canoe business.

Another area the plantations served Opobo was in the defense. Their strategic locations in Opobo’s neighbouring communities became a defensive strategic mechanism for protection of the kingdom from external aggression. This clearly explains why arms and ammunitions were stored at the plantations (Alagoa, Tamuno and Clark (eds), 2009:541). An Opobo tradition states that Jaja strategically stationed his warriors and ammunitions at Opukalama, to easily quell any uprising from the Ibibio/Annang hinterlands against his trade that may threaten the security of his kingdom.
Furthermore, those Opobo communities in the Kalama axis of Opobo and those in the plantations have helped Opobo’s ownership of those areas of vast lands, which contributed to the creation of Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area in 1996 with Opobo town as its headquarters (Fubara, 2016). These areas are witnessing tremendous development in recent years, due to influx of Opobo sons and daughters from the main town (Opobo town), following scarcity of land spaces for building of personal houses and other development activities.

Indeed, those communities have remained an economic nerve centre of Opobo. The agricultural activities going on there, has been a source of livelihood to so many families in Opobo. For instance, in the plantations, many families from Opobo town have relocated to those areas and taking to agriculture. Opobo Chiefs in charge of those areas also receives royalties from many economic activities going on at those places such as lumbering.

**Establishment of Trading Ports and Posts**
The trading ports and posts are remarkable economic mile stones in the history of Opobo. The establishment of these significant places occurred as a result of Opobo’s doggedness in the quest to dominate the palm oil trade against Bonny in the Niger Delta Region. The ports were opened in Down Below/Norah Beach formally known as white man’s beach and Egwanga Opobo now Ikot Abasi in Akwa Ibom State. The posts were opened in the hinterland trading communities of Ohambele, Essene, Azumini to mention a few.

On commencement of trade in Opobo River, shortly after founding Opobo, Jaja and his Chiefs thought it wise to establish a port for the European traders, which will serve as their camping and trading place. Opobo tradition states that, King Jaja was skeptical, of the characters and intentions of the Europeans and so restricted them from his town. This assertion however, tend to explain the reasons for article three of the 4th
January 1873 commercial treaty between Her Britannic Majesty’s Government and king Jaja of Opobo. The article reads:

After the 5th April, 1873, the king of Opobo shall allow no trading establishment or hulk in or off the town of Opobo, or any trading vessel to come higher up the river than the white man’s beach opposite hippopotamus Creek...(Epelle, 1970:9).

Consequently, Down Below/Norah Beach became the first commercial hub centre of Opobo, where trading ships moored, Europeans goods received and hinterland palm oil delivered. However, establishment of that site for the European traders, enabled king Jaja to collect payments such as hand shake, “Comey” and other trading duties from the European traders. “Comey” is a payment made to African rulers that provided land as well as security for the European traders (Epelle, 1970:13). It is first introduced by the Portuguese in Nigeria and paid to the Oba of Benin by the Portuguese traders in the 17th century. “Hand Shake” was a levy paid by any new agent of a firm to African ruler before commencement of trade (Epelle, 1970:13).

In essence, King Jaja received huge amount of money from the duties paid to him by the European traders within the period of his reign. According to Epelle, Jaja received between 15,000 to 20,000 pounds annually on ‘comey’ alone (Epelle, 1970:13). Also, having successfully, restricted European traders activities within Down Below/Norah Beach, Jaja and his people dominated the trade and dictated the tone of the commerce with the European traders and the hinterland middle men. In so doing, they monopolized the commerce in Imo River, so much so that other neighbouring communities like the Andoni traders pass through them to trade with the Europeans at ‘Down Below’ (Ejituwu, 1991:143). Having achieved this feat, Opobo tradition states that, Opobo traders introduced a ‘finger dip’ system in the transaction of palm oil business with the European traders. This system was used by the Opobo traders to cheat the
supercargoes. It requires a supercargo to dip his finger in a puncheon of oil, and having seen the liquid on his finger, the puncheon is certified okay, but unknown to the supercargoes that Opobo traders usually put some quantity of water in the puncheon then fill it up with oil, and consequently, they reaped enormous wealth from the system.

### Table 1: Palm Oil and Kernel exports from the Principal Oil Rivers Ports in 1888 compared with Lagos (in tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ports</th>
<th>Palm Oil</th>
<th>Palm Kernels</th>
<th>Future Kernel Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>11,470</td>
<td>31,259</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nembe/Brass</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Calabar</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonny</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opobo</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Calabar</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44,470</strong></td>
<td><strong>61,759</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Wariboko, 2014:132

Furthermore, the expansion of trade by Jaja and his people towards the palm oil rich Ibibio/Annang hinterland areas which were formerly dominated by the Efik traders from Calabar caused a palm oil boom in Opobo River, consequently attracted an influx of supercargoes in the area. This development, spurred King Jaja to acquire a place where he established another port to decongest ‘Down Below/Norah Beach. The establishment of Egwanga Opobo Port increased the activities of the palm produce commerce in Opobo River and contributed to Opobo dominance of the trade in the Niger Delta Region.

The proclamation of oil Rivers protectorate in 1885 and the subsequent exile of king Jaja in 1887 signaled British colonization of Opobo and some other
city states in the Eastern Delta, this development, speeded up the development of Egwanga Opobo. The strategic location of Egwanga and her closeness to oil rich Ibibio and Annang communities, contributed to the transfer of Oil River Protectorate Headquarters from Norah Beach to the area, and the influx of many European traders to the area (Epelle, 1970:21). Consequently, Egwanga became the hub of economic centre of the protectorate and beyond. It rose and became the second largest sea port in Nigeria after Lagos port (Jaja, ‘Egwanga Opobo’, Opobo inside story magazine, 2005).

Table 2: Return showing number of Tonnage of vessels entered and cleared in each district of the Oil Rivers protectorate from 1st August to 31st July, 1892

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Number of Vessels entered</th>
<th>Tonnages</th>
<th>Number of vessels cleared</th>
<th>Tonnages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quo Ibo and old Calabar</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65,942</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opobo</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>60,859</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>60,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonny and new Calabar</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>99,052</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>90,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nembe-Brass</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57,326</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50,443</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warri</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>68,833</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>68,833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wariboko, 2014:216
Table 3: Palm Oil and Kernel Exports (in tons) from Opobo, 1903-1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Palm oil</th>
<th>Kernel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>12,186</td>
<td>9,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>13,521</td>
<td>10,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>10,329</td>
<td>11,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>13,970</td>
<td>12,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>17,300</td>
<td>14,339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>16,665</td>
<td>14,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>17,646</td>
<td>17,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>16,578</td>
<td>17,434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wariboko, 2014:230

Many European firms established base at Egwanga such as, United African Company (UAC), African Trading Company (ATC) Paterson Zochonis (PZ), Compagnie Francaise De’l Afrique Occidentale (CFAO) and to mention a few (Jaja 2005). Furthermore, the establishment of a gigantic bulk oil plant (BOP) in Egwanga, the first of its kind in West Africa was remarkable due to its multiplier effects in the economy of Opobo. The activities of these multinational firms, contributed in creating jobs for many Opobo youths especially for the educated ones (Jaja, 2005).

It is important to state at this juncture that before this period many Opobo sons have acquired Western education, a knowledge they used to support the expansion of their father’s oil business. The exile of Jaja and subsequent colonization of Opobo, reduced Opobo’s influence over the trade, and propelled a gradual introduction of Western economic system which created opportunities for white collar jobs.

In essence, the educated class, who had began to find it difficult to make a living from the oil trade following British domination and control, started looking for an alternative opportunity which they saw in the white colar job which the British economy introduced. They were among the few Niger
Delta people who got this opportunity because of their earlier acquisition of Western education. Consequently, their enviable position in the new economic system spurred the zeal for western education among Opobo sons and daughters, and ever since, became a core value of the Kingdom (Epelle, 2017). The earliest Opobo sons and daughters who benefited from the European economy were Barrister Lambert Oxford Bell-Gam, Harry Opusunju, Harry Peterside and Gerald Peterside, Mitchell Ogolo, Reymond Ogolo, Biekpo Cookey, Firi Peterside, Iwo Dappa, Mark W. Dappa, Micheal Tom Jaja, Jonathan M. Jaja, Isaiah S. Jaja, Elizabeth Romey Jaja, Hannah Dappa, Cinderela Uranta and among others (Jaja, 2005).

In the same vein, the activities of the companies contributed in enriching Egwenga Opobo as a second class Nigerian township and a cosmopolitan society, with influx of people from many West African countries and different parts of Nigeria. This development, gave room for diffusion of ideas, cultures and knowledge which contributed in the development of Opobo at that period. Remarkable among the contributions was the information about developments in other West African countries, especially the Anglophone States, by Opobo people through their citizens at Egwenga Opobo, which encouraged many parents to send their children to other West African countries to further their Western education (Omi Oko Jaja, 2017). Hitherto, trading transactions between the Europeans and the Niger Delta coastal people had encouraged Long distance trading among the people. This development which also existed in Opobo, however, encouraged the establishment of trading posts by King Jaja and his chiefs in their hinterland trading areas, manned by loyal and enterprising house members (Cookey, 2016:13).

The trading posts, served multifarious purposes such as, an investment area on plantations for food production, distribution/collection areas of goods and services, and area used to galvanize support and projection of Opobo’s interest among the hinterland people. It also serves as a point.
where the Niger Delta Christian Missionaries used to evangelize Christianity to the interior hinterland people (Jaja, 2012). Consequently, the trading posts became a melting pot and a source of economic development and cultural transformation of Opobo. The posts were located in areas that are closer to river that links to Imo River which connects to Opobo River. This was to ensure easy movement of persons and goods from the posts to Opobo River and back. Some of the trading posts were located in hinterland areas such as, Umuagbai, Obete, Ohambele, Azumini, Essene and to mention a few.

In another development, the trading posts, following the cordial Intergroup relations between Opobo communities and indigenous groups like the people of Ngwa, Ndoki, Annang and Ibibios, became areas were Opobo communities have maintained a lasting cordial presence till date, and above all, the areas have contributed in influencing Opobo’s economy through introduction of their food stuffs into Opobo such as palm wine, locally made gin, ‘tobacco, yam, wrappers and to mention a few (Oko Jaja, 2014). Apart from consumption, these food stuffs, also played a role in the tradition of the people such as in libation, Owu (water spirit) festivities and marriage.

Furthermore, the hinterland areas also created huge economic activities to Opobo. The collapse of the palm oil trade and with the introduction of British economy system, many Opobo sons and daughters who were not privileged to benefit from the British economy, retired to the trading posts where they took to farming and other trading activities. In fact, Opobo long presence in those areas, integrated them into the culture of the interior people which also, had contributed in transforming some aspects of Opobo culture, like language introduction of Onu Obu (gateway) in the building structure of War Canoe Houses, Amaiwo festival, Okonko, Nwatam festival and to mention a few (Oko-Jaja, 2014).
Consequently, Opobo’s long presence in the hinterlands, had contributed to their permanent settlement on those areas. Many of them acquired lands and built permanent houses. These developments have fostered a peaceful integration that had led to inter-marriages among them, and in some areas, it had metamorphosed into assimilation of Opobo communities into Ibo and Annang cultures (Oko-Jaja 2014).

**Critical Assessment of Local Economy of Opobo**

The local economy of fishing was not encouraged in Opobo due to the lucrative nature of palm oil trade. This posed serious challenge to the economy of Opobo, contributing to migration of Opobo people into hinterland trading posts due to the poor economic situation Opobo experienced when the palm produce economy collapsed.

However, the founders of Opobo, while in Bonny, had relaxed their local economy of fishing and salt making which preoccupied their economic activities before their contact with the Europeans in the 15th century (Jones, 1963; Finapiri, 2001). Their contact with the Europeans, which opened a new vista in their economic activities, propelled a greater contact with their interior hinterland trading communities for the sales of European goods and purchase of some local products and slaves, later palm oil for European buyers at the coast. This was the economic activities that the founders of Opobo moved along with to their new location. This is not to say that the generality of the people jettisoned the knowledge and activities of their local economy of fishing in their new location. In Opobo, Jaja and his Chiefs, in their quest to increase palm oil trade in Opobo river, engaged in mass acquisition of domestic slaves from the Ibo hinterland. Many of the slaves, if not all lacked the knowledge of Opobo local economy of fishing and salt making.

The influx of slaves into Opobo and the booming lucrative business of palm oil trade, contributed in withering the surviving activities of the local
economy of fishing and salt making. As Hopkins, rightly noted, the trade in palm oil provided opportunities of employment to a greater number in many areas, like intermediaries who were needed to collect export crops and to distribute manufactured goods. Entry into these small scale trades was easy because there were few barriers of capital or skill (Hopkins, 1973:141). The employment opportunities the trade provided and the easy participation in the trade, contributed in discouraging the participation in fishing economy. Interestingly, Ejituwu illuminate further on this issue, when he observed that:

_The palm produce trade was not the only new source of Obolo prosperity. Opobo also required foodstuffs and fish in large quantities. Its traders were not particularly interested in the foodstuffs trade; and its people abhorred the profession of fisherman. So the supply of both these commodities was largely left to the Obolo (Ejituwu, 1991:143)._ 

Unlike their Obolo (Andoni) neighbours, they participated in palm oil trading business and also in fishing activities not only for subsistence but for commercial purposes as they supplied the largest quantity of fish Opobo consumed. The Obolo (Andoni) people took the local economy of fishing very serious for commercial purposes. The seriousness they put in due to the demand in Opobo and other neighbouring communities resulted in plenty harvest of fishes which they flooded Opobo markets with and consequently, contributed to lots of interest in commercial fishing activities by few Opobo sons who had remained in such occupation.

Also some regulations put forward by Amanyanabo-in-Council in Opobo contributed to the abysmal attitude of people towards fishing economy. It is claimed that Jaja’s administration banned the hanging of fishing nets in any part of the metropolis. The regulation made the small number of fishermen to leave the town and settled in the satellite towns and the
plantations (Alagoa, Tamuno and Clark (eds) 2009), where they remain in the fishing business mainly for subsistence.

Furthermore, the longevity lucrative trade relations between Opobo and the Europeans which started from Bonny River and later Opobo River cannot be underestimated as a factor that contributed in whittling away interest on fishing economy. The relations influenced the attitude and behavior of the people as they gradually integrate into European civilization, as such, they developed a feeling of superiority complex among their neighbouring communities, and therefore, generate a tendency that detested the profession of fishing as not a noble profession. The Western education system introduced in Opobo in 1874, became serious nightmare to fishing economy in the Kingdom. The school which King Jaja established was manned by Mr. Gooding and later by Miss Emma Johnson, both Sierra Leonean (Epelle, 1970:23).

The school produced the first set of Opobo’s educated elites, those of them who furthered their education like, Prince Sunday Jaja, Prince Arthur Mac Pepple Jaja, George Cookey Gam and Gamaliel Biesha Toby (Jaja, 2012:19), later became wealthy and established their own War Canoe Houses. This development, spurred parents to start considering sending their children to school. Interestingly, the few that followed the line of education, and the tremendous benefits they enjoyed shortly after the establishment of British economy, sparked the mass educational drive in Opobo to the detriment of the local economy of fishing.

Nevertheless, Opobo reaped enormous wealth from the palm oil trade. Their position as middlemen contributed to this development because they interfaced between the hinterland producers and the European buyers at the coast. Also, the influx of European traders in Opobo river, generated enough wealth, some in the form of royalties such as, “Hand Shake”, “Comey”, “Dashes” and to mention a few. This wealth, which was made,
mainly when Opobo was in control and regulating the trade within her territories, were used to develop heavily the social sector of the kingdom, especially in infrastructure and particularly education, and with little reinvestment in the palm oil business and agriculture in the trading posts at the peril of the fishing economy (Jaja, 2012).

The trade encouraged a lucrative dugout canoe business. The dugout canoes were the means of transportation in the area at that period. One of the multiple effects of palm oil trade on Opobo was the increase usage of dugout canoes, which encouraged many people to specialize in the business of hand pulling or paddling people with their dugout canoes from one location to the other, as a means of making a living.

This new development in Opobo’s economy, survived for a long period of time even after the introduction of engine boats in the 1940s (Jaja, 2012). The paddlers were responsible for conveying petty traders to and from all the neighbouring and hinterland markets, such as Uruagwa, Ika, Egwanga, Ikot Oboronyin, Offion and to mention a few. Also, they convey people and their goods from Opobo town to satellite communities, plantations and other areas. But with the introduction of small speed engine boats, the business of dugout canoes have gradually fissiled out, and the activities of the engine boats created a new employment opportunities.

As noted, palm oil trade encouraged Opobo’s contact with the European traders, administrators and missionaries. The long contact of Opobo with Europeans led to the introduction of some European items into Opobo that influenced her socio-economic and political activities, such as can foods, foodstuffs and spirit drinks like stockfish, sardine, Gordon dry gin, Bournvita, Nicholson gin, Beefeater, Schnapps and to mention a few (Jaja, 2012). The availability of these cheap European can foods and foodstuffs, contributed also in whittling down Opobo’s interest in fishing economy because those European items serves as alternative and as a fast food, which
encouraged quick trade transactions. In addition, these European food items, serve as a trade commodity to many Opobo traders, who bought them from the European traders at the port and move them into the interior hinterlands were they sell them and make profits.

**Conclusion**
Legitimate trade is a commercial transaction Opobo cannot forget. The trade, as we have seen, impacted so much on the kingdom. Despite the impacts it contributed so much for the founding of Opobo, and was the life-blood of the economy of the kingdom. The works of Cookey, 1974; Dike, 1956; Alagoa and Fombo 1972 and others, have shown that Opobo in the pre-colonial era, was in total control of the regulations of the trade, and their active participation in the trade transactions, earned them enormous wealth which they used in building the kingdom and as such became famous in 17 years of the kingdom’s sovereign existence. The activities of the trade, contributed in the demographic increase of the kingdom which in itself, contributed in the territorial explanations. In no doubt, the trade contributed in the snowball of Opobo’s presence in the interior hinterland areas of Ibo, Ibibio and Annang communities. Their presence in these communities, in some areas, witnessed peaceful coexistence and diffusion of ideas, knowledge and culture, while in some other areas, witnessed conflicts, resulting to bombardment of those areas by Opobo (Talbot 1967; Epelle, 1970; Cookey, 1974).

Furthermore, it is obvious that the impacts of the trade on Opobo was quite enormous, on the economy, it arrested Opobo’s fragile local economy of fishing which the kingdom had a comparative advantages. Also, the failure of various administrations to channel some resources from the trade into diversifying the economy especially revitalizing the fishing economy, underscores the reasons for the economic challenges the kingdom is facing since after the palm oil economy.
It is not in contention, from the foregoing, that the palm oil economy created so much wealth and many gainful employment opportunities for the kingdom, the different administrations, however encouraged diversification into western education which became a blessing in disguise, following establishment of British economy. This is because, in the period of palm oil economy, acquisition of western education was not measured by certificate, but ability to use it to improve on palm oil business but later changed in the British economy where education is being measured by certificate. Many of the employment opportunities created by palm produce economy ended as a result of the establishment of Western economy, thereby putting so many people back into the labour market, and consequently, posed a challenge of sending many children to school. The unemployment challenges would have been under control if various administrations had diversified into the fishing economy as they did on Western education.

In addition, Opobo’s doggedness to maintain their sovereignty and maximum control of the regulations of their trade relations with European groups in Opobo Rive soured their relationship with British government who claimed to have gotten legal right of possession of the Lower Niger following the obnoxious Berlin Conference accord of 1884-1885 (New African Magazine, 2010). Consequently, the plan bombardment of Opobo loomed as Njoku highlighted when he observed that:

*British government officials on the sport, each anxious to make a name for himself were too willing to use the naval and military means at their disposal to advance British interest in land in the face of African opposition (Njoku, 2001).*

Sequel to the surrendering of Opobo River with British gunboats such as HMS Goshawk and HMS Icarus, Jaja was invited for a meeting at the Beach of Harrison and company (Cookey, 1974:132), by Consul Johnson on
September 18th 1887 (Anyandele, 1966:101). On September 19th, Jaja accompanied by all his leading Chiefs and his secretary Miss Emma Johnson attended the meeting (Cowan, 1922), which turned to be his kidnap and subsequent exile to West Indies (Cookey, 1974), and consequently, Opobo lost her sovereignty and control of palm produce economy to British imperial government who manipulated the system to advance British interest into the interior hinterlands of Nigeria and established British economic system.

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